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THE WANDERING THOUGHT OF HANNAH ARENDT

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Global Political Thinkers

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The Wandering Thought of Hannah Arendt

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For Marianne

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Contents

Abbreviations Used for Works of Hannah Arendt

BPF	Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought
DT	Denktagebuch
EU	Essays in Understanding 1930–1954
HC	The Human Condition
LKPP	Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy
MDT	Men in Dark Times
MTW	Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought
OR	On Revolution
OT	The Origins of Totalitarianism
PAT	The Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution
PhP	Philosophy and Politics
Th	The Life of the Mind. Vol. 1: Thinking
V	On Violence
W	The Life of the Mind. Vol. 2: Willing

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract Although Hannah Arendt refrained from explicitly investigating meta-theoretical questions of epistemology and methodology, her writings do entail a self-reflective sub-text on the question of "how to think" adequately in political theory. Focusing on this sub-text, the present study suggests an interpretation of Arendt's work as a "wandering" type of political theorizing. Theory is characterized by its oscillating movement between the experiential positions of philosophy and politics and by its distinctly multi-contextual perspective. In contrast to the "not of this world" attitude of philosophy, Arendt's political theory is "of this world." In contrast to politics, it refrains from being "at home" in any particular part of this world and instead wanders between the multiple horizons of the many different political worlds in time and space.

Keywords Political theory • Epistemology • Methodology • Philosophy • Politics

Of all the major questions that arguably run through all of Hannah Arendt's writings and that connect as leading threads the rich abundance of themes she dealt with in her various "exercises in political thought,"[1] there is one which is particularly implicit and inarticulate, that is the question of what it actually means to engage in the intellectual practice of "political thought" in the first place, or more precisely: what it means to be a "political theorist." Although this question occupied Arendt almost

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from the very beginning and definitely to the very end of her intellectual biography, it does not figure prominent among the explicit topics of her work. Not even in her last unfinished study on *The Life of the Mind* where Arendt attempts to clarify the foundations, peculiarities, and potentials of the most fundamental mental activities of which human beings are capable, does she systematically deal with the characteristics of the one mental activity in which she herself was majorly engaged.

It almost seems as if Arendt categorically refrained from such theoretical self-reflections and consciously preferred to approach this question simply by "exercising" political theory rather than analyzing its foundations from some sort of meta-perspective. In fact, in her well-known interview with the German journalist Günter Gaus from 1964, Arendt seems to indicate that she was hesitant to explicitly reflect upon her self-perception as a political theorist for quite principal reasons. The interview is surely one of the great moments of early German public broadcasting, and definitely serendipity for all those interested in Arendt as a political thinker. The film catches a good deal of the personal style or "tone" of Arendt's intellectual involvement with reality, which is not the least also due to the alert intellectual attitude and the sensitive Hanseatic understatement practiced by her interlocutor. Gaus and his guest—at the time an internationally renowned intellectual figure and, thanks to the controversy about her book on the Eichmann trial,[2] also somewhat notorious—were a perfect match, as it turned out in the course of the conversation. On this occasion, when answering a question regarding the motives and intentions of her political theorizing, Arendt makes the following remark:

> What is really essential to me, I want to say, all these things – with the qualification that nobody knows himself, that one should not look at one's own cards [*dass man sich nicht selber in die Karten gucken soll*], that one actually should not do what I am just doing with you – if we suppose all that, I want to say that what is essential to me: I have to understand.[3]

We will return to the quite telling answer Arendt provides here with her succinct reference to the concept of "understanding" which may sound like a commonplace but in fact bears important epistemological implications. For now I want to focus on the qualification preceding the answer, which, by the way, is not included in the published transcriptions of the interview.[4] Arendt does not dwell on the question why she apparently hesitates "to look at her own cards" as a theorist and to go into a more

elaborate discussion of her own theory's intentions and foundations. And unfortunately, her interview partner does not insist on a clarification, as he does in a number of other instances during the conversation. Its laconic nature notwithstanding, however, the remark confirms the impression that Arendt apparently considered an explicit self-reflective inquiry into the nature of her own way of theorizing a rather useless, maybe even detrimental, undertaking. In her occasional remarks on this problem, she insists on dissociating her own perspective from the classical understanding of *philosophy*, emphasizing that she intends to at least partly "put aside" the peculiar experiences of philosophers and scientists and instead "to fasten our attention on men of action"[5] in order to look at *politics*, the main subject matter of her reflections, "with eyes unclouded by philosophy."[6] And she stresses that the term "political theory" best describes this specific mode of "understanding" political reality.[7] Occasionally, furthermore, she rather "metaphorically and tentatively" indicates the epistemological complexities involved in the intellectual endeavor to "discover and ploddingly pave … anew" the peculiar "small non-time space" in which the mental activity of political theorizing can originate.[8] Nowhere in her work, however, does she more elaborately explain the significance and foundations of this obviously crucial concept of political theory in general or of her specific account of the term in particular.

Hence, while Arendt's major intellectual commitment as a political thinker was to "understand" the historical, social, and political reality in which human beings live and act, she did not attempt to systematically understand herself, as it were, in terms of her own mental practice of political theorizing—and ostensibly for principal, maybe also for good reasons. These reasons may have to do with Arendt's general idea put forth in her theory of action that the answer to the principal question of "who I am" can never be given by myself but only by the many others I interact with.[9] They may also have to do with Arendt's marked suspicion against the predominant concentration of the social sciences on "methodology"[10] and with her critique of certain philosophical modes of introspection which she associated, for instance, with René Descartes or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Arendt was especially ambivalent in her assessment of Rousseau's political philosophy. Although her explicit statements on Rousseau's work are highly critical, it is not always completely clear which parts of his thought she outrightly dismissed and which she at least partly and implicitly approved of. What she definitely did not approve of, however, was the kind of systematic attempt to look at one's own cards in

the fashion of the radically explicit introspection as practiced in Rousseau's *Confessions*.[11] Even in the very private records of her *Denktagebuch*, never intended for publication, Arendt observes a conspicuously self-distanced and outwardly (or, in her own words we might say: a "worldly") oriented intellectual attitude, focusing on the reflection of concrete historical and conceptual problems and above all on her genuine reading of and interpretative controversy with other thinkers. Even in her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt remains a thinker who almost never speaks about herself.

Be that as it may, to an interpretation of Arendt's work—that is, to a study where the question of "understanding Arendt" changes from being self-reflective into constituting the very subject matter—Arendt's reasons to refrain from explicitly reflecting upon her mode of theorizing do not apply, just as they do not apply to Arendt's own attempts to lay open "the very center"[12] of a work when interpreting the writings of other political thinkers. To the contrary, for an interpretation of Arendt's work, it is crucial to come to terms exactly with this point which Arendt—convinced that the "method" or "criteria" of a theoretical work "are mercifully hidden from its author though they may be, or, rather, *seem* to be quite manifest to reader and listener"[13]—refrained from explicitly bothering herself with and instead left to her interpreters. Accordingly, it is not surprising that many of her interpreters have taken up and focused precisely on this question of what it means for Arendt to engage in the practice of political theorizing. It indeed leads into the motivating center of Arendt's intellectual endeavor. Although lacking a systematic consideration, her writings are firmly engaged in reflecting this question, in epistemological, political, and ethical terms. And her work as a whole provides a genuine answer to this question, not by explicitly addressing it, but by exercising a very peculiar mode of political theorizing.

The present study attempts to bring out this tacit yet important motive of Arendt's work by making explicit some of the premises and principles of political theory which Arendt followed in her numerous exercises in political thought. Focusing on these rather implicit aspects of Arendt's political thought and hence attempting to take a look at her cards as a theorist, as it were, I suggest an interpretation of her work in terms of a "wandering" type of political theorizing. According to this interpretation, for Arendt, political theory is a particular mode of understanding reality which is based on a specific experiential position. This position is characterized by two fundamental features. It is, first, characterized by its localization in between philosophy and politics and, for that matter, somewhere at the boundary between the two realms that Arendt used to call the *vita activa*

and the *vita contemplativa* of human beings and which she understood to be closely intertwined with each other. Second, it is characterized by its distinctly multi-contextual or comparative perspective. Her studies of the Jewish cultural tradition, the German tradition of philosophy, the European modern political history, the American political tradition since the revolutionary and founding era, and the political institutions, practices, and languages of Ancient Greece and Rome render a great variety of comparative empirical insights. Arendt uses these different and partly even contradictory insights to constitute a multi-contextual theoretical perspective by connecting and *fusing* these different experiential horizons while at the same time articulating the fragmented constellations in which they are empirically embedded.

These two closely interrelated motives are the decisive traits of Arendt's intellectual self-perception. They connect her various writings, influence the way how she identifies her major problems, determine how she deals with her material, and, most importantly, inspire the way in which she approaches the conceptual question which more explicitly is at the center of her work, namely the meaning of politics. Arendt's understanding of the practice of political theorizing implies, as we will see, both a genuinely comparative empirical foundation and a gradual epistemological alignment with and at the same time a gradual emancipation from the practice of politics. This complex relation of her own position toward the realm of political action also resonates in her understanding of the political itself, particularly of its spatial dimension. For Arendt, politics is above all an exceedingly variegated practice by which individual persons and communities make themselves "at home" in the world, not in a romanticist sense, but in the sense of participating in common affairs and therewith creating common "spaces" of freedom. Politics is an activity that not only moves within but also constitutes and reproduces those concrete spaces and horizons of meaning that provide the narratives and contexts in which freedom, citizenship, commonsense understanding, political judgment, and being "at home" are individually and collectively realized.

Arendt stresses that, in order to theoretically grasp the practical logic of this activity, it has to be understood on its own terms, from within these manifold practices of creating common spaces of freedom. This is the major reason why the practice of theorizing must emancipate itself from classical philosophy which since Plato always made the mistake, according to Arendt, to observe these practices from a position too remote to provide insight into their peculiar meaning. At the same time, also theory itself does not immediately participate in these practices. To Arendt,

political action and political theory as mental activities are akin, but they are not identical. As a consequence, the intellectual endeavor of political theory for Arendt aims at actualizing a mental activity that not only has to be distinguished from what she took to be the classical understanding of political philosophy. It is also different from the practice and experiential position of politics. It requires an act of emancipation not only from the traditional forms of philosophizing, but also from the concrete historical and cultural horizons of meaning which provide the contexts of common sense and of the civic mode of experiencing and understanding reality.

Hence, Arendt's position as a political theorist is constituted by a twofold act of emancipation. And the two sides of this emancipation reciprocally shape each other's form and intellectual basis. Arendt's emancipation from philosophy, on the one hand, is not aimed against philosophy in general, but, more specifically, against what she saw as the philosophical mainstream's notorious enmity against politics. On the other hand, the gradual emancipation from politics which is equally constitutive for her perspective of political theory, for Arendt, cannot only and primarily be realized in the traditional form of the withdrawing and abstracting, somewhat *vertical* mental movement of philosophizing, although this is an element of her method of theorizing. In addition and more importantly, however, theoretical emancipation in Arendt is to be understood in terms of a *horizontal* intellectual activity. It is realized by a practice of intellectual wandering which actualizes the mental ability to transcend and to move between different historical and cultural horizons while at the same time remaining in close touch with the concrete experiential field of practical human affairs.

By constantly enacting this twofold emancipative intellectual movement, political theory as understood by Arendt constitutes a specific epistemological perspective, the "small non-time space" of its particular experiential position. Contrary to an immediate participation in the mental activity of citizens which consists of making oneself at home in the common worldly affairs of one's community, but also contrary to the philosophical attempt to withdraw from these worldly affairs completely in order to reach an Archimedean "view from nowhere," political theory is a worldly, but at the same time an unsettled, a wandering mental activity. It requires to assume an experiential position in the midst of human affairs, but also to constantly stay in motion, to move between the various times and spaces of human affairs, to understand their various common horizons of meaning while intellectually to a certain degree remaining "alien" within any single one of them. In contrast to the "not of this world"

attitude of philosophy,[14] political theory is *of this world*. In contrast to politics, theory refrains from being *at home* in any particular part of this world.

Elaborating these two central themes of a twofold emancipation and of theoretical wandering, the succeeding chapters offer an interpretation of Arendt's oeuvre as a deliberately unconventional, multi-faceted, yet coherent endeavor of paving the ways for and probing the potentials of a distinctly multi-contextual or comparative political theory in terms of the idea of *wandering thoughts*. Certainly, Arendt's reluctance to engage in theoretical self-reflections poses a number of methodological problems to an attempt to investigate these questions. To reconstruct Arendt's conception of political theorizing implies to tell a story, as Lisa Disch put it, "that Hannah Arendt did not tell because she considered it inappropriate to do so."[15] Furthermore, it requires to deal with a number of traits of the conceptual foundation of her work which, although of crucial significance, remain as implicit and vague in her writings as her concept of political theory itself, such as, for instance, her concept of "understanding" and in general her account of the relation between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* of human beings. In terms of interpretive method, the question of Arendt's theoretical self-perception therefore implies to dare a rather "strong" and reconstructive interpretation and maybe at times even to take the chance to read between the lines, or more precisely to focus on the self-reflective epistemological sub-text that indeed is inscribed in almost all of Arendt's studies. In terms of content, it implies to begin the analysis, instead of approaching directly Arendt's theoretical self-perception, with elaborately dwelling on those experiential positions or modes of perceiving reality to which Arendt juxtaposes her own perspective as a political theorist.

Accordingly, the second chapter starts with an elaboration of the significance of Arendt's critical relation toward philosophy. In this respect, Arendt's position is fairly clear and explicitly stated. Her critique is majorly aimed against the "Platonic position" and a mode of philosophizing which is not only too remote from worldly human affairs to grasp their meaning, but actually based on a more or less open and determined enmity against the public realm of politics. According to Arendt, this anti-political position of the philosophical tradition results in a distorted understanding of politics, its confusion with non-political practices and an artificial and misleadingly strict distinction between the practical and the intellectual or mental activities of human beings. In contrast to such a strict distinction, Arendt depicts the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* as being

both rooted in the fundamental experiences of human beings' attempts to practically as well as mentally relate to their living environment. As a consequence, the human potentials of actively reacting upon reality and those of contemplating it are closely intertwined with each other.

Against this background, Chaps. 3, 4, and 5 examine Arendt's understanding of the different forms and realms of the *vita activa* as unfolded in her study on *The Human Condition* and in a number of other texts. Chapter 3 sketches the activities of labor and work. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on action as the one activity which Arendt immediately associates with politics. These passages provide a succinct summary of Arendt's theory of human practices. Besides that, however, they especially focus on a rather implicit and only vaguely articulated layer of Arendt's account of the most fundamental human activities, namely on their mental or experiential implications. These experiential implications intimately connect the practical activities of the *vita activa* with aspects of the *vita contemplativa* as understood by Arendt. Consequently, the major forms of activity that Arendt distinguishes in her study not only articulate fundamental conditions of humans' practical existence, but also constitute different fields of experience. They therefore correspond to different practical logics and different experiential positions which in turn open up different possibilities to mentally relate to reality. Especially the practice of politics turns out, as Chap. 5 elaborates, to follow a specific rationale, to actualize specific existential experiences, and to open up specific possibilities to "understand" the world. And this practical logic engenders "worldly" effects which clearly distinguish political action not only from the other basic forms of human activity of labor and work but also from other mental activities such as philosophizing or science. As Arendt emphasizes, it is only in this practical and at the same time mental activity of politics that human beings are able to concretely realize the experience of freedom.

As a consequence, it is this practical and intellectual activity of realizing political freedom which constitutes a major part of Arendt's own experiential position as a theorist. The peculiar "form of cognition," "distinct from many others,"[16] which unfolds its rationale only within the experiential field of politics, also serves as a major part of the epistemological framework of Arendt's theoretical self-perception. Political experience in this sense constitutes the epistemological basis of both, the mental activities of citizenship and of political theorizing. However, although understanding, judging, and reflecting in terms of politics on the one hand and in terms of political theory on the other are similar "forms of cognition," they

are still not identical. They have to be gradually distinguished in various respects. By focusing on these gradual distinctions, Chap. 6 brings out the complex relation between political experience proper and the practice of political theorizing. On this basis, the chapter gives a summary account of Arendt's wandering type of political theory and also examines some of its methodological characteristics.

The concluding chapter gives an outlook on the normative and ethical implications of this account of theory and of its relation to politics. It particularly brings out that the major ethical purpose which Arendt's wandering practice of theorizing pursues is a critical one. Politics, being the practice of human beings of making themselves at home in the world and therewith of realizing civic freedom, is for Arendt the most fundamental condition for societies to flourish. At the same time, however, it has its peculiar limitations and inherent dangers. Politics not only generates but also depends on the concrete practical context of a common space and horizon of meaning. As a consequence, political action and the commonsense experience of citizenship can have not only integrative but also exclusive implications, in terms of both persons and content. There is a "price to pay" for political freedom, as Arendt occasionally noted. This is why politics, as indispensable as it is for realizing freedom, has to be accompanied by intellectual modes of critique that attempt to constantly stir and open up the concrete political horizon of a society. The citizen's *amor mundi*, in order to be prevented from degenerating into a narrow and exclusive provincialism, needs to be tamed by critical, subversive modes of experiencing reality which transcend the established frameworks of communication and meaning of any concrete political community.

Notes

1. Thus the programmatic subtitle of the collection of essays in BPF.
2. Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil. Introduction by Amos Elon, New York (Penguin Books) 2006.
3. My translation. The interview is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsoImQfVsO4 (February 26, 2015), the quotation at minute 6:17 ff.
4. For the German transcription, see Hannah Arendt: Ich will verstehen. Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk. Edited by Ursula Ludz. 3rd Edition, Munich (Piper) 2007. p. 48; the English translation is published in EU, p. 3. In both transcriptions, only the first and the last half sentence of the quoted passage are included.

5. W, p. 198.
6. EU, p. 2.
7. EU, p. 1.
8. BPF, pp. 11–15; the quotation on p. 12 f.; also Th, p. 210.
9. HC, p. 175 ff.
10. BPF, p. 53.
11. DT, p. 664 and 645 f.; also in HC, p. 38 f.; see also Arendt's general critique of "introspection" in HC, pp. 254, 280–284.
12. BPF, p. 24.
13. Th, p. 211.
14. BPF, p. 23.
15. Lisa J. Disch: More Truth than Fact. Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt, in: *Political Theory* 21/4 (1993), pp. 665–694; here: p. 665.
16. EU, p. 322.

CHAPTER 2

Defending Politics Against Philosophy

Abstract Arendt's critical stance against philosophy, especially against Plato, forms an important part of the background of her theoretical self-perception. For Arendt, the term philosophy denotes a main historical current of the Western tradition of political thought, but also a general mental activity and experiential position. In both respects, philosophy bears anti-political implications. As a consequence, the practical logic of political experience which substantially differs from philosophizing has often been neglected or even dismissed within Western political thought. Arendt's political theory not only aims at defending the experience of politics against these misconceptions. It also epistemologically sides with the political against the philosophical mode of experiencing reality, at least gradually, and therewith closely relates the *vita contemplativa* with the *vita activa* of human beings.

Keywords Philosophy • Plato • Socrates • Tradition

"Politics" is the one fundamental field of human phenomena which Arendt's intellectual endeavor is most clearly focusing on. And her most genuine and most important insights are surely immediately related to the practice of politics. Based on very personal experiences, Arendt's theoretical project concentrates on the attempt to understand the complex phenomenon of citizenship and of the whole world of deeds, words, relations, and experiences that emerge from the political practice of women

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and men who try to act together. This world of civic action is a distinct field in the realm of human affairs which, as Arendt claimed, had been very often either misunderstood or neglected throughout the tradition of Western philosophical thought.

Arendt's distinctly critical stance against "philosophy" is to be understood against this background. But it is nonetheless somewhat surprising. It is surprising not only because of Arendt's majorly philosophical academic education, and not only because large parts of her work are dedicated to elaborate interpretations of major representatives of the Western tradition of philosophy, from Plato and Aristotle over Descartes, Rousseau, and Kant to Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Jaspers. What is more, these interpretations, although often distinctly critical, undoubtedly exerted a substantial influence on Arendt's own theoretical account. On the other hand, Arendt frequently stresses that her intellectual endeavor substantially differs from "philosophy" in the proper sense of the term. Notwithstanding her reservations against dwelling on her personal intellectual motives and intentions, she leaves no doubt that among these motives her marked critical dissociation from the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition plays a crucial role.

At the beginning of the TV interview from 1964 mentioned above, for instance, when Günter Gaus introduces his guest as one of the few female representatives of philosophy, Arendt outright refuses this allegedly self-evident categorization: "I am afraid I have to protest. I do not belong to the circle of philosophers. My profession, if one can even speak of it at all, is political theory. I neither feel like a philosopher, nor do I believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers, as you so kindly suppose."[1] Gaus, having read Arendt's works, especially the comprehensive phenomenological reconstruction of the practical potentials, possibilities, and vicissitudes of human existence as laid out in *The Human Condition*, apparently was not ready to easily accept this statement. And the statement indeed is in need of certain qualifications. These qualifications notwithstanding, however, Arendt's critical turn against "philosophy" does mark out a major characteristic of her intellectual self-understanding.

In order to bring out this significance of Arendt's critical perception of "philosophy" for her own intellectual self-localization, it is important to examine the specific meaning which this term assumes in her writings. Two aspects of the concept are crucial in this respect. For Arendt, the term philosophy is, first, a major historical concept, denoting one of the main currents of Western intellectual history since ancient Greece.

As such a major historical term, "philosophy" articulates a pivotal aspect of the core identity and of the very basis of the Western "tradition" of thought. Second, the term for Arendt also denotes a genuine mental activity which realizes one specific mode of human beings of intellectually relating themselves to reality. Besides having a peculiar "history," philosophy is also a certain general mode of experiencing and understanding human reality (among other such possible modes of experience) which reflects, in its specific way, fundamental traits of the human condition as such. Arendt's understanding of the term "philosophy" relates to this general experiential as well as to the historical level of its major implications. And it particularly examines the interrelation between these two aspects. In other words, Arendt is particularly interested in the question of how the experiences inherent in the practice of philosophizing unfold historically, how they came to constitute the "tradition" of Western philosophy, and how this "tradition" in turn effects these constitutive experiences.

As a general possibility of mentally relating to reality, philosophy reflects fundamental experiences, such as man's individuality or the radical openness, boundlessness, and contrariness of his experiential horizon, which for Arendt articulate major traits of the human condition in general. At the same time, however, she holds that this peculiar mode of experiencing reality exerted a problematic influence on the historical course of the Western tradition of thought. From Arendt's perspective, the philosophical experience apparently unduly dominated the "tradition" of the West and therefore unfolded a historical dynamic in which other modes of experience, especially the experience of politics, were repressed or distorted while philosophy's own inherent experiential logic was pushed into extreme and self-contradictory forms. As a consequence, the Western mode of experiencing reality and its intellectual history suffers from an inherent experiential imbalance. It especially suffers from a growing lack of awareness of the major significance of those experiences, utterly different from philosophy, which human beings make as political actors. In its consequences, the Western tradition renders an apolitical, partly even anti-political experience of human reality. "Philosophy," as understood by Arendt, although it does articulate important existential experiences, is one of the major sources of this anti-political bias of the Western tradition of thought.[2]

To be sure, the term "philosophy" as used by Arendt in this distinctly critical sense does not quite include the whole Western tradition of philosophizing, but implies at least a few prominent exemptions, especially

the philosophy of Socrates and, at least partly, also those of Aristotle and Kant. It does denote, however, what Arendt took to be the predominant mainstream of the philosophical tradition since Plato. According to Arendt, the decisive characteristic "of almost all post-Socratic philosophy"[3] is its very peculiar attitude toward the practical realm of politics. Plato's work is crucial in this respect; it marks the founding moment of political philosophy as a historical phenomenon. To Arendt, Plato paradigmatically articulates philosophy's genuine reaction to a fundamental conflict between philosophy and politics. This conflict spectacularly played out historically in the fate of Socrates who was sentenced to death and executed by the Athenian citizenry for being guilty of impiety and of intellectually spoiling the Athenian youth. Being substantially shaped by this experience of the lethal conflict between politics and philosophizing, represented by Athens on one side and his teacher Socrates on the other, Plato's political philosophy for Arendt represents the first paradigmatic articulation of the main current of Western political thought. The defining feature of this mainstream constituted by the "Platonic position" is a fundamentally hostile relation toward the realm of politics:

> The beginning [of our tradition of political thought] was made when, in *The Republic's* allegory of the cave, Plato described the sphere of human affairs – all that belongs to the living together of men in a common world – in terms of darkness, confusion, and deception which those aspiring to true being must turn away from and abandon if they want to discover the clear sky of eternal ideas.[4]

As opposed to all other branches of philosophy which originate in and are inspired by an "original wonder before and gratitude for the miracles of man and earth and the universe," political philosophy, starting with Plato's work, "is the only branch of philosophy which began with a profound conflict between the philosopher and the particular realm with which he was concerned, the field of human affairs."[5]

Following this paradigmatic Platonic articulation of the philosopher's existential situation and of his hostility against politics, the understanding of the experiential position of philosophy as assumed within the mainstream of Western political thought for Arendt implies a principally anti-political thrust. Since Plato, the realm of practical human affairs has been perceived by philosophy not only from an exterior position, but also on a basis of an intellectual self-perception which is alien and even directly

opposed to the rationale of the active life of citizens. As a consequence, the activities of thought and action are sharply separated in the philosophical tradition and perceived as constituting two different, mutually contradicting ways of life which realize fundamentally different attitudes toward human existence. On the one side of this existential dividing line stands the great majority of people, leading a life deeply preoccupied with the common affairs of their society, attentively attuned to the currents and opinions of the day and hopelessly entangled in the immediate interests, power games, and struggles for recognition that come along with them. On the other side stands the minority of the few who succeed to emancipate themselves from these predominant preoccupations of human affairs. No longer ensnared in the web of the interest-driven relations between themselves and others, these few are able to pause and to look upon reality for no other purpose than to examine its truth, beauty, and goodness, its what, how, where from, and where to.

This "Platonic" perception of human affairs and of philosophizing consequently results in the conviction that the conditions and the genuine motivations of "thinking" in the sense of the philosophical *vita contemplativa*,[6] especially its constitutive withdrawal from the worldly affairs of common practical life, both in mental terms and in terms of interest, engagement, and personal solidarity, necessarily make it the natural opponent, almost the enemy of the *vita activa* and of politics. Being a philosopher and being a citizen are two distinct forms of human existence, constituted on two fundamentally different and even incompatible modes of experiencing reality. Becoming a philosopher from this perspective virtually requires dismissing and leaving behind the experiential position of citizenship. It requires emancipating oneself from the common interests, concerns, and convictions that constitute the political bonds among one's fellow citizens and the experiential coordinate system of the polis.

In Arendt's interpretation, this deliberate apolitical or trans-political turn of Platonic philosophy is rooted in the nature of the mental activity of philosophizing itself, and it therefore articulates a real problem involved in any form of political practice. In the experience of philosophizing, the major significance of individuality as a fundamental condition of human existence most clearly comes to the fore—to an extent and in a profundity which political experience cannot fully account for. Particularly the fundamental philosophical experience of "wonder" or of *thaumazein*, in the sense of the ability to be struck by "everything that is as it is" and

to ask ultimate and actually unanswerable questions, is a distinctly individual experience of "man in the singular." It "strikes man in his singularity, that is, neither in his equality with all others nor in his absolute distinctness from them."[7] Insofar as the experience of "wonder" necessarily involves this strong self-reflective motive, highlighting the existential experience that it is "me," as an individual, who finds myself confronted with those unanswerable questions about everything that is as it is, the logic inherent in philosophizing in itself has an individualizing, almost isolating tendency. The "inherent incompatibility between the fundamental philosophical and the fundamental political experiences"[8] is ultimately rooted in the principal opposition between this radically individual experience of wonder and the pluralist practice of forming opinions on the basis of "the common and commonly accepted standards of common sense."[9] As a consequence, at the heart of Platonic philosophy's resistance against the polis lies a peculiar idea of freedom corresponding to this experience, namely the idea of autonomy in an equally radically individualistic sense of the term.[10] For Arendt, even in Kant's moral philosophy, whom she otherwise held to be one of the rare exceptions among philosophers who do not share in philosophy's general enmity against politics,[11] the question of freedom is understood in such individualist terms. This philosophical idea of autonomy focuses on "self-interest, not interest in the world" and hence exclusively concerns "the conduct of the self in its independence of others."[12]

In this idea of autonomy there resonate two further fundamental motives of philosophizing which are rooted in distinct, but somehow interconnected, experiences. It, first, articulates an ideal of individual liberation from "the necessities of life" which plays out, for instance, in the classical philosophical attempt to spiritually master one's own bodily existence. A similar idea of freedom from necessity is, as we will see later, also inherent in the very practical experience of transcending the realm of nature in the activities of work and action. In this respect, philosophy and politics share a common experiential root; in historical terms, the former even directly draws from the pre-philosophical political tradition of the Greek polis culture: "The suspicion and contempt of the philosophers concerned the activity of *politeuein* itself but not the basis on which it rested. In the stead of *politeuein*, which had been made possible by liberation from the necessities of biological life, came the ideal of *philosophein*, the activity of philosophizing."[13] The ideas of philosophical and political freedom, hence, coincide, according to

Arendt, with regard to the fundamental experience of man's ability to rise above the realm of natural necessity.

