

THINKING AND ACTING:  
ON HANNAH ARENDT'S POLITICAL THEORY

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A THESIS

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### Abstract

Hannah Arendt's political theory is both provocative and deeply unsettling—reckoning with the decline of tradition that framed her life. While Arendt bemoans a loss of meaning in the modern world, the path out of our predicament remains ambiguous. This senior thesis aims to reconstruct an Arendtian politics based on action with others in the public sphere. Chapter One traces the motif of the mob that haunts Arendt's corpus, and argues that the mob is antipolitical because it eschews plurality and thinking, and hence, politics itself. Chapter Two utilizes *The Human Condition* to pinpoint Arendt's conception of the political and considers the implication of this conception for theorizing about politics. Chapter Three, based primarily on a review of J. Glenn Gray's correspondence with Hannah Arendt, offers a history of Hannah Arendt at Colorado College. My goal throughout is to grapple with the ambiguity between Arendt as a diagnostician and as a proponent. Put simply, my argument is that for Hannah Arendt, politics is action.

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## Acknowledgments

In “The Idea of a University,” Michael Oakeshott writes about the nature of liberal learning:

...the doctrine would be no more than a brief expression of what it felt like to be an undergraduate on that first October morning. Almost overnight, a world of ungracious fact had melted into infinite possibility; we who belonged to no “leisured class” had been freed for a moment from the curse of Adam, the burdensome distinction between work and play. What opened before us was not a road but a boundless sea; it was enough to stretch one’s sails to the wind.<sup>1</sup>

My undergraduate education at Colorado College has been an adventure across that long, rolling, boundless sea. To my great fortune, I was not alone on my journey. Thanks are due to Professor Timothy Fuller, who introduced me to the thought of Hannah Arendt and who provided immense encouragement throughout my studies. Like so many students over your nearly half-century of service to Colorado College, I feel gratitude for your example of what an examined life might be.

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<sup>1</sup> Oakeshott, Michael, “The Idea of a University,” in *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1989): 105-117, 115.

### Introduction: Arendt's Ambivalence

An ambivalence lies at the heart of Hannah Arendt's conception of the political. On the one hand, Arendt bemoans a loss of meaning in the modern world, a world where morality collapses into mores,<sup>2</sup> a world where mass society transforms men into man.<sup>3</sup> This Hannah Arendt is the theorist of metaphysical devastation, or, more precisely, of the impact of metaphysical destruction on the world of men.<sup>4</sup> She is an archeologist, using the tools of phenomenology to recover language lost in the past.<sup>5</sup> She is a cultural critic, attuned to the loneliness of man in mass society.<sup>6</sup> Above all, she is a diagnostician, painstakingly outlining the malaise consuming modern political thought. At the apex of this metaphysical devastation stands not Satan, as before, but a new, modern man, Adolf Eichmann, whose "inability to think"<sup>7</sup> exemplifies the political consequences of philosophical impoverishment. If Nietzsche best articulated the metaphysical devastation

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<sup>2</sup> Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 49-146, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout, to preserve the integrity of Arendt's language, I follow her use of the gendered 'men.' Villa, Dana R., "Hannah Arendt: from philosophy to politics," in *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Ed. Catherine H. Zuckert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 108-125, 116.

<sup>4</sup> I use 'devastation' intentionally: "Devastation is more than destruction. Devastation is more unearthly than destruction. Destruction only sweeps aside all that has grown up or been built up so far; but devastation blocks all future growth and prevents all building. Devastation is more unearthly than mere destruction. Mere destruction sweeps aside all things including even nothingness, while devastation on the contrary establishes and spreads everything that blocks and prevents." See Heidegger, Martin, *What is Called Thinking?*, Trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004): 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Arendt, "What is Authority?," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954): 91-141, 95.

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954): 194-222, 196.

<sup>7</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963): 49.

of modernity, Arendt theorized the political consequences of this devastation on “this whirling earth to which we cling.”<sup>8</sup>

And yet, amid Hannah Arendt’s lucid and insightful understanding about the modern condition, it remains uncertain what path out of our predicament she proposes; her solution to the problem she identifies is not entirely clear. Thinking, “the two-in-one of soundless dialogue,”<sup>9</sup> is no solution. Its character is purely negative, and in a world of men, outside the solitary individual, thinking neither tells us how to act nor provides us political principles to follow. Moral examples, “the ‘go-cart’ of all judging activities,”<sup>10</sup> aren’t necessarily a path forward, either: they inspire us, rather than instruct us; they don’t necessarily apply across cultures or moral systems; they are limited in their scope and dependent on a particular kind of education. Political action, a kind of “startling unexpectedness” which “appears always in the guise of a miracle,”<sup>11</sup> offers a promising start, but it can occur only after we judge “right from wrong, beautiful from ugly.”<sup>12</sup> It requires a prior judgment of how we are to act. Tragically, Arendt’s thoughts on judgment were never fully recorded, as she died just as she began to write them down.<sup>13</sup>

In short, the student of Arendt is struck by both the clarity by which she identifies the metaphysical destruction consuming us, and the difficulty in gleaning our long-covered path forward.

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<sup>8</sup> Gray, J. Glenn, *The Warriors* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967): 21.

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003): 159-189, 189.

<sup>10</sup> Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 49-146, 144.

<sup>11</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958): 178.

<sup>12</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 189.

<sup>13</sup> See Arendt, “Appendix: Judging,” in *Life of the Mind: Willing*, Ed. Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978): 255-272; see also Young-Bruehl, Elizabeth [sic], “Reflections on Hannah Arendt’s *The Life of the Mind*,” *Political Theory* 10.2 (May 1982): 277-305;

I chose to write this senior thesis on Hannah Arendt's conception of the political because it eludes both simple classification and easy explanation. Arendt is beloved—and despised—on both the left and the right; debates rage over her relationship to inquiries as disparate as feminism, legal philosophy, the history of political and theological thought, international relations, Zionism and Jewishness, civil rights, storytelling, and the project of modernity. When asked in 1973 about her relationship to political movements, Arendt responded, “I have no exact political philosophy which I could summon up with oneism.”<sup>14</sup> Instead of subscribing to ideological movements, Arendt clung steadfastly to the task of thinking:

Thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.<sup>15</sup>

Her project is by its very nature ambivalent: to be a political theorist, for Arendt, means both to separate oneself from the baggage of the tradition of political philosophy, and at the same time to reassemble the shards of the past to think through what we are doing. To think is, by definition, to think critically;<sup>16</sup> yet to think critically is not to long for a washed-over past or for the future yet to come. Arendt is neither a quixotic grecophile nor blind utopian,<sup>17</sup> for “all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia

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<sup>14</sup> Arendt, “The Last Interview: Interview by Roger Errera,” Trans. Andrew Brown, in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2013): 107-133, 122.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Arendt, “The Last Interview: Interview by Roger Errera,” 123.

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah Berlin, for one, falls in this school of thought. As he states, “she produces no arguments, no evidence of serious philosophical or historical thought. It is all a stream of metaphysical free association. She moves from one sentence to another, without logical connection, without either rational or imaginative links between them.” Berlin, Isaiah, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991): 82; see Benhabib, Seyla, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000): xxv, note 6; see also Pitkin, Hanna

for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.”<sup>18</sup> And yet, there is an element of unrootedness haunting Arendt’s analysis: “I do not believe in a world, be it a past world or a future world, in which man’s mind, equipped for withdrawing from the world of appearances, could or should ever be comfortable at home.”<sup>19</sup> Ambivalence thus permeates Arendt’s conception of political theorist: we are both at home in the world and profoundly removed from it; we have no choice but to stand as part of a tradition that has been irreparably ruptured.

Hannah Arendt couples the philosophical framework of Heideggerian German Existenz philosophy with a formative life experience as a stateless, Jewish German émigré.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Arendt’s thought should be read as an ode to being-in-the-world, a world where devastation and calamity foreclosed the possibility of a primordial yearning for the agora and acropolis of yore. The turning point in the development of this thought was certainly in 1933, when, while living in Berlin, Nazi police arrested Arendt as she walked to meet her mother for lunch, and detained her in the Alexanderplatz police station for eight days.<sup>21</sup> Arendt proceeded to narrowly escape Germany, and eventually settled in New York, where she could respond intellectually to the demands of history, which engulfed her. Inspired by Heideggerian phenomenology, Arendt’s response is

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Fenichel, “Conformism, Housekeeping, and the Attack of the Blob: The Origins of Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 51-81, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Arendt, “Preface to the First Edition,” *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004): xxvii; see also Arendt, “Home to Roost,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003): 275.

<sup>19</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Willing*, Ed. Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978): 158

<sup>20</sup> Benhabib, Seyla, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000): xxiv.

<sup>21</sup> Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 105.



framed in a methodological approach that attempts to ‘rescue’ political phenomena, to correct misinterpretation and to thereby return political ideas to their roots.<sup>22</sup> Just as Martin Heidegger rescued *metaphysical* concepts of Dasein and thinking from the past, so too did Arendt rescue *political* concepts of violence, authority, freedom, and guilt.<sup>23</sup> The methodology of recalling and rescuing from the past for the present is more than a merely philological pursuit—it is an expressly political act, for after 1933, Arendt declares: “Indifference was no longer possible.... I was no longer of the opinion that one can simply be a bystander.”<sup>24</sup>

Arendt was thus forced by her political times to embrace politics. Yet instead of yearning for dogmatism or utopian visions, her method was to reach for the past, to rescue political definitions, and to thereby think politics in a world ravaged by its excesses. The paradox of Arendt is this: living and writing in a century ravaged by war and destruction, gripped by a politics which crystallized an “ideal” order, resulting in a mass exclusion of the unwanted other, Arendt sees hope in rescuing political phenomena from modern thought.<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt is keen to cite our dual selves; the dueling voices inside of us whose two-in-one conversation provides the basis for thinking. I’d argue that a careful read of Hannah Arendt’s political theory suggests two selves within one theorist, a veritable two-in-one. Perhaps what makes Arendt such a partisan for truth is

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<sup>22</sup> See Vollrath, Ernst and Hans Fantel, “Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking,” *Social Research* 44.1 (Spring 1977): 160-182.

