

# Hannah Arendt's Angels and Demons: Ten Spiritual Exercises

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*Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one, you can't impress him with glorious emotion; in the universe where he feels more powerfully, you are a novice. So show him something simple which, formed over generations, lives as our own, near our hand and within our gaze. Tell him of Things. He will stand astonished.*

Rilke, *Ninth Elegy*

## A Beginning

October 14, 1906 – the first cry. “After twenty-four hours, the baby was given mother’s milk [...]. We saw the first smile in the sixth week, and observed a general inner waking. The first sounds began during the seventh week [...].”<sup>1</sup> Martha Arendt, who made these careful maternal observations during the autumn of 1906, always expected much from her daughter. Yet, she could hardly have foreseen that 100 years later the centennial of her baby girl would be celebrated with conferences and lectures around the world.<sup>2</sup> However, it was not the bare naked birth of a baby girl in a suburb of Hanover which was celebrated and commemorated. Instead, what gathered scholars together around the world was the potentiality of thought which her “second birth” initiated in the shared world of words. It was this initiation which marked an interruption in occidental thought – a new beginning, which still endures as a beginning after the death of Arendt over 30 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Observations from Martha Arendt’s book *Unser Kind*. Quoted from Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, 13.

<sup>2</sup> This paper was originally given as a presentation in Hannah Arendt anniversary symposium held in Helsinki November 2006.

But what was this new beginning, if not the beginning that began a new thought of the beginning itself. In fact, this article will claim that it was this “poetic-productive” beginning in the field of thought which made Arendt a “creative genius” as a “productive” philosopher, instead of being a mere spectator (i.e. theoretician of politics) or acting judge (the cultivated critic) as she herself claimed to be.<sup>3</sup> And it is around this thought of the beginning that this paper tries to create some humble spiritual exercises, using the spiritual images of angels and demons as its metaphorical guiding stars. This, in spite of the fact, that, their recent popularity notwithstanding, neither angelology nor demonologies are anymore respected academic disciplines in a strict sense.<sup>4</sup> But as Arendt, who thought that “the language of thinking is essentially metaphorical,”<sup>5</sup> once noted: “The spiritual exercises are exercises of imagination [einbildungskraft] and they may be more relevant to method in the historical sciences than the academic training realizes.”<sup>6</sup>

But there still remains the more profound *Arendtian* problem of liberty, i.e. the problem of the abyss of freedom, the problem of how to begin to talk about beginning. Michel Foucault, who in his late thought also became interested in spiritual exercises described this anxiety as a desire to be freed from the obligation to begin [...]. Desire to be on the other side of discourse from the outset, without having to consider from the outside what might be strange, frightening, and perhaps maleficent about it.<sup>7</sup>

The desire to be carried along by the shining light of pure angelic discourse circumventing the old demons of our well-worn discourses has of course since times immemorial guided that famous desire for knowledge which seeks to re-collect the immemorial arches, the first and last angelic principles of knowledge. But even if the ancient Pythagorean saints or the modern angelic logicians could manage to begin from the pure subsisting forms (*formae subsistentes*) as the

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3 “My profession, if one can even speak of it at all, is political theory. I neither feel like a philosopher, nor do I believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers.” Hannah Arendt, “What remains? Language remains.” In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994, 1.

4 Instead, in both popular culture and in poetry angels had been a very popular theme at least since the 1990s. The figure of an angel has also reappeared as a concept in philosophical and aesthetic thought, where it has been related in very different ways to the problems of representation and communication. See for example Massimo Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994; Michel Serres, *La légende des anges*. Paris: Flammarion, 1993

5 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*. New York: A Harvest Book, 1978, Vol. 1, 110.

6 Hannah Arendt, “A Reply to Eric Voegelin?” In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*. New York: Harcourt Brace 1994. Originally published in *The Review of Politics*, 1953.

7 Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971. Translation “The Order of Discourse” in R. Young (ed.), *Untying the Text: a Poststructuralist Reader*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, 51.

respected Doctor Angelicus defined angels,<sup>8</sup> the more earthly modern reflections had sought a beginning in the things themselves, whether this has meant starting from the original lived experience (phenomenology) or from the recorded natural fact (positivism). Should we then commence from the original lived experience of the beginning, from the natural birth, which since Aristotle has been seen as the natural source of the generative potentiality. But how should we recall any lived experience of it? Or should we first state the recorded historical fact that in the beginning there was a naked birth, a first cry in a suburb of Hanover? And could that pure cry of the beginning have been heard among the “Angelic Orders?”<sup>9</sup>

At least according to the young Arendt this might have been possible, since in her early interpretation of the *Duino Elegies* she and her first husband, Günther Stern, opined that a child in a certain way shares the angelic orders of open eternity: “Only child has a deathless existence.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, it is its very angelic nature that excludes this cry from the public human orders. For Arendt, the birth itself is singular and discursively mute and, as death, it cannot be experienced on behalf of the other nor expressed in public words. Furthermore, the cry as an expression of pain is too subjective to appear in the shared and objective “public ontology.” In the world of public appearances, the first cry of the child has no more reality than angels do.<sup>11</sup>

## Fama (Exercise I)

To be sure, Arendt was always convinced that not only the first cry, but the generative natural potentiality as such, “life qua life,” can thrive only in darkness, shielded from the light of the public. Hence, the life of the child – where “the simple fact of life and growth outweighs the factor of personality”<sup>12</sup> – should be sheltered from the public affairs:

The child shares the life of becoming with all living things; in respect to the life and its development, the child is a human being in process of becoming [...]. Everything that lives, not vegetative life alone, emerges from darkness and, however strong

8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. In *Opera omnia*, Vol. IV–XII. Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1882–1948, I, 63q, 1a, 1.

9 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino elegiat – Duineser Elegien*. Helsinki: WSOY, 1974, 6–7. “Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders?” Transl. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 2001.

10 Hannah Arendt and Günther Stern, “Rilke’s Duino Elegies.” In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Reflections on Literature and Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 21.