Due to its turn against the pluralistic spirit of public opinion, however, the idea of philosophical freedom as understood in the Platonic tradition also implies, second, a principal claim of "rulership over the city."[14] The resistance of the philosopher, claiming to be a master of himself, aims not only against being enslaved by his own bodily existence and the natural necessities that come with it, but also against the power of the many others surrounding him. At the experiential core of the Platonic position lies an act of resistance against the experience that the autonomous individual, no matter how "strong" he or she may be in terms of personal abilities, talents, and intellectual maturity, may always be overturned by the many others standing together. It reflects the potentially repressive nature of the power of the many, most clearly expressing itself in the constellation of "all against one" which for Arendt indeed represents the purest manifestation of the "power" of the many in general.[15] This resistance to power is the major experience which brings the common affairs of citizens into philosophy's focus in the first place. *Political* philosophy as a peculiar branch of the Western tradition is constituted, so Arendt's argument seems to suggest, by the experience of the individual of being existentially threatened by the power of the many others.[16]

Insofar as Platonic philosophy reflects these experiences—the individuality of the experience of wonder, the idea of freedom in terms of individual autonomy, and the repressive potentials of power—its anti-political tendency articulates and highlights real problems involved in any form of political practice. On the other hand, from Arendt's point of view, the reaction of philosophy against politics is somehow flawed, which becomes most obvious in its immediately practical consequences. In practical terms, the Platonic philosopher's claim to paradigmatically represent the interests, experiences, and way of thinking of "the few" against politics inevitably forces him to himself follow a "political" and therefore somehow self-contradictory logic. The philosophical retreat from politics eventually results in the claim of politically ruling the many, as an act of self-defense, as it were, hence of ruling in the interest of the few: "Plato clearly wrote the Republic to justify the notion that philosophers should become kings, not because they would enjoy politics, but because, first, this would mean that they would not be ruled by people worse than they were themselves and, second, it would bring about in the commonwealth that complete

quiet, that absolute peace, that certainly constitutes the best condition for the life of the philosopher."[17]

This authoritarian turn, however, has major experiential consequences. It results in an identification of the realm of practical human affairs with the rather base motivations of self-interest and *libido dominandi*, to the denial of its foundation in any form of substantial reasoning, and to a corresponding reductionist account of politics in terms of mere domination, enforcement, and violence. What is more, the Platonic position not only renders a distorted perception of the practical logic of politics and especially its confusion with "fabrication," a substantially different activity in the realm of practical human affairs.[18] In a way it also leads to misconceptions with regard to philosophy's own public position. As soon as it enters the realm of human affairs, philosophy finds itself in a somewhat paradoxical practical position. Being confronted with the public, it is forced—by its own claim of being able and of having the legitimacy of withdrawing from the play of interests, opinions, and power—to nonetheless partake in this very play and to itself assume a self-interested position. When appearing in the public sphere, the philosophical dismissal of politics as a mere power game for the sake of arbitrary opinions itself turns into an opinion, bound to struggle for power against the power of the other opinions. As a consequence, the Platonic philosophical understanding of politics does not render a neutral, but an intellectual *and* political opponent's perspective and therefore a distorted conception of the fundamental characteristics of political action. Viewed from the Platonic position, the life of politics and the political sphere of common human affairs, especially the plurality of opinions and interests communicated in the public discourse among citizens, are experienced as primarily non-philosophical, even anti-philosophical phenomena. But in the very moment that the philosopher encounters the many "opinions" in the public realm and articulates his reproach for them, he cannot help but being himself drawn into the struggle among them. His anti-political critique of politics paradoxically politicizes the philosopher's own experiential position.

Arendt's critique of Platonic philosophy especially highlights these problematic practical implications, but also questions its plausibility on the theoretical level. The inimical attitude of philosophy results not only in a practically paradoxical position, but also in an epistemological neglect of politics as a source of experiential inspiration and, as a consequence, in the general neglect of the historical and cultural dimension of reality as perceived from the commonsense perspective of socially engaged

human beings. Due to these experiential shortcomings, the "Platonic position," the longer it dominated the philosophical tradition, the more clearly it turned out from Arendt's perspective to also be epistemologically contradictory:

> In the course of an ever evolving civilization, the political aspects of human affairs constantly gain significance for any kind of thinking, in the sense that they constantly have to be taken into account. Whereas Heraclitus and Parmenides, even when they, as Heraclitus did, dealt with political matters, could still philosophize in a manner untroubled by and without giving consideration to politics, Plato had to remain constantly aware that he, while philosophizing, at the same time had to secure the philosopher's existence in the polis. This is not so obvious in later philosophies because the Platonic position with its implications was already established. This does not change the fact that since Plato a "pure" philosophy, viz. one that was not tailored to politics in the sense that it had to safeguard philosophy as such, had become impossible, simply because philosophy as such was politicized. In other words: As philosopher the philosopher had always already taken his position; to philosophize always meant to politicize (because) it implied a distinct and fixed attitude towards politics.[19]

In this passage from the *Denktagebuch,* the major *historical* implications and hence the second major aspect of Arendt's concept of philosophy mentioned above most clearly come to the fore. It particularly seems to imply that there is an intimate connection for Arendt between the existential position of Platonic philosophy and its role in the history of the Western tradition of thought. In fact, the passage indicates that Arendt's political and epistemological critique of the "Platonic position" reflects not only her reading of Plato, but also (and maybe even primarily) her perspective on the philosophical "tradition" of Platonism, including its modern contemporary variants. Indeed, as Arendt points out, the most problematic aspect of the inimical tendency of the Platonic philosopher's account of politics is that it exerted such a strong influence on the Western tradition of political thought as a whole, effectively inducing it with a principally anti-political bias:

> Politics ... was judged to be an unethical business, judged so not only by philosophers, but in the centuries to come by many others, when philosophical results, originally formulated in opposition to common sense, had finally been absorbed by the public opinion of the educated. Politics and

> government (rulership) were identified and both considered to be a reflection on the wickedness of human nature, as the record of the deeds and sufferings of men was seen as a reflection of human sinfulness.[20]

It almost seems as if these historical repercussions of the philosophical experience, which obviously are also accompanied by substantial transformations, distortions, and a dogmatization and therewith actually the concealment of this experience itself—hence as if the implications not so much of Plato, but rather of the "tradition" of Platonism—are the crucial problem for Arendt. Since the philosophical bias against the polis, concealed and effectively conserved and reproduced within certain dogmas of the Western philosophical tradition, inhibited the development of an intellectual perspective from which the experiential foundations of politics and their crucial significance for human freedom could be understood in their own terms, philosophy itself was transformed and actually distorted into something like a pseudo-public experience, incompatible with an authentically political public discourse. It indeed seems primarily this distorted form of pseudo-public derivatives of philosophy which substantially contributed to the general neglect of authentic politics that Arendt diagnoses as a major problem not only in the intellectual history of Western thought, but also in the concrete history of Western politics. As a consequence, also the dominant practical understanding of politics within Western history, since it was majorly informed by the Platonic tradition of philosophy, turns out for Arendt to be fundamentally distorted by the anti-political tendency inscribed in it.

To grasp this historical emphasis of Arendt's argument against the Platonic position, it may be understood as some sort of an anti-Platonic alternative to the famous "second-cave" argument as it is to be found in the early work of Leo Strauss. In order to bring out the contemporary bearings of Plato's allegory of the cave, Strauss interprets this allegory in the terms of his epistemological critique of the modern idea of a major significance of history in philosophy. Contrary to the historical and hermeneutical perspective of modern philosophy and scholarship, Strauss stresses that to philosophize in the Socratic and Platonic sense originally means to ask "natural" and hence trans-historical questions, particularly the fundamental question about the good life. According to Strauss, the epistemology of this natural way of philosophical questioning is metaphorically sketched in Plato's allegory. Against this background, Strauss's metaphor of the "second cave" is meant to highlight what he takes to be

the peculiarly modern inability to ask natural philosophical questions in this original Platonic sense. Due to the modern social reality of "historical consciousness" and to the fundamental prejudice against philosophy which was originally introduced by revelatory religion, philosophy's natural truth, particularly the natural questions posed by the philosophies of Socrates and Plato, have become inaccessible for the contemporary discourse.[21] Instead, this discourse, without being able to even meaningfully ask questions about the good life in a truthful, non-relativist, philosophical way, is entangled in the numerous and contradictory opinions of the day and therefore indeed remains "tied to particular historical conditions,"[22] turning "historical consciousness" into a practically self-fulfilling prophesy, as it were.

Arendt's argument in a sense implicitly deals with similar problems, but she draws substantially different conclusions. Above all, she transforms the reflections on the questions of truth, opinion, and history from rendering a Socratic–Platonic critique of the polis and of modernity as put forth by Strauss into the basis for an anti-Platonic argument put forth from a position which represents the self-understanding of the Greek polis as much as pre-Platonic Socratic philosophy.[23] As a consequence, the critical thrust inherent in Strauss's Platonic narrative is directly turned around.[24] Contrary to the Platonic position, Arendt holds that the major concerns of "practical human affairs" (arguably Arendt's distinctly political equivalent to Strauss's "natural" question about the good life) cannot be meaningfully reflected at all without referring to the numerous opinions articulated and exchanged in the public realm. Claiming to take side with Socrates *and* the polis, Arendt stresses that also in philosophizing (or, for that matter, in theorizing), the opinions of the day and the changing historical and political conditions of human existence have to be substantially considered, or otherwise philosophy gets entangled in fundamental contradictions.

From Arendt's point of view, it is therefore the Platonic position's own enmity toward politics which exerted the problematic influence of a politically self-fulfilling philosophical prophesy in the history of the West. Over the course of its becoming the dominant historical "tradition" of Platonism, philosophy's anti-political motive is successively transformed into a substantially distorted understanding of public action and reasoning which at the same time systematically conceals its own historical genealogy. As a consequence, the Platonic philosopher's attempt to withdraw from history and politics altogether paradoxically results in the complete politicization of his own experiential position, a politicization which,

somewhat ironically, blinds philosophy for the very characteristics of the civic practice of politics as performed in the authentic terms of the realm of practical human affairs. This politicization renders the Platonic position to be self-contradictory in various respects. It is not only anti-political and political at the same time. According to Arendt, it also reflects the experiential background of a peculiar historical constellation and hence is itself formulated from a historical and contextual perspective, contrary to its claim of being trans-historical. Historically speaking, what is crucial for the Platonic philosophy's self-understanding is its post-Socratic position. Against this background, not only the religious and modern prejudices against philosophy, as Strauss argued, but the Platonic position itself turns out to be "tied to particular historical conditions" (to use Strauss's formulation quoted above). Consequently, it is constituted on a fundamental prejudice rooted in its own history.

Indeed, according to Arendt, "the trial and condemnation of Socrates ... in the history of political thought plays the same role of a turning point that the trial and condemnation of Jesus plays in the history of religion."[25] In its consequences, the trial and death of Socrates made Plato to not only "despair of polis life," but even "doubt certain fundamentals of Socrates' teachings" themselves.[26] Plato's turning away from the Socratic position especially regards the epistemic status of *doxa*, of the plurality of opinions which constitutes the political discourses among citizens. To Plato, the whole exchange of different and changing opinions among citizens only reflects the merely subjective, self-interested, and unstable character of practical human affairs and therefore occurs only as an obstacle and as the opposite of truth and even of truthfulness. This opposition of truth and opinion, however, "was certainly the most anti-Socratic conclusion that Plato drew from Socrates' trial."[27] Contrary to this radical separation of philosophy from the citizens' common affairs and their opinions, Arendt's interpretation of Socrates envisions a relation between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* in terms of a close interconnection and reciprocal inspiration. Being embedded in the public discourse and exchange of a plurality of opinions, the Socratic perspective, in contrast to the Platonic position, is based for Arendt on "a still-intact relationship to politics *and* the specifically philosophical experience."[28] To Socrates, the plurality of opinions put forth, exchanged and altered in the realm of common human affairs, was the very medium in which his way of philosophical questioning was pursued:

> To Socrates, as to his fellow citizens, *doxa* was the formulation in speech of what *dokei moi*, that is, of what appears to me. This *doxa* ... comprehended the world as it opens itself to me. It was not, therefore, subjective fantasy and arbitrariness, but also not something absolute and valid for all. The assumption was that the world opens up differently to every man, according to his position in it; and that the "sameness" of the world, its commonness ... resides in the fact that the same world opens up to everyone and that despite all differences between men and their positions in the world – and consequently their *doxai* (opinions) – "both you and I are human."[29]

According to Arendt, this experiential balance was lost in Plato's post-Socratic anti-political turn in the understanding of philosophy. And historically, this anti-political turn not only prevailed, but was potentiated in its anti-political effects by its transformation into a "tradition." Although in principle anti-Socratic and although at least temporarily abridged in the political philosophy of Aristotle (who for Arendt turns out to be more Socratic than Plato in this respect[30]), the "radical separation of those matters that men can reach and attain only through living and acting together from those that are perceived and cared about by man in his singularity and solitude"[31] became the most influential part of the Platonic heritage. In effect, it opened an "abyss … between thought and action" which "never since has been closed."[32]

It is against this background of her interpretation of the Socratic position and her critique of the philosophical tradition since Plato that Arendt's self-characterization as a political theorist rather than a philosopher has to be understood. In contrast to the enmity of traditional philosophy against politics, Arendt pursues the intellectual project of a political "theory conceived for the purpose of political action."[33] Her concept of "political theory" opposes the strict separation between human deeds and thoughts and instead attempts to be capable of reconsidering the elements of truthfulness and meaning in *doxa* and in public discourse and hence of understanding politics in its own terms. This critical turn has far-reaching historical, empirical, and also epistemological implications. In historical terms, it implies both a distinctly anti-traditional perspective and a return to and a modern reformulation, as it were, of what Arendt took to be the Socratic (pre-Platonic) perspective on politics. In empirical or experiential terms, it also implies the relevance of the peculiar insights and experiences to be made within the realm of practical human affairs and especially in the practice of politics for theorizing the human

condition. In epistemological terms, finally, it implies to oppose the self-contradictory idea of philosophy's a- or trans-historical position in favor of a historically grounded theoretical perspective, articulated on the basis of one's concrete experiences of the present, yet without being completely determined by one's own time. And it implies to reject the idea of a strict distinction and fundamental conflict between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*.[34] Contrary to this clear distinction, which for Arendt was taken for granted in almost all post-Socratic philosophy, her political theory attempts to connect more intimately the logic of our daily lives, of what we do when we are active, with our intellectual capacities to critically reflect upon these practical activities.

In order to overcome the "radical separation of thought and action which … runs like a red thread throughout the whole history of political philosophy,"[35] Arendt's understanding of political theory at least to a certain degree intellectually takes side with politics against philosophy's anti-political prejudice. Consequently, Arendt's theory draws not only from philosophical but also from non-philosophical sources of inspiration. It is substantially inspired by "non-philosophical literature" such as "poetic, dramatic, historical, and political writings,"[36] by such political thinkers like Machiavelli or Montesquieu who, according to Arendt, cannot "be said to have been concerned with philosophy,"[37] and especially by the historical discourse among "men of action." Arendt's frequent references to Pericles as representing the "pre-philosophical" political self-understanding of the Athenian polis,[38] for instance, as well as her elaborate investigations into the mindsets of literary and political figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe in general and within the Jewish European discourse in particular[39] are examples for her attempt to take into account and make use of genuinely non-philosophical experiences within her theoretical reflections. Her most important source of inspiration in this respect surely is the generation of political intellectuals and statesmen that shaped the founding era of the USA.[40] Among them, John Adams was one of her favorite authors, not least because he most expressively articulates the peculiar motives and experiences of men and women acting in the public sphere of politics.[41]

These references to men of action do not merely stress a peculiar focus with regard to the content of Arendt's theory. Their genuinely political experiences not only inform the criteria of relevance and the subject matters of her studies. More importantly, they inform her theory's own conceptual and epistemological basis. What in principle distinguishes her

political theory from what she took to be the Platonic position is not so much that she makes the world of practical human affairs the major object of investigation. The crucial difference is that Arendt's theory attempts to make the experiences of "men of action" a constitutive part of its own experiential basis and epistemological framework. Her attempt to reflect upon the fundamental characteristics of human affairs not against, but rather "with the help of the polis," virtually means to understand political action from within its own experiential sphere, "within the framework of *politeuesthai*, of living, acting and thinking in and with the city,"[42] and hence in terms and concepts that are directly derived from the self-perception of political actors.

Taking sides with politics as it does, this argument certainly invites misunderstanding. It ought not to be understood, for instance, in the simplistic terms of a functionalist ideology of practicability, or as uncritical empiricism, or even as a positive ethics that in effect merely affirms the powers that be. The argument for an epistemological alignment of theory with politics above all indicates that for Arendt the relation between the practical and the mental activities of human beings in general is much more complicated and also more important than their clear and easy separation in two independent *vitae* mistakenly suggests. This argument has important implications in both directions. It not only locates Arendt's understanding of theory within the concrete practical framework of human practice and of politics. It in turn also emphasizes the reflective, experiential, and mental aspects involved in human practice. As we will see, for Arendt, any form of human activity somehow involves mental faculties. Although this mental or experiential side of the *vita activa* at first sight is not always very clearly emphasized in her texts, it turns out on closer inspection to be crucial for a proper understanding of both Arendt's account of human practices and her self-localization as a political theorist. This especially holds true with regard to her conception of politics. Arendt's idea to theorize not against, but "in and with the city" implies that the city has got something to say, as it were, that the common human affairs of citizens consist not only of "deeds" and "actions," but also of specific mental activities and peculiar modes of reflecting upon reality which have their "own *modus operandi*" and their "own way of proceeding."[43]

In order to clarify Arendt's genuine conception of political theory, it is therefore necessary to examine her understanding of politics, not only in practical but also in epistemological terms, and to elaborate the distinct

experiential position of "men of action", especially those aspects in which it substantially differs from "the specific experience of the philosopher."[44] Arendt famously defines politics as the practical realization of freedom by means of the human activity called action: "The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom and its field of experience is action."[45] But what is "action" if understood as a peculiar "field of experience"? To elicit this requires a more elaborate examination which arguably has to begin with reconstructing, in experiential terms, the broader conceptual context in which Arendt deals with practical human affairs. In the next chapter, I therefore turn to Arendt's renowned theory of the *vita activa*.

Notes

1. EU, p. 1.
2. On Arendt's critical reading of the philosophical tradition, see also Steve Buckler: Hannah Arendt and Political Theory. Challenging the Tradition, Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press) 2011, p. 15 ff. and Lisa Disch: Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy: With a New Preface, Ithaca and London (Cornell University Press) 1996.
3. PAT, Folder 1, p. 4.
4. BPF, p. 17.
5. PAT, Folder 1, p. 3.
6. "Thinking" is actually a somewhat difficult concept in Arendt's work. She mostly uses the term as denoting the peculiar mode of experience of philosophizing, but sometimes also as a synonym for the whole variety of human beings' different abilities to mentally relate to reality. Especially with regard to the questions examined here, it is necessary to more clearly distinguish these different meanings than Arendt's equivocal concept of thinking alone allows for. In the following, the term will mostly be used in its specific sense of denoting the mental mode of philosophizing, and complemented with other concepts denoting other mental modes.
7. PhP, p. 100.
8. PhP, p. 100 f.
9. PhP, p. 99.
10. PhP, p. 93.
11. LKPP, p. 28 f.
12. LKPP, p. 20, 19.
13. MTW, p. 286.
14. PhP, p. 93.
15. V, p. 42.

16. In LKPP, p. 29, Arendt indicates that the philosopher's interest in politics consequentially would disappear altogether as soon as this motive of resistance of the few against the many would disappear.
17. LKPP, p. 21.
18. HC, p. 221 ff. See also the more elaborate explanations in Chap. 3.
19. DT, p. 495 [my translation].
20. PhP, p. 102.
21. Leo Strauss: Philosophie und Gesetz – Frühe Schriften. Gesammelte Schriften. Volume 2. Edited by Wiebke und Heinrich Meier, Stuttgart (Metzler) 1997, p. 386 f., 454 ff.
22. Ibid., p. 445 [my translation].
23. On Strauss's understanding of classical philosophy which "assimilates the Socratic position to Plato's," as opposed to Arendt's substantially different interpretation of Socrates, also see Dana R. Villa: The Philosopher versus the Citizen. Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates, in: Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt, Princeton (Princeton University Press) 1999, pp. 155–179, here: p. 168 ff.
24. Although these different critical thrusts in my opinion ultimately indicate substantial differences between Arendt's and Strauss's perspectives on the relation between philosophy or theory and politics, they do share, on the other hand, a number of common concerns with regard to this question. On these common concerns, see ibid.: p. 172 ff. and Liisi Keedus: The Crisis of German Historicism: The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2015, p. 165 ff.
25. PhP, p. 73.
26. PhP, p. 73.
27. PhP, p. 75.
28. PhP, p. 101.
29. PhP, p. 80.
30. MTW, p. 296 ff.
31. MTW, p. 316.
32. MTW, p. 297.
33. W, p. 216.
34. PAT, Folder 1, p. 7.
35. PAT, Folder 1, p. 6.
36. BPF, p. 164.
37. LKPP, p. 21.
38. HC, p. 205 f.; BPF, p. 72, 213.
39. OT, p. 80 ff.; Hannah Arendt: The Jewish Writings. Edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, New York (Schocken Books) 2007, p. 275 ff.

40. See also Patchen Markell: The Experience of Action, in: Roger Berkowitz/Jeffrey Katz/Thomas Keenan (Eds.): Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics, New York (Fordham University Press) 2010, pp. 95–102.
41. OR, p. 110.
42. PAT, Folder 1, p. 29.
43. Th, p. 216.
44. LKPP, p. 23.
45. BPF, p. 145.

CHAPTER 3

The Realms of Necessity and of Utility

Abstract This chapter turns the focus to Arendt's theory of the *vita activa*. In order to understand Arendt's account of political experience, it is helpful to first look at her account of labor and work as developed in *The Human Condition*. The chapter provides a succinct summary of these two fundamental types of human activity. More importantly, however, it examines the peculiar practical logics they follow as well as the existential experiences they provide. It turns out that Arendt's clear distinction of the fields of experience these activities constitute has important implications for her own theoretical position, particularly regarding her understanding of nature, utility, the social question, self-determination, freedom, and alienation. These implications also help to clarify her perspective on the political mode of experiencing reality.

Keywords Labor • Work • Self-determination • Alienation • Nature • Instrumental rationality

Arendt's theoretical reflections on the practical realm of human existence, on what she calls the *vita activa*, are most comprehensively laid out in her seminal work on *The Human Condition* from 1958. The book claims to depict the rationale of practical human affairs in their own terms and hence presents Arendt's vision of politics as seen with "eyes unclouded by philosophy." Political action, however, is but one part of women's and men's practical involvement with their living environment. According to

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Arendt, human activity assumes a number of different basic forms. The most fundamental forms of such human activities are "labor," "work," and "action." These terms are best understood as ideal–typical distinctions, referring to general paradigmatic patterns of meaning which are generated within and at the same time orient the manifold of human activities. Although in practice they rarely occur in pure form, they each single out a fundamental dimension of the *vita activa*. As we will see, each one of these forms of activity not only actualizes distinct human capacities and is intimately connected with a distinct fundamental condition of human existence, but also follows a distinct practical logic and provides genuine experiences.[1]

What do women and men actually do when they are active? In most general terms, they react to the peculiar position in which they find themselves by way of actively relating themselves to their living environment and to the "conditions" this environment poses on their existence. It is this position within reality and the various forms of men's and women's enactments of it which makes human existence specifically human.[2] But this position can be acted out or interpreted differently, and it can be actively shaped in different ways. Depending on the specific form of activity, particular aspects of the human condition and with them also particular experiences come to the fore. "[W]hat goes on in the minds" of individuals depends on "the place where they stand, the conditions they are subject to, which always differ from one individual to the next, from one class or group as compared to another."[3] What women and men experience, "what and how things appear to them," corresponds to the "position in the world" they occupy and actively assume.[4] Accordingly, the different forms of actively relating oneself to the world each constitute different "fields of experience" as Arendt puts it with reference to action (see above). In order to bring out the peculiar practical logic of action and its field of experience, however, it is very helpful to at first examine Arendt's account of the activities of labor and work and to sketch the fields of experience they constitute. In Arendt's theory of the *vita activa*, these fields serve as a contrasting foil for the conceptualization of that one form of human activity which she immediately connects with politics. What is more, in Arendt's peculiar understanding of political theory, all these different fields of experience are somehow reflected and considered as sources of inspiration for the intellectual practice of theorizing, although to clearly different degrees (and with a clear focus on the field of action). In this chapter, I therefore give a succinct summary of labor and

work, understood as activities and as fields of experience, before I turn to action in the next chapter.

In the activity of labor, men and women deal with the fact that they are biological beings, in need of food and physical reproduction.[5] By laboring, human beings relate themselves to their environment in terms of biological life and bodily needs, by enacting the most natural features of their existence. Labor aims to reproduce the material resources they need in order to physically survive and to reproduce life. Consequently, the activity of labor generates products which are meant to serve the most basic natural needs of human beings, to be consummated by men and women of flesh and blood, as it were. Accordingly, for Arendt, *animal laborans* (i.e. man as a laboring agent) is engaged in mostly natural activities which are immediately connected with those delights and burdens of bodily existence that humans in principle share with other animals.[6]

Therefore labor, notwithstanding the elaborate human techniques and "means of production" that have developed during history, remains as close to nature as it gets in the realm of specifically human activities. There may be vast differences from a cultural historian's or a political economist's viewpoint between prehistoric hunters and gatherers, tillers of the soil, and modern laborers producing consumer goods at a conveyor belt. Within the categories of Arendt's existentialist phenomenology of the *vita activa*, however, these activities are nonetheless closely related and, although the status of labor has dramatically changed under the circumstances of modern society, in principle follow a very similar rationale. All these activities of labor virtually "swing" in the endlessly repeating cyclical rhythm of natural processes. In these processes, human beings' activities do not result in any substantial changes of the natural rhythm of the process itself. In labor, human activity repeats itself each day without really achieving or changing anything that lingers on. Labor makes sense not because it solves any problem associated with the physical existence of man once and for all, or because it creates something that remains and resists the natural cycle of becoming and passing away, but because it serves this cycle. As laboring agents, human beings pay their due to the fact that they remain embedded in the endlessly repeating natural cycle of life and necessity with its alternating phases of physical deprivation, production and consumption. We attain food and eat it, and once hunger comes back, the same process of production and consumption starts over again. We produce consumer goods in order to feed the social cycle of consumption, knowing (and hoping, for that matter) that tomorrow the

cycle will have to be fed again. We clean up our room, knowing that in a few days it will be as if we had never made the effort and that we will have to do it again.

The activity of *animal laborans* as described by Arendt somewhat resembles the labor of Sisyphus who endlessly repeats to push a boulder up a mountain which rolls down again as soon as he reaches the peak. Similarly to Albert Camus's famous interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus,[7] also Arendt emphasizes that the experience of being involved in such an endlessly repeating process is not only a burden, but also engenders peculiar and very intense, if only passing, experiences of fulfillment and happiness.[8] Contrary to Camus, however, for whom the myth of Sisyphus expresses the most important trait and at the same time the absurd nature of human existence, for Arendt, the endlessly repeating activity of labor is the one form of human activity which most purely provides the compact experience of being a part of nature, of harmoniously swinging in its cyclical rhythm, as if man were nothing but an animal completely at home in nature.

Again, in a certain way, and somehow paradoxically, this holds true even with regard to the highly artificial forms and environments of labor in industrialized modern societies. Watched from an Arendtian perspective, the humor and tragedy of the conveyor-belt laborer ingeniously portrayed in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, for instance, is to be understood not only in terms of the Promethean story of man having liberated himself from nature and then being overturned by his own powers. At the same time, Chaplin's figure portrays man as being deeply involved in the intrinsically "natural" process of producing and consuming, as reduced to his "natural" status of an animal in need of physical reproduction, only under modern conditions, with the processes and forces of nature potentiated by the means of modern technology. In *Modern Times*, we witness *animal laborans* performing the peculiarly modern *mimesis* of man's metabolism with nature, swinging in its endlessly repeating natural rhythm of producing and consuming, and eventually of being himself consummated in the process. In some very short, quickly passing moments of the movie, it seems as if the laborer is about to reach the somewhat happy stage of complete atonement to the process's rhythm. That Chaplin's figure is obviously nevertheless reluctant to give himself over to this natural rhythm and hence to be reduced to the "natural" aspect of his existence, if only in a mimetic, highly artificial manner, is all too understandable from an Arendtian perspective. For Arendt, labor is surely the most natural, but

for this very reason also the most base, and least "human" activity human beings are capable of. And it is an activity in which man remains virtually "enslaved" by his biological needs and hence bound completely to the realm of necessity. There is no "freedom" in labor for Arendt, except, maybe, the non-human sort of a somewhat liberating self-dissolution engendered in the experience of "swinging" in the rhythm of nature.

Human beings are able to transcend this realm of nature and necessity, as Arendt argues with reference to the classical Greek understanding of the terms *poiesis* and *techne*, by way of a second practical ability, namely when they fabricate not only products in the sense of consumer goods, but also things, tools, instruments, and artifacts.[9] Only *homo faber*, the working or fabricating man, has the Promethean capacity to create those "things" that altogether make up the "unnatural" world of human objects. Fabricated things are meant not to be consumed, but to stay in the world and to be used: houses, bridges, knifes, tables, watches, weapons, pictures, instruments, conveyor belts, airplanes, computers, t-shirts, and so on—with the qualification that the t-shirts, for instance, in order to be considered as fabricated "things," should be expected to at least last a bit longer than a few weeks and hence not to be consummated right away. The activity of "fabrication" or "work" reflects the fact that men and women are not just natural, but also "worldly" beings with the capacity to build up the artificial realm of durable things that fundamentally distinguish the living environment of humans from that of animals. Only this world of man-made objects, wrested from the realm of nature with the force of instrumental rationality and fabricating activity, can provide an adequate habitat for human existence insofar as it is not just a natural or animal-like, but an artificial, cultural, "worldly" existence.

This unnaturalness of work also implies that the world of "things produced by human activities" itself becomes a condition of human existence. Contrary to labor which simply follows an unchanging natural rhythm of repeating cycles, fabrication influences and changes the conditions of human beings' existence by lastingly altering and shaping their environment according to their needs and to the models of their inventive imagination[10]:

> [M]en constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things. ... The objectivity of the world – its object- or thing-character – and the human condition supplement each other; because

> human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.[11]

Arendt frequently stresses the significance of this clear distinction between labor and work in her study. Certainly, one could conceive of a lot of marginal cases which somehow transgress the line drawn by this distinction. But rather than questioning its plausibility, many of these marginal cases may be especially apt to underscore its significance. The art of building sand castles, for instance, may be understood from an Arendtian perspective as a playful jugglery with the distinct experiences of labor and work, hailing the heroic magnificence and at the same time emphasizing the transience of *homo faber*'s endeavors in the face of the irresistible natural cycle of becoming and decay. Likewise, the practice of "urban gardening" may be understood as a peculiarly "worldly" mode of pursuing the "natural" activities of food production and consumption (which may even imply certain aspects of "action" as understood by Arendt).[12] The labor of preparing food, even the very simple labor of peeling an orange (if I may add an example from personal observation), can be pursued in such a thorough and sophisticated manner that it feels almost like an ignorant sacrilege (or, alternatively, like a conscious and ostentatious act of profligacy) to simply consume its end product which so closely approaches the status of a piece of art meant to stay in the world of things.

These marginal cases, hence, illustrate the ideal–typical nature of the conceptual distinction between labor and work which, of course, allows for complex hybrid forms of activities in the concrete empirical practices of individuals. But they also indicate the distinction's far-reaching conceptual implications. It is worth dwelling on these implications for a moment. With this distinction, Arendt explicitly dissociates, to begin with, her phenomenology of practical human affairs from Karl Marx's anthropology. According to Arendt, Marx, because he fails to make this distinction, reduces human practice "to the lower, almost animal-like functions of human life,"[13] to its most basal level of the metabolism with nature in labor and consumption.[14] As a consequence of this lack of differentiation, Marx's social theory is characterized by a marked materialistic emphasis on the crucial role of economics and the historical development of the "means of production" in society. Arendt opposes this emphasis as reductionist and instead stresses, as we will see, the major and independent

significance of the "super-structures," as it were, of human culture, and particularly the significance of politics.