<sup>23</sup> See, respectively, Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*; Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969); Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003): 147-158.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” 28 October 1964, in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Bruce & Company, 1994): 1-23, 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.

her commitment to honesty about her views, even in the midst of intense controversy.<sup>26</sup>

As Arendt wrote in unpublished notes on Marx:

Inconsistencies, flagrant contradictions, if they do not occur, as they usually do not in second-rate writers, lead into the very center of the most great thinkers [sic] where they belong to the most revealing clues of understanding.<sup>27</sup>

My claim is that, by thinking through the ambiguity embedded within Hannah Arendt's work, we might, like her, recover what was lost.

The aim of this thesis is to dive headfirst into the ambiguity of Hannah Arendt, into the void between diagnostician and proponent, or, more specifically, into the void between thinking and acting. Chapter One explores the motif of the mob that haunts Arendt's corpus; the mob, I argue, is precisely the opposite of the political because the mob eschews plurality and thinking, and hence, politics itself. Chapter Two recreates Arendt's conception of the political, primarily utilizing *The Human Condition*, and investigates the implications of an Arendtian view of politics on the standpoint of theory. Arendt's politics, I argue, eschews the Archimedean point above and outside of men. Chapter Three, based primarily on a review of Hannah Arendt's correspondence with J. Glenn Gray in the Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress, offers a history of Arendt's relationship with Colorado College. My aim overall is to reconstruct Arendt's political theory, with an eye toward addressing the ambiguity in her approach. For, if we are to accept Arendt's bold premise that freedom is "to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or

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<sup>26</sup> For two recent examples, see Stangeth, Bettina, *Eichmann Before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) and Gines, Kathryn T., *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought" (1953), in *Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress*, Container 71, p. 4, qtd. in Benhabib, Seyla, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000): 124.

imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known,”<sup>28</sup> then perhaps to call Arendt’s conception of the political into being, as this thesis intends, is to engage in the pursuit of human freedom, however modest a contribution it might make.

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<sup>28</sup> Arendt, “What is Freedom,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006): 142-169, 150.

## Chapter One: Thinking and the Mob<sup>29</sup>

What is the meaning of modernity's discontents? "Once the suprasensory realm is discarded, its opposite, the world of appearances as understood for so many centuries, is also discarded."<sup>30</sup> So writes Hannah Arendt at the beginning of the first part of her last published book, *The Life of the Mind*. The crux of her argument goes like this: if modern thought accepts the Nietzschean premise—that God is dead and metaphysics is defunct—then it follows that the distinction between the suprasensory "true world" and the "apparent one" erodes.<sup>31</sup> When we eliminate the suprasensory realm, we likewise eliminate the referent for the world of appearances. The sun sets behind the cave; we sit anew to watch shadows dance on the wall; "the whole framework of reference in which our thinking was accustomed to orient itself breaks down...nothing seems to make much sense anymore."<sup>32</sup> Malaise, confusion: this is the modern condition. And yet, while the character of modern thought is radically severed from that which came before, our ability to think is identical. This is Arendt's core assumption: "our *ability* to think is not at stake; we are what men have always been—thinking beings." Our ability to think transcends history. It stands firm even as the storm of progress blows violently.<sup>33</sup>

This chapter argues that thinking—an ability that transcends historical rupture in thought—is one key to unlocking Arendt's conception of the political. I begin my analysis with two particular historical moments: the summer of 427 B.C., in ancient

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<sup>29</sup> This chapter expands in part on a paper I wrote for Professor McEnnerney's Contemporary Political Philosophy course.

<sup>30</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Willing*, Ed. Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, 1971): 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999): 54. Note that Arendt was quite fond of this metaphor; see Arendt, "Franz Kafka: A Reevaluation," in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Bruce & Company, 1994): 69-80, 74-75.

Corcyra, and the fall of 1957, in Little Rock, Arkansas. My claim is that the motif of the mob permeates both these moments and haunts Arendt's work<sup>34</sup> (I). I argue that, properly understood, the mob is antipolitical precisely because it erodes both our capacity to think, Socratic two-in-one within ourselves, and Arendtian plurality, the fact that we are born alongside others whom we did not choose. Politics requires a mentality utterly opposed to mob-rule, a mentality—the political—staked instead in human dignity (II).

### I. Corcyra and Little Rock

In the summer of 427 B.C, in ancient Corcyra, revolution broke out. The Corcyraean people, allied with democratic Athens, fought a bitter revolutionary war against the Corcyraean oligarchs, allied with the Spartans. This conflict—which became bloodier and bloodier as it dragged on—marks one of the most dramatic moments in Peloponnesian War, which was according to Thucydides the greatest war yet known to man.<sup>35</sup> Thucydides' account of this revolution is staggering. Amid ruthless violence, language became warped beyond repair, reflecting the extremity of man's actions.<sup>36</sup> Moderation was held suspect—as “a cloak for unmanliness,” restraint washed away, and the reasonable citizen perished between the two virulent factions.<sup>37</sup> The motivation for men on each side was neither the pursuit of justice and virtue, nor by self-preservation, but rather by a more pernicious hope: revenge.<sup>38</sup> Public and private distinctions collapsed: “although the crime imputed was that of attempting to put down the democracy some

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<sup>34</sup> The secondary literature on the ‘mob’ in Arendt is underdeveloped, especially in analyzing the mob across Arendt's oeuvre.

<sup>35</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Touchstone, 1998): § 1.1.2.

<sup>36</sup> Thucydides, § 3.82.4.

<sup>37</sup> Thucydides, § 3.82.4.

<sup>38</sup> Thucydides, § 3.82.7.

were also slain for private hatred, others by their debtors because of the moneys owed to them.”<sup>39</sup> Human nature, Thucydides tells us, “gladly showed itself ungoverned in passion, above respect for justice, and the enemy of all superiority; since revenge would not have been set above religion, and gain above justice, had it not been for the fatal power of envy.”<sup>40</sup> Envy, revenge: these are the underlying hopes that govern mob rule. Reason and moderation collapse into envy and ruthless, incessant violence.

Comparing Thucydides’ depiction of the Corcyraean revolution with Arendt is advantageous precisely because each thinker responds to the demise of tradition, the collapse of order,<sup>41</sup> where “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.”<sup>42</sup> Thucydides encourages his reader to draw broad conclusions from the example of Corcyra, for “the sufferings which revolution entailed upon the cities were many and terrible, such as have occurred and always will occur as long as the nature of mankind remains the same...”<sup>43</sup> Per his wish, we might claim that Thucydides’ account instructs us that when the chips are down and when political life is harshly bifurcated into opponents at arms, greed, jealousy, and vengeance overtake us. Moderation is a virtue only when political life contains a semblance of normalcy and cooperation. Where cooperation deteriorates, where standards of normalcy erode, crude envy and revenge

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<sup>39</sup> Thucydides, § 3.81.4.

<sup>40</sup> Thucydides, § 3.84.2.

<sup>41</sup> “In grappling with the Holocaust, she [Arendt] had to think through the ramifications of the collapse of traditional standards, just as Thucydides had confronted this problem, most notably, in his examinations of the plague in Athens and the Corcyraean civil war.” Klusmeyer, Douglas B., “Contesting Thucydides’ Legacy: Comparing Hannah Arendt and Hans Morgenthau on Imperialism, History and Theory,” *The International History Review* 33.1 (March 2011): 1-25, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Yeats, W.B., “The Second Coming,” qtd. by Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 188.

<sup>43</sup> Thucydides, § 3.82.2.

take their place. Thucydides teaches us that in the mob, we are ruled by a passion not only to improve our own livelihood, but more specifically, to harm and destroy an unwanted, reified other. This is the logic of the mob.

Consider another, more recent example of mob rule, an example which Hannah Arendt subjected to philosophical inquiry. On September 4, 1957, Elizabeth Eckford, a fifteen-year-old African-American schoolgirl, attempted to enter all-white Little Rock Central High School. As she walked toward the school, an angry mob screamed epithets:

*“Lynch her! Lynch her!” “No nigger bitch is going to get in our school!” “Get out of here!” “Go back where you came from!” “Go home, nigger!” “Throw her out!” “Nigger, go back to where you belong!” “Send her back to the NAACP and Eleanor Roosevelt!” “You’ve got a better school of your own!”<sup>44</sup>*

The photographer I. Willmer Counts documented the scene. He shot an iconic image of Eckford stubbornly pushing onward.<sup>45</sup> Count’s photograph evokes sympathy for Eckford and her abundant courage in marching forward toward the all-white school in the face of cruel jeers. Count’s photograph became, in the words of one historian, “one of the most enduring emblems of the crisis,”<sup>46</sup> vivid evidence of the fight for desegregation in Little Rock.

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<sup>44</sup> Margolick, David, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011): 35-36; see also Fine, Benjamin, “Arkansas Troops Bar Negro Pupils; Governor Defiant,” *New York Times*, 4 September 1957, Page A1; Roberts, Gene, & Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007): 160.

<sup>45</sup> Margolick, 33-37; the photograph is reprinted in Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 192.

<sup>46</sup> Kirk, John A., *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007): 12.