11 “For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, 50. “Pain [...] is so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all.” Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 51.

12 Hannah Arendt, “Crises of Education.” In Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977, 188.

its natural tendency to thrust itself into the light, it nevertheless needs security of darkness to grow at all.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the very task of education, as the sheltering middle ground between public and private, was to secure this darkness; which prepares the growth of the natural life for its gradual emergence into the public light. It was this firm conviction that gave rise to her most controversial comments in her reflections on Little Rock, where the physical darkness and whiteness clashed in the field of education. Wanting to maintain the clear cut separation between legal equality and social prejudices, Arendt claimed that even the natural right for social discrimination should be sheltered from the public light.

The moment social discrimination is legally abolished, the freedom of society is violated [...]. The government can legitimately take no steps against social discrimination because government can act only in the name of equality – a principle which does not obtain in the social sphere.<sup>14</sup>

The sun might “rise on the toilsome (*ponêrous*) and good (*agathos*)” as the Sermon on the Mount declares (Mat. 5:45), but for Arendt the artificial light of equality belongs only to those of the good (*agathos*), who had left their toilsome life behind and risen to the proper political sphere as the ancient political wisdom states. To this artificial equality “the dark background of mere givenness [...] formed by our unchangeable and unique nature, breaks [...] as the alien.”<sup>15</sup> And Arendt, because of her own lived experiences, was afraid that the social prejudices against the unique aliens would overrun the very idea of political equality if one let the differences between artificial public light and natural private darkness become blurred. Yet at the same time she thought that the blushing blurriness of this distinction was the very nature of that grey social realm where the discriminating societies should have the natural right to rule according to their social prejudices. As it is in this grey gloom—where the winged messenger of social prejudice, the feathered Fama (fame), flies in the opposite direction than education and lets “the merciless glare of public realm”<sup>16</sup> flood into the private life of the people.

However, it was precisely this “merciless glare” which the Greek victory hymns celebrated as the “ancient fame (*phêêmê*) for glorious deeds.”<sup>17</sup> *Phêêmê* was some

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13 Arendt, “Crises of Education”, 185–6.

14 Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock.” In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Responsibility and Judgement*. New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 209.

15 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego: Harvest Book, 1968, 301. “Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given to us, but is the result of human organization.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301.

16 Arendt, “Crises of Education”, 186.

17 Pindar, *Isthmean*. In *The Odes of Pindar*. London: William Heinemann, 1937, I, 4, 23–4.

kind of goddess also for Hesiod, but now a bad (*kalos*) one to be avoided.<sup>18</sup> For Arendt Hesiod, to whom “the possibilities of glory and great deeds count for nothing,”<sup>19</sup> was, however, an exception among the Greeks: “the only Greek who unashamedly praises private life.”<sup>20</sup> Whereas it was the Roman poet who, acknowledging the sacredness of privacy, described this “swiftest of all evils”<sup>21</sup> flying between heaven and earth as an awful monster (*monstrum horrendum*).<sup>22</sup> Now, it is true that Arendt followed the ancient victory hymns by always stressing that fame was the very principle of action in the pre-*polis* Homeric world with its quest for immortal fame. And she even claimed that “*polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win ‘immortal fame,’ that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself.”<sup>23</sup> But it is often forgotten that Arendt also argued that the “aim to make extraordinary an ordinary occurrence of everyday life”<sup>24</sup> was the reason for the eventual “swift decline”<sup>25</sup> of the *polis* and that she criticized its supposed disregard for the private sphere. Furthermore, her favorite Homeric hero was never the exceptional Achilles with his unceasing effort to excel in personal glory and fame, but instead the “pre-Roman” Hector, “who did not place fame and glory above else, but fell in battle, a defender of his family altars.”<sup>26</sup> By the same token it was their desire to trust to Fama, as “the force that would open all doors, the ‘radiant Power of Fame’,”<sup>27</sup> instead of fighting for the honor of their threatened family tradition, that made Arendt scorn the politically ignorant self-deception of the Jewish social parvenus.<sup>28</sup> The master of this deception was the Potent Wizard, Benjamin Disraeli, whose political magic was to discover “the secret of how to preserve luck, that natural miracle of pariahdom.”<sup>29</sup> But even if Disraeli succeeded

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18 Hesiod, *Works and Days*. In Hesiod and Homer, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric*. London: William Heinemann, 1914, 764.

19 Hannah Arendt, “The Great Tradition II. Ruling and Being Ruled.” *Social Research*. No 4, Vol. 74, Winter 2007, 946.

20 Arendt, “The Great Tradition II”, 946.

21 Vergil, *Aeneid*. In *The Bucolics, Aeneid, and Georgics of Vergil*. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1900, IV, 173.

22 Vergil, *Aeneid*, IV, 180.

23 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 197.

24 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 197.

25 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 197.

26 Hannah Arendt, “Introduction into politics.” In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: The Promise of Politics*. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

27 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 52.

28 “For honour never will be won by the cult of success or fame.” From the “disgrace of being a Jew there is but one escape – to fight for the honour of the Jewish people as a whole.” Hannah Arendt, “Stefan Zweig: Jews in the World of Yesterday.” In J. Kohn and H Feldman (ed.): *Hannah Arendt: The Jewish Writings*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, 328.