This shift of emphasis is particularly important regarding the critical thrust of Arendt's theory of human activities. The fundamental problem which Marx identifies in the historical process of "alienation" unfolding from man's metabolism with nature, for instance, for Arendt by definition cannot be experienced at all if put solely into the mental framework of laboring agents. According to Arendt, alienation, in terms of a dialectical and dynamic tension between human practices on the one hand and the enduring and cumulating repercussions of these practices' own products on men's position within reality on the other, virtually lies beyond laboring man's experiential horizon, simply because he does not accomplish anything that lasts. Alienation in this sense is a problem which can be experienced only within the peculiar experiential framework provided by the activities of work and, as we will see, of action, hence within the realms of durable artificial things and instruments and of inter-subjective political relations. It is only in these experiential spheres that human beings unfold the truly worldly aspects of the human condition in the first place. Arendt therefore consequently uses the term "world alienation" when she refers to this problem,[15] therewith ascribing to it fundamentally different implications.[16]

This substantial shift of emphasis inherent in Arendt's critique of Marx and its implications in terms of social critique has conceptual strengths as well as weaknesses. It in a way is a fundamental premise of Arendt's genuine understanding of politics in general, and hence a crucial part of her theory of action as a whole, which in itself proves its extraordinary theoretical fruitfulness. Due to this shift in emphasis, Arendt's critical reflections succeed to bring out certain problems of modern society which are indeed rather neglected by Marx. Her critique of modern capitalism, for instance, transcends the rather narrow economic focus of a classical Marxist critique and therefore succeeds to focus on the problematic *political* implications of the reductionist *economism* inherent in the "Weltanschauung of the bourgeoisie" as well as the political connections of this "Weltanschauung" with certain forms of violence in modern society in general and with the pre-totalitarian political ideology of modern European imperialism in particular.[17] Likewise, Arendt's critique of modern consumer society sheds light on certain disintegrating dynamics which can only be brought out on the basis of her distinction of labor and work. From Arendt's perspective, modern consumer society is characterized by the fact that it is

completely dominated by the fundamental experiences of man as *animal laborans*. Consequently, consumer societies interpret themselves within an experiential coordinate system in which virtually everything—production, work, communication, culture, entertainment, and so on—turns into an affair of labor and consumption, drawing all things, deeds, stories, and interpersonal relations into an accelerating cyclical process of social metabolism, of mass production and immediate decay. Arendt's analysis of these processes entails a phenomenological richness which, especially regarding the problems of the alienating "naturalization" involved in them, exceeds other similar critical accounts that more closely follow a classical Neo-Marxist idea of alienation.[18] In Arendt's critical descriptions, it is as if modern consumer society because of its *naturalizing* dynamics has forgotten that women and men can be more than laboring and consuming animals, without any ambition to raise above the almost unconscious experience of swinging in the rhythm of an all-comprising "natural" metabolism.[19] As a consequence, Arendt's strong emphasis on the dignity of human beings as practical agents aims against the functionalization of individuals as much as against their "naturalization" into merely producing and consuming animals. Her critical charge against Marx's economism that it would eventually fail to fully recognize this dignity and its humanist ethical consequences immediately results from this twofold critique of the functionalist *and* the naturalist forces of dehumanization operating in modern societies.

The same shift in emphasis however also results in certain analytical weaknesses of Arendt's perspective. It particularly is the conceptual reason for Arendt's often criticized dismissal of "social problems," especially her rather irritating perspective on the problem of social injustice, inequality, and poverty. It seems as if her critique of Marx's "glorification of the labouring activity"[20] and of his concept of alienation has the unintended conceptual side effect that the problems of social inequality and poverty in turn lie beyond the experiential horizon of politics as perceived by Arendt. Especially in her critical interpretation of the French Revolution (which she depicts as a social, rather than a political, revolution), Arendt explicitly refuses to accept problems of socio-economic inequality and even poverty as political problems at all and insists on treating them as merely technical, "administrative" issues.[21] To be sure, the fact that there is an obvious connection between Arendt's conceptual distinction of labor and work and her dismissal of the political bearings of the "social question" does not mean that this dismissal is conceptually necessary. To the contrary,

Arendt's clear distinction may even have the potential to provide a particularly interesting perspective on such questions. If this is the case, however, it is a potential Arendt does not make much use of. Labor is surely the one fundamental human activity whose experiential side is least clearly recognized in Arendt's work as a genuine source of theoretical inspiration.

There are only few occasions when Arendt at least vaguely intimates that the realm of necessity or, to use a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu, the peculiar culture of necessity[22] unfolding from an experiential position primarily molded by activities and experiences of labor may provide significant insights and entail its own peculiar dignity. Among the rather rare examples in this respect are, for instance, Arendt's occasional hints on the power of laughter to undermine any sort of established authority,[23] her reflections on the experiential background of the concepts of "culture"[24] and of solidarity,[25] or her indication of a particular strength of resistance inherent in the non-bourgeois classes' position in nineteenth-century Europe against the disintegrating influence of the "good society's" philistinism—at least as long as these non-bourgeois classes are not themselves penetrated with and transformed by the consumerist derivatives of philistinism dominating the modern culture of entertainment.[26] Besides such vague intimations, however, Arendt does not dwell on more principal questions in this respect, like, for instance, the question of whether this strength of resistance may be grounded in a specific mental mode of perceiving as well as a genuine, distinctly *cultural* practice of dealing with the more immediately *natural* experiential aspects of the human condition.

Viewed under this premise, the "realm of necessity" may indeed entail a richer and more significant variety of practices than those reflected by Arendt. Accordingly, the experiences of such "tramp" or "Hobo" figures in which Chaplin's imaginary in *Modern Times* finds a humanist source of emancipation,[27] or those experiences articulated in the various "caring" activities located in the private realm,[28] but also those more public, traditional as well as modern popular forms of religious and cultural rituals, of fairy tale cultures, folk music, or, finally, the manifold popular forms of a Dionysian culture of Festivals and Carnivals,[29] may turn out to be a more inspiring source especially for *critical* political theorizing than Arendt's theory of the *vita activa* accounts for. While Ernst Bloch, for instance, emphasizes the significance of such popular cultural traditions for providing access to certain experiential sources that may at least partly transcend the dominant experiential coordinate system of modern consumer

society,[30] it seems as if Arendt takes side with Adorno in this respect, implicitly sticking to an exclusive idea of "high culture" and mostly neglecting the possibility of any kind of popular or "low" culture beyond the alienated realm of "cultural industry."[31] Against this background, it is fair to ask whether Arendt indeed may neglect a number of important conceptual questions in her account of labor as a fundamental part of the *vita activa*—like those questions, for instance, of a "theory of vital materiality" as recently suggested by Jane Bennett[32] or, more broadly, the problems of a non-materialist "philosophy of labour" which Simone Weil found indicated, yet not developed, in Marx's early work and which she thought to be a major project "for our century to accomplish."[33] To reflect on these questions may have especially enriched Arendt's perspective on the implications of the existential condition of "natality" which she does consider to be crucial for understanding the human capacity to act politically and which arguably anchors the artificial world of common human affairs in a genuinely "natural" experience.[34]

In fact, this last aspect points to another, theoretically perhaps even more fundamental implication of Arendt's distinction of labor and work, besides its anti-economist thrust. This implication regards Arendt's more general understanding of man's relation toward nature and hence concerns that problem which above (in Chap. 2) was identified as constituting the common experiential roots of philosophy and politics. When understood in more general terms, Arendt's perception of man's "unnatural" nature, as it were, as it most clearly comes to the fore in the human capacity to fabricate an artificial world of things, does share a certain fundamental motive with Marx, particularly with his early work, notwithstanding her determined critique of Marx's economism. This motive connects Arendt's anti-philosophical phenomenology of the human condition with a genuine philosophical background. It touches upon a core idea of modern philosophical humanism in general, and Arendt's account is as much connected to this tradition as Marx's idea of a true or perfect humanism ("vollendeter Humanismus = Naturalismus") as he articulates it in his early manuscripts on the problem of alienation.[35]

The paradigmatic modern philosophical formulation of this motive is Rousseau's idea of *perfectibilité* according to which the most fundamental characteristic of human "nature" is its indeterminacy and hence man's capacity of self-determination. For Rousseau, this capacity is what most clearly defines man as man and what at the same time in principle distinguishes him from all other animals, what virtually excludes him from

being completely at home in "the state of nature."[36] Rousseau's idea of *perfectibilité* did not only profoundly influence especially that German modern philosophical discourse which makes up a major part of Arendt's intellectual frame of reference, from Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche to Heidegger. It also echoes a core theme of early modernity, namely of renaissance philosophy,[37] and hence indeed constitutes a major trait of the modern mindset as a whole. It is expressively inaugurated, perhaps for the first time in its peculiarly modern form, in Pico della Mirandola's humanist philosophy. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico sets out to give a new and more appropriate answer to the old question of "why man is the most fortunate of creatures and consequently worthy of all admiration and what precisely is that rank which is his lot in the universal chain of Being – a rank to be envied not only by brutes but even by the stars and by minds beyond this world. It is a matter past faith and a wondrous one."[38] To Pico, the core significance of man's rank within the "chain of Being" lies in the fact that he has no peculiar fixed place in it; it lies in his principal and virtually unlimited "mutability of character" and "self-transforming nature" as "the maker and moulder" of himself:

> [God] took man as a creature of indeterminate nature and, assigning him a place in the middle of the world, addressed him thus: "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and posses what abode, what form, and what function thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. ... [T]hou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer."[39]

This modern idea of self-determination as it is inaugurated in Pico's classical humanism takes up, but also decisively changes and transforms, the traditional Aristotelian idea of a teleological ethics which rests on Man's capacity to become what he by his nature (*physei*) can and at the same time ought to be. While the idea of an actively pursued practice of ethical self-education as it is inherent in Aristotle's ethics is adopted in modern humanism, the idea of a "natural" *telos* of human existence as its guiding principle loses its central status. For Pico, man is free virtually to become whatever he chooses to make of himself. The classical idea

of a teleological ethics, more or less clearly directed by human nature, is replaced by the idea of a radically open, undetermined human capacity of self-determination. To man "it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills."[40] Consequently, human existence and human freedom on the one side and "nature" on the other are divided and part ways, as it were.

In Pico, this new understanding of self-determination articulates a yet unshattered optimism and faith in the almost indefinite potentials of the intellectual and practical abilities of men. In the course of its further development—discernible already in Rousseau and most clearly articulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—this idea substantially changes its tone. What comes to the fore, more and more clearly, is the ambivalent reverse of self-determination, namely the problem of alienation. The "free choices" of women and men to be what they want to be, especially those among these choices which are most successfully realized, linger on in the form of objectified historical and social "conditions" of any further attempts in self-determination. The liberation from being determined by human nature actually reveals the substantial determination of the human "condition" by human culture, history, and society. Against this modern background, Pico's humanist optimism had turned, at the latest in the perspective of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' cultural and social theory, into a profoundly ambivalent, often openly pessimistic view on the self- and world-determining powers of the "objectified" historical results of human practice. To Georg Simmel, for instance, when considering the experience of the massive objective forces of modern urban life—with their determining effects on almost everything surrounding the individual, profoundly shaping all the items of daily use, the buildings and means of transportation that constitute his or her living environment, and even the bodies of law and knowledge produced under these circumstances—it appears as if the lingering results of former activities as the "objective" part of the human spirit almost completely predominate over the "subjective" human spirit, hence the ability of the individual to actively shape and alter his or her own existence's conditions.[41] To Simmel, representing therewith a general experience pervading large parts of the intellectual and especially the German discourse of the time, the historical dynamics of self-determination seemed to have resulted in a situation in which the individual is in danger "of being levelled and consumed" completely, yet not by the forces of natural necessity, but rather within an "overwhelming abun-

dance of crystallized, depersonalized human spirit" and an artificial yet all-embracing "social-technological mechanism."[42]

Arendt's political theory does not share in this marked pessimism that dominated the perspective of many of her contemporaries. Instead, she stresses that human beings, due to the existential condition of *natality*, are also characterized by their ability to begin something anew, hence to disturb and interrupt any course of historically and socially determined processes. To Arendt, due to the fact that human beings' existence begins with the naturally given event of birth, they, as individuals, each are a new "beginning" in the world of human affairs, still more or less completely unconditioned by the man-made conditions of social life. It is majorly due to this existential condition of originally being a "newcomer" to the game of social life that human beings are not merely fabricating, but also political agents with the capacity to themselves begin something completely new in human affairs. It is this political practice of beginning something new which keeps open the liberating potentials of self-determination, notwithstanding its equally strong alienating potentials.[43]

What Arendt clearly does share in, however, together with the mainstream of modern philosophy, is the general "humanist" idea of self-determination as the genuine capacity, but also as the genuine and quite ambivalent "fate" of Man. This is most clearly discernible in her conceptual distinction between labor and work. "All living creatures, man not excepted," are contained in the realm of nature. But "[w]henever men pursue their purposes, tilling the effortless earth, forcing the free-flowing wind into their sails, crossing the ever-rolling waves, they cut across a movement which is purposeless and turning within itself."[44] The most fundamental experience which comes to the fore in Arendt's characterization of the activity of work is the human experience of not being completely at home in nature. As we will see, this fundamental experience also reoccurs in the experiential field of political action. Arendt's assertion that the practice of politics is primarily characterized by the fact that women and men only here succeed to *make themselves at home* in the world is a direct reflection of this experience.[45] What characterizes the realms of work and action alike is the fundamental experience that human beings, as soon as they begin to actively unfold their specifically human potentials, leave the realm of nature and enter the artificial realms of self-determination, and hence realms of almost indefinite possibilities, posing almost no "natural" limits on what humans can choose to *make* of themselves and of the world they live in, for the better or the worse.

This short digression may suffice to indicate that the distinction between labor and work and the question of the *vita activa*'s experiential relation toward nature bear important implications, while especially the latter at the same time remains rather unresolved in Arendt's theory of human activities. We will come back to this question in the final chapter. Let us for now return to Arendt's account of fabrication or work as laid out in *The Human Condition*. The activity of work not only introduces the problem of self-determination. By introducing this problem into the *vita activa*, man as *homo faber* also encounters the question of freedom, albeit in a yet limited way, regarding both his practical and his mental activities. By fabricating an artificial world of things, man's activity as *homo faber* gradually liberates human existence from the burdens of necessity, as it were, and from being completely determined by the unending natural cycle of biological needs and consumption. At the same time, however, this liberating activity creates new, self-generated conditions of human existence that shape the way in which reality is given to men and women. The constellation of a self-created artificial thing-world constitutes an experiential field in which reality is perceived within a coordinate system that corresponds to this artificial environment established by the activity of fabrication. The experiences connected with work therefore substantially differ from the "natural" experiences given in labor. In contrast to the merely natural experience of *animal laborans* of "swinging" in the cyclical movement of the process of nature, *homo faber* experiences reality in terms of objects to be used and of models to be realized.[46] His experiential position is constituted by the "experiences of instrumentality" in the sense of the "experience of means and ends."[47] Consequently, he "thinks" in terms of "the utility standard inherent in the very activity of fabrication" and in terms of those "means and ends which arise directly out of his work activity."[48] In short: The world created by *homo faber* constitutes the fundamental human experiences of "objectivity" and of "utility."

To relate with one's living environment in such terms of instrumentality and fabrication does provide an experience of individual freedom. Within his world of experience, within the realm of utility, *homo faber* is an autonomous master of his work and its results. In his activity of transforming raw material into things that last, by inscribing his creative and calculating intellect and will into the piece of wood or the stone in his hand, fabricating man virtually is a Promethean figure. He adds some-"thing" to reality which had not been there before and which lasts and resists the

natural cycle of becoming and decay.[49] It at least succeeds in doing so for some time—a time, to be sure, that may exceed the life span of its creator and that therefore in a sense also provides the experience of a worldly way of immortalizing human existence. *Homo faber*'s mode of perceiving and working with reality provides all the pleasures of practical individual autonomy and of material creativity and virtuosity. It especially provides the pleasure of creating artificial "things" that last, a pleasure which everybody knows who ever had the opportunity to "build" something by following his or her own "model," or who has a certain sensitivity for the beauty of a high-quality piece of craftsmanship, or who has ever inherited a Louis-Philippe-style piece of furniture which had been in the property of the family for several generations. The fundamental experiences of freedom and self-determination that resonate in *homo faber*'s activity most clearly articulate an immediately materialist sense of human worldliness, the affectionate and caring awareness of the concrete material basis of the "world" as the artificial edifice erected and cultivated by the human abilities of creating and molding useful and beautiful "things" that last.

This kind of freedom (which bears some kinship with the experience that in the liberal tradition of political thought is usually referred to as "negative freedom"), however, is for Arendt not yet a political experience proper, because it lacks, as we will see, the clearly inter-subjective moment characteristic to any authentic political practice. In fact, to confuse autonomy in this radically individualist (and actually materialist) sense with the inter-subjective phenomenon of political freedom necessarily results in a purely instrumental idea of political rulership which, according to Arendt, actually replaces the logic of politics with a logic of the fabrication of things altogether.[50] The marketplace is the utmost of an interpersonal realm which is conceivable for *homo faber*,[51] and the only kind of company with others directly corresponding to his experiential framework springs from "the need of the master for assistants" and "his wish to educate others in his craft."[52] What is more, his peculiar mode of experiencing freedom is ambivalent, particularly because its inherent practical logic has expansive, and therefore violent, tendencies. Experiences from the realm of utility and instrumentality not only imply an almost autistic perspective, but also tend to actively violate certain experiences springing from the plurality of women and men living together. There either are no real others at all recognized in the experience of utility, or if there are, then *homo faber* tends to experience them in the reductionist terms of objects

to be used. In the narrative of Chaplin's *Modern Times*, to return once again to this instructive example, it is the figure of the engineer presenting his automatic "eating machine" to the director of the factory who represents these problematic potentials of instrumentality. Here, in this slightly autistic figure of a "mechanic salesman" demonstrating at the "object" of the poor conveyor-belt laborer his lunchtime sparing idea of automatizing the act of eating, the most basic form of human consumption, we have the humor and tragedy of *homo faber* following his business without any consciousness of the monstrosities the activity of fabrication can give birth to when directly applied to human beings.

The principal danger of working man's particular narrow-mindedness, the tendencies of fostering phenomena of de-personalizing reification and of violent action that result from his instrumental mode of perceiving reality, become apparent in the moment when *homo faber*, the master of his creative will's imaginations and of his hands' works, is confronted with the fact that there are other "masters" besides him, other creative wills' imaginations, models, and plans, and other hands capable of shaping their environment. The experience of "the other," understood in non-reductionist and more fully humanist terms, virtually goes beyond *homo faber*'s imagination, or it even tends to shatter his frame of experience and to trigger resistance. In Arendt's phenomenology of the *vita activa*, it is as if Hegel's dialectic of master and servant—the mutual degradation of the other into a part of one's own environment at the disposal of one's creative imagination and fabricating ability, applied to satisfy one's own most basic needs and to realize one's own negative freedom—turns out to be the peculiar existential dilemma of *homo faber*. In experiential terms, it is a dilemma which arises from but cannot be resolved in the coordinate system of utility, instrumentality, and autonomy, but only, at least partly, in the realm of political action. As opposed to the merely negative freedom of autonomy, in action, human beings realize their potential of a positive, truly political form of freedom: "[I]n doing or acting, we are not masters as we are in fabrication where we are confronted with one object. Yet, while we are no masters, we are no servants either; we act in insecurity and unpredictability because we act into a world composed of free, i.e. unpredictable beings."[53] This is one of the reasons why action, the activity most clearly associated with political experience, represents the most important part within Arendt's theory of the *vita activa*.

Notes

1. That in *The Human Condition* these experiential aspects often remain in the background, may be partly due to the fact that Arendt herself, by strictly focusing on the *vita activa*, conceptually reproduces the strict separation between thought and action which she attempts to overcome. Although it is a major consequence she draws from her critique of philosophy, her theory of human activities in a way itself still presumes that this distinction "is valid" (see Hannah Arendt: Labor, Work, Action, in: James W. Bernauer (Ed.): Amor Mundi. Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt, Dordrecht (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers) 1987, pp. 29–42; here: p. 29). This problem had troubled Arendt, as she concedes in her last unfinished book on *The Life of the Mind* (W, p. 6 f.), ever since she had finished her study on *The Human Condition*. See also her remarks on this problem in a discussion with colleagues in Toronto 1972 (Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, published in: Melvyn Hill (Ed.): Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World, New York (St. Martin's Press) 1979, pp. 301–339).
2. Arendt in principle shares this idea of examining the specific "Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos" (Max Scheler) and his peculiar "Positionalität" (Hellmuth Plessner) with the project of "philosophical anthropology" as pursued by some of her German contemporaries (Max Scheler: Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos. Gesammelte Werke Vol. 9, 3rd edition, Bonn (Bouvier) 2008; Max Scheler: Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft, Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 8, 2nd edition, Bonn (Bouvier) 2008; Hellmuth Plessner: Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie, 3rd edition, Berlin (De Gruyter) 1975). Contrary to these attempts to formulate a "philosophical anthropology," however, Arendt stresses that she does not intend in *The Human Condition* to evolve an "anthropological" in the sense of a philosophical account of human "nature" (HC, p. 10 f.). Viewed against the background of her critique of philosophy, this is indeed an important qualification of her peculiar perspective. At the same time, however, the question of the relation between the "human condition" and "nature" remains an unresolved problem in Arendt's work. See more elaborately here below the passage on labor in this following and the one on Arendt's normative perspective in Chap. 7.
3. LKPP, p. 43.
4. PhP, p. 94.
5. On labor, see chapter III of HC, p. 79 ff.
6. HC, 96 ff.
7. Albert Camus: The Myth of Sisyphus, New York (Penguin Books) 2012.

8. HC, 106 ff.; Arendt: Labor, Work, Action, p. 33 f.
9. See chapter IV of HC, p. 136 ff.
10. HC, p. 140.
11. HC, p. 9.
12. I owe this example to Linda Wagner who attended my seminar on Arendt's political theory at the University of Darmstadt, Germany, in 2013.
13. MTW, p. 285.
14. HC, p. 85 ff.
15. HC, 248 ff.
16. On this topic, see Rahel Jaeggi: Welt und Person. Zum anthropologischen Hintergrund der Gesellschaftskritik Hannah Arendts, Berlin (Lukas Verlag) 1997, p. 90 ff. and Dana R. Villa: Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation, and Critique, in: Ronald Beiner/Jennifer Nedelsky (Eds.): Judgment, Imagination, and Politics. Themes from Kant and Arendt, Lanham (Rowman & Littelfield) 2001, pp. 287–310.
17. OT, p. 136 ff.
18. An example in this respect is Max Horkheimer's treatment of the role of nature within the alienating dynamics of modern instrumental rationalization in his essay *Eclipse of Reason*, New York (Oxford University Press) 1947, p. 92 ff. Due to its stronger Marxian as well as Freudian implications, Horkheimer's twofold concept of outer and inner nature does not as clearly bring out the non-instrumental, yet nonetheless problematic effects of those processes of "naturalization" of human life that Arendt's critique of consumer society focuses on. It is not equally clear, however, whether Arendt's critique of naturalization actually exceeds Marx's own understanding of alienation. See Jaeggi: Person und Welt, p. 101.
19. HC, p. 126 ff.
20. MTW, p. 286.
21. OR, p. 91.
22. Pierre Bourdieu: Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, Cambridge (Harvard University Press) 1984, p. 372 ff.
23. V, p. 45.
24. BPF, p. 211 ff.
25. OR, p. 88 ff.
26. BPF, p. 200.
27. Although Arendt ingeniously brings out the emancipative potentials of these very peculiar types of pariah figures in Chaplin's movies (Arendt: Jewish Writings, p. 286 ff.), as well as in Heinrich Heine's poetic references to the *natural* experiences of the *common people* (ibid: p. 279), she does not take up these themes in her experiential account of the realm of necessity.
28. See, for instance, Nel Noddings: Starting at Home. Caring and Social Policy, Berkley/Los Angeles (University of California Press) 2002.

29. See the classical study of Mikhail Bakhtin: Rabelais and His World. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington (Indiana University Press) 1984.
30. Ernst Bloch: Das Prinzip Hoffnung, Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 5, Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 1959, p. 409 ff.
31. Although Arendt admires and explicitly stresses the significance of Walter Benjamin's sensibility for such popular sources of experience (MDT, p. 158, 168), she herself does not make much use of them in her account of labor.
32. Jane Bennett: Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things, Durham/London (Duke University Press) 2010, p. 40.
33. Simone Weil: Oppression and Liberty, London (Routledge) 1958, p. 169. Such a theoretical project, of course, would also have to reflect on the highly problematic potentials of such a "philosophy of labor," such as its potential tendencies toward irrationalism and violent activism as they seem to come to the fore, for instance, in Ernst Jünger: Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt (1932), Stuttgart (Klett-Cotta) 2007.
34. Interestingly, Arendt herself indicates an existential connection between labor and natality (or at least the biological fact of birth), for instance in MTW, p. 311.
35. Karl Marx: Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844, in: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: Werke, Berlin (Dietz Verlag) 1972, Ergänzungsband 1, pp. 465–588, here: p. 536.
36. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The First and Second Discourses. Edited by Roger D. Masters, New York (St. Martin's Press) 1964, p 115 ff.
37. See Ernst Cassirer: The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy. Translated with an Introduction by Mario Domandi, New York/Evanston (Harper & Row) 1963, p. 73 ff.
38. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Oration on the Dignity of Man, in: Cassirer, Ernst/Kristeller, Paul Oskar/Randall, John Herman Jr. (Eds.): The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, Chicago and London (University of Chicago Press) 1948, pp. 223–254; here: p. 223.
39. Ibid., p. 224 f.
40. Ibid., p. 225.
41. Georg Simmel: Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben, in: Brücke und Tür. Essays des Philosophen zur Geschichte, Religion, Kunst und Gesellschaft, Stuttgart (K. F. Koehler) 1957, p. 240 f. [my translation].
42. Ibid., p. 237, 227.
43. HC, p. 177 f., 247. Interestingly, by the way, the idea of *natality*, which is crucial for Arendt's conception of politics, also resonates in Leo Strauss's argument for the "natural" question of philosophy mentioned above (Strauss: Die geistige Lage der Gegenwart, p. 451).

44. BPF, p. 42.
45. Put within this argumentative context, this motive of Arendt's understanding of politics as *making oneself at home* does not so much articulate an anti-modernist trait within her political theory, as George Kateb's interpretation (Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil, Totowa (Rowman and Allanheld) 1984, p. 158) argues, but rather a genuinely modern aspect. The ideas underlying this characterization are surely partly anti-liberal or at least critical of certain assumptions of political liberalism (see also Buckler: Hannah Arendt and Political Theory, p. 10 f, 167 ff.), but they are also genuinely modern in the sense of humanist. For an interpretation which focuses on the significance of this *topos* for Arendt's self-perception, stressing the insider–outsider dichotomy involved in it and a certain type of "liberal humanism" connected with the latter, see Disch: Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy, p. 172 ff.
46. HC, p. 143, 140 f.
47. HC, p. 154, 157.
48. HC, p. 153, 155.
49. HC, p. 136 ff.
50. This is actually another anti-political conclusion which, according to Arendt, results also in the Platonic tradition of political philosophy from its experiential focus on individual autonomy. See HC, p. 221 ff.
51. HC, p. 159 ff.
52. HC, p. 161.
53. PAT, folder 4, p. 2.

CHAPTER 4

The Practice of Politics

Abstract This chapter provides an interpretation of Arendt's account of action as that form of human activity which she most clearly associates with the practice of politics. By acting politically, human beings establish a common world of inter-subjective relations in which freedom is realized. Against readings of Arendt's theory of action as implying an understanding of politics too elusive to be applicable to real politics, however, the chapter emphasizes the significance of spatiality, borders, and stability for Arendt's account. Politics takes place in concrete public spaces which require more or less stable borders to serve their function of realizing freedom. As such a spatial phenomenon, the practice and experience of politics involve an ambiguous ingredient of instrumentality.

Keywords Action • Politics • Freedom • Spatiality

As we have seen, the experience of the other person, and with it the experience of political freedom, lies beyond the reach of *homo faber*'s experiential horizon. It is only in the activity of action that human beings are able to also transcend the working man's artificial realm of objects and material creativity, of utility and instrumentality, and enter the sphere of interpersonal relations.[1] And it is in this interpersonal sphere of action where the peculiar practice of politics and with it an experience of freedom can be realized which transcends the limits and contradictions of the individualist sort of liberty characteristic to the experiential realm of utility.

H.-J. Sigwart, *The Wandering Thought of Hannah Arendt*,
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Acting politically, human beings react upon the fact that "plurality" is a fundamental condition of human existence, that "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[2] In the activities of action and speech, human beings react upon each other and relate with each other. By acting and "speaking" (the latter being an indispensable aspect of acting for Arendt), women and men turn the "things" of the world from the immediate and primary concerns of *homo faber* into the material preconditions and mediators of genuinely *civic* forms of human activities. The world of things is now used to connect different actors with each other, therewith transcending the merely *objective* and instead realizing the *inter-subjective* potentials of the *vita activa*.[3] A hammer, for instance, used to knock a nail into a roofing tile is a tool in the strict sense of the term whose significance can be described solely in the utilitarian terms of instrumental rationality. The significance of a judge's gavel, on the contrary, used to command silence in a courtroom, transcends these terms of mere "thingness" and instrumentality because it has become a medium of interpersonal communication. Accordingly, the question of how to use a gavel properly in a courtroom cannot be answered solely with reference to the instrumental logic of means and ends. It involves phenomena such as authority, power, law, and discourse which all transcend the realm of utility and instead follow a substantially different practical rationale. Likewise, the comprehensive phenomenon of a table used to gather a group of people for a discussion, a debate, or a negotiation blurs the merely instrumental coordinate system of *homo faber*. Transformed into the material basis of activities that aim at interpersonal relations rather than objects, a "roundtable" is not merely a thing anymore. It bears a significance that transcends the logic of its original fabrication.