Hannah Arendt saw Count's photograph in a newspaper, and, in 1959, published a response to the photos in *Dissent* magazine. She called her essay "Reflections on Little Rock."<sup>47</sup>

*The point of departure of my reflections was a picture in the newspapers showing a Negro girl on her way home from a newly integrated school: she was persecuted by a mob of white children, protected by a white friend of her father, and her face bore eloquent witness to the obvious fact that she was not precisely happy.*<sup>48</sup>

In "Reflections," Arendt—ever the non-conformist—came to a vastly different view from the dominant liberal consensus at the time.<sup>49</sup> Sharply critical of desegregation, Arendt writes that the whole affair "impresses one with a sense of futility and needless embitterment as though all parties concerned knew very well that nothing was being achieved under the pretext that something was being done."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 193-213.

<sup>48</sup> Arendt, "Reflections," 193.

<sup>49</sup> Arendt herself put great value in intellectual nonconformity, i.e., escaping the mob of the chattering class: "When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action." See Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 188; Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, Trans. Ross Guberman, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, 114.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, "Reflections," 197.





For Arendt, education was always found at the nexus of the political, the social, and the private. Attempts at desegregation muddled the proper divide between the three realms, and in so doing, deprived parents of “the private right over their children and the social right to free association.”<sup>51</sup> Arendt opposed desegregation because it violated a firewall between private life, society, and the public sphere. While Arendt feels “sympathy for the cause of the Negroes,”<sup>52</sup> and while she certainly believes in the goals of civil rights, she writes of an apprehension with desegregation’s justification and aims.

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<sup>51</sup> Arendt, “Reflections,” 212.

<sup>52</sup> Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” in *Dissent* 6.1 (Winter 1959): 45-56, 46 [original version].

The publication of “Reflections” “pleased practically nobody.”<sup>53</sup> Critics howled in protest: the editors of *Dissent* prefaced Arendt’s essay with the following warning: “We publish it not because we agree with it—quite the contrary!—but because we believe in freedom of expression even for views that seem to us entirely mistaken.”<sup>54</sup> David Spitz wrote that Arendt argued for states’ rights “in terms that would gladden the heart of a John C. Calhoun.”<sup>55</sup> Ralph Ellison remarked that Arendt was “way off into left field” in her analysis, by failing to understand that, for African-American parents, “the child is expected to face the terror and contain his fear and anger precisely because he is a Negro American.”<sup>56</sup> Most recently, Kathryn Gines, in a book-length critique of “Reflections,” argued that “Arendt wears profound blinders when it comes to racial oppression in the United States.”<sup>57</sup> Arendt herself conceded that she veered “into an entirely wrong direction” with her arguments on race in “Reflections,” and I tend to agree.<sup>58</sup> Yet my claim is that, notwithstanding its awkward perception of American race relations, “Reflections” sheds light on a concept helpful to elucidate what Arendtian politics most opposes: rule by mob.

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<sup>53</sup> May, Derwent, *Hannah Arendt* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986): 96.

<sup>54</sup> Editors Preface, in Arendt, “Reflections,” original version, 45.

<sup>55</sup> Spitz, David, “Politics and the Realms of Being,” *Dissent* 6.1 (Winter 1959): 56-65, 58

<sup>56</sup> Warren, Robert Penn, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, New York: Random House, 1965, 343-344.

<sup>57</sup> Gines, Kathryn T., *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014): 58.

<sup>58</sup> In a 1965 letter, Arendt concedes this point, writing to Ellison that “it is precisely this ‘ideal of sacrifice’ which I didn’t understand, and since my starting point was a consideration of the situation of Negro kids in forcibly integrated schools, this failure to understand caused me indeed to go into an entirely wrong direction.” See Arendt, *Hannah Arendt to Ralph Ellison, 29 July 1965*, Library of Congress, *The Hannah Arendt Papers*, Accessed 15 December 2014, <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/arendthome.html>>; see also Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, 311.

## II. Mob Rule

My claim is that, although it emerges in diverse places throughout Arendt's political theory, 'mob' has a coherent meaning in Arendt's corpus, and that its coherence can help us understanding what Arendt precisely Arendt means by the political. We might note forthright that 'mob' is peppered throughout "Reflections on Little Rock:"<sup>59</sup> Arendt speaks of a 'mob of white children,' of 'mob ideology' and 'mob organization,' of 'mob rule' and 'a jeering and grimacing mob of youngsters.' Yet it is instructive to consider the deployment of 'mob' throughout Arendt's oeuvre. The word appears for perhaps the first time in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). There, in a discussion of the evolution of anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus affair in France, Arendt lays out a straightforward definition of the mob as a classless composite under the seductive grip of a charismatic leader:

The mob is primarily a group in which the residue of all classes are represented. This makes it so easy to mistake the mob for the people, which also comprises all strata of society. While the people in all great revolutions fight for true representation, the mob will always shout for the "strong man," the "great leader."<sup>60</sup>

Later in *Origins*, Arendt points out that the mob is opposed to working within existing systems of governance. It does not consent to the underlying societal consensus: "excluded as it is from society and political representation, the mob turns of necessity to extraparliamentary action." It is the mob that repudiates political legitimacy, radically questioning the very basis for modern democratic authority.

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<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., pgs. 193, 198, 202, 203, & 212.

<sup>60</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004): 138. Note that Arendt's "strong man" or "great leader" for whom the people shout echoes Max Weber's charismatic leader, who uses his charisma as a legitimation of domination. See Weber, Max, *Politics as a Vocation*, Trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965): 3.

In reference to her well-known distinction between power (acting in concert with others), strength (acting alone) and violence (flowing from one person in a top-down and instrumental fashion), Arendt addresses mob rule in *The Human Condition*:

If tyranny can be described as the always abortive attempt to substitute violence for power, ochlocracy, or mob rule, which is its exact counterpart, can be characterized by the much more promising attempt to substitute power for strength. Power indeed can ruin all strength and we know that where the main public realm is society, there is always the danger that, through a perverted form of “acting together”—by pull and pressure and the tricks of cliques—those are brought to the fore who know nothing and can do nothing.<sup>61</sup>

Her argument consists of two bold claims: first, that mob rule (ochlocracy) is the opposite of tyranny, and second, that mob rule replaces strength (individual action) with power (collective action). We might argue that mob rule—ochlocracy—aptly depicts the angry white faces surrounding Elizabeth Eckford as she walked to Little Rock Central High School. Pulling, and pressuring, and tricking into cliques, the citizens surrounding Eckford that day resembled, as one journalist wrote at the time, “drooling wolves [who] took off after their prey.”<sup>62</sup> These white citizens acted together in a leaderless, shapeless mob, proving that the rule by mob is indeed one of the most pernicious and dangerous forms of contemporary political power. In Corcyra, as well, both the oligarchic and the democratic factions morphed into cliques. Knowledge (and its natural home, epistemic moderation) flew by the wayside, subsumed by unrestrained force and a murderous rage. To act together became to act as one against a singular, hated other.

If we make the heuristic assumption that Arendt’s use of the word ‘mob’ coheres, we might therefore conclude that by ‘mob,’ Hannah Arendt means something different

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<sup>61</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 203.

<sup>62</sup> Lonesome, Buddy, qtd. in Margolick, 47.

from merely the masses or the *demos*,<sup>63</sup> more than “a large and disorderly collection of people tending to acts of violence,”<sup>64</sup> more than the combination of some group-based identity with political power.<sup>65</sup> Instead, ‘mob’ for Arendt refers to a (i) thoughtless, (ii) antipolitical group of people, (iii) whose fundamental character is a proclivity to disavow plurality.

Let us defend each part of this definition in turn. First, the mob is thoughtless, its members unable to think. For Arendt, thinking—the Socratic two-in-one which occurs between I and myself—focuses on “invisibles, with representations of things that are absent.”<sup>66</sup> Importantly, thinking is a purely negative activity: by thinking, “we cannot expect any moral propositions or commandments, no final code of conduct from the thinking activity, least of all a new and now allegedly final definition of what is good and what is evil.”<sup>67</sup> Arendt cites her Heidegger approvingly:

1. Thinking does not bring knowledge as do the sciences.
2. Thinking does not produce usable practical wisdom.
3. Thinking does not solve the riddles of the universe.
4. Thinking does not endow us directly with the power to act.<sup>68</sup>

However, while thinking doesn’t produce positive moral propositions, it is of critical importance in dark times, for when a wave of conformity approaches, thinking manifests judgment, and judgment manifests action.<sup>69</sup> Thinking thus defined is precisely what the

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<sup>63</sup> Canovan, Margaret, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 40-41.

<sup>64</sup> “Mob,” in *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993, 1450.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Butler, Judith & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State: Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>67</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 167.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 159; qtd. by Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1971): 1.

<sup>69</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 189.

mob in Corcyrea and Little Rock is unable to do, where “to think means to examine and to question; it always involves the shattering of idols.”<sup>70</sup> The mob neither shatters idols nor, following Socrates, conducts an internal dialogue about how to proceed. Conscience falls away. Instead, in a mob, action proceeds thought, the Socratic dialogue draws to a close, and the capability to think and in turn the possibility of using one’s conscience shuts down entirely.<sup>71</sup> Men’s character, in other words, became level with their fortunes,<sup>72</sup> unable to transcend the relentless, unyielding inner desire for revenge, and hence, unable to think.

Second, the mob is antipolitical insofar as it denies public equality, the “innermost principle” of the body politic.<sup>73</sup> Arendt conception of public equality derives from the ancient Athenian *polis*. While the presence of the ‘unequal’ was always assumed in private life, public, political life was constituted in terms of equality: equality to speak, equality to engage in civic duties, equality to act in concert with others.<sup>74</sup> This equality was much more than merely formal equality: it demanded an active life: as Fustel de Coulanges writes, “there was enough to occupy almost one’s whole existence, and there remained very little time for personal affairs and domestic life.”<sup>75</sup> The mobs in Little Rock and in Corcyra were precisely constituted in opposition to public equality, advocating instead a reactionary splinter along fault lines of race (Little Rock) and of

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<sup>70</sup> Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 49-146, 103.