29 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 68.

to make himself “the great man of the ‘exception Jews’,”<sup>30</sup> his “singular great good fortune finally led to the great catastrophe of his people.”<sup>31</sup>

Again it was Cicero, the Roman Orator, who differentiated the solid glory of honest public words from the deceitful popular fame (*fama popularis*) that only simulates lasting honor.<sup>32</sup> In a like manner, Arendt also stated that the simulation of political glory as an effort to attain social fame did not bring to light men in their unique distinctness but vice versa sought “the worship of that great leveling idol, Success.”<sup>33</sup> Whereas in her reflections on Walter Benjamin, this difference between proper and improper fame, distinctive glory and leveling success, is drawn between posthumous solid fame and merchandise success, which makes Arendt believe that the winged Fama is more arbitrary in her selection upon the living than the dead:

Fama, that much-coveted goddess, has many faces, and fame comes in many sorts and sizes – from the weak notoriety of the cover story to the splendor of an everlasting name. Posthumous fame is one of FAMA's rarer and least desired articles, although it is less arbitrary and often more solid than any other sorts, since it only seldom bestowed upon mere merchandise. The one who stood most to profit is dead and hence it is not for sale.<sup>34</sup>

To be sure, Benjamin attained the posthumous, everlasting name, even if he was followed through his life by no guardian angel but by the demonic “little hunchback.”<sup>35</sup> However, this unlucky gambler, who lacked “the natural miracle of pariahdom,” acknowledged that this lack was not only his individual misfortune, but that in the given social circumstances even the odds seemed to be on the side of the privileged. And this acknowledgement made Benjamin a “conscience pariah” in clear opposition to Arendt’s portrait of Disraeli, the lucky parvenu *par excellence*.

But how about Arendt herself! Clearly more fortunate than Benjamin, she did not just manage to escape from the worst political terrors of her times almost by sheer luck, but also reached “the notoriety of the cover” with her analysis of this

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30 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 68.

31 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 79.

32 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanarum Disputationum ad M. Brutum libri quinque*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1887, III, 3.4.

33 Arendt, “Stefan Zweig”, 324.

34 Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin.” In Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*. San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1968, 153.

35 “Wherever one looks in Benjamin’s life, one will find the little hunchback.” Arendt, “Walter Benjamin,” 168. About Benjamin’s hunchback, see Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. I have discussed Benjamin’s misfortunes in Markku Koivusalo, “Pakolaisen kuolema.” In T. Kaitaro & M. Roinila (eds.), *Filosofin kuolema*. Helsinki: Summa, 2004.



very same political terror. And today the director of the center carrying her name can write how “her fame, which at times approached notoriety, increased with her subsequent publications and has continued to grow posthumously.”<sup>36</sup>

In fact this fame did not just approach notoriety, but reached the summit of infamy in the Eichmann controversy, where Arendt’s refusal to see a “diabolical or demonic profundity”<sup>37</sup> in Eichmann took the wings of Fama, spreading a rumour that she wanted to reverse the roles of angels and demons in what had been the greatest catastrophe of her people. And indeed this new public radiance did not satisfy Arendt, who complained to Jaspers that it was “pure blasphemy”<sup>38</sup> manipulating public opinion in order to destroy her reputation. Jaspers agreed, answering that “you had been attached to a fama, which is for you quite injurious and detestable.”<sup>39</sup> This offensive and swiftly flying Fama carried Arendt into the public limelight but only by accusing her of committing the very sin of parvenu, i.e. putting personal fame above the family altars in her tactless lack of “*ahabath Israel*.”<sup>40</sup> To be sure Arendt had wanted to abandon the very age-old sacred history of altars and to treat Eichmann’s crime as the unprecedented crime against humanity, a crime committed neither by a demon or an angel, but a man of unprecedented banality. For Arendt the “winged words”<sup>41</sup> of Eichmann actually lacked the wings of thought and were nothing but banal clichés revealing the thoughtlessness of man, who as “a leaf in the whirlwind of time”<sup>42</sup> ended up committing the greatest of crimes.

It was the thoughtlessness of Eichmann together with the thoughtlessness of the whole infamous controversy that set Arendt to re-investigate what was in the end her strongest passion. For as Hans Jonas stated in her funeral: “Thinking was

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36 Jerome Kohn, “The World of Hannah Arendt.” Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/essay3.html>

37 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977, 288.

38 A letter from Arendt to Jaspers 20 July 1963. In H. Arendt & K. Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1929–1969*. München: Piper, 1993. Translation mine.

39 A letter from Jaspers to Arendt 25 July 1963. In Arendt & Jaspers, *Briefwechsel*, 548.

40 “*Love of the Jewish people*.” This was the famous charge made by Gershom Scholem in their 1963 exchange of letters on the Eichmann controversy, published in *Encounter* in 1964. In contrast to her other critics Scholem granted that Arendt still belonged to the Jewish people, but lacked the love and the tact of the heart (*herzenstakt*). Whereas Arendt responded by drawing a distinction between political belonging and loving, admitting that she belonged to the Jewish people, but did not count either love or heartiness among the political virtues: “Generally speaking, the role of the ‘heart’ in politics seems to me altogether questionable.” Hannah Arendt, “The Eichmann controversy. A Letter to Gershom Scholem.” In J. Kohn and H. Feldman (eds.), *Hannah Arendt: The Jewish Writings*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, 467.

41 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 105.

42 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 33.

her passion.”<sup>43</sup> And whereas her political fame never freed itself of certain infamous aspects it was thanks to this thinking passion that she had posthumously received a more glorious place among the immortal thinkers of the occidental tradition.

For it was neither her naked physical birth nor her public infamy, but the very effort to think afresh the fragments of this “broken” tradition, both loved and hated by her, which endowed her own thought with immortality. This freshness was due to her ability to make a new beginning in this tradition by paradoxically saving those traditional thought-fragments which crystallize the experience of beginning, i.e. to make a new beginning in the tradition by re-thinking the tradition of the beginning. And at the core of this new thinking was the thinking of birth and natality, the rethinking of the first cry of the child as the hidden and unspoken truth of the spoken beginning.<sup>44</sup> It is from this cry of the beginning that we had to begin.