In fact, according to Arendt, the whole logic of means and ends in general does not immediately apply to those activities performed in the realm of interpersonal relations. Action, in contrast to fabrication, does not intentionally "realize" a particular aim in the sense of applying certain means in order to bring something about which is planned beforehand. It at least does not primarily follow such a clearly end-oriented rationale:

> [In] fabrication, … the *ergon*, the actual work, is the result and the aim of the fabricating process, which in itself, without such an end-product, would become meaningless. ... Action, on the contrary, since it is possible only in a web of relationships of many wills and many intentions and since it is by definition related not to dead material, but to other men, who are equally

> obsessed by ideas and desires, the chances are that no intention ever will be realized in even a compromised purity and that no work will ever be recognized by its author as his own in the sphere of action as it can be recognized by its author in the field of fabrication.[4]

The particular results achieved by a plurality of persons acting and speaking with each other do not primarily determine and define the activity's major frame of reference, simply because these results are always open to the changing interaction between many different actors and therefore unpredictable: "Human action, projected into a web of relationships where many and opposing ends are pursued, almost never fulfils its original intention; no act can ever be recognized by its author as his own with the same happy certainty with which a piece of work of any kind can be recognized by its maker. Whoever begins to act must know that he has started something whose end he can never foretell, if only because his own deed has already changed everything and made it even more unpredictable."[5] Accordingly, action, based on the ability to relate to others, does not follow an object-oriented logic at all, but rather a principally subject-oriented rationale. Rather than fabricating an identifiable objective, action reveals the person performing the act in his or her "who I am" among a plurality of many other persons.[6] Following such a personal rather than an objective rationale, action is in principle not an instrumental activity, but an end in itself, insofar as the "end" of the activity is nothing but its own actualization. Rather than aiming at *achieving something*, action aims at *being someone* among a plurality of others.

This distinctly personal and interpersonal, as opposed to a merely objective rationale, of action is crucial for Arendt's understanding of politics. In the activities of consciously performing deeds in front of others, of addressing others, of trying to persuade others, of disagreeing and arguing with others, of asking others to join in, of joining in and modifying the projects of others, of evoking stories as well as continuing and altering the narratives evoked by others, in short, in their attempts of *being someone among others*, human beings actualize their potential of being political agents. The existential condition reflected in this potential, besides the basic fact of plurality, is the human ability to spontaneity which is rooted in natality, the capacity of beginning something anew (of *archein*, as Arendt puts it with the corresponding political term of the Greek polis culture),[7] as well as the ability to voluntarily join in, to support such new beginnings of others and act together (*prattein*) and hence to generate "power"

among a plurality of persons. Indeed, power, one of the most fundamental phenomena engendered in the political sphere of human affairs, for Arendt virtually consists of nothing but the ability of individuals to voluntarily act in concert with others.[8]

It is only on the basis of this genuinely political activity of action that the most significant potentials and the "higher and more meaningful activities"[9] of the *vita activa* are realized. For Arendt, political action is obviously not just another type of being active, but *the* decisive potential of human activity altogether, existentially, socially, and ethically, and both in individual and in collective terms. Only by acting politically, human beings succeed to balance and transcend the tendency of reifying everything, potentially even other persons, inherent in the activity of fabrication, to prevent the world-alienation looming in the practical logic dominating modern consumer societies, to fight the dangers of modern totalitarianism. Arendt's understanding of politics indeed bears distinctly normative underpinnings, as many of her interpreters emphasize. On this background, to some readers, her perception of politics even appears to be quite idealistic or maybe even utopian and therefore lacks a realistic sense for the actual possibilities and necessities of politics in real life. In particular, Arendt's claim that action, as opposed to fabrication, does not primarily pursue any "purposes" that could be planned and modeled beforehand was criticized by many of her readers as rendering an understanding of politics way too elusive and unrealistic to be applicable to real life. Reflecting on these issues, Hannah F. Pitkin, for instance, in her interpretation of Arendt, asks somewhat aggravated: "What keeps these citizens together as a body? … What is it that they talk about in the endless palaver of the agora?"[10]

In fact, especially in *The Human Condition*, Arendt stresses the utterly elusive, unpredictable, boundless, and "purposeless" character of "pure politics"[11] to a degree at which it indeed appears difficult to conceive how this emphatic understanding of political action and speaking may be at all compatible with questions of stability and institutions and with the problems of "real politics" and concrete decision-making processes. On closer inspection, however, such an exceedingly emphatic and idealist picture of Arendt's understanding of political action turns out to be incomplete. Her account of politics also entails a distinctly realistic trait, especially regarding the question of "what keeps citizens together" any longer than for those fleeting, isolated incidents of spontaneous common activity. In conjunction with this question, Arendt discusses aspects of politics in which

the inherent logic of action somewhat comes close to, or maybe better: is somehow mingled with the world-building logic of *homo faber*.[12] Action and speech, being the activities of constituting relations between different actors, inscribe a web of inter-personal relations into the human world of things and objects and therewith constitute an immaterial public space of appearance in which politics can take place in a relatively stable framework. Therefore action, notwithstanding its performative, unpredictable, and boundless character, also has the potential to render permanent effects and to alter and shape the world of human experience. By enacting the freedom of boundless and spontaneous interactions between individuals, politics is also an active "creation" and "preservation" of the "(institutionally articulated) public world" which makes freedom "possible in the first place."[13]

This stabilizing moment comes to the fore most clearly, according to Arendt, in the practice of "founding" as it is articulated in the political spirit of modern revolutions. Being exemplary enactments of the spontaneous, non-instrumental human capacity of making a new beginning by common political action, revolutions at the same time entail a self-stabilizing logic: "To the extent that the greatest event in every revolution is the act of foundation, the spirit of revolution contains two elements which to us seem irreconcilable and even contradictory. The act of founding the new body politic, of devising the new form of government involves the grave concern with the stability and durability of the new structure; the experience, on the other hand, which those who are engaged in this grave business are bound to have is the exhilarating awareness of the human capacity of beginning, the high spirits which have always attended the birth of something new on earth."[14] Although there is a fundamental tension between these two elements, they are both part of the concrete practice of real politics. Especially "in the act of foundation," they are "not mutually exclusive opposites but two sides of the same event."[15]

To the extent that the "foundation" of common spaces is an integral part of its practical logic, political action is indeed somehow associated with peculiar traits of the activity of fabrication. The practice of politics, insofar as it is a practice of "founding" of political worlds and spaces, bears an element of instrumental rationality—just as much as the activity of remembrance, pursued by poets and historiographers, succeeds to rescue human words and deeds, "the most futile" of "all man-made things," from immediately perishing in the moment in which they are performed, only by "translating action and speech in that kind of *poiesis*

or fabrication which eventually becomes the written word."[16] In the practice of politics, the equivalences to the "written word" are institutions, common stories, relatively stable boundaries, and all the other forms of "materialized power," as opposed to the spontaneous incidents of pure or "lively power." The latter "disintegrates as rapidly as it appears with the being-together of people" and therefore "calls for objectification in political institutions, organizations, rights and laws to guarantee duration and stability."[17] Accordingly, the categories associated with Arendt's understanding of politics—plurality, action and speech, power—to the extend that they pose the question of how to relatively stabilize political affairs, in a sense always indicate an instrumental element. And this is especially the case insofar as they describe spatial phenomena, like the phenomenon of a "public space" in the sense of "a politically organized world."[18] As it will turn out later, this spatial aspect which adds a genuinely realist and also somewhat ambivalent tone to Arendt's account of political action is particularly interesting with regard to our questions at hand, both in epistemological and in ethical respects. It remains to be sketched as an ingredient of Arendt's account of political action before we can turn to the question of politics as a mode of experience and a mental activity.

The conceptual and metaphorical use of the category of "space" and of related categories such as "realm," "world," or "localization" plays a prominent role in Arendt's political thought. This is discernible in almost all of her writings. Also in *The Human Condition*, Arendt emphasizes the high degree to which the very meaning of human activities depends on the spaces in which they take place. Their localization within particular spaces "is neither arbitrary nor merely based on historical circumstances, but corresponds to the nature of these activities themselves."[19] Consequently, the practice of politics is closely connected to and even to a great extent defined by the concept of the "public sphere" as the "space of appearance" in which the genuinely political human activity of action takes place and which, in turn, is permanently constituted and reproduced by this peculiar form of activity. Since public spaces represent a distinct dimension of the *vita activa*, involving their own uses, concerns, and principles,[20] they are clearly distinguishable from other spheres of human activity, such as the spaces of individual privacy or those of markets.

Although Arendt frequently emphasizes these spatial implications, however, she is not always very explicit in *The Human Condition* with regard to the question of how the concrete shape of such political spaces, that is, their institutional organization or their concrete limits and boundaries

ought to be perceived. It remains especially unclear how according to Arendt political spaces are actively stabilized, how the boundaries and limits between them and other spaces of activity are exactly constituted or by whom and in which way this "art of separation"[21] of establishing the obviously "manmade" public spheres and worlds of communication is performed. In *The Human Condition*, this problem of the self-stabilization and self-limitation of political spaces is occasionally indicated, for instance in the chapter on "promising" and "forgiving" as the most important modes of "self-limitation" of human action.[22] Arendt also indicates that it is the main function of laws and constitutions to put these modes of self-limitation into practice. Written laws and constitutions not only concretely articulate the founding principles of a "republic" and the public narratives which evolve from and are permanently reshaped in political action and communication. They also help to stabilize, shape, and limit the practical and communicative spaces of politics.[23] But apart from these indications, Arendt often, particularly in *The Human Condition*, omits the questions of stability, institutionalization, and of the concrete limitation of political spaces and rather focuses on the elusive and intangible character of politics.

These omissions notwithstanding, however, for Arendt political spaces and public spheres are not merely abstract conceptualizations, but very concrete empirical phenomena with discernible shapes and boundaries, if rather immaterial ones. The actual significance of this question comes to the fore more clearly than in *The Human Condition* in some of Arendt's other major writings. Particularly on the background of her critique of the various modern deviations from authentic political action and especially of her critique of totalitarianism, Arendt clearly emphasizes that "public spaces" demand spatial limitations—in the literal sense of the term, to begin with. Public communication and the practice of politics demand a stable territorial basis. And this also implies a limited capacity regarding the size of public spaces in terms of member citizens. Arendt does not necessarily argue for the particularly limited structure of modern nation states or even for the small-sized city-state in this respect, but rather for federal and subsidiary structures and institutions.[24] But still, size plays a role insofar as it is one basic and concrete aspect in which public spaces are limited and, for that matter, particularistic phenomena. As such, furthermore, they also demand the limiting function of stable institutions and positive laws.[25]

This problem of boundaries and limitations not only refers to practical considerations in a narrow sense of the term or merely reflects institutional necessities set by concrete application problems. Rather, it implies some major qualifications of Arendt's genuine concept of political freedom in general. For Arendt, the practice of politics is both the exercise and realization of freedom and at the same time the constant activity of self-limitation of this exercise. Again, Arendt does not argue for any kind of "gated" political communities, as it were, or strictly "walled democracies"[26] with clear-cut borders fixed once and for all. The "meaning of politics is freedom" (see above), and political action, permanently opening up new horizons of meaning and initiating new stories, has "an inherent tendency to force upon all limitations and cut across all boundaries."[27] At the same time, political action also constitutes the spaces in which this utterly unpredictable and boundless activity of spontaneous beginning can be given some sort of a relative stability and continuity. Political freedom is not a natural, but an artificial phenomenon, a product of self-determination which depends upon a number of self-created conditions. In order to be realized and to be more than a "worldless" and literally "homeless" state of individual isolation or even of existential "loneliness," freedom requires the stable limits and boundaries of a concrete human artifice. Freedom as a "worldly reality, is something created by men to be enjoyed by men rather than a gift or a capacity," something that can exist only in the "manmade public space."[28] And it depends on the relative stability of this space, of its institutional frame and constitution, and this also means: of its boundaries and limits. The political sphere, notwithstanding the fact that the central meaning of its constitutive rationale is human freedom, is not unlimited, neither in terms of the possibilities of human activities and experiences, nor in terms of "space," as Arendt lays out in her study *On Revolution*:

> Freedom, wherever it existed as a tangible reality, has always been spatially limited. ... [T]he borders of national territory or the walls of the city-state comprehended and protected a space in which men could move freely. Treaties and international guarantees provide an extension of this territorially bound freedom for citizens outside their own country, but even under these modern conditions the elementary coincidence of freedom and a limited space remains manifest. What is true for freedom of movement is, to a large extent, valid for freedom in general. Freedom in a positive sense is possible only among equals, and equality itself is by no means a universally valid

> principle but, again, applicable only with limitations and even within spatial limits. If we equate these spaces of freedom – which ... we could also call spaces of appearances – with the political realm itself, we shall be inclined to think of them as islands in a sea or as oases in a desert. This image, I believe, is suggested to us not merely by the consistency of a metaphor but by the record of history as well.[29]

While the political realm is pluralistic, boundless and unpredictable, constantly in motion and permanently changing, as a concrete and "tangible reality," it at the same time is characterized by relatively stable limits and boundaries that determine its concrete shape. "Political boundaries between men ... give protection together with limitation, and not only separate but also bind men together."[30] Such boundaries seem to be constitutive and indispensable conditions for public spaces to exist as real empirical phenomena in the first place:

> A citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries. His rights and duties must be defined and limited, not only by those of his fellow citizens, but also by the boundaries of a territory. Philosophy may conceive of the earth as the homeland of mankind and of one unwritten law, eternal and valid for all. Politics deals with men, nationals of many countries and heirs of many pasts, its laws are the positively established fences which hedge in, protect, and limit the space in which freedom is not a concept, but a living, political reality.[31]

By including this spatial and more realistic aspect in the picture, Arendt's account of political practice can be summarized as follows. Politics is the realm of active life in which the meaning of the existential conditions of human plurality and spontaneity are played out and thus human freedom is realized. Women and men as citizens act in concert and generate power; they enact new beginnings and join in the activity of taking up and collectively continuing and altering the initiatives of their fellow citizens. They generate and constantly continue and alter the public narratives that integrate these deeds, words, and projects into more or less continuous, but at the same time, highly pluralist "stories" of and about the common world of human affairs. And they create and stabilize public spheres which provide the worldly spaces and the boundaries in which politics can take place. These man-made "spaces" of communication, similarly to the world of things fabricated by *homo faber*, in turn become the structural framework which enables and at the same time encloses and limits, without, of course,

completely determining, all further civic actions of men and women. The existence of such political spaces is not only an indispensable condition to further realize the type of activity which brought them into being in the first place. It also shapes the peculiar mode of experience in which reality is perceived within these spaces.

But what does reality look like when perceived from this specific experiential position? Although Arendt's reflections in *The Human Condition* remain especially implicit and inarticulate with regard to this question, it is nonetheless quite obvious in her study that also in these activities peculiar mental faculties are involved. Her theory of action implies a theory of a distinctly political mode of experiencing reality. The next chapter will try to reconstruct this implicit theory of political experience from Arendt's texts.

Notes

1. See chapter V in HC, p. 175 ff.
2. HC, p. 7.
3. HC, p. 182 f.
4. PAT, Folder 1, p. 12, 14 f.
5. BPF, p. 84.
6. HC, p. 178 ff.
7. HC, p. 222 f.
8. V, p. 44.
9. HC, p. 5.
10. Hannah F. Pitkin: Justice: On Relating Private and Public, in: Political Theory 9 (1981), pp. 327–352, here: p. 336.
11. Dana Villa: Arendt, Heidegger, and the Tradition, in: Social Research 74/4 (2007), pp. 983–1002; here: p. 988.
12. On the complex interconnection of action and work implied in Arendt's understanding of politics, see also Elme Vivier: Construction of Identity in the Philosophy of Hannah Arendt, in: At the Interface/Probing the Boundaries 79 (2012), pp. 83–100.
13. Villa: Arendt, Heidegger, and the Tradition, p. 988.
14. OR, p. 222 f.
15. OR, p. 223.
16. BPF, p. 45.
17. Waltraud Meints-Stender: On the Concept of Power. Some remarks on the dialectic between lively and materialized power, in: Zoran Kurelic (Ed.): Violence, Art, and Politics, Zagreb (University of Zagreb) 2015, pp. 31–45, here: p. 37.

18. BPF, p. 148.
19. Hannah Arendt: Vita Activa oder vom tätigen Leben. 11th Edition, München/Zürich (Piper) 1999, p. 96 [my translation]. The German version of Arendt's text from which I take the quotation is more expressive here than the English text (HC, p. 78).
20. See also Leroy A. Cooper: Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy: An Interpretation, in: The Review of Politics 38 (2) 1976, pp. 145–176, here: p. 145. Cooper rightly emphasizes the idea of a fundamental pluralism of human practices and spheres of activity as a crucial feature of Arendt's political philosophy in general.
21. This phrase coined by Michael Walzer quite accurately points out this problem which is rather missing in Arendt's explicit reflections. See Michael Walzer: Thinking Politically. Essays in Political Theory, New Haven/London (Yale University Press), 2007, pp. 53–67.
22. HC, p. 236 ff.
23. On the significance of law and political institutions for Arendt's understanding of politics in general, see also Christian Volk: Arendtian Constitutionalism. Law, Politics, and the Order of Freedom, Oxford (Hart Publishing) 2015 and Jürgen Förster: Die Sorge um die Welt und die Freiheit des Handelns. Zur institutionellen Verfassung der Freiheit im politischen Denken Hannah Arendts, Würzburg (Königshausen und Neumann) 2009.
24. OR, p. 247 ff.
25. HC, p. 191.
26. The term is taken from Wendy Brown: Walled States, Waning Sovereignty, New York (Zone Books) 2010, p. 7 ff.
27. HC, p. 190.
28. OR, 115.
29. OR, p. 267.
30. MTW, p. 301.
31. MDT, p. 81 f.

CHAPTER 5

The Epistemology of Politics

Abstract Taking up the results of the previous chapters, this chapter examines the epistemological or experiential implications of Arendt's understanding of the practice of politics. While these implications are not elaborately addressed in *The Human Condition*, they more clearly come to the fore in Arendt's reflections in other texts on the concepts of judgment, common sense, and understanding. They indicate that politics as a field of experience is constituted by a peculiar "thinking of citizens" which can be characterized as a worldly mental activity (1) of meaningfully integrating particulars, (2) of self-localization, (3) of assuming a We-perspective, and (4) of actualizing a bounded form of enlarged mentality.

Keywords Understanding • Judgment • Common sense • Political experience • Integration • self-localization • We-perspective

By acting politically, citizens not only realize a crucial capacity of the *vita activa*, at the same time they actualize a mental capacity. Accordingly, the man-made immaterial webs of interpersonal communication and interaction inscribed into the human world constitute an experiential coordinate system which renders genuinely civic experiences. Public spheres are not only spaces of action, practical and communicative networks, but at the same time common horizons of meaning that serve as experiential frameworks of orientation. For Arendt, politics follows a distinct mode of perceiving and interpreting reality. It articulates, as Melvin Hill happily puts

H.-J. Sigwart, *The Wandering Thought of Hannah Arendt*,
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it in his interpretation of Arendt's work, not only the practical activity, but also the "experience" and "thinking of citizens – how they perceive and understand what happens in the world."[1]

In actualizing this political mental faculty, citizens obviously do not follow the logic of instrumental reason, of model building and utility, or the causal logic of modern science.[2] Nor do they follow the dialogical rationale of "thinking" in the specific sense in which Arendt mostly uses this term, as denoting the mental faculty which is primarily involved in the activity of philosophizing. Politics as a mental activity substantially differs from these other modes of experiencing reality. But how exactly, according to Arendt, do we perceive reality when we are involved in acting politically and in trying to be someone among others? How do human beings as citizens "think," how do they experience the world and themselves? What do things, deeds, stories, and fellow men and women "mean" when they are perceived in genuinely political terms, hence when they are experienced by citizens acting within public spaces?

Again, these questions are clearly implied, but not very clearly answered in Arendt's study on *The Human Condition*. Her most systematic reflections on the connection between human practices and experiences rather deal with the mental implications of the activity of fabrication. As we have seen, man as *homo faber* pursues his activity of fabricating things within the categories of instrumental rationality. This instrumental mindset, furthermore, corresponds to the coordinate system of the space or experiential field, the "strictly utilitarian world,"[3] in which fabrication as an activity takes place. With regard to the experiential side of action and politics, Arendt only gives a number of rather vague hints. She indicates that there are specific intellectual capacities involved in experiencing the world politically, such as the communicative use of language, the activity of "storytelling," the "political art" of rhetoric in the sense of persuasive speech, or the practice of public remembrance.[4] She further indicates that these activities indeed render somehow specifically political experiences: They constitute "meaning," engender "stories" to be told and to be publicly remembered, realize freedom in the sense of the initiation of and the individual participation in common, collective endeavors, and, finally, they render these endeavors legitimate.[5] Apart from these indications, *The Human Condition* does not provide a more systematic account of political experience or political reasoning, comparable to Arendt's more elaborate reflections on *homo faber*'s instrumental rationality.

In other parts of her work, Arendt addresses the issue more elaborately, although still not very systematically, by using a number of further concepts, particularly those of "common sense," "understanding," and "judgment." In her late texts, Arendt especially emphasizes the significance of a Kantian account of judgment for her perspective on political experience. To work out a more elaborate political epistemology of this term was supposed to be the subject matter of the unwritten third part of *The Life of the Mind*. Accordingly, most of Arendt's interpreters agree that she "regards the capacity for judgment as the political faculty *par excellence*"[6] among the mental faculties of human beings. The concept denotes the faculty of individuals to distinguish in particular cases—referring to particular objects, problems, actions—between right and wrong, but also between beautiful and ugly, by judging from the perspective of an "enlarged mentality." This perspective is constituted by the ability to "think for oneself," to judge from one's personal and hence *particular* experiential position, while at the same time being able, by actualizing the faculty of "imagination," to "think from the other person's standpoint," to take into account within one's own judgment the perspectives of many others judging from different personal experiential positions and hence to integrate the plurality of opinions given in the constellation of being someone among others into a common perspective.[7]

As a complementary term, Arendt also often applies the concept of common sense (or, when she refers to Kant's specific understanding of the same term: the concept of *sensus communis*[8]) to express certain peculiarities of political experience.[9] On other occasions she indicates that the concept of "understanding" may most accurately describe the mental faculty involved in politics. In her essay *Understanding and Politics*, for instance, Arendt claims that the activity of "understanding," "distinct from many others," constitutes the peculiar "form of cognition" of "acting men."[10] This conceptual reference to understanding deserves special attention, not only because it coincides with Arendt's use of the same concept to indicate her theoretical self-perception (see above), which, of course, makes the term particularly interesting for the present study. What is more, it is quite obvious, although Arendt does not really clarify her use of this term, that its implications partly differ from that of the other concepts mentioned above and therefore substantially complement her account of political experience. Arendt's use of the term understanding especially clarifies her very peculiar account of the concept of judgment and her very selective, partly even contradictory reading of Kant in this respect which,

in terms of theoretical exegesis, indeed renders "a rather misleading picture of Kant's aesthetics."[11] Read against the background of her quite different reflections on the concept of understanding, her idiosyncratic interpretation of Kant turns out to be a deliberate reinterpretation of his theory of aesthetic judgment in terms of political experience, combining his concept of "enlarged mentality" with substantially different theoretical ideas and therewith transforming its epistemological implications.[12] In her reflections on understanding, Arendt emphasizes more clearly, for instance, the republican (or neo-Aristotelian) bearings of her perspective on political experience, as opposed to its rather liberal bearings resonating in her Kantian concept of judgment, and relates it to the classical Greek accounts of practical reason (*phronesis*)[13] and political friendship[14] as well as, if only implicitly, with certain Hegelian motives[15] and modern conceptions of hermeneutics.[16]

Hence, these different concepts—judgment, understanding, common sense—have different implications; in some respects, they even seem to contradict each other. Yet in the way Arendt uses them, they are clearly related and actually coincide in many respects. In fact, Arendt's very creative interpretive handling and connection of these concepts seem to be interested not so much in their correct exegesis but primarily in an experimental conceptual elaboration of the very idiosyncratic questions of her theoretical exercises, especially of those "experiential" questions left open in *The Human Condition*. As a consequence, her account of judgment selectively draws from Kant's theory while at the same time substantially transforming its epistemological implications, just as much as she selectively draws from the hermeneutic tradition when reflecting on the concept of understanding while at the same time giving the term a very genuine, distinctly political meaning. In terms of exegesis, Arendt's idiosyncratic use of the terms judgment and understanding (partly also her account of narration and common sense) often appears misleading, partly even distorting. When interpreted as interrelated, deliberately experimental concepts, however, they help to reveal her genuine theoretical questioning. Seen together, their experimental reinterpretation by Arendt most accurately articulates, even if in a rather unsystematic, tentative, and unfinished manner, her account of political experience.

Under this premise and read against the background of Arendt's account of political action as it was sketched in the preceding chapter, her use of these terms can indeed be interpreted as indicating different but interrelated aspects of the peculiar "thinking of citizens" and the most

general contours of politics as a "field of experience." I want to suggest that from these contours four major aspects of her tentative account of political experience can be reconstructed: The thinking of citizens is, firstly, an interpretive practice of *political integration of particulars.* As such, it, secondly, implies a constant civic practice of interpretive *self-localization* which, thirdly, generates *the pluralist and at the same time common perspective of a political "We."* Within this framework, finally, political experience turns out to constitute *a bounded form of enlarged mentality.*

1. The Integration of Particulars In political experience, individuals refer, to begin with, to substantially different aspects of reality than those referred to in philosophy. Thinking as philosophizing "is concerned with eternal, nonhuman, and nonpolitical things."[17] Political experience, on the contrary, is concerned with "words, deeds, and events," being the most elusive and dynamic of all man-made things within the affairs of human communities.[18] It does not refer to unchangeable and universal, but to historical and contextual, objects and questions. Consequently, the activities of judgment and understanding are themselves historical and contextual modes of intellectual orientation, dealing with "the particular and contingent"[19] from the perspective of "men in the plural, as they really are and live in societies,"[20] and hence rendering "insights into the world of human affairs" with a relative, not a universal validity. Instead of being "valid for all intelligible beings," they "are strictly limited in their validity to human beings on earth," hence to the experiential fields constituted in human practice[21]: "The notion of good (agathos)," for instance, "has no connection here with what we mean by goodness in an absolute sense; it means exclusively good-for, beneficial or useful (chrésimon) and is therefore unstable and accidental since it is not necessarily what it is but can always be different."[22] Political judgments do not claim to be valid in the sense of compelling truth claims. They are rather suggestions for common agreement, discursive and "persuasive activities" which "'woo' or 'court' the agreement of everyone else."[23]

Notwithstanding this focus on "the particular and contingent," however, the experience of citizens at the same time also implies the mental integration of particulars into comprehensive horizons of meaning which serve as common frames of reference. Remembrance, for instance, which Arendt considers to be an important "mode of thought" in the realm of politics, "is helpless outside a pre-established framework of reference, and the human mind is only on the rarest occasions capable of retaining

something which is altogether unconnected."[24] Consequently, political experience implies some sort of a "thinking completion," the motive of a mental generalization of particulars, "which indeed every enacted event must have in the minds of those who then are to tell the story and to convey its meaning."[25] According to Arendt, experiences which by their very nature are utterly particular, isolated, or private phenomena, often remain, "politically speaking, irrelevant and without consequence."[26] This holds true, for instance, for love between individuals properly understood,[27] or for the motive of "compassion," or most generally for "the strength of passion itself, which, in contrast to reason, can comprehend only the particular, but has no notion of the general and no capacity for generalization." The effect of "this inability to generalize" is indeed a principal "incapacity" of such radically isolated experiences "for all kinds of predicative or argumentative speech, in which someone talks *to* somebody *about* something that is of interest to both because it *inter-est*, it is between them." Contrary to such isolated particulars, any form of "talkative and argumentative interest in the world"[28] involves a peculiar sort of generalizing or meaningfully integrating practical logic "which fits all our particular sense data into a common world."[29]

The specific meaningfulness of political experience therefore implies a focus on particulars and at the same time an aspect of integration or "generalization" of the civic perception of human affairs. By generalization, the experienced particulars are broad or tied together into some sort of an ordered constellation. This political sort of generalizing logic, however, is substantially different from other mental modes of integrating or interconnecting particulars. It can be clearly distinguished from the relation between means and ends as experienced in fabrication, between causes and effects as experienced in the (natural) sciences, or between appearances and essentials or universals as experienced in philosophy. In contrast to scientific reasoning, for instance, the major concern in political experience is not primarily the disinterested or instrumental comprehension of objects in order to actively "handle things whose nature is at our disposal,"[30] but rather their "meaningful" relation toward other objects, that is, as integrated parts of a comprehensive constellation. Whereas instrumental rationality perceives the relations between particulars exclusively in terms of means and ends or causes and effects, the political experience of the interconnected relations between particulars involves the generalizing idea of a comprehensive context integrating the manifold of particulars. Instead of merely connecting particulars within (mostly linear) chains of causation,

it perceives them as being integrated in the meaningful general structure of a common political "world." In other words, political experience is oriented toward "meaning," as opposed to "truth" or "utility." In most general terms, the concept of "meaning" as used by Arendt articulates the experience of the relation between something as a particular toward its comprehensive context. As Arendt explains, echoing a classical *topos* of modern hermeneutic epistemology, the "meaningfulness" of something virtually consists of its quality of being a part of something, as it were, of being a "particular" and at the same time a "constituent" of a more comprehensive whole.[31]

In contrast to philosophy, however, this political or "worldly" mode of mental generalization does not bear universal implications. To the contrary, the mental act of political generalization itself remains particularistic. Political understanding always starts with and always remains bound to particulars—contrary to the universalistic generalizations of philosophy. According to Arendt, such universal generalizations, when they are applied in the public sphere, turn into anti-political, peculiarly philosophical attempts to "escape … from the particular" altogether. Such universalistic speculations try to connect any particular which is "in itself meaningless" directly "to the universal"—the only comprehensive framework from which, according to philosophy, "meaning" in terms of truth can be derived.[32] For Arendt, the political experience of meaning has to be clearly distinguished from such universalistic speculations. This is why she vehemently criticizes Kant's idea of a continuous "progress" of world history as rendering the otherwise meaningless particulars of human stories meaningful in the first place as an anti-political attempt to find meaning in history by escaping from the particular.[33] Contrary to such speculative escapisms, in political experience also the "generalizations" remain bound to the condition of particularity, as it were. The activities of political understanding and judgment move within the "worldly" and therefore man-made and itself always particular comprehensive framework of a concrete public space and the stories enacted and told within it.[34] A concrete public's "story may contain rules valid for future generations also," as Arendt stresses with reference to the classical Greek mode of understanding political deeds and words, "but it remains a single story."[35]

The idea of such concrete generalizations is particularly present in Arendt's use of the concept of understanding.[36] Similar to judgment, for Arendt understanding renders a specifically pluralist form of knowledge about the world of human affairs which enables individuals to meaningfully

relate themselves to these events, to mentally participate and to orient themselves within the world of politics. Whereas the mental activity of judgment, however, primarily focuses on concrete instances and cases, in Arendt's use of the term "understanding," the integrative or synthetic aspect of political experience more clearly comes to the fore. By politically "understanding", women and men integrate the particulars of politics into the comprehensive framework of a meaningful common "world" and its constitutive narratives. Only by integrating the various incidents of political action into such patterns of meaning, can women and men "come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists."[37] Accordingly, understanding is the mental activity of reflecting upon or experiencing the particularity or singularity of incidents, deeds, and words, and at the same time of experiencing the constituent place of such particulars within their comprehensive contexts. Metaphorically speaking, comprehending a piece of clay to be a particular fragment of the more comprehensive structure of a vase, to belong at a specific spot within this comprehensive structure and hence to be different from and at the same time to be related to other neighboring pieces of clay in the way of complementary parts, is to understand its "meaning." Politically speaking, to understand the "meaning" of a deed or a sentence or a story is to comprehend it to be woven into the complex matrix of a public discourse, to perceive its relation to other deeds and sentences and stories, but neither in terms of their "universal" meaning nor in terms of chains of causation, or of means, ends, and effects, but in terms of a particular among other particulars within the all but universal or even harmonious, yet nonetheless somehow comprehensive constellation of the common practical affairs of a particular political public.