<sup>71</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 189.

<sup>72</sup> Thucydides, § 3.82.2; for a provoking exploration of this phenomenon, see Machiavelli, Niccolò, *The Prince*, Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): ch. 25, 98-101.

<sup>73</sup> Arendt, “Reflections,” 205.

<sup>74</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 32.

<sup>75</sup> De Coulanges, Fustel, *The Ancient City* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956): 335.

social status (Corcyra). The mob is antipolitical insofar as it impoverishes and ultimately degrades political speech. In the mob, “political speech and deliberation are reduced to the expression of sheer outrage and resentment;”<sup>76</sup> and our voices morph from cacophony into unison. Words become almost meaningless,<sup>77</sup> collapsing into cries of the first-person plural.

Third, the mob disavows plurality, i.e., “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”<sup>78</sup> Plurality means that we are born alongside those whom we did not choose. When the mob yells “Go back where you came from!”<sup>79</sup> they forget that we all come from the same place, thrown into existence in a world of humans who are different than ourselves. For Arendt, we live in a world of women and men whose narratives form between birth and death, and whose biographies are ultimately distinct from one another, resistant to collapse.<sup>80</sup> When the mob mouths slurs at Eckford and engages in ruthless envy in Corcyra, it disavows the condition of our plurality and hence strictly contradicts what it means to be human. That which separates us overwhelms that which unites us, mitigating our plurality in the process. To be related to one another yet retain our strict separation as utterly unique creatures: this is the crux of our condition. Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, utilizes a poignant metaphor to describe the nature of our plurality:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our

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<sup>76</sup> Brunkhorst, Hauke, “Equality and Elitism in Arendt,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana Villa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 178-198, 179.

<sup>77</sup> Thucydides, § 3.82.4.

<sup>78</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Margolick, 35.

<sup>80</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 97.

falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and separate them. The weirdness of this separation remembers a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.<sup>81</sup>

The mob is the magic trick that suddenly and irrevocably removes the table from our grasp, the spiritual séance that erodes our capacity to live with others, the bacchanal whose inner spirit both accentuates and refutes the natural difference among women and men. In the soul of the mob, what makes us human washes away, revealing the mutable nature of our existence.

If my argument holds that a mob is indeed a thoughtless, antipolitical group which disavows plurality, then we might be able to approach that with withdraws from us—the question of Arendt’s conception of the political—with improved clarity. The mob helps elucidate the ambiguity in Arendt’s thought because her conception of the mob is both a diagnosis and a prognosis. The mob’s collective failure to think can be countered with individual reflection; its failure to recognize difference can be countered with a politics of human dignity that recognizes the plurality undergirding the human condition. What perhaps the mob shows us most clearly is that human nature can, upon final analysis, be radically altered:

Only the claim to global rule has made us aware that mankind is no longer a beautiful dream of unity or a dreadful nightmare of strangers, but a hard inescapable reality. Only the insane notion that “everything is possible” has expressed our deepest knowledge that far more is possible than we had ever thought. Only the criminal attempt to change the nature of man is adequate to our

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<sup>81</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.



trembling insight that no nature, not even the nature of man, can any longer be considered to be the measure of things.<sup>82</sup>

The mob demonstrates for us to the fragility of the political. For if in the mob at Little Rock or Corcyra our very nature changes, if we become “ungoverned in passion,”<sup>83</sup> then we are no more than mere animals.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004):

<sup>83</sup> Thucydides, § 3.84.2.

<sup>84</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 322.

## Chapter Two: The Standpoint of Theory

Hannah Arendt was a learned student of Franz Kafka. As an editor at Schocken Books, Arendt worked on Kafka's *Diaries*.<sup>85</sup> Her first essay in the *Partisan Review*, published in fall 1944, was on Kafka. She writes, "...the terror of Kafka adequately represents the true nature of the thing called bureaucracy—the replacing of government by administration and of laws by arbitrary decrees. We know that Kafka's construction was not a mere nightmare."<sup>86</sup> The Nazi regime from which Arendt narrowly escaped was indeed one, as Kafka foretold, where "lies are made into a universal system," entrapping those who happened to fall in its wake.<sup>87</sup>

Arendt was especially keen on the following Kafka parable (translated by Arendt from the German):<sup>88</sup>

He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though is that some time in an unguarded moment—and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet—he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.<sup>89</sup>

'He,' our protagonist, is caught between past and future, squeezed uncomfortably between what has and what will. His dream, as Arendt notes, is not to escape above this

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<sup>85</sup> Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 189. N.B. Kafka doesn't merely loom behind Hannah Arendt's corpus—he also loomed, physically, in her home: an enormous photograph of Kafka hung in Arendt's New York City apartment. See Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, Trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 87.

<sup>86</sup> Arendt, Hannah, "Franz Kafka: A Reevaluation," in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994): 69-80, 74.

<sup>87</sup> Kafka, Franz, *The Trial*, Trans. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken Books, 1998): 223.

<sup>88</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1971): 207.

<sup>89</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006): 7.

dispute, but rather to step outside of it, as an umpire and a veteran of sorts of this fight.<sup>90</sup> It is the character of dreams to excite our hopes without realizing them, which is to say ‘He’ represents the modern longing to stand outside the crushing fight between past and future. This hope is irrational and unrealistic: it requires an impossibly dark night and an unlikely promotion. And yet we are moved by this hope, by a desire to escape our uncertain situation and return to the certainty of what came before and what is still to come. For Arendt, this parable defined so clearly our modern predicament: as Kafka remarks elsewhere, “we have an infinite amount of hope, but not for us.”<sup>91</sup>

Kafka’s parable speaks to an underlying issue throughout the Arendtian corpus: the standpoint of theory—and the difficulty for ‘He,’ the modern subject, to escape entrapment between past and future. Specifically, this chapter argues that the process by which Arendt rescues political phenomena, a process developed primarily through *The Human Condition*, can rightly be understood only vis-à-vis her aversion to a universal point outside the world of men, the so-called ‘Archimedean point.’<sup>92</sup> After outlining the building blocks of politics that Arendt rescues from the past (I), and applying those building blocks to the Arendtian distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, I assert that the character of Arendt’s conception of the political is its embedded nature in the world of men and its opposition to philosophical Archimedeanism (II). Lastly, I defend my thesis from anticipated objections (III). Rather than looking down on politics from the outside—in the tradition of Western thinkers from Plato to Marx—Arendt imagines a radically new kind of political thought, derived from

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<sup>90</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1971): 207.

<sup>91</sup> Qtd. by Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999): 142.

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 257-268; Arendt, “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006): 260-274, 272-274.

the hope, doubt, and irrational faith of men.<sup>93</sup> Our modest task, therefore, is to begin to elucidate Arendt’s thinking, for “I shall never fear or avoid things of which I do not know...”<sup>94</sup>

### I. Ontological Building Blocks<sup>95</sup>

The year was 399 B.C. Before a jury of 501 Athenians, a deeply unpopular seventy-year-old philosopher stepped forward to speak.<sup>96</sup> His aim was to defend himself from a litany of charges: transforming the worse argument into the stronger; corrupting the youth; “studying things in the sky and below the earth.”<sup>97</sup> To the assembled jury, Socrates offered a defense of his pursuit of wisdom, an activity that he called ‘philosophy.’<sup>98</sup> For Socrates, amidst the unending swirl of assertions and claims made in the public sphere (including by citizens like Meletus at his trial), philosophy—which begins in wonder—can orient an individual towards wisdom, virtue, and a well-ordered soul.<sup>99</sup> Socrates remarks in *Gorgias* that the goal of his dialectical method of philosophy was not to convince a majority, but rather, to produce just one witness to truth and

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<sup>93</sup> Note that hope and faith for Arendt are the “two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether.” Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

<sup>94</sup> Socrates, *Apology*, § 29b, in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1975): 32.

<sup>95</sup> I use ‘ontological’ to denote those conceptions which frame our way of being as political animals.

<sup>96</sup> Socrates, *Apology*, §§ 17d, 28a.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, § 19b.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, § 29d.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, § 30; Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 9; *Republic*, § 329d.

wisdom.<sup>100</sup> This remark is ironic, because, as the reader knows, the Athenian jury voted by majority to find Socrates guilty and to sentence him to death.<sup>101</sup>

Later readers of Socrates, such as Augustine, focus the ‘Socratic turn,’ whereby Socrates transforms philosophical analysis inward. Specifically, for Augustine, Socrates’ focus on examining and interrogating qualities of the soul—qualities like beauty, morality, truth, love and virtue—separates him from the pre-Socratic philosophers’ focus on the natural world.<sup>102</sup> Arendt is sympathetic to this view, yet reinterprets the Socratic turn entirely. For Arendt, Socrates was a public philosopher *par excellence*. His method was to engage with others in conversation, whether while bartering in the Athenian *agora*, drinking and giving speeches in the *Symposium*, or chatting at night after a festival in the Piraeus in the *Republic*. For Arendt, Socrates stood “alone among the great thinkers” in never writing down his ideas; “no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them.”<sup>103</sup> Instead of writing philosophical treatises and books, a task done in solitude, Socrates pursued his ideas in conversation, a task done with others.

Socrates’s death in 399 B.C. therefore epitomized for Arendt the victory of the *polis* over the philosopher.<sup>104</sup> It marks the point where philosophy was irrevocably

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<sup>100</sup> Socrates, *Gorgias*, Trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987): § 474a, pg. 38.