## Genius (Exercise II)

Cry of the beginning, the anxiety of beginning, in the occidental imagination there seem to be two spiritual creators who are free from it. The more famous is of course the old Judeo-Christian God, who created the world from nothing and “saw that *it was good*” (Gen. 1:10), although having ever since Christian Gnosticism been accused of being wrong. The other is the artistic and especially romantic genius whose angelic role is to function as the messenger of the creativeness of nature itself. As feminists have pointed out, both of these spiritual creatures had been pictured mainly as manly powers, and even if the romantic genius might need his muse, he had always been seen as the incarnation of the masculine formative powers of nature. Recently however, Julia Kristeva has sought for uniquely female geniuses, counting Hannah Arendt among them. For Kristeva Arendt’s posthumous fame resides in her intimate female uniqueness, which surpassed all given socio-historical female conditions and made her an extraordinary female genius.<sup>45</sup> As unique female genius Arendt would also be an angel, the messenger of a new spiritual feminism that could overcome the totalitarian tendencies of the old materialist mass feminism.

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43 Hans Jonas, “Hannah Arendt, 1906–1975.” Eulogy Delivered at the Funeral Service at Riverside Memorial Chapel. Appendix C in Christian Wiese, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2007, 180.

44 Infancy as the relation between voice and speech as well as the historico-transcendental condition and limit of human discourse is developed in a fertile way by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben who, however, does not mention Arendt in this context, even otherwise she had have a profound influence in his thought. See Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*. New York: Verso, 1993. See also Agamben’s early letter to Arendt. Letter Giorgio Agamben to Hannah Arendt February 21, 1970. Correspondence, General, 1938–1976, n.d. Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

45 Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.



It is indisputably true that Arendt, a critic of totalitarianism and despiser of mass-society, always wanted to distance herself from the masses. Yet, she also wanted to distance herself from feminism, even more than from Zionism. Indeed, Arendt, who never denied being a Jew and a woman, affirming them instead gratefully as given indisputable facts, never tried to challenge the political or social conditions of this given female status in the same way that she called on Jews to challenge the Jewish condition.<sup>46</sup> From the perspective of political feminism and in the light of her own political thinking, this “exceptional woman” seems to have rather acted as the very *parvenu* among the *pariah* females.<sup>47</sup> Far from being the angel of new (or any kind) of feminism, in the light of her own thinking, she might have to be classified rather as Benjamin Disraeli of feminism.

Neither did Arendt ever think of herself as a genius and, as Kafka, “clearly did not want to be considered a genius, or incarnation of any objective entity.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed her criticism of the modern cult of genius was as harsh as her criticism of the commercial mass-society, which she in fact linked together as the two sides of the same coin. “The frustration of the human person inherent in a community of producers and even more in a commercial society is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of genius.”<sup>49</sup> For Arendt the very idea of “creative genius as the quintessential expression of human greatness was quite unknown to antiquity or Middle Ages.”<sup>50</sup> And even if the cult and idolization of genius had “absorbed those elements of distinctness and uniqueness which find their immediate expression only in action and speech,”<sup>51</sup> it was for Arendt only a poor substitute for the lost human greatness and in fact “harbors the same degradation of the human person as the other tenets relevant in commercial society.”<sup>52</sup>

But if the Romantic notion of genius as a “superhuman monster”<sup>53</sup> was for Arendt only a sign of the “empty greatness”<sup>54</sup> of a personality cult, she thought

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46 An exception in this regard is her early 1933 review. See Hannah Arendt, “On the Emancipation of Women.” In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994.

47 As Arendt answered in an interview with Günter Gaus, when the latter asked whether the emancipation of woman had been a problem for her: “To problem itself played no role for me personally. To put it very simple, I have always done what I liked to do.” Hannah Arendt, “What remains? Language remains”, 3.

48 Hannah Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew.” In Susannah Gottlieb (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Reflections on Literature and Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 108.

49 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 210.

50 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 210.

51 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 210.

52 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 211.

53 Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew”, 108.

54 Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew”, 108.

that the Kantian definition of genius as an impersonal gift had more content, even if she also thought that in this gift, genius is not a messenger of nature but of humankind.<sup>55</sup> Yet Arendt did not believe that she had been given this gift. For if we follow the famous Kantian distinction between genius and taste (*Genie und Geschmack*), i.e. between creative production and evaluating judgment, it was always the talent of taste and good judgment which Arendt considered as her own special *daimon*. Thus never regarding herself as a genius with the originality and productive imagination, she however claimed that her special birthright was the ability to make judgments, which as she noted “is not the privilege of genius.”<sup>56</sup> The special gift that she claimed to herself was not productive imagination but a sense that she associated with good taste, the common sense of the real as her sixth sense.<sup>57</sup> This common sense should naturally not be mistaken for the vulgar taste, since it needs the “enlarged mentality” of the cultivated critic. And far from thinking herself as genius, who as Nietzsche reminds us, can never be impartial as creator,<sup>58</sup> Arendt considered herself as the impartial spectator (theorist) and tasteful critic (judge) of the sensible world of common appearances. But was there any truth to this? Let us return to Kant’s famous definition according to which genius is

the inborn predisposition of the spirit (*Gemütsanlage*) (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art. [...] Hence the author of a product that he owes to his genius does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him [...]. For that is also presumably how the word “genius” is derived from genius, in the sense of the peculiar guardian and guiding spirit given to a man at birth.<sup>59</sup>

Whereas for Arendt the ancient guiding spirit, the impersonal personality, (Greek *daimon* and Latin *genius*) was not an inner but a public spirit, disclosing itself in action and speech only when witnessed by others:

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55 For Kant genius is the gift “through which nature gives the rule to art.” This conception may seem questionable nowadays, and one could take the opposing view that genius is the disposition through which mankind itself “gives rules to art.” Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew”, 108.

56 Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, 63.

57 “What since Thomas Aquinas we call common sense, the *sensus communis*, is a kind of sixth sense, needed to keep my five senses together.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. I, 50. In her 1953 essay “Ideology and Terror,” she had however charged modern ideological thought with presupposing such sixth sense. “Hence ideological thinking becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses, and insists on a ‘truer’ reality concealed behind all perceptible things, dominating them from this place of concealment and requiring a sixth sense that enables us to become aware of it.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 471

58 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. In *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) 5. München: DTV, 1999, III, 6, 346–9.