Regarding this emphasis on "generalization" in terms of "integration," Arendt's concept of understanding shares some principal traits with the hermeneutic tradition, for instance with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. It is not just her account of common sense which resembles Gadamer's socially and politically embedded reading of the commonsense tradition—as opposed to Kant's rather apolitical account of the *sensus communis*.[38] There are also substantial parallels between Arendt's use of "understanding" in general and Gadamer's Hegelian emphasis on "integration" in his account of the hermeneutic problem.[39] Accordingly, Arendt's concept of understanding adds a hermeneutic emphasis on "integration" to her account of political experience. This emphasis does not, however, bear any traditionalist implications, as it arguably does in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. Political experience as understood by

Arendt does imply an integrating motive, but in a distinctly open, liberating, and also in a rather contingent sense. For Arendt, to understand politically means to participate in the common world, but not in a merely passive or receptive way. It means to actively and creatively participate in the sense of *archein* and *prattein*. Understanding politically not only requires the ability to meaningfully relate to the perspectives of others and to integrate oneself (in Gadamer's term: to "einrücken"[40]) into the meaningful horizon of the common world and its "tradition" of stories and memories. It equally requires "the autonomy of the minds of men and their possible independence of things as they are or as they have come into being."[41] Political narratives are stories that constantly remain in the status of a plot "to be continued" and spontaneously rewritten by many different authors. They are like plays which are still in the making while being performed. Their plots emerge from the numerous public suggestions of the participating actors on the "story's" next dramatic turn, as it were.

This openness of political stories is the way in which the citizens' fundamental capacity to begin something anew in political action manifests itself in terms of political experience. In her essay on *Understanding and Politics*, reflecting on the disturbing experience of totalitarianism, but arguably also on this decisive general feature of political experience, Arendt stresses that "a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality. If the essence of all, and in particular of political, action is to make a new beginning, then understanding becomes the other side of action, namely that form of cognition, in distinction from many others, by which acting men (and not men who are engaged in contemplating some progressive or doomed course of history) eventually can come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists."[42] In other words, political generalization implies a distinctly creative (or with Kant's term: an imaginative) motive. Accordingly, the vase metaphor used above to explain the "meaningfulness" of a constellation between particulars has to be corrected with regard to one of its implications in order to adjust it to the peculiarity of political experience. In the political mode of understanding reality, the comprehensive constellation of the "meaning" of particulars (metaphorically: the shape of the vase) is not to be understood as a given premise preceding the experience of the particular (the piece of clay). On the contrary, the distinct experiential position of politics is constituted by the very fact that the particular is prior to the whole

or the "general," as Arendt indicates, for instance, in her reflections on Kant's concept of judgment:

> The chief difficulty in judgment is that it is "the faculty of thinking the particular"; but to think means to generalize, hence it is the faculty of mysteriously combining the particular and the general. This is relatively easy if the general is given – as a rule, a principle, a law – so that the judgment merely subsumes the particular under it. The difficulty becomes great "if only the particular be given for which the general has to be found." For the standard cannot be borrowed from experience and cannot be derived from outside. I cannot judge one particular by another particular; in order to determine its worth, I need a *tertium quid* or a *tertium comparationis*, something related to the two particulars and yet distinct from both.[43]

In terms of political experience, to perceive a particular as being a part of something means to actively participate in imaginatively evoking, reproducing, and constantly reshaping this "something." The thinking of citizens can be understood as the mental activity of "finding" a generalization which is not simply given, or even more precisely: it is the mental activity of *making* and *creating* such a "general" in the first place, and of reproducing and permanently reshaping it from the manifold particulars of common affairs. Hence, the political integration of particulars as understood by Arendt generates meaning in terms of generalizations which not only themselves remain bound to particularity but are also permanently in the making, as it were, in the process of being actively shaped and reshaped in the open endeavor of public discourse.

In order to fully understand the genuinely political character of these generalizations, however, a further characteristic trait of political experience has to be considered. It derives from the fact that the primary and immediate concern and orientation of politics is not toward "objects" but toward other "subjects." As Arendt frequently emphasizes, the defining "content" of politics consists of the agent-revealing acts of disclosure by which individuals participate in the non-objective world or the web of interpersonal relations which builds up the public sphere.[44] As a consequence, political experience refers to persons rather than things. This holds true with regard to the "particulars" as well as to the "generalizations" involved in the civic mode of understanding and judging. The former eventually are to be understood in terms of *individuals* localizing *themselves* in a web of relations; the latter integrate this web not so much

in terms of "objects" or "contents," but rather in terms of a somewhat generalized form of political *subjectivity*. This leads us to the next two characteristics of the thinking of citizens indicated in Arendt's writings.

2. Self-localization In political experience, individuals not only perceive (and create) the meaningfulness of particulars as being integrated in the comprehensive context of public discourse; they also perceive (and create) a meaningful position *for themselves* within this comprehensive context. Political understanding is not only a genuinely integrative mode of experiencing particulars in terms of perceived "objects"; more importantly, it is a "subjective" act of self-integration or self-localization. It implies the setting of a personal perspective *within* the comprehensive contexts of public discourses which in the first place constitutes the position from which objects and phenomena can be perceived in their character as "particulars" of the "world." In understanding the world of human affairs politically, individuals primarily comprehend *their own place as constituent particulars* or as *participants* in the common space and practice of politics. Political experience first and foremost implies a "mutual involvement in the enacted stories that unfold in our public world"; it renders the experience of being "drawn out of ourselves, and to be inserted in a public world of shared experience, shared vocabulary, shared spectacles."[45]

Hence, political understanding constitutes an experience of not merely looking on, but actively *participating* in, in a sense of personally becoming a part of those integrating generalizations engendered in politics. It virtually is a self-involving mode of experience and therefore, as Arendt indicates by referring to Hegel, always bears a very personal motive of "reconciliation," the attempt to personally "be at peace with the world"[46]: "Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge ... is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world."[47] By "understanding" the "world" politically, human beings not only integrate particulars, but also orient *themselves* and find a place for themselves within the common spaces of political action. This self-involving mode of understanding is "the only inner compass we have" without which "we would never be able to take our bearings in the world" and "to be at home on this earth."[48] According to Arendt, such acts of experiential self-localization are a crucial aspect of political experience. They indeed can be understood as the enactment of "common sense" par excellence, "that sixth sense that we not only all have

in common but which fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a common world."[49]

In epistemological terms, this self-localization *within* the "field of experience" of the human world implies an immanent perspective of political experience which, again, clearly distinguishes it from the reflective activity of philosophizing.[50] The most fundamental condition of philosophy is its localization outside of the public discourse on common affairs, achieved by a "deliberate act of abstaining, of holding oneself back from the ordinary activities determined by our daily wants." It requires a radical "withdrawal from the world" and "from doing," from any form of immediate practical involvement and hence also "from the partiality of immediate interests that in one way or another make me part of the real world."[51] In contrast to this philosophical mode of experiencing human affairs "from outside," the political understanding of meaning is a genuinely world-bound mental activity; it requires as its most fundamental condition that it "in one way or another" does have the potential of making citizens "part of the real world." As opposed to the experiences of reality in terms of necessary relations of causality between things, the perception of reality in terms of "meaning" for Arendt implies an experiential constellation in which the experiencing person perceives himself or herself as an integrated and an actively participating part of the experienced reality.

Hence, the aspect of self-localization via participation underscores the subjective rather than objective orientation of political experience, insofar as it is the practical and cognitive act of connecting with other human beings by which human beings make themselves at home in the political world. Being mentally at home within a public discourse in the political sense implies the ability and the mental habit to take into account "how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other," more precisely, how it appears to the many others. "This kind of understanding – seeing the world (as we rather tritely say today) from the other fellow's point of view – is the political kind of insight par excellence."[52] At the same time, the idea of self-localization also highlights once more that neither the comprehensive whole of a public space nor the individuals' positions within it are simply objectively given facts, but rather permanently in the making and constantly in the remaking. Political participation in terms of a mental act of self-localization implies not only to connect with "equals" but also to individually confirm one's personal "distinctness."[53] This is why individual acts of participating are never completely "conditioned" by the many others who also participate

in the shaping and reshaping of common stories.[54] Rather, such acts of self-localization constitute that kind of reciprocity within inter-subjective relations which is characteristic for political freedom (as opposed to mere individual autonomy). It consists of the activity of actually participating in public discourse and at the same time of recognizing the others' freedom to do the same, by taking into account both one's own and the others' perspectives on common questions and problems. In other words, it renders one's own perspective to be "particular" and distinct, yet at the same time connected and integrated. Only by making oneself politically "at home" in such a public space, in the sense of being someone among others, the genuinely political experience of freedom can be realized.

Both the activities of judging politically and of understanding in terms of making oneself at home politically presuppose and at the same time constitute a web of interpersonal relations. Only such a web of interconnected acts of self-localization generates the peculiar "Wirklichkeitsdichte," the high density of worldly reality, as Arendt expresses it in the German version of *On Revolution*,[55] which is characteristic for public spaces. Understanding (or *phronein*) within these spaces renders "action and thought" as "almost one and the same, summed up as it were and bound together in the great words with which man meets his destiny and asserts himself in his essentially human condition. This he can do only if he lives together with others in the way of a polis, if he lives a political life in the original sense of the word."[56] Only within such dense interpersonal constellations of public spaces, can human beings successfully orient their judgments on political questions. It is "one's community sense" of participating in such a common space which "makes it possible to enlarge one's mentality. Negatively speaking, this means that one is able to abstract from private conditions and circumstances, which, as far as judgment is concerned, limit and inhibit its exercise. Private conditions condition us; imagination and reflection enable us to liberate ourselves from them and to attain that relative impartiality that is the specific virtue of judgment."[57] Such individual acts of self-localization are reiterated in any concrete act of political judgment which always implies an appeal to the "community sense": "In other words, when one judges, one judges as a member of a community."[58]

3. We-experience This "community," in turn, is permanently created and virtually consists of nothing but such self-localizing acts and the interpersonal connections constituted by them. Accordingly, the genuinely politi-

cal "generalizations" engendered in the mental activity of citizens are themselves to be understood in *personal* terms, as primarily constituting an *inter-subjective* constellation. The specific character of these "generalized" interpersonal relations implied in political experience can be further clarified, again, by distinguishing them from the way in which persons may relate to each other in the activity of thinking as philosophizing. According to Arendt, philosophizing in its classical form indicates the inter-personal constellation of a dialogue, either between individuals or in the form of the tacit inner "dialogue with myself" in the Socratic sense. Genuinely civic mental activities, while they do rely on the ability of individuals to "think" in this sense, at the same time transform this dialogical into the quite different interpersonal constellation of a multitude of citizens simultaneously present in a public sphere. Compared with the dialogical nature of philosophy, political experience appears to be more immediately related to the existential condition of plurality, insofar as the activities of understanding and of judgment are always embedded in and conflate a plurality of many different perspectives. They rely on "the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself"[59] in the public realm and on the "infinite number of different standpoints, to which correspond the most diverse points of view."[60] The difference "between the art of persuasion" as "the political art of speech," for instance, and "the art of dialectic" as "the art of philosophical speech" is, as Arendt argues with reference to Aristotle, "that the former always addresses a multitude whereas dialectic is possible only as a dialogue between two."[61]

Rather than being merely inter-subjective or dialogical in nature, the civic conflation of many different perspectives of a multitude into a plural, yet common experiential position seems to constitute a somewhat collective mode of common perspective which at the same time remains plural and diverse. In her late texts, Arendt often uses the pronominal metaphor of the first-person plural to indicate the peculiar kind of "sameness in utter diversity"[62] of this interpersonal constellation: The "true plural of (political) action," which is "paradigmatic for the political sphere," constitutes the experiential perspective of a "We."[63] "The only trait that all (the) various forms and shapes of human plurality have in common is the simple fact … that at some moment in time and for some reason a group of people must have come to think of themselves as a 'We.'"[64] In other words, not only the particulars but also the "generalizations" engendered in political experience are to be understood in personal terms. The constitutive integrating

whole engendered in the mental activities of political understanding and judgment is that of a "generalized" political subject which assumes the pronominal form of the first-person plural. To make oneself "at home in the world" by way of political understanding implies not only to find one's place within the world of objects, deeds, and stories told in a common public sphere, but also to perceive these objects, deeds, and stories from the perspective of a "We" in which "I" am and many others are participating. To understand from the position of this political "We" does therefore not so much imply "to understand one another as individual persons, but to look upon the same world from one another's standpoint, to see the same in very different and frequently opposing aspects."[65]

Arendt's metaphoric use of this pronominal formula may be understood to describe similar constellations than those that have recently been discussed under the headings of "collective intentionality" or "We intention."[66] According to Arendt, the interpersonal constellation of a "We" apparently emerges when the practice of political judgment and understanding is vividly enacted and broadly shared by many actors in a public sphere. It constitutes a somewhat common or collective experiential position, but not in terms of commonly shared convictions with a clearly defined content. The commonality of this peculiarly political interpersonal constellation does not seem to imply any definite content or even a collective "identity" rooted in a common cultural tradition. It rather seems to leave room for, it even seems to depend upon plurality, diversity, conflict, and the open and contingent character of politics[67]:

> We don't know the future, everybody acts into the future [which] nobody can at all know. Nobody knows what he is doing, because the future is being done. Action is a WE and not an I. Only where I am the only one, if I were the only one, could I foretell what's going to happen from what I am doing. Now this looks as though what actually happens is entirely contingent, and contingency is indeed one of the biggest factors in all history.[68]

Arendt's idea of a political "We" obviously does not imply any collectivist notion of common "identity" or even a Rousseauian *volonté générale*.[69] In Arendt's understanding of public discourses, contingency is a major factor. But although citizens may disagree about almost everything, there still seems to be one common conviction or "generalization" they implicitly share. By controversially discussing and somehow deciding their common public affairs, the citizens' numerous particular opinions are integrated

by the commonly shared notion of forming a "We" as the plural subject of their debates and decisions. The commonness of political experience is constituted, so Arendt seems to suggest, solely by this peculiar constellation of a first-person plural. In terms of content, this subject's perspective remains highly pluralistic, diverse, and contested. Political "generalizations" always remain open, contested, and flexible, not only because they are substantially bound to particularity, and not only because they always remain in the status of being constantly and simultaneously shaped and reshaped by many participants, but also because they do not primarily refer to and hence "generalize" certain experiences of concrete contents, ideas, or convictions, but rather the experience of *political subjectivity* as an open interpersonal constellation. Not identity, not even "solidarity but plurality; not shoulder to shoulder, but action in concert by distinct individuals, is the mark of a political life in common."[70] Seen from the participating individual's perspective, to "generalize" in this political sense does not mean to fix one's judgments or understandings by claiming a general validity for certain particular ideas, but rather to extend and enlarge their experiential basis by integrating them into the generalized perspective of the public. The thinking of citizens is an "enlarged mentality" in terms of a highly pluralist but inter-personally connected and integrated "We." At the same time, however, it is a substantially bounded mentality.

4. A Bounded Form of Enlarged Mentality When taking into account the hermeneutic and integrative aspects of political experience sketched so far, it is not surprising that Arendt transforms the concept of judgment she takes from Kant into a quite different idea. It is especially understandable why she transforms Kant's transcendental and potentially universalistic idea of an "enlarged mentality" into an empirically concrete and particularistic political category, ignoring the fact that Kant's own conception places substantial "constraints upon how much he can allow relations of community to enter into the formation of judgments."[71] Rather than being a misunderstanding, this conceptual transformation seems to be the very point of her *political* reading of Kant. Her reinterpretation of the idea of an enlarged mentality into a concept of political theory deliberately fuses it with her hermeneutic concept of understanding, the reference to *concrete particulars* and the mental act of creatively deriving the *concrete generalization* of a political "We" from them. The mental activity of citizens does not unfold in a transcendental framework constituted by a *counter-factual* regulative idea of "the other" and the *hypothetical* manifold of all possible,

theoretically conceivable perspectives. Rather, it unfolds in the *concrete* framework of public discourse, constituted by the *empirically embedded* enlarged mentality of public opinion, articulated by *real* other citizens and groups of citizens *actually* present within a particular public space:

> It needs the presence of others "in whose place" it must think, whose perspectives it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all. As logic, to be sound, depends on the presence of the self, so judgment, to be valid, depends on the presence of others. Hence judgment is endowed with a certain specific validity but is never universally valid. Its claims to validity can never extend further than the others in whose place the judging person has put himself for his considerations. Judgment, Kant says, is valid "for every single judging person," but the emphasis in the sentence is on "judging"; it is not valid for those who do not judge or for those who are not members of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear.[72]

This political variant of an "enlarged mentality" is not a purely Kantian idea strictly speaking. For Arendt, however, this more political and pragmatic, epistemologically "impure" variant apparently more accurately describes the practical logic of that "enlarged" mental activity as it is actually practiced by citizens within public spaces. Being aware of the argument's deviation from Kant's original intention and also, by the way, of its quite ambiguous normative implications (see Chap. 7), Arendt's interpretation claims that this is indeed how politics and political experience works. On the basis of this partly transforming interpretation, the Kantian concept more clearly coincides with the Greek understanding of *phronesis* as well as with the idea of *common sense*.[73] And it seems especially to bear distinctly realist and spatial implications that highlight those questions of limitation and of boundaries we already encountered in Arendt's general conception of political action (see Chap. 4). Expressed in the terms of Arendt's theory of judgment, these implications suggest that the practical form of "enlarged mentality" realized in the experience of citizens is at the same time a substantially "bounded" form of experience. Political experience is embedded in a concrete "space" of appearances and interpersonal relations which, because it is concrete, is always limited.

Some of the implications of this bounded character of political experience are addressed, for instance, in Arendt's critical reflections on the substantial differences between political and scientific experience and the

latter's impact on the intellectual situation in modernity, with the faculty of thinking having become "chiefly the handmaiden of science, of organized knowledge."[74] This question figures quite prominent in Arendt's writings. The perspective and mental activity of modern science, especially the extraterrestrial extension of human technology and scientific experience in the twentieth century, even explicitly mark the major "vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears" from which Arendt's consideration of the *vita activa* is undertaken.[75] It is no coincidence that Arendt chooses the problem of modern science as the starting point of her theory of action in *The Human Condition*.[76] With regard to the epistemological or experiential side of this theory, the topic is right to the point. Modern natural science is presented by Arendt as the more or less direct opposite of the mental activity of political understanding, especially regarding its spatial implications.

The question occurs in a number of Arendt's texts. It is most clearly laid out in the final chapter of *The Human Condition* and in the essay on *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*.[77] In this essay, Arendt responds to a "Symposium on Space" held in 1963 on the technological extension of the human horizon into extraterrestrial spaces and on the question of what this "exploration of space is doing to man's view of himself and to man's condition."[78] On this occasion, Arendt reflects on the "humanistic" consequences of the general progress made in theoretical physics during the twentieth century. She argues that scientific progress, particularly the ongoing "conquest of space" with the means of scientific reason and the extension of the world of man beyond the earth and into the unlimited space of the universe (at first in theory and imagination, then in practice), is substantially changing the whole spatial coordinate system in which human reality is conceived. This substantial change of perspective produces an ever-growing gap between the world of sense perception, common language, and common sense on the one hand and the physical universe as grasped by the abstract categories and the technical devices and measuring instruments of natural science on the other. In fact, Arendt diagnoses an almost complete detachment of the latter from the former since the formulation of quantum theory and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Moreover, the fact that the insights and experimental results of natural science increasingly lay beyond the limits of the human capacity of sense experience, even beyond the human capacities of comprehension and description in common language, confronts with the question of whether there may be "absolute limits" of human knowledge in general

that come to the fore in this development: "[I]t might be wise to suspect such limitations whenever it turns out that the scientist can do more than he is capable of comprehending."[79]

That science seemingly tries to push and blur these proposed "limits" is a consequence, as Arendt argues, of its own inherent logic which is grounded on a specific experiential position and a corresponding mode of human knowledge. Scientific experience looks upon "earth-bound nature from a truly universal viewpoint, that is from an Archimedean standpoint taken, wilfully and explicitly, outside the earth."[80] This perspective requires an attitude toward reality which is in principle indifferent to the practical and ethical concerns of human affairs: "The very integrity of science demands that not only utilitarian considerations but the reflection upon the stature of man as well be left in abeyance. ... [M]an, insofar as he is a scientist, does not care about his own stature in the universe or about his position on the evolutionary ladder of animal life; this 'carelessness' is his pride and his glory."[81] It seems to be this peculiar attitude—a natural science variant of Max Weber's "intellectual honesty," one might say, which seems to consist of a consequent dispensation of any form of mental "self-localization"—which for Arendt provides the experiential basis for the enormous extension of human knowledge about nature and for technological progress.

The same attitude however for Arendt has ambivalent social, cultural, and political side effects. The disinterested, virtually dislocating rationale of natural science not only unfolds extraordinary potentials for scientific discovery and the extension of "objective" human knowledge particularly about nature. It also tends to dissolve the "humanist" basis of "common sense" and "everyday language" as those substantially different modes of reflection on humanist concerns which provide the very conditions under which the experience of reality can be "meaningful" for human beings:

> We have come to our present capacity to "conquer space" through our new ability to handle nature from a point in the universe outside the earth. ... Without as yet actually occupying the point where Archimedes had wished to stand, we have found a way to act on the earth as though we disposed of terrestrial nature from outside, from the point of Einstein's "observer freely poised in space". If we look down from this point upon what is going on on earth and upon the various activities of men, ... then these activities will indeed appear to ourselves as no more than "overt behavior", which we can study with the same methods we use to study the behavior of rats. ... All

> our pride in what we can do will disappear into some kind of mutation of the human race; the whole of technology, seen from this point, in fact no longer appears "as the result of a conscious human effort to extend man's material powers, but rather as a large-scale biological process." Under these circumstances, speech and everyday language would indeed be no longer a meaningful utterance that transcends behavior even if it only expresses it, and it would much better be replaced by the extreme and in itself meaningless formalism of mathematical signs.[82]

The passage highlights that Arendt's immediate concern here is a general critique of scientism. But it also brings to the fore very interesting implications of this critique for her understanding of political experience. On the one hand, the indifferent, disinterested perspective that initiates and impels the extensive dynamics of scientific progress demands its virtual dislocation, an intellectual abstraction and an actual emancipation from that down-to-earth perspective (in the literal sense) from which reality in the practical terms of human concerns is experienced. On the other hand, it is only through these self-localizing modes of cognition, through "humanist concerns," "common sense," and "everyday language," that reality can be experienced as being meaningful. In other words, the dislocating logic of unlimited expansion and the self-localizing logic of meaningfulness seem to directly contradict each other. Viewed against the background of the disinterested logic of modern science, it turns out for Arendt that among the very conditions of any possible sphere of objects to be accessible for a perception of their "meaning" is that this sphere is not infinite or infinitely extensible.[83] Indeed, to Arendt, the world of common affairs, as much as the "We" experiencing this world from within and therewith rendering it meaningful, is not boundless, elusive, abstract, and universal, but concrete, particular, and hence always limited and particularistic. Accordingly, acts of self-localization and the experience of meaning seem to require comprehensible boundaries of perception. This is what the extensive process of modern science unintentionally seems to prove for Arendt.[84]

Translated into more general terms, Arendt's spatial imagery in this context helps to complement and to summarize the reconstruction of the specific features of political experience as indicated in her theoretical exercises. Political experience refers to the contingent, constantly changing, contextual, and historical matters of human affairs, and perceives them in terms of relations of particulars and constituents to the practical generalizations of the plural, yet comprehensive, integrated contexts of

public spaces. It, secondly, is a "self-localizing" mental activity by which individuals make themselves "at home" in the common world of public spheres. Any act of political understanding and interpretation is an act of personal participation in the public discourse. This activity implies, thirdly, the perspective of a first-person plural, the concrete "We" of a political community. Accordingly, the integrative or generalizing aspect of political experience is to be understood primarily in subjective rather than in objective terms, and therefore relatively independent from any sort of consent in terms of content or commonly shared values. The most fundamental political generalization which integrates a concrete public sphere into a comprehensive pattern is the subjective "general" of a public "We." Finally, the peculiar experience of reality rendered by political experience can be "meaningful" only if it is discerned from within a frame of reference, or from within a "space" of appearances, which is not infinite, but discernible as a concretely delimited "whole" that consists of interconnected parts and participants—even if this space is highly dynamic and permanently changing. The thinking of citizens consists of the activity of constantly beginning anew, of opening up new possibilities and initiating new stories and chains of action the end of which are utterly unpredictable. At the same time, however, the sphere of appearance which politics demands to take place is not an infinite but a limited "space" with concrete and relatively stable boundaries. These boundaries are as constitutive for its existence as are personal freedom and the human ability of initiating new beginnings. "[I]t is only by respecting its own borders that this realm, where we are free to act and to change, can remain intact, preserving its integrity and keeping its promises."[85]

Notes

1. Melvin Hill: The Fictions of Mankind and the Stories of Men, in: Melvin Hill (Ed.): Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World, New York (St. Martin's Press) 1979, pp. 275–300, here: p. 277.
2. Ernst Vollrath: Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking, in: Social Research 44/1 (1977), p. 160–182, here: p. 170 ff.
3. HC, p. 154.
4. HC, p. 179, 184 ff., 26, 198 ff.
5. On the relation between legitimacy and political power, see V, p. 52.
6. Patrick Hayden: Arendt and the political power of judgment, in: Patrick Hayden (Ed.): Hannah Arendt. Key Concepts, London (Routledge) 2014, pp. 167–184; here: p. 167.

7. LKPP, p. 71, 74.
8. LKPP, p. 70.
9. BPF, p. 265 ff.
10. EU, p. 322.
11. Ronald Beiner: Rereading Hannah Arendt's Kant Lectures, in: Ronald Beiner/Jennifer Nedersky (Eds.): Judgment, Imagination, and Politics. Themes from Kant and Arendt, Lanham (Rowman & Littelfield) 2001, p. 91–101; here: p. 98.
12. See also Disch: Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy, p. 151 ff.
13. PhP, p. 75 f.
14. PhP, p. 85 f.
15. On the Hegelian motives in Arendt's account of action, see Allen Speight: Arendt and Hegel on the Tragic Nature of Action, in: Philosophy and Social Criticism 28/5, p. 523–536. See also, more generally, Andrew Cole's characterization of Hegelian "theory" as opposed to Kantian "philosophy" in his recent study *The Birth of Theory*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 2014. Arendt's political theory indeed shares a number of characteristic traits with Cole's account of Hegelian theory.
16. See the instructive summary of Arendt's concept of understanding by Masa Mrovlje: Narrating and Understanding, in: Hayden, Patrick: Hannah Arendt. Key Concepts, London (Routledge) 2014, pp. 66–84. On the hermeneutic aspects of Arendt's theoretical perspective in general, see, more elaborately, Hans-Jörg Sigwart: Politische Hermeneutik. Verstehen, Politik und Kritik bei John Dewey und Hannah Arendt, Würzburg (Königshausen und Neumann) 2012, p. 355 ff.; on the influence of certain "Weimar hermeneutic connections" and especially of Friedrich Gundolf's romanticist conception of hermeneutics on Arendt's thought, see Liisi Keedus: Thinking beyond Philosophy: Hannah Arendt and the Weimar Hermeneutic Connections, in: Trames. Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences 18/4 (2014), 307–325.
17. PhP, p. 77.
18. BPF, p. 44.
19. LKPP, p. 15.
20. Ibid., p. 13.
21. Ibid.
22. PhP, p. 76.
23. LKPP, p. 72.
24. BPF, p. 6.
25. Ibid.
26. OR, p. 86. See also PAT, Folder 1, p. 9 (the marginal note there at separate sheet).
27. HC, p. 51 f.

28. The last quotations are from OR, p. 85 f.
29. PAT, Folder 4, p. 1.
30. HC, 181 f.
31. Th, p. 94.
32. LKPP, p. 26.
33. LKPP, p. 56.
34. See also Winfried Thaa: Die notwendige Partikularität des Politischen. Über Hannah Arendts republikanische Perspektive auf Politik und Weltgesellschaft, in: Zeitschrift für Politik 46 (1999), pp. 404–423.
35. LKPP, p. 56.
36. It also resonates, however, in her interpretation of Kant's concepts of judgment and imagination. See LKPP, p. 16, 66 ff., 79 ff.
37. EU, p. 323. See also Vollrath: Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking, p. 172.
38. This is rightly emphasized in Ronald Beiner: Interpretive Essay: Hannah Arendt on Judgment, in: Hannah Arendt: Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy. Ed. By Ronald Beiner, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 1982, pp. 89–156; here: p. 136 and Beiner: Rereading Hannah Arendt's Kant Lectures, p. 95.
39. See Hans-Jörg Sigwart: Tradition and the Experience of Citizenship: Political Hermeneutics in Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dewey and Hannah Arendt, in: Anamnesis 3/1 (2013), pp. 7–40.
40. Hans-Georg Gadamer: Wahrheit und Methode. 6th Edition. Gesammelte Werke Vol. 1, Tübingen (Mohr) 1990, p. 295.
41. Th, p. 216.
42. EU, p. 321.
43. LKPP, p. 76.
44. HC, 182 f. On the motive of disclosure in Arendt's theory of action (and its ethical implications), also see Garrath Williams: Disclosure and Responsibility in Arendt's The Human Condition, in: European Journal of Political Theory 14/1 (2015), pp. 37–54.
45. Beiner: Rereading Hannah Arendt's Kant Lectures, p. 91.
46. BPF, p. 8.
47. EU, p. 307 f.
48. EU, p. 322 f.
49. PhP, p. 100.
50. This applies to the citizen's perspective as "actor" *and* as "onlooker" or "story-teller." On this distinction, see Shmuel Lederman: The actor does not judge: Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment, in: Philosophy and Social Criticism 2015, published online before print: http://psc.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/05/29/0191453715587974.full.pdf+html (accessed December 16, 2015). Lederman's analysis rightly points out the

significance, but in my opinion also overemphasizes the practical implications of this distinction. In effect, it neglects the close relation between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* in Arendt's theory of action and judgment.