<sup>101</sup> Socrates, *Apology*, §§ 36a-38d.

<sup>102</sup> As Augustine notes, “Socrates is remembered as the first to turn the wheel of philosophy to the reforming and arranging of morals, for all philosophers before him instead expended their greatest efforts on investigating physical—that is, natural—things.” Augustine, *City of God*, Book VIII, Ch. 3., in *Political Writings*, Trans. Michael W. Tkacz and Douglas Kries (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994): 58.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

transformed from a public activity, which was tolerated amongst citizens in the *polis*, to a private activity, better suited for the contemplative philosopher (or, at its end, for the philosopher-king).<sup>105</sup> As Fustel de Coulanges writes, “philosophy appeared, and overthrew all the rules of the ancient polity. It was impossible to touch the opinions of men without also touching the fundamental principles of their government.”<sup>106</sup> Socrates’ death marked the change from freedom as acting and doing with others in public, political space to a feeling of inner freedom.<sup>107</sup> It demonstrates the opposition between politics and philosophy, and hence irrevocably separated philosophy from politics, marking the point where philosophy turned away from the world of men into the world of contemplation.

Depicting Socrates’ death in this way—as the moment where philosophy and politics were divorced—allows Arendt to define her project: theorizing a politics which responds to the fact that “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”<sup>108</sup> Arendt begins her argument by introducing a truly radical ontological toolkit.<sup>109</sup> First, Arendt introduces ‘plurality.’ As discussed in Chapter I, above, by plurality, Arendt simply means that we are born alongside those whom we did not choose. It is instead a fact of political genesis, derived from what we construct to be in common. To be related to one another yet retain our strict separation as utterly unique creatures: this is the crux

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<sup>105</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965): 318n; qtd. by Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Why Arendt Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 83.

<sup>106</sup> De Coulanges, Fustel, *The Ancient City* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956): 355.

<sup>107</sup> Arendt, “What is Freedom,” 163. Note that Arendt’s distinction is somewhat similar to the distinction between positive and negative freedom. See Wilkerson, Michael, “Between Freedom and Law: Hannah Arendt on the Promise of Modern Revolution and the Burden of ‘The Tradition,’” in *Hannah Arendt and the Law*, Ed. Marco Goldoni and Christopher McCorkindale (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2012): 35-61, 37-38.

<sup>108</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

<sup>109</sup> By ‘radical,’ I mean returning to the root of things.

of our condition. Coupled with the phenomenon of plurality is ‘natality,’ by which Arendt refers to the quality of being born into the world with the capacity to create anew. The term originates in antiquity—Thucydides, for example, records the following characterization of the Athenians: “To describe their character in a word, one might truly say that *they were born into the world* to take no rest themselves and to give none to others” (italics my own).<sup>110</sup> Natality is described by Arendt as a “miracle that saves the world” precisely because men retain the ability to shape their lives, and hence to save them. Natality is related to Arendt’s belief that each life, the space between birth and death, is a narrative, proceeding along a linear line.<sup>111</sup> We are each a biography, thrown into a world we can reshape and reconfigure.<sup>112</sup>

These two strikingly original concepts—plurality and natality—ground Arendt’s conception of the political, and in particular, her depiction of action, “the political activity par excellence.”<sup>113</sup> Put simply, for Arendt, politics is action. By ‘action,’ Arendt refers to the ability of men to act and speak spontaneously in concert, in “the space where I appear to others as others appear to me”—the public realm.<sup>114</sup> When men come together to found political bodies, they engage in action, a public practice of politics.<sup>115</sup> Politics is action for two reasons: First, action is grounded in plurality because action is predicated precisely on the uniqueness of each of us; “we are all the same, this is, human, in such a way that

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<sup>110</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Touchstone, 1998): §1.70.9.

<sup>111</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 97; Buckler, Steve, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011): 53.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>113</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 198; Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” 28 October 1964, in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Bruce & Company, 1994): 1-23, 23.

<sup>115</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8-9.

nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.”<sup>116</sup> Whenever we act, we act among others.<sup>117</sup> Second, Arendt tells us that action is ontologically rooted in natality, meaning that the fact of beginning anew, as a basic category of being, provides the foundation for acting.<sup>118</sup> Because we are each born into the world, and because in the public sphere we each create anew, we might say that creating anew mirrors being born anew, and that an Arendtian politics is predicated on natality, our being thrown into this world of appearance.

In *The Human Condition*, action exists alongside both labor and work. Briefly, labor, for Arendt, is the activity that creates and sustains the life process on earth. It encompasses basic goods, like shelter and food, as well as fertility, the life-sustaining force that preserves our existence.<sup>119</sup> Labor springs from the human condition of life.<sup>120</sup> Labor is conducted outside the household and always denoting a process, not a product,<sup>121</sup> and that which it produces is consumed almost immediately.<sup>122</sup> Work, in contrast, refers to the world-artifice created by humans, unrelated to concerns of biological processes or life cycle; work springs from the human condition of worldliness.<sup>123</sup> (Note here Arendt’s distinction between the earth, a physical planet imagined as our sole place of inhabitation,

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>117</sup> D’Entreves, Maurizio Passerin, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994): 70.

<sup>118</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 108; Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Why Arendt Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 81.

<sup>120</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> N.B. Much of Arendt’s approach to labor arises, at least in part, out a desire to reconcile what she viewed as a contradiction in Marx, who in her interpretation viewed labor s both a fundamental quality of human nature and as something that would be abolished after capitalism. *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>122</sup> Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974): 55.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



and the world, an artificial artifice fabricator by man and consisting of our own constitution.) Work, labor, and action constitute the foundational elements of the *vita activa*, “under which life on earth has been given to man.”<sup>124</sup> Action, however, remains the most political of this trio, for it is through action that men both act alongside others (i.e., plurality) to create anew (i.e., natality). As Pericles prophesized, through action, man’s deeds endure long beyond man’s death.<sup>125</sup>

## II. The Vita Activa and the Vita Contemplativa

So far I have argued that Arendt’s theory of politics emerges from dual ontological starting points—plurality, the fact that we are born amongst others whom we did not choose, and natality, the fact of birth and the miracle to begin anew. From these premises she introduces action, a political activity carried out among men. This section argues that these conceptions are deployed in service of a poignant and striking theme throughout Arendt’s work: the distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. As I alluded to in (I) above, Socrates’ death marked the beginning of a tradition in Western thought that inverted contemplation, the *vita contemplativa*, and action, *the vita activa*. Plato’s *Republic* dramatically sets out this inversion. The prisoners in the allegory of the cave are “like us;” they listen to the sounds of the puppet-masters; they hear echoes from the walls around them; they attempt to identify the shadows before them and, based on those shadows, make guesses about the future.<sup>126</sup> The philosopher breaks the bonds holding him down and, walking out of the cave toward the light at its

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>125</sup> Thucydides, § 2.43.1-3.

<sup>126</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 292; Plato, *Republic*, Trans. G. M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992): §§ 514a – 516d.

entrance, is hence “freed,” free in his ability to contemplate the Good from a standpoint outside of the cave.<sup>127</sup> Additionally, while the sailors on the ship of state quarrel and throw one another overboard in pursuit of their own interests, they completely ignore the fine art of sailing; they understand neither navigation nor the weather; they comprehend neither the sky nor the stars. Only the “true captain,” standing above the field of action below, can correctly steer the ship at sea.<sup>128</sup> Consider, finally, the comical entrance of Alcibiades after the rousing speech of Diotima in the *Symposium*.<sup>129</sup> Diotima engages the assembled listeners in stirring philosophical contemplation about the upward movement toward the form Beauty—until she is interrupted by a loud, drunken Alcibiades: “‘Good evening gentlemen. I’m plastered,’ he announced. ‘May I join your party?’”<sup>130</sup>

The Platonic reversal, coupled with the demise of the ancient city-state, elevated contemplation and the *vita contemplativa* over action, work, and labor and the *vita activa*.<sup>131</sup> Arendt contends “that the Platonic tradition of philosophical as well as political thought started with a reversal, and that this original reversal determined to a large extent the thought patterns into which Western philosophy almost automatically fell wherever it was not animated by a great and original philosophical impetus.”<sup>132</sup> In turn, it permanently “distorted... the very idea of freedom such as it was given in human experience by transposing it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, the will, where it would be open to self-

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, § 515c.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 488a – 489c.

<sup>129</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>130</sup> *Symposium*, § 212e.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>132</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 292.

inspection.”<sup>133</sup> This is the inversion of philosophical tradition: the elevation of the ‘I-will’ over the ‘I-can;’ of inward, individual freedom over collective, outward freedom; of the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*.<sup>134</sup> Contemplation is elevated above action, labor, and work, and in turn the very basic of our condition is uprooted, only to be set down violently on its head.<sup>135</sup>

The acquisition of scientific knowledge, which Arendt argues advanced more quickly during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than during the entirety of previous recorded history, is coupled with an odd and uniquely modern phenomena: the rise of despair; “...both despair and triumph are inherent in the same event.”<sup>136</sup> The root of this phenomenon, a wild advance in scientific-technological achievement coupled with doubt over our nature as humans, lies at the standpoint of theory.<sup>137</sup> For Arendt, the crux of the problem is a historical tendency for the theorist, and specifically the post-Socratic philosopher, to adopt a universal standpoint.<sup>138</sup> Much as the philosopher in the allegory of the cave ascends towards the light to glean universal knowledge, so too does the Archimedean philosopher adopts universal perspective, anathema to lived conditions on earth:

Without actually standing where Archimedes wished to stand... still bound to the earth through the human condition, we have found a way to act on earth and within terrestrial nature as though we dispose of it from outside, from the Archimedean point. And even at the risk of endangering the natural life process we expose the earth to universal, cosmic forces alien to nature’s household.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Arendt, “What is Freedom,” 144.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>135</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 291.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-262.