59 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 186–7. Translation modified. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. In *Werke in zwölf Bänden*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, § 46, 241–3.

This disclosure of who in contradistinction to “what” somebody is [...] can be hidden only in the complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a willful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this “who” in the same manner he has and can dispose of his qualities [...]. The “who” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies each man through his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those that he encounters.<sup>60</sup>

But was the *daimon* that was looking over Arendt’s shoulders and thus visible to the others although hidden from herself really her supposed sixth sense, which in fact so often failed to appeal to the others, let alone to everyone?<sup>61</sup> Or was it actually her imaginative gift to think politics poetically by producing new thoughts and concepts for the humankind? Even if this gift was less a gift of nature than the gift of muses, those ancient deities who united the existential rhythm of *homo temporalis* by “telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforesaid with consenting voice.”<sup>62</sup> And as the muses, who derived their names from the Indo-European root of thought and mind (*men*), are always plural, originally forming the *trichotomy of Voice, Practice, and Memory*, also Arendt’s productive mind always worked through the plurality of concepts and threefold *divisions*.<sup>63</sup>

In fact in her essay on Benjamin, which actually says more about herself, Arendt emphasized that Benjamin “without being poet thought poetically.”<sup>64</sup> For Arendt, thinking in its difference from knowing, as reason in its difference from intellect, is a quest for meaning and not a quest for truth.<sup>65</sup> And in the spiritual quest for meaning, it is metaphor that contains the poetic element of thought, since it “establishes a connection which is sensually perceived in its immediacy.”<sup>66</sup> The metaphor links the thought to its “sensual substructure,” to the totality of sensually experienced data. She even claims that *Vernunft* can be traced back to *Vernehmen*, which means to perceive and hear, whereas *metaphorical* connects “the sensible and non-sensory

60 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 181.

61 For Arendt “this *sensus communis* is what judgement appeals to in everyone, and it is this appeal that gives the judgements their special validity. The it-pleases-or-displeases-me, which as a feeling seems so utterly private and noncommunicative, is actually rooted in this community sense and is therefore open to communication once it has been transformed by reflection, which takes all others and their feelings into account.” Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 72.

62 Hesiod, *Theogony*. In Hesiod and Homer, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric*. London: William Heinemann, 1914, 39.

63 In her early dissertation we find the trichotomy of Love and in *The Human Condition* the triadic division of *vita activa*, whereas her last writings were structured by a trichotomy of mind.

64 Arendt, “Walter Benjamin”, 166.

65 Arendt even claims that “the basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies is to interpret meaning on the model of truth.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 15.

66 Arendt, “Walter Benjamin”, 166.

matters – *metapherein* – carrying over our sense experiences.”<sup>67</sup> Through the metaphor the world of appearance inserts itself in the thought “bridging the abyss between inward and invisible mental activities and the world of appearances.”<sup>68</sup> As taking place in-between the sensible and non-sensible, this “carrying over” metaphor actually seems to share the very abode of the Platonic spirituality, where “daimonic is in-between (*metaxy*) divine and mortal.”<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, in their controversy over the question of modern totalitarianism and human nature,<sup>70</sup> Eric Voegelin explicitly charged Arendt for forgetting this spiritual dimension of daimonic man (*daimonios aner*) by letting the “phenomenal differences”<sup>71</sup> obscure the essential and so failing to locate the origins of totalitarianism in “the genesis of the spiritual disease.”<sup>72</sup> In Voegelin’s pneumatological interpretation, totalitarianism as “the climax of a secular evolution” was the sickness of the immanentist creed that refuses to live in the openness of the spiritual *metaxy* and is characteristic of both modern totalitarianism and liberalism in their shared quest for immanence.<sup>73</sup> When Arendt wrote that in totalitarianism “human nature as such is a stake”<sup>74</sup> since its aim is “the transformation of human nature itself,”<sup>75</sup> Voegelin claimed that she herself “adopts the immanentist ideology.”<sup>76</sup> For human nature “that cannot be changed or transformed”<sup>77</sup> but only destroyed, was for Voegelin the very daimonic in-between, as the tension of the mutual participation (*metalêpsis*) of human and divine. He

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67 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 110.

68 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 105.

69 “kai gar pan to daimonion metaxu esti theou te kai thnêtou.” Plato, *Symposium*, 202d-e. *Platonis Opera* – recognovit brevisque adnotatione critica instruxit Ioannes Burnet. Tomus II. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922.

70 The controversy took place in 1953 in the pages of *Review of Politics*. Waldemar Gurian asked Voegelin to review *Origins of Totalitarianism* and sent the review to Arendt, whose response Gurian also published with a final one page comment from Voegelin.

71 Eric Voegelin, “The Origins of Totalitarianism.” In Ellis Sandoz (ed.), *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 11. Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 2000, 16

72 Voegelin, “The Origins”, 16.

73 “The true dividing line in the contemporary crisis does not run between liberals and totalitarians, but between the religious and philosophical transcendentalists on the one side and the liberal and totalitarian immanentist sectarians on the other side.” Voegelin, “The Origins”, 22.

74 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 459

75 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 458.