51. Th, p. 92 f.
52. PhP, p. 83 f.
53. HC, p. 175 f.
54. HC, p. 177.
55. Arendt: Über die Revolution, 57.
56. PAT, Folder 1, p. 8.
57. LKPP, p. 73; also BPF, p. 220.
58. LKPP, p. 72.
59. HC, p. 57.
60. BPF, p. 51.
61. PhP, p. 79.
62. HC, p. 57.
63. W, p. 200 f.
64. W, p. 202.
65. BPF, p. 51.
66. See more elaborately Sigwart: Politische Hermeneutik, p. 398 ff. For a succinct summary of the debate on collective intentionality see David P. Schweikard/Hans Bernhard Schmid: Collective Intentionality, in: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2013 Edition), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/collective-intentionality/ (December 15, 2015).
67. See also Lisa Disch's argument that there is an idea of "situated impartiality" intimated in Arendt's understanding of politics which not only includes, but stresses the constitutive significance of conflict and dissent in political processes (Disch: Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy, p. 162 ff. and 210 ff.).
68. Hannah Arendt: Interview with Roger Errera, in: HannahArendt.net – Journal for Political Thinking 2/1 (1999), http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/issue/view/11 (December 15, 2015), p. 56.
69. See particularly Arendt's critique of Rousseau's idea in *OR*, p. 76 ff.
70. Elisabeth Frazer: Power and Violence, in: Patrick Hayden (Ed.): Hannah Arendt. Key Concepts, London/New York (Routledge) 2014, pp. 155–166; here: p. 161.
71. Ronald Beiner: Rereading Hannah Arendt's Kant Lectures, p. 95.
72. Ibid., p. 220 f.
73. BPF, p. 221.
74. Th, p. 7.
75. HC, p. 5

76. HC, p. 1 ff. On the general significance of Arendt's critical examination of modern science and technology, also see Waseem Yaqoob: The Archimedean Point: Science and Technology in the Thought of Hannah Arendt, 1951–1963, in: Journal of European Studies 44/3 (2014), pp. 199–224.
77. HC, p. 248 ff.; BPF, pp. 265–280.
78. BPF, p. 299 (Note 1).
79. BPF, p. 278.
80. HC, p. 11.
81. BPF, p. 275.
82. Ibid., p. 279 f.
83. This is also why for Arendt the practical principle of "expansion" prevailing in European imperialism is so highly destructive in political terms. See OT, p. 209 ff.
84. BPF, p. 278 f. Actually, insofar as science itself is a "man-centred inquiry into what is," even scientific insights are never completely objective for Arendt, because they "always remain replies to questions asked by men" (BPF, p. 49).
85. BPF, p. 264.

CHAPTER 6

The Experiential Position of Political Theory

Abstract According to Arendt, the mental activity of political theorizing on the one hand resembles the worldly practical logic of political experience as examined in the previous chapter. On the other hand, it at the same time is characterized by a gradual epistemological deviation and emancipation from the limited horizons of practical political understanding. This is realized by a practice of critical understanding which oscillates between genuinely political and genuinely philosophical experiences and which locates itself in a distinctly comparative and multi-contextual frame of reference. This account of a wandering type of theory has important implications for Arendt's relation toward modernity, for her method of interpretation and conceptual construction and for the language of her political theory.

Keywords Epistemological deviation • Self-localization • Multi-contextuality • Interpretive simultaneity • Multi-linguality

The major contours of politics in terms of a field of experience and of a corresponding civic mental activity outlined in the previous chapter, together with Arendt's critical perception of the "Platonic position" of mainstream philosophy, form the epistemological background of her self-understanding as a political thinker. When Arendt insists on being a political theorist rather than a philosopher, she takes side with the worldly activity of political judgment and understanding against the detached, abstract activity of thinking

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as philosophizing. This critical turn against the tradition's general hostility toward politics and the realm of human affairs is a constitutive motive of Arendt's theoretical perspective. It makes the specific features of political experience an essential part of the epistemological framework of her political theory—a theory which is itself "conceived for the purpose of political action."[1]

Against this background, Arendt's marked self-reflective abstinence may indeed be understood as being itself motivated by her theory's epistemological alignment with politics.[2] Arendt's outwardly or worldly oriented attitude as a political thinker corresponds to a method of theorizing which in many respects seems to follow a similar rationale than the civic practice of appearing in public. In this respect, Arendt's self-perception as a theorist squarely follows Kant's ideal of publicity, an ideal which she underscores as a crucial intellectual principle also in her reading of Jaspers.[3] Consequently, the reasons for shifting the focus in her description of the various forms of public engagement away from self-reflection and toward "self-revealing" public exercises equally apply to Arendt's understanding of both the practices of politics as well as of theorizing. In addition, also the claim of her theory's logic of inquiry to think "in and with the city," that is, to be intimately intertwined with its concrete subject matter, renders the idea of a separate and abstract treatment of epistemological and methodological questions to appear epistemologically inadequate. In contrast, such an intertwined epistemology may be more accurately articulated in terms of a sub-text constantly present in concrete empirical, interpretive and historical studies. And this is indeed the case. Instead of explicitly dealing with epistemological questions regarding her concept of theory from a meta-perspective, Arendt's work as a whole consists of implicit epistemological "exercises" on the question of "how to think" which accompany and are inscribed into her concrete analyses of historical and contemporary phenomena as well as her interpretations of other thinkers and her examinations of the practical logic of political words, deeds and actions, political narratives, and experiences of "men of action."

Hence, Arendt's rather unusual sub-textual mode of epistemological examinations directly reflects her attempt to locate her political theory's experiential position in the midst of the common human affairs of citizens and their field of experience. This epistemological alignment with politics, however, is not Arendt's final word on the experiential position of political theory. *Political experience* in the sense outlined in the previous chapter and *understanding politics theoretically* are related mental activities, but

they are not identical. Arendt's political theory takes side with politics against philosophy, but it does not simply assume "the position of the political man."[4] The attempt to theoretically understand politics on the one hand and the mental practice of politics on the other closely resemble each other, but for this very reason they have to be cautiously distinguished. When they are identified or confused with each other, the result is either a curious "rebellion of the philosopher against philosophy" which attempts to intellectually "escape from the perplexities of modern philosophy into the unquestioning commitment of action."[5] Arendt considers this activist anti-philosophical rebellion to be a characteristic trait of modern philosophical "existentialism," and she holds it to be as problematic in its practical implications as the classical philosophical escape from action. Or otherwise the result is less problematic in immediately practical terms, but still misleading in terms of theoretical analysis, that the theorist unconsciously over-intellectualizes the understanding of political practice by completely identifying it with his own experiential position. This, in fact, is one of the major mistakes, according to Arendt, of Kant's "unwritten" political philosophy. Kant's too narrow focus on the figure of the spectator or onlooker of society as the paradigmatic model for reconstructing the practical logic of politics in effect prevents him from fully grasping the nature of the political judgment of men of action (in contrast to theoretical judgment) and of the political experience of citizens.[6]

A further example for Arendt of such an over-theorization of the political is a certain form of political "cosmopolitanism" which assumes an understanding of political action as being capable of engendering one global common field of civic experience. To Arendt, "men cannot become citizens of the world as they are citizens of their countries."[7] To be sure, experiential cosmopolitanism, like the sort of reasoning which may constitute the global field of a "Gelehrtenrepublik" in the Kantian sense of the term, is not impossible from Arendt's perspective.[8] The "main social and political function" of such universal intellectual discourses, however—as much as the function of "universities" as the peculiar institutions which help to enable such discourses—"lies precisely in their impartiality and independence from social pressure and political power."[9] Universities as institutions indeed for Arendt somewhat transcend the peculiar partiality of a society's logic of practice, but only *because* they at least potentially "provide the only place in society where power does not have the last word – all perversions and hypocrisies to the contrary notwithstanding."[10] Kant's "republic of scholars," being politically powerless and having to

be powerless, as far as Arendt is concerned, in order to fulfill its proper function of critique, is not to be confused with a "world republic" in the truly political sense of the term. Regarding the idea of such a real political community on a global scale, Arendt is indeed highly skeptical. It seems as if such a cosmopolitan field of experience which would actually have the potential to universally generate the high "density of reality" (see above) which is characteristic to political experiential fields, without turning tyrannical or even totalitarian, is neither practically conceivable nor even desirable from Arendt's perspective.

We may leave open the question whether these critical interpretations of "cosmopolitanism" and of Kant are convincing in terms of exegesis.[11] In the case of Kant, Arendt's critique may be more plausible with regard to certain forms of contemporary Kantianism than with regard to Kant himself. What is more interesting for our present concern, however, is the self-reflective epistemological sub-text of these interpretations. On this level, they indicate that for Arendt the epistemological alignment with politics, although necessary, does indeed not yet fully define the experiential location of theory. Rather, this alignment has to be accompanied by a gradual distinction from politics to prevent misleading identifications, both in terms of the over-politicization of critical theorizing and in terms of the over-theorization of politics. In both cases of misconceiving the relation between politics and theory, equally easy to fall into, the theorist loses sight of the most genuine potentials as well as the genuine limits and ambivalences of the practice of politics. In order to keep open the theoretical perspective on these potentials, limits, and ambivalences of political experience, theory's turn against philosophy's hostility toward politics has to be balanced by an emancipative move into the other direction, as it were. To Arendt, the experiential positions of politics and theory are, of course, compatible; they even depend on each other. But there nonetheless remains an inescapable, yet very productive, tension between the two. Both are an intellectual play with the components of plurality, diversity, and commonality, as well as with the potentials for intellectual emancipation inherent in political experience. In the practice of theorizing, however, these components play out in a substantially different way or on a different level, as it were, than in politics. Politics and theory may be divided merely by differences in degree rather than in principle. But these differences in degree indeed make all the difference, as far as Arendt's experiential position as a theorist is concerned. They set an only gradual

but crucial distinction between political experience proper and political theorizing.

Due to this distinction, the relation of Arendt's theory toward the public realm of common understanding assumes a principally ambiguous form, oscillating between alignment with and emancipation from politics.[12] This brings a genuinely equivocal tone into her work which is discernible in almost all of her writings, and especially in those of her texts that deal with the mental activities of human beings. It is no coincidence that these texts have always been particularly puzzling to her interpreters. The problem is clearly reflected, for instance, in Ronald Beiner's critical representation of Arendt's Kantian theory of judgment. Beiner interprets Arendt's account as actually entailing two different theories, one to be found in Arendt's early writings, the other in her late work. The latter, according to Beiner's interpretation, not only emphasizes different aspects, but actually contradicts Arendt's earlier perspective and, in addition, is founded on a misinterpretation of Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment. This interpretation quite accurately articulates the equivocal character of Arendt's concepts. Rather than implying an early and a late variant which contradict each other, however, Arendt's conceptualization of judgment is puzzling because it works on two different levels,[13] just as much as her conceptualization of understanding and to a certain degree even her concept of common sense work on two different levels.[14] On a first level, these concepts are explicitly focused on articulating the crucial characteristics of political experience. On a second level, they at the same time entail a self-reflective epistemological sub-text which articulates Arendt's own experiential position as a theorist, a position which is constituted by an alignment with, but also by a method of gradual deviation from political experience. Accordingly, these two different layers are closely related and intertwined, but nonetheless distinct. The theorist's perspective gradually deviates from the citizen's experiential position. It therefore also gradually changes the nature of the mental activity of judgment and of understanding. And this in principle holds true for Arendt's early as much as for her later texts, although the sub-text appears to figure ever more prominent the longer Arendt struggles with these questions.

But what, more concretely, does this sub-text say about Arendt's experiential position? How does she attempt to transcend the limited experiential horizon of public opinion and of common sense without losing the connection to political experience and the genuine meaning of the concrete empirical incidents of human affairs to which "the curve which the activity of thought describes must remain bound ... as the circle remains

bound to its focus"?[15] This indeed is the crucial epistemological question examined in Arendt's "exercises" on the problem of "how to think" adequately in political theory. Due to the sub-text character of Arendt's reflections, they do not give a straightforward and systematically evolved answer to this question. But when read against the background of the major characteristics of political experience sketched in the previous chapter, her exercises do render an impression of the most general features of her theory's gradual deviation from politics.

1. Theoretical Self-localization This gradual deviation manifests itself, to begin with, in a shift of emphasis in the relation between the activity of politics and its mental implications, and hence in the concrete constellation in which *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* are interconnected in theory.[16] While "understanding" as the activity of reflecting on politics for Arendt is nothing but "the other side of action" and hence inconceivable outside the practical world of common affairs and its activities of immediate participation, the relative weight, as it were, of these two sides of the same activity nonetheless differs in theory and politics. In theory, the emphasis lies on the reflective or mental element involved in political experience, whereas in politics, the active and immediately participatory element gradually prevails.[17] In a discussion with colleagues about this question, Arendt, speaking as a theorist, admits "that I am, of course, primarily interested in understanding. This is absolutely true. And I will admit that there are other people who are primarily interested in doing something. I am not." Opposing the more "immanent" accounts of theory advocated by some of her discussion partners, Arendt emphasizes that this conscious gradual dissociation from politics is a decisive trait of her intellectual self-localization: "This need (of understanding) is, of course, much stronger in me than it usually is in political theorists, with their need to unite action and thought. Because they want to act, you know. And I think I understood something of action precisely because I looked at it from the outside, more or less."[18]

In this respect, Arendt sides with Kant's dissociation of public philosophizing from real political action and power, notwithstanding her critique of Kant's otherwise still too philosophically biased understanding of politics. The theorist's attitude indeed approximates the perspective of a Kantian onlooker, therewith introducing a principal tension and a clear distinction, if only a gradual one, into the relation between theory and politics. A characterization of this relation can also be found in Arendt's essay on Lessing where at one point she sketches Lessing's attitude toward

the common world of public affairs. The passage quite accurately also sketches Arendt's own position in this respect:

> [Lessing] lacked, according to his own judgment, that happy, natural concord with the world, a combination of merit and good fortune, which both he and Goethe considered the sign of genius. Lessing believed he was indebted to criticism for something ... which never quite achieved that natural harmonization with the world in which Fortuna smiles when Virtù appears. ... [He] never felt at home in the world as it then existed and probably never wanted to, and still after his own fashion he always remained committed to it.[19]

Arendt's practice of theorizing, equally indebted to criticism, equally refrains from achieving a "natural harmonization with the world." In contrast, it aims at rendering a critical perspective which, although it is empirically embedded in political practices and intimately bound back to political experiences, at the same time still remains aware of the gradual difference from politics which constitutes the possibility to understand political experience *theoretically* in the first place. As a consequence, the theorist, according to Arendt, has "to keep back to a large extent from participating, from commitment."[20]

As a consequence of this shift of emphasis, Arendt's practice of theorizing quite obviously deviates from political experience proper in its mode of *self-localization* within political spaces. The general idea underlying Arendt's experiential phenomenology that "the place" where individuals come to stand and hence "the conditions they are subject to" majorly influence "what goes on in [their] minds" (see above), applies to theory as much as to any other kind of human experience. Theory's "place" in this sense is in the midst of common human affairs. The peculiar mode however in which the theorist actively assumes this place or position gradually differs from the citizen's mode of self-localization. Instead of actively participating and of making oneself "at home" in the common affairs, deeds, and stories of a concrete public discourse, the theorist's practice of self-localization is more about exposing oneself to the ambiguities and tensions inherent in human affairs and to "point out the antinomies within thinking and acting, within judging and deciding, within being and experiencing."[21] Referring to the peculiar position from which her critical analysis of totalitarianism is pursued, for instance, Arendt expresses this exposing or confronting nature of theorizing as follows: "Comprehension does not

mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be."[22] To keep open the necessary space for the "shock of experience" and its unsettling consequences requires some sort of a gradual methodological "alienation" from the commonsense routines of understanding,[23] and an attempt to locate theory in an experiential *in between* position.

The major significance of this *in between* position, which is empirically grounded in both time and space, yet also gradually alienated, is indicated in the two passages of Arendt's work where she may come closest to explicitly examine her own experiential position as a theorist, namely in the preface to *Between Past and Future* and in the last chapter of *Thinking*. Here Arendt depicts her own position in using the mathematical metaphor of a temporal and spatial parallelogram of contradicting experiential forces.[24] In both passages, Arendt refers to a parable from Franz Kafka's "collection of aphorisms entitled 'HE'" which she finds to quite adequately express the particular location of "the thinking ego."[25] Actually, for Arendt, Kafka's work as a whole appears primarily concerned with the "relationship between experience and thought,"[26] and hence inherently self-reflective in terms of epistemology. Accordingly, although Kafka's parable and maybe even more so Arendt's interpretation of it are highly metaphorical, it is obvious that both clearly entail a self-reflective epistemological sub-text dealing with the authors' own experiential positions.

In Kafka's narrative, which Arendt interprets exactly in terms of such a self-reflective sub-text, the thinking ego's location is characterized as a "battleground" between the experiential forces of past and future as they appear to an individual reflecting on them. This location is constituted by a peculiar enactment of man's ability of active self-localization within reality. It is engendered not merely by some sort of an "objective" contradiction between the two forces of past and future, but rather by the fact that the "thinking ego" is able to actively take a position, to pay their due to each one of them, yet at the same time to claim his own "subjective" ground to stand on by refraining from fully associating with either one of them: "It is the insertion of man with his limited life span" and his conscious self-localization on an *in between position in time* which "transforms

the continuously flowing stream of sheer change – which we can conceive of cyclically as well as in the form of rectilinear motion without ever being able to conceive of an absolute beginning or an absolute end – into time as we know it."[27] At the same time, it is this peculiar act of relating oneself to these contradictions which opens up possibilities for a gradual withdrawal from the present and for critical self-reflection.[28]

Again, although Arendt's interpretation of Kafka's literary and highly metaphorical imagery itself remains highly metaphorical, it is obvious that she considers this imagery as articulating crucial epistemological problems. In principle she seems to agree to a great extent with Kafka's metaphorical characterization of his experiential position—with one important exception. According to Arendt, Kafka's depiction of the problem renders an idea of critical thinking which is too abstract and not enough grounded in the concrete experiential field of human affairs: "The extreme parsimony of Kafka's language, in which for the sake of the fable's realism every actual reality that could have engendered the thought-world is eliminated, may cause it to sound stranger than the thought itself requires."[29] Kafka ascribes to his metaphoric figure of the "thinking ego" a position so elusive, detached, and "outside the game of life"[30] that the experiences of past and future in his imagery are almost completely "emptied, as it were, of their concrete content and liberated from all spatial categories."[31] It is as if his figure "jumps out of this world altogether"[32] into an experiential position which provides "barely enough room to stand."[33] As a consequence, Kafka seems to understand "the region ... of thought" too exclusively in terms of "a timeless, spaceless, suprasensuous realm,"[34] therewith implicitly sharing in the philosophical tradition's notorious enmity toward the concrete experiences of common human affairs. Kafka's parable eventually indulges in the same "old dream Western metaphysics has dreamt from Parmenides to Hegel, of a timeless region, an eternal presence in complete quiet, lying beyond human clocks and calendars altogether."[35]

To Arendt, the practice of political theorizing, in order to be able to understand the inherent meaning of political processes and constellations, requires a more solid ground to stand on, both in terms of time and space. It must assume an experiential position in the midst of those public spaces in which these processes and constellations are engendered and take place. As a consequence, the critical focus on contradictory experiential forces in theory must be complemented by the quite different temporal experience

as it is given in "ordinary life," in the sequence of deeds and stories embedded in the concrete *spatial* reality of a common world of human affairs:

> That we can shape the everlasting stream of sheer change into a time continuum we owe not to time itself but to the continuity of our business and our activities in the world, in which we continue what we started yesterday and hope to finish tomorrow. In other words, the time continuum depends on the continuity of our everyday life, and the business of everyday life, in contrast to the activity of the thinking ego – always independent of the spatial circumstances surrounding it – is always spatially determined and conditioned. It is due to this thoroughgoing spatiality of our ordinary life that we can speak plausibly of time in spatial categories, that the past can appear to us as something lying behind us and the future as lying "ahead".[36]

In other words, in order to incorporate the peculiar experience of "time" as perceived from the perspective of citizens involved in their practical affairs within a "human artifice," the theoretical focus has to be gradually shifted to the "spatial" dimension in which this peculiarly *political time* occurs. It is an adequate representation of this meaningfully integrated "spatial dimension" of everyday life which, according to Arendt, "is missing in Kafka's description of a thought-event."[37] The practice of political theorizing must somehow account for this dimension, yet without neglecting its own primarily critical and emancipative thrust. Consequently, in Arendt's alternative imagery of a "parallelogram" of forces, the concrete spatial experience of a common world is integrated into the picture and at the same time combined with its experiential counterpart. This seems to me to be the meaning of her curious metaphor of a "third force" as the "resultant diagonal" originating from the clash between past and future in acts of critical thinking: "[T]his diagonal, though pointing to some infinity, is limited, enclosed, as it were, by the forces of past and future, and thus protected against the void; it remains bound to and is rooted in the present – an entirely human present though it is fully actualized only in the thinking process and last no longer than this process lasts."[38] The thought-events of theorizing are anchored in an act of self-localization in the midst of the concrete spatial reality of political experience, while at the same time being oriented toward the indefinite experiential horizon of critical questioning. "This diagonal force, whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and future, but which exerts its force toward an undetermined end as though it could reach out into infinity, seems to me a perfect metaphor for the activity of thought."[39]

This idea of an act of self-localization which uses fundamental, yet contradicting temporal experiences for constituting a squarely "subjective," but for this very reason also a critical *in between* position quite obviously represents a crucial insight for Arendt. Although it may be only vaguely sketched here, it is clear that this position—the position of political theory—has to be distinguished from "philosophy" as much as from "citizenship," but also from the erroneous idea of "objectivity" underlying the self-perception of modern historiography[40] as much as from "immanent" conceptions of social critique. It especially implies a decisive change of metaphor if compared to Arendt's depiction of the Platonic position. In Arendt's parallelogram of experiential forces, the "appearances" of the common world, its deeds and stories, are considered, in contrast to Plato's cave metaphor, as the very subject matter, as the major experiential source, and even as the medium of critical thought. "[T]hought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings."[41] There seems to be no "outside" of the cave for Arendt, or if there is one, this outside does not provide a perspective from which the genuine meaning of "human affairs" can be properly understood. Actually, when perceived from within, Plato's "cave" turns out to be a space of freedom rather than a prison. Accordingly, political theory, although a critical reflection of political experience, must not disconnect from this world, or it disconnects "the very key words of political language – such as freedom and justice, authority and reason, responsibility and virtue, power and glory" from their "original spirit ..., leaving behind empty shells with which to settle almost all accounts, regardless of their underlying phenomenal reality."[42] In contrast to trying to escape from the appearances into the light of essences, theory must remain bound to the "original spirit" of the "game of life" while at the same time being able to critically understand and question the game's most fundamental rules. This requires to assume the equivocal experiential position in "the quiet of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man." It attempts to assume a position that resembles, "to change the metaphor, the quiet in the center of a storm which, though totally unlike the storm, still belongs to it."[43]

2. In Between Philosophy and Politics This peculiar mode of critical reflection which "belongs to" yet still is "unlike" political experience (to translate the metaphor) constitutes an *in between* position in two crucial respects. It is located, first of all, in between philosophy and politics, both

understood in experiential terms. Political theory deliberately leaves open the tension within "the relationship between specifically philosophical experience and our experience when we move among men."[44] It aims at rendering a third position beyond the false alternative "either of interpreting philosophical experience with categories which owe their origin to the realm of human affairs or, on the contrary, of claiming priority for philosophic experience and judging all politics in its light."[45] This third position, in order to equally consider philosophical and political experiences in their own terms, keeps a critical distance from both. Performed from this in between position, Arendt's practice of theorizing transforms the mental activity of "understanding" into something which in part resembles both philosophical and political experience proper, but at the same time gradually differs from each of them. This practice of theorizing from between philosophy and politics indeed aims at squaring the circle of constructively combining two contradicting modes of experience by keeping an equi-distance from both.[46] Described from either side, the experiential localization at this *in between* position appears to be substantially equivocal.

In terms of philosophical experience, theory can be understood as an attempt to rearticulate the Socratic perspective on human affairs and to incorporate it into a practice of understanding which directly draws from the experiences of "men of action." According to Arendt, Socrates's philosophy, since it is based on "a still-intact relationship to politics *and* the specifically philosophical experience,"[47] is bound to concrete experiences, but also genuinely critical. Particularly the Socratic understanding of the philosophical experience of "wonder" (*thaumazein*), since it is the ultimate existential source of man's ability to ask questions, even questions which may challenge and shake the foundations of common sense experience, for Arendt is an indispensable ingredient of any sort of critical understanding of reality.[48] To the extent to which the practice of theorizing involves this Socratic motive, it gradually contradicts the integrative logic of politics. As a consequence, Arendt's theoretical position clearly deviates from the "thinking of citizens" in its form of subjectivity. Compared with the intersubjective and collective perspective inherent in political experience, the motive of philosophical "wondering" introduces a distinctly individualistic experience into the practice of theorizing which in a way is not completely, but gradually, alien in the experiential realm of politics. To a certain degree the civic mode of experiencing reality, due to its inherent practical logic, "can only look with suspicion on everything that concerns man in the singular."[49]

Constituted by an individual intellectual act of claiming "subjectivity" against the forces of past and future, political theory cannot unreservedly share into the experiential position of a political "We," or if so, it is an extended or enlarged "We" which transcends the horizon of a concrete political public and its experiential coordinate system of citizenship properly understood. If theoretical inter-subjective relations do constitute a "common" field of experience, this field from Arendt's point of view rather resembles a Kantian republic of scholars than a real republic. "World citizenship," the horizon of "humanity" or "mankind" understood as a concrete experience, is constituted, not in terms of political experience proper, but rather by the free exercise of scholarly reasoning in a "reading public"[50] and by the intellectual cosmopolitanism of "artists, writers, and, generally, men or women whose genius forced them to keep the world at a certain distance and whose significance lies chiefly in their works, the artefacts they added to the world, not in the role they played in it."[51] The major means of communication and modes of experience realized in this peculiar field are modeled after the mutual reading and interpretation of such works, after the dialogical vis-à-vis encounter of authors and interpreters—a model which quite substantially differs from a "real" public discourse among a plurality of citizens simultaneously articulating the controversial yet integrated multi-perspectival constellation of a political "We."

In order to incorporate these genuinely philosophical and individualist motives into an intellectual practice of theorizing "in and with the city," however, the experience of wonder ought not to be generalized to a point where it results in a complete decomposition of political experience and a loss of orientation in the "world common to all."[52] In contrast to this anti-political turn of the philosophical tradition, the motive of wonder ought to be redirected and brought back, as it were, into the experiential realm of common human affairs. This seems to mark out the point in which Arendt's understanding of political theory indeed entails a genuinely philosophical ingredient, in terms of a "new political philosophy from which could come a new science of politics." In this new political philosophy, the motive of wondering would be turned into a genuinely philosophical mode of participating in the *amor mundi* of citizens: "If philosophers, despite their necessary estrangement from the everyday life of human affairs, were ever to arrive at a true political philosophy they would have to make the plurality of man, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs – in its grandeur and misery – the object of their *thaumazein*."[53]

3. Multi-contextuality This theoretical mode of self-localization, however, not only constitutes a position *in between* philosophy and politics. Its position is located *in between*, secondly, also in more concrete, empirical terms. Arendt's theory gradually deviates from political experience also in its experiential relation to the spaces of politics, and especially in its mode of experiencing the spatial constellations of plurality and particularity. The "thinking of citizens" accounts for particularity primarily by making oneself "at home" and by recognizing other citizens' equally legitimate place in a concrete public realm. The practice of theorizing accounts for particularity by highlighting and by cautiously examining the plurality of the many common political worlds existing simultaneously in space and successively in time. It stresses the experience that *plurality* determines not only the relation between citizens *within* the public realm, but also the relation *between* different political "worlds," public "spaces," and common fields of experience. Any public space by definition is part of a multiplicity of other such spaces. Doreen Massey articulates a similar idea in her theory of political spaces: "Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality."[54] Besides the fact that "it is not man, but men who inhabit the world," Arendt's theoretical examinations also stress the experience that it is not one, but many different political "worlds" they inhabit. Her practice of theorizing wanders between these different spaces of common affairs, consciously cutting across their self-asserting boundaries of meaning and resolving their comprehensive narratives into simultaneously present fragments of many spaces, pasts, and traditions. If the civic practice of political action consists of an activity of making oneself at home in the world, Arendt's theory's specific gradual deviation from this practice consists of a wandering reflection which belongs to "the world" but is not "at home" in either one of its many concrete spatial realizations.

In methodological terms, this critical deviation from political experience is realized by the distinctly *comparative* character of Arendt's practice of theorizing. Arendt's propensity to combine her conceptual, phenomenological, and structural analyses with an abundant number of concrete empirical examples from very different contexts, thereby often overleaping centuries and continents as if a distance of some hundred years or of some thousand kilometers were simply not a problem, but rather substantially help to clarify the conceptual argument, is well known. What indeed characterizes all of her writings, even if in a different degree, are their frequent

side glances into historical and regional peculiarities, into biographical miniatures of different, political, literary, and philosophical historical figures from a whole variety of contexts or into the intricate etymologies of Greek or Latin concepts and their equivalents in modern languages. This characteristic focus on abundant comparative empirical reflections (while the reader may be rather awaiting a clearly composed line of conceptual argument and a succinct definition) may at first sight merely appear as an idiosyncratic peculiarity, even as a notorious lack of coherence of her work. But it may also be understood as a crucial method of theorizing, as Arendt's peculiar method of gradual deviation or alienation from politics which opens up the space for the "wondering" motive of critical thinking, yet without completely "jumping out of human time altogether."[55]

The critical distance of Arendt's practice of theorizing is indeed not so much realized by a "contemplative," but rather, at least primarily, by this strictly empirical, yet abundantly "comparative" method of theorizing. Instead of following the predominantly contemplative logic of the Western philosophical tradition, Arendt's theory articulates the experience of "wonder" in terms of the method and "experience" of empirical comparison. Instead of withdrawing completely from the disharmonious chaos of the realm of opinions into critical philosophical contemplation, Arendt's theory uses this realm's fundamentally pluralistic nature to realize a much more concrete and down-to-earth mode of intellectual emancipation and methodological alienation. By assuming a distinctly comparative perspective, Arendt's theory makes the actual plurality and fragmentation of political experience as it empirically manifests itself in the numerous political worlds in time and space the experiential basis of her reflections. This comparative way of theorizing remains bound to concrete incidents and to the common world of politics. At the same time, it makes this very connection a source of critical emancipation, by enacting a mental practice of wandering between different worlds and fields of experience which brings out the highly fragmented and pluralist character of those constellations in which the world of politics empirically presents itself.