<sup>137</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1-5.

<sup>138</sup> In Arendt’s historical progression of theory is the rise of Cartesian doubt, a standpoint characterized by personal introspection and uncertainty. See *Ibid.*, 260, 280-284.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

The most problematic feature, therefore, of the inversion of contemplation and action is precisely its adoption of Archimedeanism as a viewpoint to solve political questions;<sup>140</sup> the ‘solution’ to political questions “can never lie in theoretical considerations or the opinion of one person.”<sup>141</sup>

Let me illustrate this point by reference to a popular example in our time: the idea that humans exist as socially conditioned creatures, reflecting a moral outcome which arises from a particular time and place, and that by extension our moral hopes can be explained through a framework of conditioning and its corollary, moral relativism. This belief is historically embedded within modern empirico-positivism; its aim, as Michael Oakeshott remarked, is “making conduct self-conscious;”<sup>142</sup> its frames of analysis are men as socially conditioned beings. Arendt emphatically agrees on the diagnosis that humans are conditioned beings, “because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence.”<sup>143</sup> First, through work, men fabricate artifices, which, in turn, condition men. Second, through action, men spontaneously create political order, which normalize and condition them to one another. Thus, men are conditioned both by the natural world and by the artificial world of artifice (work) and of politics (action) that they create: “men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings.”<sup>144</sup> Yet Arendt’s analysis does not render men conditioned *absolutely*.<sup>145</sup> Men retain qualities—plurality and natality—which exist prior to our own grand entrance on

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<sup>140</sup> Berlin, Isaiah, “History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific Theory,” *History and Theory* 1.1 (1960): 1-31, 10; see also Dworkin, Ronald, “Hart’s Postscript and the Character of Political Philosophy,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 24.1 (2004): 1-37.

<sup>141</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5.

<sup>142</sup> Oakeshott, Michael, “Rationalism in Politics,” in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991): 5-42, 25

<sup>143</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

the stage of the *vita activa*. Men are conditioned, but we are more than merely conditioned creatures.

What Arendt's shrewd analysis of conditioning serves to suggest is that, while humans are indeed socially conditioned, the process cannot be identified from a universal standpoint outside the world of ideas. The Archimedean point negates an essential aspect of our humanity, and hence of Arendt's conception of politics. If we view ourselves as no more than *animal laborans*, then we lose an integral facet of what it means to be a political animal: to act in concert, to engage in speech, to practice a freedom which distinguishes humans from other species, for "if we apply to Archimedean point to ourselves, 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."<sup>146</sup> What makes us political is precise lack of Archimedianism: we are most political not when contemplating the good in philosophy seminars nor when examining data on monitors, but instead when we band together with others in public spaces. For Arendt, "there are no absolutes in politics,"<sup>147</sup> and any attempts to define political absolutes outside the world of men are doomed to fail.

### III. Response to Objections

One might object to my argument in this chapter so far by claiming that if all theory was standpoint-oriented, and if the task of universal theory is impossible, then Arendt is no different from Marx: "Social life is essentially *practical*...The philosophers

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<sup>146</sup> Arendt, "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006): 260-274, 273-274.

<sup>147</sup> Fuss, Peter, "Hannah Arendt's Conception of Political Community," in *Hannah Arendt: The Recover of the Public World*, Ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979): 173.

have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”<sup>148</sup>

Yet I here will endeavor to sharply distinguish between Arendt and Marx’s perspectives, and in so doing, to defend Arendt’s anti-Archimedean claims from Marx’s more daring call to action. First, Arendt shuns the title of philosopher. “I do not belong to the circle of philosophers. My profession, if one can even speak of it at all, is political theory.... In my opinion I have said good-bye to philosophy once and for all.”<sup>149</sup> Relatedly, in great contrast to both Marx and Hegel, Arendt emphatically rejected the view that history is predetermined and predictable.<sup>150</sup>

Second, while I do claim that Arendt eschews a universal epistemology to ground political judgment, I do not think it accurate to suppose that Arendt saw the theorist as engaged in politics to change the world. At most, Arendt saw thinking as a defensive hedge against evil.<sup>151</sup> She mentions this point at least twice, once at the end of “Thinking and Moral Considerations”: “When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action;”<sup>152</sup> and once at the end of *The Human Condition*, “...it is in fact far easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think.”<sup>153</sup> Arendt, in Marxian terms, neither views thinking as the task

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<sup>148</sup> Marx, Karl, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978): 143-145, 145 (emphasis in original).

<sup>149</sup> Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” 28 October 1964, in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Bruce & Company, 1994): 1-23, 4-5.

<sup>150</sup> King, Richard H., “Arendt Between Past and Future,” in *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, Ed. Richard H King & Dan Stone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007): 250-261, 252.

<sup>151</sup> I draw on my argument here from a paper I wrote on Arendt and Oakeshott for Professor Fuller in *Political Thought Since Nietzsche*.

<sup>152</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 188

<sup>153</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 324.

of interpretation nor the task of changing the world. The task of thought, that two-on-one conversation between me and myself, is no more and no less than to “prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.”<sup>154</sup>

Third, as I read it, Arendt and Marx’s position on this point differ because unlike Marxian theory, Arendt’s theory of action, insofar as it derives from plurality, remains ethically bounded by the presence of a conglomerate of unique humans whom we did not choose. In other words, if it is true that we are born alongside those who, we did not choose, if this is a fact of our condition, then perhaps a universal ethical imperative of cohabitation may exist.<sup>155</sup> Immanuel Levinas— who, like Arendt, emerges out of traditions of phenomenology and Jewish thought— offers a vision of ethics grounded in our relationship to the face seated across from us, a face whose existence shines back against our own.<sup>156</sup> Levinas’ inventive grounding of ethics shows how an ethical duty to the other might emerge from Arendt’s very original concept of plurality.<sup>157</sup>

The core of Arendt’s conception of politics— derived from the building blocks of politics sketched above, distinguished into the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, depicted as an opposition to philosophical Archimedeanism, and opposed to Marxian objections— stands as a vivid tribute to her commitment to engage in the theory and

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<sup>154</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 161.

<sup>155</sup> See, e.g., Butler, Judith, *Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>156</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991): 194.

<sup>157</sup> Recall Arendt’s description of the face of the Nazi policeman who arrested her, as mentioned above: “...this man who had arrested me had such an open, honest face, I put my trust in him and figured I would have a better chance that way than with some lawyer who would only be afraid.” Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 105. I consider plurality to be perhaps the most poetic aspect of Arendt’s political theory.

practice of political life. “One exposes oneself to the light of the public, as a person.”<sup>158</sup>

For Hannah Arendt, we are never more political than when we act with others in the public sphere. It is precisely our capacity to be and act with others—to eschew contemplation in favor of what she calls the I-can—which perhaps most directly confronts the ambiguities of Arendt’s political theory. The decline of tradition has indeed uprooted the guideposts that we once looked to guide our path forward; instead, we are to look inside ourselves, and to consider our existence *alongside others*, to reconstruct what exactly Arendt means by the political. To think with Hannah Arendt is thus to think through the entirety of Western political thought. If “the thinking self is ageless,” as Arendt suggests, then to read Arendt is to think beyond our own time, to wrestle between natality and mortality, “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 depths, and to carry them to the surface...”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” 28 October 1964, in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Bruce & Company, 1994): 1-23, 23.

<sup>159</sup> Arendt, “Letter to Martin Heidegger After Forty-Five Years,” 26 September 1969, in *Letters: 1925-1975*, Ed. Ursula Ludz (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004): 155; Arendt, “Introduction,” in Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999): 54.



### Chapter Three: Hannah Arendt and Colorado College<sup>160</sup>

The story of Hannah Arendt's association with Colorado College begins in Marburg, Germany, in October of 1925. Hannah Arendt, a brilliant 18-year-old Jewish philosophy student, received a letter from her teacher, Martin Heidegger:

Dear Miss Arendt!

I must come see you this evening and speak to your heart.

Everything should be simple and clear and pure between us. Only then will we be worthy of having been allowed to meet. You are my pupil and I your teacher, but that is only the occasion for what has happened to us.

I will never be able to call you mine, but from now on you will belong in my life, and it shall grow with you.<sup>161</sup>

It is with this letter that Arendt and Heidegger's secret affair commenced. The affair marked a "most stimulating, composed, eventful period," the period Martin Heidegger would write his masterpiece, *Being and Time*.<sup>162</sup> Though their affair ended, over the next fifty years, until Hannah Arendt's death on December 4, 1975, Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger continued an intellectual companionship, albeit interrupted, that remains one of the most striking stories in 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual history.

The story remains compelling because, as time went on, Martin Heidegger became more and more intertwined with Nazism. The evidence on this point is clear: consider Heidegger's famous address given upon the assumption of the rectorate at

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<sup>160</sup> A version of this chapter was published as "Hannah Arendt and Colorado College" in the *Colorado College Cipher* 18.2 (October 2014): 23-25. My research herein was conducted over summer 2014 in the manuscript room of the Library of Congress, where Arendt's correspondence with J. Glenn Gray is available for review. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence referenced herein is from the LOC's Hannah Arendt Collection. In addition, I took particular profit from Fuller, Timothy, "Glenn Gray and Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World," *Colorado College Bulletin* (October 1982): 8-9.

<sup>161</sup> Martin Heidegger to Hannah Arendt, October 1925, in *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger: Letters 1925-1975*, Ed. Ursula Ludz (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 2004): 3.

<sup>162</sup> Qtd. by Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 50.