76 Voegelin, “The Origins”, 21.

77 Voegelin, “The Origins”, 21. Arendt had written that in totalitarianism “the human nature as such is at the stake.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 495.

later even capitalized this In-Between (*Metaxy*)<sup>78</sup> as a substantive technical term of his new noetic political science, which was supposed to overcome the spiritual disease of modernity by remembering (*anamnesis*), what Voegelin called as the Platonic-Aristotelian spiritual quest for the noetic ordering principles.<sup>79</sup>

Whereas Arendt, who claimed to have chosen the very “phenomenal differences” as the starting point of her “spiritual exercises” argued that it was the very nature of ideology to suppress these differences under of the supposed logic of idea. For Arendt the unprecedented demonism of totalitarianism was not even its ideology, but the “event of totalitarian domination itself”<sup>80</sup> that had shattered the traditional categories of political thought. And the main problem with this domination was not the ideological forgetting of the vertical *metaxy*, but the destruction of the horizontal in-between space of the common appearances. It was the political destruction of the common space and the ideological destruction of common sense which according to Arendt called forth a new thinking. Indeed, and in reference to Voegelin, she noted that a new political philosophy that could become a “new science of politics” was once more on the agenda.<sup>81</sup> Yet for Arendt this new science should not be based on the philosophical anthropology of noetic man (*zoon noetikon*) but on a political anthropology of plural human affairs. For in order to develop a “true political philosophy,” philosophers “have to make the plurality of man, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs – in its grandeur and misery – the object of their *thaumadzein*.”<sup>82</sup> And if in this new quest for a philosophy of human affairs, which could no longer take the old tradition of political philosophy for granted, there was still something to remember (*anamnesis*) from the ancient experience, it was not the contemplative quest for the noetic order, but the political experience of the in-between, shared *logos*.<sup>83</sup> And for Arendt, it is this in-between of shared *logos* that

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78 “By letting man become conscious of his humanity as existence in tension toward divine reality, the hierophanic events engender the knowledge of man’s existence in the divine-human In-Between, in Plato’s *Metaxy*, as well as the language symbols articulating the knowledge.” Eric Voegelin, “Order and History: The Ecumenic Age.” In Michael Franz (ed.), *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 17. Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 2000, 50.

79 See Eric Voegelin, “Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics.” In *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 6. Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 2002.

80 Arendt, “A Reply to Eric Voegelin”, 405.

81 “The breakdown of common sense in the present world signals that philosophy and politics, their old conflict notwithstanding, have suffered the same fate. And that means that the problem of philosophy and politics, or the necessity for a new political philosophy from which could come a new science of politics, is once more on the agenda.” Hannah Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics.” *Social Research*, Vol. 71, No 3, Fall 2004, 453.

82 Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics”, 453.

83 It was this experience of shared *logos* that Voegelin’s noetic science wanted to forget by strategically bypassing the Aristotelian definition of political man as a living being capable of *logos* and by claiming that “Aristotle characterized man as the *zoon noun echon*, as the living being that possesses *Nous*.” Eric Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience.” In Ellis Sandoz (ed.), *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12. Published Essays: 1966–1985. Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 1990, 267.

grounds even the metaphoric in-between of the sensible and non-sensible – not only because the non-sensible can become manifest and appear in the world only through shared language, but furthermore since thinking itself needs metaphors in order to think, to make sense of its abstract concepts.<sup>84</sup> Metaphor itself creates analogies and it is through analogies and comparisons that thinking both works and is able to manifest itself.

In his *Poetics* Aristotle wrote that good use of metaphors means seeing the resemblances, which is the “token of genius.”<sup>85</sup> And if there was a natural talent (*euphysis*) that Arendt had, its token was not her supposedly good public taste, but her genius to use the metaphors of a shared language and tradition in order to create unprecedented and new concepts of thought and in this way respond to what is unprecedented in human affairs. And certainly her most ingenious effort to create new thought was trying to think the human experience of beginning through the concept of natality, to think beginning poetically through the metaphor of birth.

### Birth (Exercise III)

But as thinking itself had to borrow its metaphors from a shared language, also the new thought had to borrow its materials from the old. Arendt stated that Benjamin’s poetic thinking expressed itself in his collection of quotations where “transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability.”<sup>86</sup> And she used the metaphor of pearl diver to describe Benjamin’s effort to save crystallized fragments of thought from the sea-change of occidental thought. Whereas what she herself cited as crystallized expression of the thought of the beginning was the “few words with which the Gospel announced their ‘glad tidings’: ‘A child has been born to us’.”<sup>87</sup>

In fact this citation was even more creative than just taking the quote out of its context, since we do not find this quote in any of the gospels. In the book of *Isaiah* (9:6) we find the sentence: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” But the Gospel of Luke (2:11), the presumed source of Arendt’s citation, reads: “For unto you is born this day in the city (*polis/civitate*) of David a Savior (*sôtêr/salvator*), which is Christ (*Christos/Christus*) the Lord (*kurios/dominus*).” So, when Arendt claims to quote the glad tidings of the gospel, she had in fact omitted all the Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian political epithets (*polis*, *savior*, *messiah* and *lord*). Further on Arendt, who saw the apolitical tendencies of Christianity as a

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84 See chapter 12 “Language and Metaphor” in Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1.

85 Literally sign of good nature (*euphysis*). See Aristotle, *Poetica*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, 1.22, 1459a5.

86 Arendt, “Walter Benjamin”, 193.

87 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247. Italics mine.



result of its lost faith in the world, argues however that the gospel is “the most glorious and succinct expression” of the faith in and hope for the world.<sup>88</sup> Whereas it was the pagan Romans – “perhaps the most political people we have known”<sup>89</sup> – that according to Arendt shared the respect for the enduring political world. And of course we also find in the Roman poet, Virgil, the celebration of the new birth of a boy, as a promise that will make the circling centuries begin anew (*magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo*) thus inaugurating a new golden era for men. “O baby-boy, begin! (*Incipe, parve puer*).”<sup>90</sup> Yet, it was in this political poem that Arendt claimed to have discovered an even more secular affirmation of the beginning than in the gospel, i.e. the celebration of pure birth as such:

Virgil’s most famous political poem, the Fourth Eclogue [...] misunderstood as a prophesy of salvation through a *theos sotêr* [...] but, far from predicting the arrival of a divine child [...] is an affirmation of the *divinity of birth as such* [...] the poet’s belief that the world’s potential salvation lies in the very fact that human species regenerates itself constantly and forever.<sup>91</sup>