A major epistemological consequence of this fragmented experiential framework of Arendt's theory, of its comparative cross-cutting of experiential horizons and its reflective practice of wandering between them, is that it in principle does not claim to constitute a "universal" perspective. It is even principally skeptical of the very possibility of such a "universal" understanding of human affairs. Contrary to any sorts of philosophical or scientific claims of "objectivity," the practice of theorizing for

Arendt is constituted by a distinctly "subjective" act of self-localization. More than any other mode of experiencing social reality, the "small none-time-space" of the theoretical position rests on the individual's ability to claim "subjectivity" in the midst of the "common" times and spaces of political publics (see above). As a consequence, Arendt's peculiar way of approaching her theoretical questions highlights the legitimacy, even the epistemological necessity of many different theoretical positions, when it comes to the interpretation of human affairs. The Socratic insight that "absolute truth, which would be the same for all men and therefore unrelated, independent of each man's existence, cannot exist for mortals," and that therefore "only through knowing what appears to me – only to me, and therefore remaining forever related to my own concrete existence – can I ever understand truth,"[56] holds true with regard to any empirically grounded experience of concrete worldly phenomena, but it especially holds true for political theory.

At the same time, Arendt's wandering political theory does claim to realize a genuine and a different perspective on politics if compared to political experience proper. Quite obviously, the comparative theoretical interpretation of political words, deeds, and stories cannot follow the same logic of a meaningful integration of particulars that is inherent in the political experience of citizenship. Yet the *differentia specifica* of theoretical understanding is not its allegedly "universal" or "trans-historical" perspective, but its *multi-contextual* mode of understanding political reality. Rather than mentally participating in the constitution of the commonly shared meaningful context of a political community, theoretical interpretation constantly combines and compares different experiences from different public realms and worlds. Instead of merely rearticulating political experiences in terms of citizenship, Arendt's theoretical interpretations of certain particulars, words, deeds, and narratives simultaneously refer to different comprehensive contexts and to a variety of places and political worlds in time and space, and hence articulate a meaning which permanently oscillates between these different experiential constellations.

In terms of Arendt's empirical and conceptual references, this multi-contextuality is reflected, for instance, in her equivocal and multi-faceted theoretical position of being, in terms of "space," at once a Jewish, a German, and also an Anglo-American political theorist, and at the same time as not really being either one,[57] or, in terms of "time," of being, if only "reluctantly,"[58] a distinctly modern thinker and at the same time a determined critic of modernity.[59] Especially the latter tension between

the allegedly "modern" and "anti-modern" traits of Arendt's thought can help to further clarify the major significance of her theoretical method of comparison.

4. Interpretive Simultaneity One of the major consequences of Arendt's distinctly comparative practice of theorizing is its liberating effects with regard to such ancient–modern dichotomies. Viewed from Arendt's comparative perspective, such epochal juxtapositions primarily reflect the contradictions and limitations of modern historical consciousness and of that sort of historical speculations which constitute the specifically modern variant of Western metaphysics. There are certain passages in Arendt's writings which seem to suggest a modernist interpretation while others strongly seem to indicate certain anti-modern motives in her theory. Accordingly, the conflicting interpretations of Arendt's theory as primarily modern or anti-modern can claim to be well grounded in the sources. At the same time, these seemingly contradictory results may indicate that an interpretation of Arendt's position in such historical or epochal terms is partly misleading in the first place.[60] As far as Arendt herself is concerned, it indeed seems as if she simply refuses to at all define her own theoretical perspective in terms of such unequivocal normative and self-affirmative theoretical self-localizations within the grant temporal narratives either of historical progress or of historical decay and decadence. Instead, her genuinely comparative theoretical reflections render a perspective on history from which the clear distinction between modern and pre-modern epochs is partly dissolved. To Arendt, the end of the philosophical tradition, its intellectual self-dissolution as it was enacted in Marx's great final attempt to articulate the human experience in terms of a grand narrative of human history, brings about not only the end of pre-modern metaphysics, but also the end of those grant historical narratives themselves which for Arendt represent the modern derivatives of metaphysics. According to Arendt, the traditional neglect of history in classical metaphysics was historically followed by an equally unbalanced intellectual turning around of the philosophical perspective by completely historicizing it in the nineteenth century, especially in the works of Hegel and Marx. Like all acts of complete inversion, however, also this turning around of the philosophical tradition eventually leaves untouched and only reproduces, according to Arendt, its major traits, if only in a distorted way.[61] One or the other variant of the idea of tradition is therefore implied also in the main currents of modernity, not only in

"conservatism which believes that we can restore 'values' without actually restoring reality," but also in "liberalism which believes the thread [of tradition] can simply be spun on and on, as it were."[62] Contrary to such distorted and somewhat concealed traditionalisms inherent also in the modern grant narratives, the breakdown of the Western tradition of metaphysics as understood by Arendt actually destroys any idea of a clearly established temporal framework for critical thinking. Her diagnosis that the spell of "tradition" is broken therefore results in the gradual dissolution of any categories of historical chronology, at least insofar as they claim to provide for theory a fixed temporal frame of normative orientation.

Instead of following the historical idea of a more-or-less clearly ordered temporal sequence of political "times" successively following each other, the overall framework of Arendt's reflections often seems to be inspired by the idea of an interpretive simultaneity, theoretically speaking, of the various realms of politics in time and space.[63] In this respect, her perspective in a sense anticipates more recent arguments for a critical dissolution of the modern grant *temporal* narratives of a universal history and of clearly distinguishable epochs in favor of highlighting instead the *spatial* dimension of social reality. At the beginning of an essay which is considered as one of the founding texts of the so-called spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences, Michel Foucault articulates the core idea of this turn as that of a theory which ought to be liberated from the "great obsession of the nineteenth century [with] history." Instead of focusing on the latter's major "themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world," a theory of space would rather interpret the present and "our experience of the world" in terms of "simultaneity," hence not in terms "of a long life developing through time" but in terms of a "network that connects points and intersects with its own skein."[64]

Notwithstanding the substantial differences between their general theoretical conceptions, this characterization of the "spatial turn" by Foucault articulates an idea which is also present in Arendt's theory. It is most clearly articulated in her interpretation of Walter Benjamin's method of theorizing as a fragmented reading of single historical incidents. Regarding its self-reflective subtext, Arendt's emphatic description of Benjamin's hermeneutics is a quite adequate characterization of her own position.[65] Arendt characterizes Benjamin's work as an attempt to do

without and actually to liberate himself from the fixed and predetermined interpretive framework of history in terms of tradition. She sketches the interpretive function of such a traditional framework as follows: "Insofar as the past has been transmitted as tradition, it possesses authority; insofar as authority presents itself historically, it becomes tradition. […] [T]radition puts the past in order, not just chronologically but first of all systematically in that it separates the positive from the negative, the orthodox from the heretical, that which is obligatory and relevant from the mass of irrelevant or merely interesting opinions and data."[66] Convinced that "the break in tradition and the loss of authority which occurred in his lifetime were irreparable," Benjamin sought to think beyond this grand narrative of a predetermined temporal framework of an ordered transmission of meaning in terms of tradition. Instead, he tried to discover "new ways of dealing with the past," and he found them in a method of reading and quoting historical texts, incidents, and experiences as single "thought fragments" immediately speaking to the present: "In this he became a master when he discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability and that in place of its authority there had arisen a strange power to settle down, piecemeal, in the present and to deprive it of 'peace of mind', the mindless peace of complacency."[67] Resolutely thinking through the "break in tradition" and liberating his own thought from the old "spell of tradition," Benjamin, according to Arendt, creates a post-traditional hermeneutics which is immediately "fed by the present," but at the same time "works with the 'thought fragments' it can wrest from the past and gather about itself."[68] Arendt famously describes this method with the metaphor of hermeneutic "pearl diving":

> Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depth and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past – but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things "suffer a sea-change" and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as "thought fragments", as something "rich and strange", and perhaps even as everlasting *Urphänomene*.[69]

This final passage of her essay on Benjamin indeed renders a quite adequate description of her own method of interpreting the crystallizations of fragments of the past into meaningful configurations in the present. Arendt's own post-traditional theory in a way consists of a similar hermeneutic practice of "tearing" significant experiences "out of their contexts and arranging them afresh in such a way that they [illustrate] one another and [are] able to prove their *raison d'être* in a free-floating state, as it were."[70] Instead of clinging to ideas of a temporal or "chronological" normative order, Arendt's comparative empirical examinations of political experiences deliberately create a *simultaneity* of worlds and human artifices which, although concretely located in different, partly remote times and spaces, are principally of more or less equal rank, in the sense that they immediately speak and relate to each other in terms of their fundamental political experiences.

Accordingly, none of Arendt's empirical studies, neither her examinations of the *polis* or the Roman republic nor those of the modern revolutions and of various other contemporary political phenomena, can be said to be either exclusively affirmative or exclusively critical. To the contrary, it appears as if these examinations deliberately aim at dissolving the old quarrel between the ancients and the moderns into an experiential *contemporaneity* among those Greek, Roman, American, and European citizens, statesmen, founders, protesters, and revolutionaries who, during the long political history of the West, were all involved and participated in the numerous, more or less successful projects of enacting a common world of meaning and action. To derive from the temporal multi-contextuality of these numerous projects a clear and unequivocal normative hierarchy among them apparently is as implausible for Arendt as an attempt to immediately translate their spatial multi-contextuality into a clear normative or critical judgment. Against the background of her comparative theoretical reflections, a clear-cut normative "modernism" or "anti-modernism" turns out to be as implausible as a theoretical Euro-Centrism, Americanism, Nationalism, or any other form of intellectual provincialism would be. Instead of exclusively dwelling on temporal successions and epochal distinctions, Arendt's wandering mode of theoretical reflection fuses historical and synchronic comparisons into one multi-contextual perspective which focuses on the conceptual crystallizations as they emerge from the various political fields of experience in space and time. Seen from this perspective, the idea of a chronologically and normatively ordered authoritative "tradition" or story of "progress" is replaced by a distinctly

open idea of history as "the historical space in which certain forms of government appeared as recognizable entities."[71]

5. An Oscillating Logic of Conceptual Construction The logic of this peculiar comparative mode of theoretical reflection is also clearly discernible in Arendt's often inspiring and thought-provoking, but at times also bewildering, method of constructing and applying theoretical concepts. In terms of its mode of hermeneutic integration, the fragmented and multi-contextual nature of her theory's field of experience apparently requires the application of somehow equally fragmented interpretive concepts which imply a somewhat oscillating hermeneutic semantic. Rather than evolving systematically organized and clearly defined concepts, Arendt's reflections often unfold in a meandering, frequently digressing, sometimes deliberately redundant flow of arguments which in many cases assumes the form of almost literary narratives rather than systematic argumentation. Her major concepts, being the results of these meandering narrative reflections, instead of providing clear definitions, seem to deliberately keep open the tensional character of the fragmented and multi-contextual experience they articulate. They "are not constructed upon a single argument, diligently unfolded, or upon a linear narrative," but rather composed of "complex thematic strands," while "[t]he interconnections between the strands are sometimes left to the reader"—to a degree that the reader is "often baffled by how the pieces fit together" or even wonder "whether there is, in fact, a consistent perspective behind her varied reflections" at all.[72]

There is often consistency in these reflections, but it is the quite peculiar consistency of a wandering, notoriously unsettled mode of theoretical understanding. Arendt's concepts deliberately maintain a gradual uncertainty and openness, translating the fragmented and multi-contextual field of theoretical experience into "dialectical,"[73] in the sense of gradually flexible, oscillating interpretive concepts. Instead of functioning as clearly determined analytical tools, undoubtedly integrated, as it were, into a fixed system of interpretation, Arendt's major concepts apply a distinctly open, partly underdetermined semantic.[74] This semantic leaves open an interpretive and analytical margin which allows Arendt to fuse a variety of historical and spatial horizons into one meaningful perspective. To finally integrate them into a determined framework of unequivocal meanings and "definitions" would necessarily contradict their own fragmented experiential basis. Although Arendt held it to be crucial for a proper theoretical

understanding of the manifold diversity of human affairs that the concepts used in theory should be as clearly defined as possible, it is nonetheless an inherent trait of almost all of her major concepts that they imply such an open, underdetermined, and oscillating interpretive semantic. This is no self-contradiction, however, but rather an elaborate attempt to simultaneously meet two equally important yet contradicting requirements of theoretical conceptualization, namely to render clear distinctions *and* to account for their multi-contextual, fragmented, and equivocal experiential background.

One of the best examples of such a conceptual fusion of very different ancient and modern, civic and philosophical experiential horizons into a deliberately open, oscillating term is Arendt's understanding of "politics" and "political action" as reconstructed in the previous chapter. This understanding is formulated on the basis of a reinterpretation of civic as well as philosophical terms and concepts, of ancient Greek, but also of the partly quite different Roman experiences with politics, articulated in the phenomenological and existentialist terms of early twentieth century's continental philosophy, understood in the light of the prudential republican realism of the American political tradition, critically confronted with the deeply disturbing questions raised by the fundamental European experience of modern totalitarianism, and blended with the emancipative enthusiasm of contemporary forms of political self-empowerment. The crucial motive of this conceptual fusion is a twofold one, consequently resulting in a distinctly dialectical conceptual logic. It aims to elicit the fundamental significance of politics for individual human existence and for society *in general* by composing a concept of the political which equally relates to all of these different contexts and hence integrates them into one "generalized" interpretive perspective. But it also aims at articulating a truly multi-contextual (instead of a trans-contextual or even "universal") theoretical perspective by articulating the experience of the fragmentation of real politics into different worlds and of the tensions between them which cannot be completely reconciled in one comprehensive, ultimately fixed conceptual "generalization." This genuinely comparative insight into a principal and unsolvable hiatus implied in any attempt to generalize and to define is, actually, one of the most fundamental insights constituting her theory's critical method of gradual deviation from political experience proper and the latter's inherent tendency to "integrate" and "generalize" particulars into the commonly shared public stories of a political community.

Accordingly, Arendt's concept of freedom also remains equivocal, bearing republican, but also liberal implications, stressing its "positive," but also considering its "negative" aspects,[75] focusing on its precondition of "liberation" from necessity while at the same time emphasizing the problematic side effects of such acts of liberation for the political constitution of freedom,[76] and even examining the "abyss of freedom" which opens up in the modern experience of the totalitarian project to proof that for man and his freedom of self-determination virtually everything is possible—not only in mental but also in practical terms.[77] Likewise, her concept of "law" oscillates between its ancient Greek, its quite different Roman, and its distinctly modern implications in terms of the idea "of a right to have rights," without finally fixing a clear position regarding the contradicting claims derived from these different implications.[78] Instead of such final fixations, her concepts provide a multi-contextual perspective on the major phenomena of human affairs, in which the single contexts' understandings partly contradict, but also balance each other and thence render a "dialectical" (as opposed to a clear, but all too schematic) understanding which always includes an inescapable interpretive hiatus that articulates the fragmented experience of the phenomena itself.

This peculiar interpretive semantic, reflecting the plural and contingent character of political experience, clearly distinguishes the logic of Arendt's conceptualizations from any one of the empirical political terms and experiences these conceptualizations refer to. It is this gradual distinction which defines them as being theoretical as opposed to political concepts. They render *generalizing* interpretations insofar as they identify equivalences between the various contextual understandings of political phenomena. But they also render *fragmentizing* interpretations insofar as they leave open and point at the tensions between these partly equivalent, partly contradictory variations. Theoretical concepts thence first and foremost articulate the insight that any phenomena in human affairs by necessity—because all of them, instead of being eternal, "natural," universally valid and unchanging phenomena, by their very "nature" only appear in the "man-made" realms of human self-determination—can only be experienced in the pluralist form of a variety of concrete and therefore particular and different political realizations. In other words: Theory articulates the experience that "in the realm of plurality … any so called 'part' can be more than the 'whole' it belongs to," wherefore the realities of "Man-people-Humanity" never fully relate to each other in terms of "parts and whole."[79] Indeed, it seems to be this insight into the neces-

sarily *fragmented social ontology* of the realm of human affairs itself, most clearly brought to the fore by the multi-contextual orientation of Arendt's theory, which is reflected in the very peculiar interpretive semantic of her major concepts. This insight inserts some kind of a hermeneutic uncertainty principle, as it were, into Arendt's conceptual framework.

6. Multi-linguality Such a multi-contextual logic of "uncertainty" is also reflected in the role that language plays in Arendt's writings,[80] for instance in that peculiar kind of etymological investigations often applied in her practice of theorizing. These etymological examinations are not primarily applied in order to bring out an allegedly "original" meaning of a term, in the sense of its true significance, nor are they merely pursued to elaborate the complex genealogies of concepts, although this is an aspect of them. More importantly, however, they serve the purpose to bring out the cultural differences and historical changes of their meaning, often indicating different "historical judgments of political communities"[81] on where to locate them within the realm of human affairs and therewith on how to practically understand them. Arendt's etymologies, hence, aim to concretely bind back terms and ideas to their actual experiential basis which, of course, also implies to bring out the highly fragmented structure of this basis and therewith to multi-contextualize the allegedly uni-contextual meaning of the most fundamental common terms of everyday language.[82] What Arendt's multi-contextual etymological reflections bring out are not so much chronological lingual genealogies in terms of "tradition," but rather the complex crystallizations of fragments into nonetheless meaningful present configurations. Language, with its rich *historical* basis, yet at the same time its immediately *present* practical significance, most clearly draws out these major post-traditional features of Arendt's understanding of such processes of crystallization of political experiences.[83]

Arendt not only frequently dwells on the multi-contextual etymology of words and concepts in this manner. Also her own practice of writing unfolds in between different languages and ingeniously uses the range of uncertainty opened up by her work's bilingual character and by the problem of translation. Arendt's wandering political theory, so it seems, not only moves within different cultural and historical horizons while not being really "at home" in either one of them. It also seems to virtually speak different languages, emphasizing different aspects in different tongues.[84] Writing her major works in the "foreign" language English, Arendt herself

translated many of them (sometimes on the basis of first draft translations by others) back into her mother tongue, German. These self-translations resulted in German texts that often substantially differ from the English originals, both in terms of length and in terms of content. The quite intricate history of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and of the book's various editions, for instance, reflects, among other things, also Arendt's oscillating reflective movement of articulating her thoughts first in English, then in German, and finally, again, in English, each time partly changing the tone and emphases of her text, yet without clearly relinquishing its earlier versions.[85] The German edition of *The Human Condition* and maybe even more so Arendt's translation of *On Revolution* into German are particularly interesting further examples in this respect. In fact, *Über die Revolution* is not just a translation, but a substantially extended version of *On Revolution*. It not only entails additional explications regarding, for instance, such sources whose intimate knowledge Arendt could take for granted when addressing an American, but not necessarily when addressing a German, audience.[86] More importantly, the extended German version of the book also entails numerous additional sentences and passages in which Arendt attempts to further explain substantial theoretical arguments. And these additional explanations, formulated in a different language, sometimes also differ in their tone and emphasis from the English version.[87] By using the unavoidable uncertainty of translation for a varying articulation of her own perspective, Arendt's bilingual practice of writing underscores the multi-contextual orientation of her theory.

7. An Experimental Logic of Discovery This multi-contextual methodology inherent in Arendt's theoretical language and conceptual framework is, again, not clearly laid out but rather implicit and articulated in terms of a methodological sub-text. In fact, the distinctly comparative empirical orientation and multi-contextual perspective of her work may itself be understood as another reason why Arendt, regarding her own method of theorizing, refrained from all-too-explicit and all-too-schematic and clearly laid-out epistemological self-reflections. Not only did she discern a general problematic tendency inherent "in the nature of academic quarrels" in which "methodological problems are likely to overshadow more fundamental issues."[88] More importantly, she was especially skeptical of methodologies in the form of abstract (and "fabricated," as it were) "instruments," explicitly defined beforehand and systematically applicable to any possible problem, subject matter, and, above all, to any kind of experiential context.

For Arendt, such pre-established methodologies tend to underrate the significance of contingency and spontaneity in the realm of human affairs[89] as well as the empirical fragmentation of politics into many different worlds and experiential horizons. They therewith in effect, even if mostly unintendedly, also substantially delimit the potentials for comparative research.

Arendt's alternative practice of theorizing with its characteristic trait of a deliberate "uncertainty"—which undoubtedly is part of the specific "tone" of her oeuvre—surely indicates a very unconventional "methodology." But to Arendt, political theory, if it ought to be truly comparative, requires a methodological basis which is substantially "different from such mental processes as deducing, inducing, and drawing conclusions whose logical rules ... can be learned once and for all and then need only to be applied."[90] In contrast to such pre-established methodological schemes, a comparative method of theorizing has to be experientially open and therefore distinctly experimental, gradually underdetermined, and rather narrative than systematic and predefined. It requires a method which resembles, we might say, that of an "extraordinary" as opposed to a "normal science" in the sense of Thomas S. Kuhn's famous distinction.[91] The project of a wandering political theory must apply a conceptual logic of discovery which is flexible enough to translate the tensional, fragmented, and multi-contextual constellations of political reality into scientific interpretive concepts which correspond to these fragmentary constellations. Consequently, theory has to be able to question any predetermined terminological premises and established methodological routines, even the most fundamental assumptions of a peculiar system of thought and its methodology.

Against this background, Arendt's etymological examinations, her practices of self-translation and of writing in different languages, and especially the oscillating semantic of her major concepts may indeed be understood as important aspects of her distinctly comparative "method" of political theorizing. In fact, especially in terms of method, when the term is understood in the broad sense just sketched, Arendt's wandering practice of theorizing turns out to provide a highly original perspective which can serve as a rich source of inspiration. The characteristics of her theorizing just outlined may potentially imply, for instance, interesting methodological contributions to the broad recent discussion in political theory on the project of a distinctly comparative, inter-civilizational political theory.[92] Arendt's reflections surely do not meet her own high standards of experiential openness in every respect,[93] and they remain almost

exclusively within the limited coordinate system and experiential horizon of the "West." Notwithstanding these shortcomings, however, within this horizon, her theory exerts a quite original methodology of fusing different political languages and fields of experience. To this end, Arendt integrates, besides her methods of conceptual construction, comparative etymology, and bilingual writing, a number of further rather unconventional methods, such as her narrative method of storytelling[94] or her characterological method of critical analysis.[95] The common purpose of these methods is to realize a "wandering" type of interpretive reflection which is empirically bounded, but not completely at home in either of the many political worlds it investigates, either present or past, but rather takes the intellectual liberty of "simultaneously" visiting very different worlds of common affairs and of fusing, by way of experimental conceptualizations, their different experiential horizons into a multi-contextual perspective.

Notes

1. W, 216.
2. See also Vollrath: Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking, p. 162 f.
3. See LKPP, p. 38 ff.; MDT, p. 81 ff.
4. LKPP, p. 40. See also Arendt's clear statements in this respect during her discussion at the Toronto Society where she was confronted with the question of the relation between theory and politics (Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, pp. 303–311).
5. BPF, p. 9.
6. LKPP, p. 44 ff.
7. HC, p. 257.
8. LKPP, p. 39.
9. V, p. 93 (Appendix III).
10. V, p. 94.
11. Especially Arendt's interpretation of Kant has often been criticized as being inadequate. See, as one example out of many, the critical comments in Richard J. Bernstein: Hannah Arendt: Judging – the Actor and the Spectator, in: Garner, Reuben (Ed.): The Realm of Humanitas. Responses to the Writings of Hannah Arendt, New York (Peter Lang) 1982, pp. 235–253.
12. For interpretations which also stress this aspect (while at the same time accentuating it differently than it is suggested here), see, for instance, Villa's concept of "alienated citizenship" (Socrates, Lessing, and Thoreau: The Image of Alienated Citizenship in Hannah Arendt, in: Austin Sarat/

Dana Villa (Eds.): Liberal Modernism and Democratic Individuality. George Kateb and the Practices of Politics, Princeton (Princeton University Press) 1996, pp. 47–63) and Disch's interpretation of Arendt's position as that of a "marginal critic" (Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy, p. 143 ff.).

13. See also Majid Yar: From Actor to Spectator: Hannah Arendt's "Two Theories" of Political Judgment, in: Philosophy and Social Criticism 26/2 (2000), pp. 1–27 and Dana Villa: Introduction: The development of Arendt's political thought, in: The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt, ed. by Dana R. Villa, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2000, pp. 1–21, here: p. 16 f. Besides the assumption of two different and contradicting phases, also Beiner's assumption that Arendt herself strictly follows the distinction of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* as advocated in the philosophical tradition (Beiner: Interpretive Essay: Hannah Arendt on Judgment, in: LKPP, pp. 89–156; here: pp. 138–140) has often been criticized. See, for instance, Disch: Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy, p. 142 ff., Annelies Degryse: *Sensus communis* as a foundation for men as political beings: Arendt's reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, in: Philosophy and Social Criticism 37/3 (2011), pp. 345–358; Dag Javier Opstaele: Die Lücke zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft: Hannah Arendts hermeneutische Theorie, in: Zeitschrift fuer philosophische Forschung 55/1 (2001), pp. 101–117; here: p. 104.
14. Regarding the latter, see the examination of the twofold meaning of Arendt's concept of common sense in Degryse: *Sensus communis* as a foundation for men as political beings, p. 350 ff.
15. Arendt: Action and the Pursuit of Happiness, in: Alois Dempf/Hannah Arendt/Friedrich Engel-Janosi (Eds.): Politische Ordnung und Menschliche Existenz. Festgabe für Eric Voegelin zum 60. Geburtstag, München (C. H. Beck) 1962, pp. 1–16, here: p. 10.
16. For this relation, also see Buckler's very fruitful argument of an "epistemological mediation" implied in Arendt's theory (Hannah Arendt and Political Theory, p 38 ff.).
17. Th, p. 93.
18. Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, p. 303.
19. MDT, p. 5.
20. Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, p. 304.
21. Vrasidas Karalis: Confronting Violence and Power: Notes on Hannah Arendt's Humanism (An Investigation into Discourse Sources), in: Andrew Sharp/Danielle Celermayer/Vrasidas Karalis (Eds.): Power, Judgment and Political Evil. In Conversation with Hannah Arendt, Farnham (Ashgate) 2010, pp. 171–189; here: p. 183.
22. OT, p. viii.

23. In her essay *Action and the Pursuit of Happiness* (p. 2 ff.), Arendt presents a certain practice of active "alienation" from commonsense experience as a fundamental methodological principle of theory.
24. BPF, p. 11 ff.; Th, p. 205 ff.
25. Th, p. 202.
26. BPF, p. 10.
27. Th, p. 203.
28. Ibid., p. 202.
29. Th, p. 203 f. See also Disch: Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy, p. 166 f.
30. Th, p. 207.
31. Ibid., p. 206.
32. Ibid., p. 207.
33. BPF, p. 11.
34. Ibid.
35. Th, p. 207.
36. Th, p. 205 f.
37. BPF, p. 11.
38. Th, p. 209.
39. Ibid.
40. BPF, p. 48 ff.
41. BPF, p. 14.
42. BPF, p. 15.
43. Th, p. 209.
44. PhP, p. 92.
45. Ibid.
46. This attempt of Arendt to constitute such an in-between experiential position in a sense resembles Pierre Bourdieu's idea of a double epistemological break as a condition for a critical and "reflexive" perspective in social theory (Pierre Bourdieu: The Practice of Reflexive Sociology, in: Pierre Bourdieu/Löic Wacquant: An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, Cambridge (Polity) 1992, pp. 217–260). There are, by the way, further interesting parallels in some respects between Arendt's and Bourdieu's theoretical works, for instance their equally creative reception of Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment (see Kennan Ferguson: The Politics of Judgment. Aesthetics, Identity, and Political Theory, Lanham (Lexington Books), 1999, p. 101 ff. and Matthias Meindl: Geschmack und Urteilskraft bei Pierre Bourdieu und Hannah Arendt, Berlin (Logos Verlag) 2009).
47. PhP, p. 101.
48. PhP, p. 98 f.
49. PhP, p. 100.
50. LKPP, p. 39.

51. MDT, p. 33.
52. PhP, p. 95.
53. PhP, p. 103.
54. Doreen Massey: For Space, London (Sage) 2005, p. 9.
55. BPF, p. 207.
56. PhP, p. 84.
57. On the personal experiential background of Arendt's "stranger persona" and the peculiar contribution she offered from this perspective to the American political discourse, see Andreea Decui Ritivoi: Intimate Strangers. Arendt, Marcuse, Solzhenitsyn, and Said in American Political Discourse, New York (Columbia University Press) 2014, p. 56 ff.
58. Seyla Benhabib: The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt, Lanham/Boulder/New York/Toronto/Oxford (Rowman & Littlefield) 2003.
59. Kateb: Hannah Arendt, p. 151 ff.
60. See also Dana Villa's critique of the adequacy of the modernist–anti-modernist dichotomy with regard to Arendt's position (Modernity, Alientation, and Critique, p. 289 ff.) and Steve Buckler's examination of Arendt's method of "temporal mediation" as in principle transcending this dichotomy (Hannah Arendt and Political Theory, p. 44 ff.).
61. BPF, p. 17 ff.
62. PAT, Folder 4, p. 1.
63. MDT, p. 84 f.
64. Michel Foucault: Space, Knowledge, and Power, in: The Foucault Reader. Edited by Paul Rabinow, New York (Pantheon) 1984, pp. 239–256; here: p. 239. See also Henri Lefebvre's reflections on the relation between the concepts of time and space in *The Production of Space*, Oxford (Blackwell) 1991, p. 1 ff.
65. Similar to her reading of Kant (see above), also her essay on Benjamin surely can be challenged in various respects regarding its interpretive adequacy. Arendt's text quite obviously combines interpretive (in the sense of exegetic) with distinctly self-reflective examinations. The latter also involve the attempt to interconnect her interpretation of Benjamin with her genuine reading of other thinkers. Arendt indicates, for instance, the significance of Heidegger's hermeneutics for her understanding of Benjamin's peculiar method of interpretation (MDT, p. 201 ff.).
66. MDT, p. 193, 198 f.
67. MDT, p. 193.
68. MDT, p. 205.
69. MDT, p. 205 f.
70. MDT, p. 202.
71. BPF, p. 103.
72. Villa: Introduction, p. 1.