Freiburg University in 1933,<sup>163</sup> his membership in the Nazi party that lasted until the end of the war in 1945, his absence at Edmund Husserl's funeral in 1938,<sup>164</sup> his life-long failure to renounce his party membership, even when asked directly in a 1966 interview,<sup>165</sup> and most recently, the publication of his black notebooks, containing evidence of Heidegger's "philosophical-political fantasies," refuting the claim that his philosophy can be distinct from his politics.<sup>166</sup>

Unlike Martin Heidegger, who avoided the calamity of war by returning to his German hut, Hannah Arendt, as a Jew, was forced to escape the horrors of Europe. She spent the rest of her life grappling with the thoughtlessness that characterized the modern predicament she experienced so acutely. Yet after 1950, their companionship reignited. Hannah Arendt became, in the words of the intellectual historian Martin J. Woessner, one of two to serve as "Heidegger's chief American advocate."<sup>167</sup>

The second of these Heideggerian advocates-in-chief came from an emphatically different background as Hannah Arendt. He grew up not in Königsberg, Prussia, but in Miffltown, Pennsylvania. He felt at home not in the cocktail-chatter of Paris or New York City, but rather riding horses and hiking at the foot of Pikes Peak. He was Jesse Glenn Gray, professor of philosophy at Colorado College.

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<sup>163</sup> Heidegger, Martin, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," delivered 1933, originally published 1983, reprinted in Wolin, Richard, ed., *The Heidegger controversy: A Critical Reader* (Boston: MIT Press, 1993), 29-39.

<sup>164</sup> Heidegger, Martin, "Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel's* Interview with Martin Heidegger," conducted September 1966, originally published May 31, 1976, reprinted in Wolin, Richard, ed., *The Heidegger controversy: A Critical Reader* (Boston: MIT Press, 1993): 6.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-116.

<sup>166</sup> Gordon, Peter E, "Heidegger in Black," *New York Review of Books*, Published October 9, 2014: <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/oct/09/heidegger-in-black/>>.

<sup>167</sup> Woessner, Martin, "J. Glenn Gray: Philosopher, Translator, Warrior," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 40.3 (Summer 2004): 487-512, 488, 496.

Glenn Gray, who received his undergraduate degree from Juniata College and his master's from the University of Pittsburgh, opened the mail on May 8, 1941, to find both his doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University as well as his U.S. draft notice.<sup>168</sup> During his four years in the military, as a private and as a second lieutenant, Glenn Gray kept a detailed philosophical memoir that was eventually turned into *The Warriors*. As a student of German philosophy, Glenn Gray was especially interested in the work of Martin Heidegger. In 1954, he made Heidegger's personal acquaintance, which led to an appointment as general editor of Harper & Row's Heidegger translation series.<sup>169</sup> As Glenn Gray wrote in the preface to his translation of Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking*, "To offer a translation of a Heideggerian work requires a measure of courage, perhaps better named rashness."<sup>170</sup> Today, the J. Glenn Grey Memorial Lecture and J. Glenn Grey Award are given in his honor.

Glenn Gray started teaching philosophy at Colorado College in 1954. He first met Hannah Arendt at Wesleyan University in the fall of 1962, while researching philosophy of education on a Guggenheim Fellowship.<sup>171</sup> This meeting was to develop into a lifelong friendship, centered on a shared interest in Heidegger, and resulting in two visits by Hannah Arendt to Colorado College.

The path to bringing Hannah Arendt to Colorado College was somewhat arduous. In the summer of 1963, Associate Dean Fred Sondermann wrote to Arendt inquiring

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<sup>168</sup> Woessner, 488-489; Gray, *The Warriors*, xv.

<sup>169</sup> "History of the Department," *Colorado College Department of Philosophy*, Accessed 4 October 2014: <<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/dept/philosophy/history-of-the-department/>>.

<sup>170</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, xv

<sup>171</sup> Woessner, 500; Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 336, 441; J. Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, April 20, 1968. Gray's work on education developed into *The Promise of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1968).

about her availability to attend as a distinguished guest in January 1964, for a symposium entitled “The Second World War.”<sup>172</sup> Arendt wrote back, “My schedule for the coming academic year is so over-crowded that I cannot afford to accept any new engagements. I hope you will understand my predicament.”<sup>173</sup>

In the fall of 1964, Hannah Arendt was asked again to speak at Colorado College, this time by her friend Glenn Gray. She insisted that she appear for an informal discussion with students and faculty, with “no singing” —no public lectures or grand speeches.<sup>174</sup> Glenn Gray suggested that Arendt discuss *Between Past and Future*, her work on political thought published in 1961.<sup>175</sup> (Arendt’s 1963 *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was both more widely known and more controversial than *Between Past and Future*.) The students brimmed with anticipation for a visit from Hannah Arendt: Glenn Gray wrote, “Though the semester seems to me much too full and preoccupied, these young people find time for one more activity when it involves the chance of talking with Hannah Arendt about her ideas.”<sup>176</sup>

Around the same time, Hannah Arendt received an unsigned note from a student member of the Colorado College program committee, finding Arendt’s work “interesting, exciting, and formidable,” and requesting that Arendt come to Colorado College to speak.<sup>177</sup> Arendt’s response was tart: “Dear Question Mark: You forgot to sign your name but otherwise everything is all right. You may know that I am in correspondence about

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<sup>172</sup> Fred Sondermann to Hannah Arendt Bleucher, July 3, 1963.

<sup>173</sup> Hannah Arendt to Fred Sondermann, July 17, 1963.

<sup>174</sup> Hannah Arendt to Glenn Gray, October 14, 1964. Mentioned in Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 441.

<sup>175</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, October 20, 1964.

<sup>176</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, November 12, 1964.

<sup>177</sup> Question Mark to Hannah Arendt, no date.

coming to Colorado Springs with Professor Glenn Gray. I suggest that you get in touch with him. Sincerely Yours, Hannah Arendt.”<sup>178</sup>

Colorado College brimmed with anticipation for Arendt’s December 1964 visit. Unfortunately, a nasty blizzard interfered with her plans.<sup>179</sup> As Glenn Gray wrote, “Many of the students were surprisingly disheartened... It is an indication of your rather awesome reputation in these parts.”<sup>180</sup> Arendt’s visit was rescheduled for April 16-19, 1965. While not delivering a formal lecture, Hannah Arendt spoke to students and faculty about *Between Past and Future*, as well as on *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.<sup>181</sup> By all accounts, her visit was a tremendous success. Glenn Gray recalls hearing from his faculty colleagues that “a kind of renaissance spirit” had emerged at CC. “From my point of view the weekend was perfect and will be cherished in memory. When one considers how rarely anything anticipated lives up to anticipation, your short stay was all the more remarkable.”<sup>182</sup> Moreover, in a glowing letter to President Worner, Professor Sondermann described Hannah Arendt’s visit as “an extraordinarily stimulating and refreshing experience,” and proposed continuing the format whereby a big speaker would visit campus for a seminar, rather than a lecture, to continue “the informality, the give-and-take, the challenging experience of meeting persons in the very forefront of their professions which was so evident during Miss Arendt’s visit.”<sup>183</sup>

The Gray-Arendt correspondence can be, at times, extremely witty. After her 1965 visit, Gray suggested to Arendt that his daughters “Lisa and Sherry are composing

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<sup>178</sup> Hannah Arendt to Question Mark, October 14, 1964.

<sup>179</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, December 6, 1964.

<sup>180</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, December 6, 1964.

<sup>181</sup> Darnell Rucker to Hannah Arendt, April 19, 1965.

<sup>182</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, April 23, 1965.

<sup>183</sup> Fred Sondermann to Lew Worner, April 20, 1965.

letters of thanks to you-in German no less!” Arendt responds: “...please leave your children alone with the thank you notes. This is one of the reasons why aunts are hated so much.”

Throughout the late 1960s, Hannah Arendt and Glenn Gray kept up an active correspondence about a variety of topics. Of particular interest is their correspondence on Heidegger. Glenn Gray at one point proposes to Hannah Arendt that a complete copy of Heidegger’s *Nachlass*, or papers, be stored in Tutt Library, “which has special facilities for such things, and which is close [to] the geographical center of the U.S.”<sup>184</sup> Gray also relays a story of “a ‘lost’ Professor Heidegger”—when Heidegger took the wrong train at Hamburg—“but by evening he had been located and all is well! Why are you the only philosopher able to cope with these normal dangers of life, Hannah?”<sup>185</sup> They also comment on contemporary politics; alluding to Lyndon Johnson’s decision not to run for re-election, Hannah Arendt writes, “I suppose you have been watching television as I have, and probably you feel as much relieved as I do.”<sup>186</sup> Glenn Gray concurs: “Yes, it is as though one had been relieved of a brain tumor.”<sup>187</sup>

In honor of Heidegger’s eightieth birthday in 1969, Arendt spoke publicly about Heidegger’s politics and philosophy. (These remarks were later published as “Heidegger at Eighty” in the *New York Review of Books* on October 21, 1971.) In a letter dated October 22, 1969, Glenn Gray responds. On Hannah Arendt’s comparison of Heidegger to Plato, Glenn Gray writes, “Plato was a political thinker. He may have appeared ridiculous, laughable, in trying to put his thoughts into practice (assuming the authenticity

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<sup>184</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, January 5, 1968.

<sup>185</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, June 12, 1969.

<sup>186</sup> Hannah Arendt to Glenn Gray, March 31, 1968.