This in spite of the fact that Arendt herself had argued that the pure regeneration of the species could never constitute a real political beginning, since the latter presupposes the foundational act of political genius, the very hallmark of Romans. For Arendt the special “political genius of Rome [was] legislation and foundation”<sup>92</sup> that did not merely regenerate the species, but instead dealt politically with the abyss of freedom, i.e. the riddle of foundation: “How to re-start time within an inexorable time continuum.”<sup>93</sup> The solution of this riddle had to form an enduring foundation that includes the *hiatus* between freedom from (liberation) and freedom to (foundation). Arendt claimed that the Greeks never really thought about this riddle, whereas it was the Hebrew and Roman founding legends where it had partially been incorporated in the occidental tradition. In Hebrew legends the solution was a creator God in whom time is absorbed into an atemporal founder of time. The creator of time is the timeless God. In Roman experience instead, every new beginning was thought as an improved re-statement of the old. Romans understood “religion as the *re-ligare*, to be tied back to the beginning, to remember again the sacredness of the beginnings.”<sup>94</sup> According to Arendt the Roman politico-

88 “It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospel announced their ‘glad tidings’: A child has been born to us.” Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

89 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

90 Virgil, *Eclogues*. In *Bucolics, Aeneid, and Georgics Of Vergil*. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1900, IV.

91 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 212. Italics mine.

92 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 195.

93 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 214.

94 Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” In Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

religious genius lies in the effort to think “together and combining meaningfully what our present vocabulary presents to us in terms of opposition and contradiction.”<sup>95</sup> Thus the Roman beginning connects the seemingly opposite metaphors of Janus and Minerva: “The most deeply Roman divinities were Janus, the god of beginning [...] and Minerva, the goddess of remembrance.”<sup>96</sup> Yet, whereas Arendt’s mind usually works through trichotomies as we noted above, in this Roman dialectics of the beginning, Arendt suddenly conceals the real trichotomy, not mentioning the third God that was usually pictured by the side of Janus and Minerva. This God was of course Mars, the allegory of war, the very God to whom the military empire actually owed its universal glory, its great beginning, and its continuous endurance. In Arendt’s effort to think the beginning without violence, the Roman foundational ingenuity can be saved only by forgetting the divinity of Mars.

## Desert (Exercise IV)

Although Arendt did not mention the trichotomy of Janus, Minerva, and Mars, she however held that the Roman trichotomy of religion, tradition, and authority constituted the foundational heritage of the occidental tradition. And it was the constitutional rupture in this heritage which constituted the political crisis of the modern world, the crisis that she described with the metaphor of broken chain: “The crisis of the present world is primarily political and [...] the famous ‘decline of the west’ consists primarily in the decline of Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority.”<sup>97</sup> With this metaphor of a broken chain, Arendt loved to half nostalgically bring up two quotations from two French thinkers as crystallized announcements of this very crisis. The first comes from the end of *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, where Tocqueville reflected the strange *daimon* of the democratic world whose spirit is not illuminated by the past: “The past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man (*l’esprit*) wanders in obscurity.”<sup>98</sup> The other comes from *Feuillet d’Hypnos*, where René Char describes his experiences in the Resistance and which according to Arendt expressed the poet’s nostalgia towards the lost sphere of public action: “Our inheritance was left to us by no testament.”<sup>99</sup>

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95 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, 1990, 224.

96 Arendt, “What is Authority”, 121.

97 Arendt, “What is Authority”, 140.

98 Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique II (1840). Troisième et quatrième parties*, 156. Une édition électronique réalisée par Jean-Marie Tremblay. Dans le cadre de la collection: “Les classiques des sciences sociales” [http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques\\_des\\_sciences\\_sociales/index.html](http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html).

99 “Notre héritage n’est précédé d’aucun testament.” René Char, “Feuillets d’Hypnos.” In René Char, *Fureur et mystère*. Paris: Gallimard, 1995, § 62, 102.

The lost authority of the tradition, as the lost action without tradition, together threaten to transform the democratic daimon into the demonism of the masses since, according to Arendt, the experience of broken tradition uprooted men and transformed their old culture, the cultivated spiritual land, into a lonely desert of the masses of individuals. And for Arendt this desert experience of the masses constituted the historical condition of possibility for the totalitarian movements, which Arendt pictured in her mind as “sandstorms” arising in the uprooted desert.

A way had been found to set the desert itself in motion, to let loose a sand storm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth. The conditions under which we exist today in the field of politics are indeed threatened by these devastating sand storms.<sup>100</sup>

These sandstorms do not shelter the rooting of the new beginnings, but instead threaten to ravage the whole cultivated world as we know it. Everywhere, the old world seems to have come to an end with the sandstorms threatening to destroy it, before a new beginning rising from the end of the old has had time to assert itself and become rooted. However, in contrast to her famous male associates working also as German-Jewish immigrants in the field of political thought, Arendt did not ask us to re-remember (*anamnesis*) the lost tradition as a noetic science or a “noble lie,”<sup>101</sup> but instead followed partly Heidegger by letting that old apocalyptic turn (trope) take place which Hölderlin had crystallized in his hymn *Patmos*: “But where there is danger, a rescuing element grows as well.”<sup>102</sup> However, in Arendt’s own version this trope means that every end always includes the promise of the new beginning.

Thus as the Angel of Gospel calmed down the terror of the shepherds by saying: “Don’t be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people” (Luke 2:10), Arendt announces her own glad tidings at the end of her essay “On Ideology and Terror,” just after having described the end of the tradition and the spiritual desert of modern world:

But there remains also the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only “message” which the end can ever produce. Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man’s freedom.<sup>103</sup>

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100 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 478.

101 The return to the Platonic “noble lie” was the core of Leo Strauss’ esoteric answer, which in itself was conditioned by the very destruction of the tradition. However, we do not have space here to discuss the enormous complexity of Strauss’ thought, which certainly cannot itself be reduced to a “lie”. The return to the *noetic science* was Voegelin’s suggestion. In fact both of these return-calls were not just answers to the broken tradition but were made possible only on the basis of the broken tradition.

102 “Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst Das Rettende auch.” Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos.” In Hölderlin, *Gedichte*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2000, 341.