73. Sigwart: Politische Hermeneutik, p. 309 ff.
74. See also Buckler: Hannah Arendt and Political Theory, p 37 ff.
75. BPF, p. 149 ff.
76. OR, p. 40 ff., 74 ff.
77. W, p. 195 ff.
78. OT, p. 290 ff.
79. DT, p. 82 f. [my translation].
80. See also Buckler: Hannah Arendt and Political Theory, p. 39 ff. on Arendt's method of modulation.
81. HC, p. 78.
82. A good example in this respect is Arendt's etymological examination of labor and work in HC, p. 80 ff.
83. See, for instance, MDT, p. 204.
84. See also DT, p. 770 ff. and MDT, p. 195 ff.
85. On the dynamic process in which the different editions of *Origins* originated, see also Roy T. Tsao: The Three Phases of Arendt's Theory of Totalitarianism, in: Social Research 69/2 (2002), pp. 579–619.
86. On the genuinely American context of *On Revolution*, see Markell: The Experience of Action, p. 96 f.
87. For instance, the overall argument of *Über die Revolution* seems to me to emphasize more strongly than *On Revolution* the distinctly realist traits of Arendt's theoretical perspective. See the references to *Über die Revolution* here in Chap. 7.
88. BPF, p. 53.
89. Peter Baehr: Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2010, p. 4 ff.
90. BPF, p. 13.
91. Thomas S. Kuhn: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 3rd Edition, Chicago/London (University of Chicago Press) 1996.
92. For a good overview of this debate, see Diego von Vacano: The Scope of Comparative Political Theory, in: Annual Review of Political Science 18 (2015), pp. 465–80.
93. The most obvious examples in this respect are, as it was already indicated in Chap. 3, her rather reduced account of labor as a field of experience as well as her rather narrow interpretation of the French Revolution.
94. See Seyla Benhabib: Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative, in: Social Research 57/1 (1990), pp. 167–196 and Disch: More Truth than Fact.
95. See Hans-Jörg Sigwart: Political Characterology. On the Method of Theorizing in Hannah Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism, in: American Political Science Review 110/2 (2016) (forthcoming).

CHAPTER 7

The Limits of Political Horizons and the Vocation of Theoretical Wandering

Abstract This final chapter provides a brief overview of the normative and ethical implications of Arendt's wandering thought. Her theory stresses the significance of political experience also in normative terms. The genuine contribution political theory has to offer to public political discourses is nonetheless rather critical than justificatory. Its vocation is majorly to understand the necessary conditions and the limitations of the political mode of understanding reality. These limitations particularly derive from the spatial conditions of the practice of politics. Against the background of the multi-contextual and fragmented social ontology of numerous political spaces and worlds brought out in Arendt's exercises in political thought, her theory not only highlights the significance of politics for realizing freedom, but also indicates certain ethical ambivalences involved in it.

Keywords Political ethics • Critique • Nature

As the previous chapter sought to demonstrate, the question of "how to think" turns out to be crucial for Arendt's practice of political theorizing, notwithstanding her reservations against "epistemological" and "methodological" meta-theories. This holds true also with regard to the normative orientation of her political thought. It was her attempt to critically react upon the most pressing ethical questions posed to political thought by the experiences of the twentieth century which especially revealed for Arendt

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the necessity to start from reflecting anew the nature of political experience and its relation to theory. Accordingly, Arendt's theoretical alignment with politics, majorly motivated by this reaction as it was, has important normative implications. Insofar as Arendt's studies aim at bringing out the crucial significance of politics for the realization of human freedom, her understanding of political experience itself provides the major frame of normative orientation for her practice of theorizing. Consequently, the major concepts Arendt derives from political experience, such as plurality, publicity, natality, and freedom, are not merely analytical concepts which help to understand the foundations of political action, but also articulate normative principles of her theoretical framework.

Also with regard to these normative principles, however, her alignment with politics is supplemented with a subtle and only gradual but decisive deviation from political experience proper. In politics, those principles serve as the basis of a practice of tying networks of common communication, action and meaning, of making common decisions, and also of rendering narratives of "reconciliation," justification, and the legitimacy of a concrete project of realizing political freedom. In Arendt's practice of theorizing, the same principles first and foremost serve as sources of critique. In fact, if there is a genuine contribution political theory has to offer to public discourses, for Arendt it seems to be primarily its strong potential for *critical* understanding rather than justification. Also in this respect, Arendt sides with thinkers like Benjamin, Kafka, or Lessing, and against what she held to be the false truth claim of the Platonic tradition. Instead of being able to tell citizens what they ought to do, how they ought to act and judge, and what kind of beginning they ought to enact together, theory's peculiar intellectual strength rather lies in its potential to gradually alienate itself from these practices and to critically reflect upon their conditions, foundations, and limitations.

The methods of theoretical comparison and gradual deviation are crucial also regarding this critical orientation. It was already indicated in the previous chapter that these methods of theorizing cut across the modern–pre-modern divide. This holds true also with regard to Arendt's understanding of critique. There is a strong critical thrust against modernity discernible in Arendt's writings. This thrust, however, ought to be seen, instead of interpreting it as some sort of romanticist anti-modern homesickness, as consciously transgressing the clear distinction between modernity and the pre-modern Western tradition, at least as far as this distinction is meant to establish clear-cut normative criteria for political

theory. Not only is Arendt's critique of modernity oriented at an understanding of political freedom which, as we have seen, is itself genuinely modern—or more precisely: inspired by the genuinely "humanist" modern idea of self-determination. What is more, the problematic effects of those particularly apolitical or even anti-political social self-perceptions which Arendt's critique of modern societies primarily focuses on closely resemble those anti-political attitudes she also emphasized in her critique of the Platonic philosophical tradition. Finally, while it is true that the juxtaposition of these apolitical self-perceptions in modernity with ancient Greek and Roman perceptions of politics helps Arendt to bring out the former's most problematic aspects, it is not so clear on closer inspection that this juxtaposition is meant to in turn rest on a clear-cut normative affirmation of the polis or the Roman republic.

Arendt's examinations of Greece and Rome, besides emphasizing the significance of ancient experiences with politics, too often also deliberately articulate the profound ambivalences involved in these experiences to count as straightforward justifications of pre-modern politics as an undoubted model of political self-organization. Her marked interest in ancient political concepts, languages, and self-perceptions, instead of expressing a romantic longing for the "happy consciousness" of antiquity, is primarily motivated by a critical turn against any sort of experiential provincialism, including a too narrowly modernist provincial contemporaneity, and toward an experientially open practice of theoretical wandering which aims at constituting a multi-contextual perspective. Arendt's comparisons are neither clearly oriented at or "at home" in modernity nor, of course, in the fantasy lands of a classicist romanticism. On the contrary, one might even say that Arendt perceives antiquity in distinctly modern terms as well as modernity in terms majorly inspired by antiquity, as if she deliberately tries to take the interpretive perspective of a stranger in any of the two historical provinces, coming from the reciprocally other province.

As a consequence, Arendt's framework of critique is constituted neither by an unequivocal reference to the political experience of antiquity nor by an unequivocal affirmation of the "project of modernity," but rather by her multi-contextual understanding of political experience which is derived from a whole variety of concrete political projects in time and space, including ancient as well as modern ones. The main focus of critique derived from these different experiential contexts aims at identifying the various phenomena of political vacuum and apolitical tendencies occurring in very different historical contexts, and especially of identifying those

literally anti-political constellations in which such tendencies under certain circumstances may crystallize. This, of course, does not mean to deny that especially modernity provided many examples of such anti-political tendencies for Arendt. Against the background of the totalitarian catastrophes in the twentieth century, Arendt was convinced that the decay and increasing dissolution of politics as a concrete practice and as a commonly shared experience were the decisive problem not only of the philosophical tradition of the West, but also, and even more imminently, of modern Western societies in her own time. Consequently, her political theory is determined to advocate and revitalize these vanishing experiences and to defend politics, not only against philosophy, but also against what she took to be the inherently apolitical, partly even anti-political forces inherent in the development of Western modernity. Large parts of Arendt's work are dedicated to deal with the intricate origins and the destructive effects of these anti-political forces within the modern development. The panorama of European politics from the eighteenth to the twentieth century that she unfolds in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* as well as her critical interpretation of the French Revolution, but also her studies on the tradition, self-perception, and the social role that was forced upon the European Jewish communities in the course of the modernization of Europe are all theoretical and historical examinations of these anti-political tendencies and constellations. In these practices of anti-politics, the civic experiences of imaginative integration and meaningful self-localization, of enlarged and creative understanding and of a common and plural political subjectivity are dissolved into the experiences of social necessities and of individual isolation, of the narrow and schematic rationale of ideological deduction and of society as an unfolding of anonymous, irresistable social forces.[1]

Against this background of her critique of weak and vanishing politics and its devastating effects, Arendt attempts to identify and explain the characteristics of authentic politics as the civic practice of constituting and reproducing the common horizons of public spheres in which political freedom can be realized. But also in this respect, Arendt refers to different historical contexts in which different aspects of politics most clearly come to the fore. Phenomena as distinct as the Greek polis of the classical era, the institutions of the Roman Republic, the American revolutionary and founding era, the various attempts and ideas of international Jewish political self-organization in the face of the totalitarian threat, the Hungarian Revolution, or student protests against the Vietnam War all appear as exemplary historical cases of authentic politics. Arendt's comparative

account of these variants of politics does focus on historical and cultural differences, and it does put a special emphasis on the severe dangers posed by the apolitical tendencies within the self-perception of modern society. More importantly, however, it aims at a conceptual fusion of these different contexts into an empirically and theoretically tenable concept of the political in general which in some of its major aspects transcends the modern–pre-modern divide.

This critique of anti-politics and the plea for (re-)activating authentic forms of citizenship constitute the most obvious level of normative and critical reasoning present in Arendt's work. It also entails the problem of the potentially devastating effects of a complete inability to "think" for oneself on politics as Arendt encountered it in the figure of Eichmann.[2] Besides this, however, there is a second and less obvious level of critical reflection present in Arendt's practice of theorizing. According to Arendt, a critical political theory cannot only remind "men of action" of their business of commonly acting, judging, and beginning. It also ought to ask questions about the limits, contradictions, and aporia of this business itself. On this second level, her theory aims at a critical determination of the limitations of political experience itself. This second-order critique, as it were, is potentially always "in a certain conflict with the polis, which must demand respect for its laws independent of personal conscience."[3] Political theory is dedicated not only to understand the common affairs of politics in their own terms, but also to confront the civic perspective with its own contradictions and the highly fragmented nature of its experiential basis. In other words, insofar as the practice of theorizing also integrates, by way of comparison, the genuinely philosophical motive of "wondering" into its reflections of the "human artifice," it cannot completely respect, but necessarily has the tendency to critically challenge "the specific political reality of the citizens"[4] and the boundaries of political experience.

On this second, more principal level, Arendt's account of theoretical critique aims not only at articulating the logic of political practice from within, but primarily at reflecting upon the conditions of political experience—and this means, also upon its limits given by these conditions. These limitations seem especially to derive from the distinctly spatial conditions of political experience, and from the fact that the spaces of politics somehow have to be distinguished from an outside and protected in order to serve their purpose of constituting concrete spheres of political action. This idea of distinct political spaces as a necessary condition of political freedom bears substantially ambivalent ethical implications. Besides the

obvious references to the classical distinction of *oikos* and *polis*, Arendt's reflections on this question in a sense can also be compared in some respects to various modern ideas of differentiated social spheres, such as Max Weber's theory of modernization[5] or Michael Walzer's conception of various "spheres of justice" in modern societies.[6] All these conceptions of "spheres" and "spaces," the ancient as well as the modern ones, in one way or the other seem to involve political problems not only of inclusion, but also of exclusion (both in terms of membership and of content). The idea of a principal plurality of spaces resonating in such conceptions indicates that "[e]very order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices," that "[t]hings could always have been otherwise and every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities."[7] In terms of ethics, the fragmented ontology of political spaces inherent in Arendt's understanding of political experience has ambivalent consequences. This is reflected in Arendt's interpretation of the exclusive, and actually partly even repressive and violent, nature of the polis as such a distinct space[8] as much as, even if in a different sense, in Walzer's concept of the political "art of separation"[9] or in Weber's somewhat heroic and tragic understanding of politics and its peculiar "Bereichsethik."[10] A somewhat "exclusive" and therefore ambivalent character of distinct political spaces is even indicated in John Rawls's theoretical justification of a clear separation of the public sphere and its public reason from the more "comprehensive doctrines" that constitute the "background culture" of a democratic society. Rawls, referring to Isaiah Berlin, at least clearly notes that "[n]o society can include within itself all forms of life" wherefore "the inevitable effects of our culture and social structure" always involve the exclusion of "some ways of life that realize in special ways certain fundamental values."[11]

A clear awareness of this constitutive limitation of political spaces is indeed also present in Arendt's spatial understanding of politics. In contrast to Rawls, however, who asserts that the social necessities of exclusion he indicates "are not to be taken for arbitrary bias or injustice,"[12] for Arendt these constitutive limitations indeed pose serious ethical questions. One of the most interesting passages in this respect is a section in *On Revolution* in which Arendt reflects on the problematic consequences of the principles of compassion and of the universal idea of "human rights" in the course of the French Revolution.[13] Referring to Hermann Melville's novel *Billy Budd*, she argues that it is indeed the problem of the limited normative scope of political ethics which is involved here. In Arendt's interpretation, Melville's novel is a metaphoric reflection on the fundamental tension between the claims of morality, such as the idea of

inalienable human rights, and the claims of politics as a concrete and tangible reality. Melville's story about a fundamental confrontation within human affairs between absolute innocence and absolute evil particularly brings to the fore, according to Arendt, the necessarily ambivalent role of political virtue when it gets involved into "absolute" moral questions. While Billy Budd represents uncompromised morality and goodness, the figure of Claggart represents absolute amorality. The most interesting figure in the novel for Arendt, however, is Captain Vere who represents the ethics and virtue of political reason which somehow—in ethical terms—stands between the other two. Getting involved into the conflict between absolute innocence or goodness and absolute evil it turns out that "virtue" has to defend itself against both, therewith revealing its own moral limitations. It is when, in the person of Captain Vere, the logic of political virtue is introduced into the conflict that "the tragedy begins":

> Virtue – which is perhaps less than goodness but still alone is capable of embodiment in lasting institutions – must (sometimes) prevail at the expense of the good man .... Laws and all "lasting institutions" break down not only under the onslaught of elemental evil but under the impact of absolute innocence as well. The law, moving between crime and virtue, cannot recognize what is beyond it, and while it has no punishment to mete out to elemental evil, it cannot but punish elemental goodness. ... The absolute – and to Melville an absolute was incorporated in the Rights of Man – spells doom to everyone when it is introduced into the political realm. ... The tragedy of the Captain, the only really tragic figure in this story, is ... that he is conscious of the deeper injustice involved in what he is doing and what he has to do.[14]

This realist theme of a certain normative ambivalence of politics which Arendt reflects here in her interpretation of Melville—again, in a metaphorical and literary rather than in an explicitly theoretical manner—articulates a general trait inherent in her language of political spaces and borders.[15] Arendt's use of these concepts often even seems to indicate that political freedom as a "tangible reality," paradoxically, always involves an element of violence. The "practice of violence," which for Arendt is nothing but the consequent application of instrumental rationality within the sphere of action,[16] may only be "a marginal phenomenon in the political realm."[17] It is also true, however, that "[p]ower and violence, though they are distinct phenomena, usually appear together,"[18] just as the spatial conditions of politics and the stabilizing and limiting aspects of political institutionalization, of bureaucratic organization, or of any other form of

materialized power always involve an element of the apolitical instrumental logic of fabrication (see Chap. 4). When it comes "to protect the borders of the political sphere," an element of "violent action" may even be an inevitable concomitant, literally a "Grenzphänomen" in the sense of an "ultima ratio," as Arendt notes in the German version of *On Revolution*, of the practice of politics.[19]

While Arendt's political theory quite obviously does emphatically defend and hail the grandeur of political freedom and resolutely criticize the numerous forms of anti-political world alienation into which human beings' practices can potentially derail, it also, less obviously, articulates a "critique" (in the Kantian sense of the term, as it were) of the *limits of political experience* itself. The common meanings and narratives that constitute public realms for Arendt do have important normative implications, but they at the same time imply a somewhat limited and compromised variant of ethics, morality, and justice—gradually compromised, as it were, for the sake of its concrete, common, worldly realization in relatively stable "public spaces." Any authentically political project pursues the genuinely humanist concern of realizing freedom, but it never really coincides with the moral idea of humanity.[20] Political action and the commonsense experience of citizenship not only have integrative, but also exclusive implications, in terms of both persons and content. There is "a price to pay" for the political foundation of freedom, as Arendt occasionally notes,[21] simply because politics is founded in particulars and embedded in a highly fragmented social ontology of political realms, and therefore always, by necessity, falls short in reality of its effectively universal normative claim for freedom.

Again, compared with Arendt's determined critique of anti-politics, as put forth, for instance, in her theory of totalitarianism, her reflections on the French Revolution or her critique of Western metaphysics, this second level of a critique of political experience itself is less explicitly formulated in her texts. Notwithstanding the vagueness of Arendt's position in this respect, however, the centrality of the moral questions just indicated for her understanding of political experience and of political theory is quite obvious. Besides the major significance and the fragility of political freedom, the ultimate ambivalence and the limitations of political experience is surely one of the most fundamental ethical problems involved in the self-reflective sub-text of Arendt's practice of theorizing. It is, for instance, reflected in the fact that Arendt, besides focusing on the experiences of "men of action," also shows a distinct interest in political borderline

figures, as it were. [22] What these figures (writers, poets, literary critics, some philosophers) have in common is that they, instead of being immediately involved in the public affairs of politics and common self-determination, primarily pursue the quite different public intellectual practices of criticizing, disturbing, and opening up the concrete political horizons of their societies. These various modes of critique, although they all in a sense gradually deviate from the "thinking of citizens," for Arendt apparently serve a vital function in public discourse. They permanently keep open *in practice* the possibility of human beings not only to participate as equals in politics, but also to draw, not so much as equal, but as unique individuals, from experiential reference points beyond the concrete horizon of political experience in which they happen to live and participate.

To make a genuine contribution to such deviating discourses appears to me the primary ethical concern also of Arendt's own theoretical endeavor—and in general the most fundamental ethical responsibility to which political theory from her perspective ought to be dedicated. The citizen's *amor mundi*, in order to be prevented from degenerating into a narrow and exclusive provincialism, aggressive forms of nationalism, or even into ideologies of complete collective self-functionalization, needs to be accompanied by the poet's careless political irresponsibility, by the novelist's affinity for uncomforting and even alienating intellectual experiments, and by the wandering political theorist's subversive propensity to transcend any concrete collective political horizon and to question the self-confidence and creedal passion of political deeds, narratives, and traditions. The way in which Arendt's political theory is apt to support "the purpose of political action" is not to directly engage and actively participate in politics, but rather to engage in "critique" in the sense of a practice of "limitation and purification"[23] of politics, and of discovering "the sources and limits"[24] of the civic mode of experiencing reality. What theory can contribute to the practice of politics is its genuine "way of defending the possibility of politics by defining its limits."[25]

The most fundamental ethical implication of Arendt's wandering political theory is its contribution to the critical practice of experiential deviation by which every truly free public discourse among "men of action" should be accompanied. Also in this critical respect, Arendt's comparative empirical method and the multi-contextual and oscillating conceptual framework of her wandering thought prove to be highly original and powerful. With respect to one particular question, however, Arendt's critique of politics also reveals a conceptual gap in her normative reflections,

one which somewhat corresponds to the gap we already encountered in her theory of the *vita activa*. It regards the question of "nature" and its significance for the practice of politics. As it was indicated in Chap. 3, this question remains particularly unclear in Arendt's theory of action wherefore especially those experiential potentials of labor that may be connected with this question are curiously left out of the theoretical consideration. Interestingly, Arendt's second-order critique of the practical logic of politics seems to underscore the normative significance of this very question, notwithstanding her marked reservations against any applications of a fixed concept of "human nature" in political theory.[26] In some passages, Arendt still seems to strongly indicate that only certain experiences of "nature"—and consequently a theoretical reflection of the relation of politics (as the practice of self-determination and as the "human artifice" in which this practice takes place) toward nature—can ultimately provide a basis for a critique of the moral limits of political experience.

Her concept of natality especially indicates such a critical reference to "nature," or to somewhat natural experiences in which those aspects of the human condition come to the fore which are not self-determined, but simply naturally given.[27] In referring to such experiences, however, the term indeed introduces a somewhat alien argument into Arendt's phenomenological framework of her major political concepts. It not only seems to bear genuinely "anthropological" and philosophical (maybe even theological[28]) implications. What is more, the concept also tends to blur the more or less clear distinction between the realms of nature on the one hand and of self-determination on the other which is indeed crucial for Arendt's theory of the *vita activa*. Still, for Arendt, the term marks a fundamental condition and articulates a crucial insight of political experience. Political action, because it reflects the "natality" of human beings, "is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance."[29] Political experience itself is therefore ultimately rooted in a genuine experience of "nature." As a consequence of this existential connection toward certain experiences of nature, the condition of natality not only provides the experiential basis on which processes of political self-determination can be kept open for new beginnings within human affairs. It also sets a principal limitation to self-determination in the first place. The "idea of man creating himself" finds its necessary limits in "the very factuality of the human condition," because "nothing is more obvious than that man, whether as member of the species or as an individual, does not owe his existence to himself."[30]

Insofar as human existence, and particularly the human ability of political action, is rooted in man's natural condition of natality, it articulates both the factual indeterminacy and the moral limitations of the human capacity of freedom and self-determination. Jürgen Habermas, in his reflections on the fundamental moral problems involved in contemporary bio-technology, applies Arendt's idea of natality precisely in this sense of a concept that determines the ethical limits of human self-determination: "With the concept of natality Arendt builds a bridge from the creaturely (*kreatürlichen*) beginning [of any individual] to the consciousness of a grown up subject of being able to constitute a beginning of a new chain of action. ... Human beings experience themselves to be free actors because birth, as the watershed between nature and culture, already marks a beginning. ... The ability to be oneself as a person requires a reference point beyond the strands of tradition and the frameworks of interaction in which the identity of a person biographically constitutes itself."[31] In other words, the *naturalness* of human beings' birth, "the naked fact of our original physical appearance" as it is articulated in Arendt's term of natality, turns out to be a fundamental existential precondition for individual freedom which must remain untouched by the human abilities of collective self-determination if a complete self-functionalization of the human species is to be prevented.

Arendt's own understanding bears very similar critical implications, but they are not systematically unfolded or thoroughly examined with regard to their conceptual premises. In fact, her specific understanding of that "watershed between nature and culture" which is marked by her concept of natality surely belongs to those major questions raised by Arendt's political theory which remain unsatisfactorily unanswered in her work. The same holds true for her understanding of the term "nature" itself, to begin with, which actually seems to oscillate between the classical Greek understanding of *physis* and a distinctly modern understanding of the term. On the one hand, this underdetermination of her concept of nature in a certain sense is another very good example of a distinctly multi-contextual and therefore oscillating term. The only vaguely indicated contours of the term clearly cut across the ancient–modern divide in its attempt to fuse classical and modern perceptions and hence demonstrate the "synchronizing" and liberating potentials of Arendt's wandering practice of theorizing. On the other hand, the concept also quite clearly marks an unresolved problem in Arendt's theory, and this especially regards the term's normative implications.[32] That it arguably is a genu-

inely "philosophical" question (and Arendt herself would surely agree that the question of nature is genuinely philosophical), which marks this unresolved problem, may be no coincidence. Her concept of natality may not only indicate the "watershed between nature and culture." It may also mark the conceptual point where her determined political critique of philosophy might have to be complemented and balanced with a genuinely philosophical determination of the limits of politics—as one ingredient of those deviating critical discourses which ought to accompany any project of realizing political freedom.

Be that as it may, what Arendt's work undoubtedly demonstrates is a clear awareness of the fact that these deviating discourses and the lofty spaces of a "republic of scholars," as it were, regardless of their predominantly literary, theoretical, or philosophical character and notwithstanding their potentials for intellectual critique, can never be a substitute for a real "city" and a truly political public space. Any sort of critique must recognize and to a certain degree even depends upon the fruits of human labor, upon *homo faber*'s capacity of building a world for men and women to live in and upon the citizens' power of enacting a public space of inter-personal relations, communications, and meanings in which women and men can appear and interact with each other and "organize the living together of many human beings in such a way that peace, the condition for the quiet of contemplation is assured."[33] As a consequence, the general thrust of Arendt's practice of theorizing, although principally critical, does not carry that moment of contempt for the city which she understood to be the most obvious trait of the Platonic philosopher's attitude to human affairs. Arendt's wandering theory's perception of politics is a gradually alienated one; her "intellectual attitude" rests upon a "resolute refusal" to be "integrated politically or socially." Only this gradual alienation makes possible "that attitude of superior disdain which gave rise to La Rochefoucauld's contemptuous insights into human behaviour, the worldly wisdom of Montaigne, the aphoristic trenchancy of Pascal's thought, the boldness and open-mindedness of Montesquieu's political reflections"[34]—and, we might add, the unsparing clarity of Arendt's wandering political theory's analysis of the grandeur, the limitations, and the inherent dangers of political experience. Still, this intellectual attitude clearly differs from that of a philosopher trying to liberate himself from the allegedly confused experience of the many altogether. In Arendt, the experiential realm of politics does not appear as a cave or, for that matter, as a second cave of public or historical obscurity and confusion. Rather, it is the only sphere of human

affairs in which individuals can make themselves "at home" in the world and realize freedom, even insofar as they actualize their potential to be resolute critics of the negligent and inacceptable, the hardly avoidable, and also the inevitable shortcomings of the "human artifice."

Read against this background, Walter Benjamin's description of *Paris* and of his character type of the stranger as *flaneur* may render the best metaphoric characterization of the "city" as perceived from Arendt's wandering theory's experiential position:

> This Paris was not yet cosmopolitan, to be sure, but it was profoundly European, and thus it has, with unparalleled naturalness, offered itself to all homeless people as a second home ever since the middle of the last century. Neither the pronounced xenophobia of its inhabitants nor the sophisticated harassment by the local police has ever been able to change this. ... [The city's] boulevards, Benjamin discovered as early as 1913, are formed by houses which "do not seem made to be lived in, but are like stone sets for people to walk between". This city, around which one still can travel in a circle past the old gates, has remained what the cities of the Middle Ages, severely walled off and protected against the outside, once were: an interior, but without the narrowness of medieval streets, a generously built and planned open-air *interieur* with the arch of the sky like a majestic ceiling above it. ... It is the uniform facades, lining the streets like inside walls, that make one feel more physically sheltered in this city than in any other. [The city's arcades and passageways] are indeed like a symbol of Paris, because they clearly are inside and outside at the same time and thus represent its true nature in quintessential form. In Paris a stranger feels at home because he can inhabit the city the way he lives in his own four walls. And just as one inhabits an apartment, and makes it comfortable, by living in it instead of just using it for sleeping, eating, and working, so one inhabits a city by strolling through it without aim or purpose, with one's stay secured by the countless cafes which line the streets and past which the life of the city, the flow of pedestrians, moves along.[35]

Notes

1. OT, p. 54 ff.; OR, p. 59 ff.
2. Vollrath: Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking, p. 176 f.
3. PhP, p. 90.
4. PhP, p. 90.

5. On the relation between Arendt's and Weber's works in general, see Tuija Parvikko: A Note on Max Weber's Impact on Hannah Arendt's Thought, in: *Max Weber Studies* 4/2 (2004), pp. 235–252 and Peter Baehr: Personal Dilemma or Intellectual Influence? The Relationship Between Hannah Arendt and Max Weber, in: Max Weber Studies 5/1 (2005), pp. 125–130.
6. Michael Walzer: Spheres of Justice. A Defense of Pluralism and Equality, New York (Basic Books) 1983.
7. Chantal Mouffe: Space, Hegemony, and Radical Critique, in: David Featherstone/Joe Painter (Eds.): Spatial Politics. Essays for Doreen Massey, Chichester (Wiley-Blackwell) 2013, pp. 21–31; here: p. 26.
8. HC, p. 36, 83 ff.; OR, p. 12.
9. Walzer: Spheres of Justice, p. 31 ff. and Walzer: Thinking Politically.
10. Max Weber: Politik als Beruf, in: Gesammelte politische Schriften. 2nd Edition, Tübingen (Mohr) 1958, pp. 541–548.
11. John Rawls: Political Liberalism, New York (Columbia University Press) 1993, p. 197. See also Hans-Jörg Sigwart: The Logic of Legitimacy. Ethics in Political Realism, in: The Review of Politics 75/3 (2013), pp. 407–432, here: p. 427 ff.
12. Rawls: Political Liberalism, p. 197.
13. On the ethical implications of these reflections in Arendt, also see Kateb: Hannah Arendt, p. 26 f. and Mark Antaki: What Does It mean to Think About Politics? in: Roger Berkowitz/Jeffrey Katz/Thomas Keenan (Eds.): Thinking in Dark Times. Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics, New York (Fordham University Press) 2010, pp. 63–69, here: p. 68 f.
14. OR, 74 f. The last sentence is only included in the German edition (Arendt: Über die Revolution, p. 107 [my translation]).
15. See also, for instance, Arendt's reflections on "goodness" in HC, p. 77. On the implications of this distinctly realist understanding of political legitimacy and ethics, which may in general be more clearly present in Arendt's German than in her English theoretical language, also see Sigwart: The Logic of Legitimacy, p. 430 ff. and Sigwart: Hannah Arendt und die Grenzen des Politischen, p. 83 ff.
16. V, p. 30, 51, 4.
17. OR, p. 19.
18. V, p. 52.
19. Arendt: Über die Revolution, p. 19 and 20 [my translation]. See also V, p. 9 ff.
20. This also results in certain contradictions involved in any form of ethical principle of collective or political responsibility. See Beiner: Interpretive Essay, p. 143 and Margaret Canovan: Politische Verantwortung in "interessanten Zeiten," in: Waltraud Meints/Katherine Klinger (Eds.): Politik und Verantwortung. Zur Aktualität von Hannah Arendt, Hannover (Offizin) 2004, pp. 65–72.

21. Arendt: Ich will verstehen, p. 66.
22. Most interesting in this respect are her *Jewish Writings* and the collection of essays in MDT. But also in her other writings, most obviously OT and OR, Arendt deals with single representatives of this group of critics.
23. LKPP, p. 36.
24. LKPP, p. 32.
25. Sheldon S. Wolin: Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time, in: *Social Research* 44/1 (1977), pp. 91–105; here: p. 93.
26. HC, p. 10 f. See also Arendt's dispute on this problem with Eric Voegelin as it is documented in Hannah Arendt/Eric Voegelin: Disput über den Totalitarismus. Texte und Briefe, Göttingen (V&R unipress) 2015.
27. HC, p. 8 f.
28. It at least must be noted that for Arendt the reference to Augustine is crucial in this respect (HC, p. 177). See also Roy T. Tsao: Arendt's Augustine, in: Seyla Benhabib (Ed.): Politics in Dark Times. Encounters with Hannah Arendt, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2010, pp. 39–57.
29. HC, p. 176 f.
30. V, p. 12 f.
31. Jürgen Habermas: Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik? Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 2002, p. 102 f. [my translation].
32. That this attempt remains an open, widely unresolved question in Arendt's theory is clearly discernible, for instance, in the very pessimistic, but also somehow contradictory critical conclusions with which she ends her essay on *The Concept of History* where she elaborately deals with the problem of nature in its classical and modern understanding (BPF, p. 86 ff.).
33. Arendt: Labor, Work, Action, p. 29.
34. MDT, p. 181.
35. MDT, p. 172 ff.

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