<sup>187</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, April 6, 1968.

of the Sicilian adventures). But MH's [Martin Heidegger's] 'escapade' seems hardly in the same league."<sup>188</sup> For Gray, Heidegger's Nazism rises to a more insidious level than Plato's failed pursuits in the realm of politics. "It was much worse than a mistake... In a way, I blame him more than you do, for his political stupidity, but sympathize with him also more. Hence my inclination is to call his performance a sad and silly error."<sup>189</sup>

Hannah Arendt indirectly responds tongue-in-cheek, focusing on her responsibilities as a female to move past dark scholarly debates: "I somehow have the notion that its about time that women enter the community of scholars and bring a little laughter among these serious beasts."<sup>190</sup> She also hints at her past affair with Martin Heidegger: "I hope I don't sound presumptuous when I say that I tend to agree with you that in these aspects which I stressed I can interpret him 'like no one else'..."<sup>191</sup> After "Heidegger at Eighty" was published, Gray cautions Arendt, "I hope your favorable estimate of MH will not stir up Jewish passions once more. The subject of Heidegger and National Socialism is still a hot potato; even I am regarded with suspicion in certain liberal circles as suspect of Nazi sympathies."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, October 22, 1969.

<sup>189</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, October 28, 1969.

<sup>190</sup> Hannah Arendt to Glenn Gray, November 18, 1969.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, October 23, 1971.

## Dr. Arendt To Speak

One of the major public lectures of the current academic year at Colorado College will be given Monday, Feb. 16 when Dr. Hannah Arendt will speak in Armstrong Auditorium at 8:15 p.m. on "Thinking and Moral Considerations."

Dr. Arendt is considered "the leading interpreter of modern European philosophical thought" and is a social critic and the author of several well known books including "Between Past and Future," published in 1961; "On Revolution" in 1963; and "Eichmann in Jerusalem" also published in 1963. A three volume work on "The Origin of Totalitarianism" was published in 1951 and in 1958 she published "The Human Condition." Her newest book, "On Violence" will be published this year.

Dr. Arendt was born in Germany but came to this country in 1941 and was naturalized as a citizen in 1951. She was educated in Germany, receiving a Ph.D. in 1928 from Heidelberg University. She holds a Honorary Law Degree

from Bard College, Goucher, Smith College and York and Loyola Universities.

Her extensive and notable academic career includes appointments as professor at the University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought; university professor of political philosophy at The New School for Social Research and visiting professorships at Columbia, Princeton, The University of California at Berkeley and others.

Dr. Arendt's list of awards and honors is both lengthy and distinguished, among them, a Guggenheim Fellow award, a Rockefeller Fellow award and the National Institute of Arts and Letters award in 1954. In 1969 she was given the Emerson-Thoreau Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Arendt will spend two days on the Colorado College campus attending classes and meeting informally with students. Her public lecture Monday evening is open to the public without charge.

The Catalyst • February 13, 1970 [2]

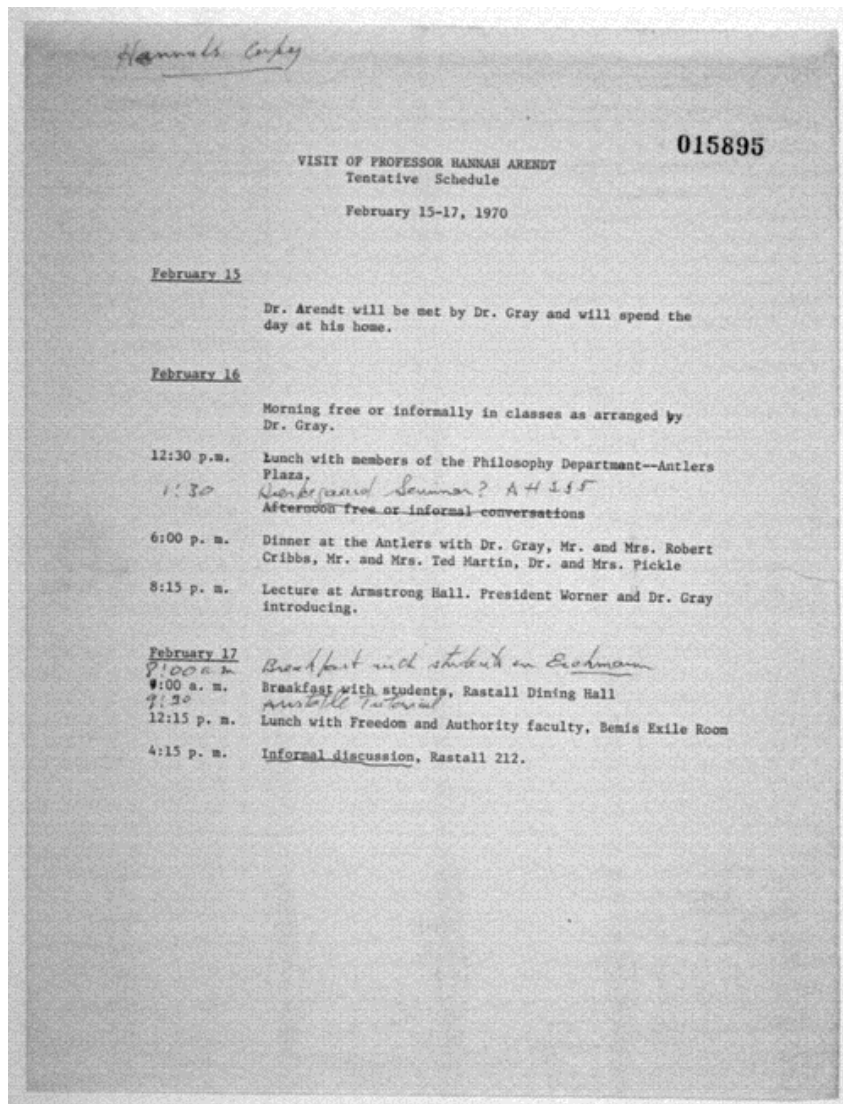
Arendt visited Colorado College for the second time from February 15-17, 1970. She discussed *Eichmann in Jerusalem* with students over breakfast in Rastall Dining Hall, she conducted a tutorial on Aristotle, she lunched with Freedom and Authority faculty in the so-called "Bemis Exile Room," and she delivered a lecture at Armstrong Hall entitled "Thinking and Moral Considerations,"<sup>193</sup> a lecture that turned into one of her most famous essays.

Indeed, "Thinking and Moral Considerations" is a tour-de-force of contemporary political thought. As Arendt so poignantly remarks, "The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly.

<sup>193</sup> "Dr. Arendt to Speak," *Catalyst*, February 13, 1970; "Visit of Professor Hannah Arendt. Tentative Schedule," February 15-17, 1970, Available from the Library of Congress.



And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.” Arendt’s thesis is that thinking, expressed through a “two-in-one,” a conversation with oneself, might allow us to overcome the thoughtless terror that Arendt experienced as a German Jew. To engage in thinking, suggests Arendt, is to attempt to strive to overcome



After her visit, Hannah Arendt sent Glenn Gray a reprint of “Thinking and Moral Considerations.” The inscription on the essay read, “for Glenn—though not good

enough—Hannah.”<sup>194</sup> Glenn Gray was remarkably impressed. “You must finish this enterprise, Hannah... This is my greatest concern about you: that you let nothing interfere with finishing what you started, for the sake of those of us who need your insights and intellect.”<sup>195</sup> Elsewhere, he wrote that the essay “is like Thucydides [sic] work on the Peloponnesian War, not for the time but for all time, as he remarked.”<sup>196</sup>

Hannah Arendt was to visit Colorado College in August of 1974 to speak with Glenn Gray and to continue her work on the relationship of judgment to thought and to action.<sup>197</sup> Unfortunately, a heart attack precluded her visit to Colorado. Hannah Arendt and Glenn Gray kept up their friendship through the end of her life. He was assigned chapters of her final opus, *The Life of the Mind*, to review.<sup>198</sup> While she completed the sections on “thinking” and “willing,” she never completed the section on judging. Hannah Arendt died on December 4, 1975, in New York City.

In *The Warriors*, J. Glenn Gray observes that the story of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a story of regression from the pioneer to the refugee. After the World War II ended, huddled masses in traversed run-down roads, in far-off lands, for “their goal was behind them and there was no light in their faces.”<sup>199</sup> The Europe Gray witnessed was a Europe replete with sprawling refugees, people forcibly torn from their *physical* home, who might not have understood the war at all.<sup>200</sup> It was also a Europe of refugees of *ideas*,

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<sup>194</sup> Gray, J. Glenn, “The Winds of Thought,” *Social Research* 44.1 (Spring 1977): 44-46, 46.

<sup>195</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, November 21, 1973.

<sup>196</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, June 7, 1970.

<sup>197</sup> Glenn Gray to Hannah Arendt, April 5, 1974.

<sup>198</sup> Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 440.

<sup>199</sup> Gray, *The Warriors*, 6.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-20.

people forcibly torn from their deepest hopes and passions, those whose understanding of human nature could never be what it once was. As Gray writes:

I am afraid to forget. I fear that we human creates do not forget cleanly, as the animals presumably do. What protrudes and does not fit in our pasts rises to haunt us and make us spiritually unwell in the present. The discontinuities in the contemporary life are cutting us off from our roots and threatening us with the dread evil of nihilism in the twentieth century. We may become refugees in an inner sense unless we remember to some purpose.<sup>201</sup>

For Gray, if after the war we are to avoid nihilism, then our vital task is to remember.

Hannah Arendt exercised the facility of memory like perhaps none other. Through memory, we might recover what was lost, and, perhaps, move from refugees to pioneers, never stagnant, searching for a path onward toward the root of thought itself.

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<sup>201</sup> Gray, *The Warriors*, 24.

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**Honor Code Statement**

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On my honor, I affirm that the Colorado College Honor Code has been upheld in the production of this thesis.