103 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479.

Yet the miracle, the rescuing child, that Arendt announces is not a new divine creation, but the natural fact of life itself. For here the natural birth itself grounds ontologically the principle of natality, which according to Arendt is capable of resisting the very logic of ideology and terror that tries to sublate all beginnings to the projected end:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, “natural” ruin is the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born.<sup>104</sup>

The capability of beginning is the indestructible ontological fact of life, which in the last instance is grounded in life itself as birth. So although Arendt wanted to hide life itself from the public light, it was at the same time the very root of the capability to begin that constituted the indestructible natural remnant of man for her. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she even suggests that this remnant of pure spontaneity is included in the very animal existence of man, as she notes that Pavlovian experiments aimed to extinguish this natural element from the dog. Yet for Arendt Pavlov’s dog is a perverted animal. Natural spontaneity can be destroyed only in a laboratory environment, as in concentration camps:

The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not; for Pavlov’s dog, which as we know, was trained to eat not when it was hungry but when a bell rang, was a perverted animal.<sup>105</sup>

More surprisingly, it is this biological fact that according to Arendt even guarantees the existence of the theological virtues of faith (*pistis*) and hope (*elpis*):

Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs *faith and hope*, those two essential characteristics of human existence, which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box.<sup>106</sup>

So in the last instance it is a biological fact that carries the theological hope of new beginning beyond the authority of lost tradition. The real angelic annunciation is the very first cry of a child and it is this cry and not God that is “near but hard to

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104 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479.

105 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.

106 Arendt *The Human Condition*, 247. Italics mine.

grasp.”<sup>107</sup> As it is this annunciation (in the last instance, the cry) that should take the place of authority and guide us away from the desert to confront anew and without the shelter of tradition, the elementary problems of human life:

For to live in a political realm with neither authority nor concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcending power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without the religious trust in a sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together.<sup>108</sup>

## Sin (Exercise V)

At the end of “Ideology and Terror,” with her annunciation of the saving power of the miracle of natality, Arendt also cites her favorite quote from the *De Civitate Dei* as the everlasting principle of this hope in human affairs: “*Initium ut esset homo creatus est* – ‘that a beginning be made man was created’.”<sup>109</sup> And until the end of her life she used this quote again and again to express her new thought of the beginning. According to Arendt, Augustine differentiates here the beginning as *initium* from the beginning as *principio*. Whereas *principio* refers to the creation of the universe, to the birth of the appearing world, the *initium* designates the birth of the initiative, the beginning of men as creatures who are born to begin. Thus the sentence announces again the idea that “beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man.”<sup>110</sup>

Of course Arendt cites the quote again out of its context, where Augustine actually does not affirm the creative powers of men at all, stating instead that God is omnipotent as the creator of souls. The riddle that Augustine tried to solve here was the paradoxical capacity of the eternal and timeless God to create the beginning of new souls, and he wanted to argue that the potentiality of God’s eternal Grace has indeed the actual power to interrupt the eternal pagan cycle of souls. At this point, when he made his attack against the “impiety of those, who assert that the souls which participate to the highest true blessedness must again and again in the circle of times return to the misery of labor (*miserias laboresque redituras*),”<sup>111</sup> the Church Father was campaigning against those demonic pagan views that presupposed the

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107 “The God is near, and hard to grasp / Nah ist Und schwer zu fassen der Gott.” Hölderlin, “Patmos”, 341.

108 Arendt, “What is Authority”, 141.

109 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479. “Quod initium eo modo antea numquam fuit. Hoc ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit.” Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*. In *Aurelii Augustini opera*, pars 14, 1–2. Corpus christianorum, Series Latina 47–8. Turnholti: Brepols, 1955, XII, 21.

110 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479.

111 “Iterum atque iterum per circuitus temporum miserias laboresque redituras.” Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, XII, 21.

eternal circulation of the souls. Arendt, on the other hand, used the quote to affirm the potency of men in their shared action to create new and meaningful temporal events and share the blessedness of the public light that has the power to release men from their circling misery in labor.

Despite this divine-secular analogy, the political message that Arendt drew from the quote was, however, so opposite to the message of the *De Civitate Dei*, that it seems as if Arendt had really despoiled this phrase from Augustine in order to use it against him.<sup>112</sup> To be sure, *De Civitate Dei* was written against the poetic-political theology of the Roman Empire which found its expression in Virgil's poems. For whereas Virgil exalted Rome as an empire without end (*imperium sine fine*),<sup>113</sup> the spiritual theology of Augustine longed for an end without end (*fine sine fine*), towards that eternal divine city which does not have any end (*cuius nullus est finis*).<sup>114</sup> Arendt herself admits that this kind of Christian political theology denies the very freedom, value, and endurance of the worldly political world. In fact, worldly politics is here reduced to the mere task of maintaining order and discipline and so becomes analogous to the task of the executioner.<sup>115</sup> And of course it was this cynical message of keeping order, and not the new beginning of political spontaneity, that formed Augustine's politics of birth, grounded in his concept of the original sin (*peccatum originale*).

In this respect it was Carl Schmitt, the thinker of politics, in contradistinction to whom Arendt tried to work out her plural conceptualization of the beginning, who actually affirmed Augustine's own politics of birth more consciously. For Arendt, Carl Schmitt was the "most able defender of sovereignty"<sup>116</sup> and also the theoretical enemy who so often gave both identity and direction to Arendt's restless effort to release the thinking of politics and power from sovereignty and will. However, as the more genuine Augustinian, Schmitt saw that the modern critique of authority and the search for immanent order "arises from a fanaticism whose anarchical force lies in the denial

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112 Arendt herself noted that "this concept of man as a beginning remained without consequences for Augustine's political philosophy or his understanding of the *civitas terrena*." Hannah Arendt, "The Tradition of Political Thought." In Jerome Kohn (ed.), Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*. New York: Schocken Books, 2005, 59.

113 Vergil, *Aeneid*, 1. 278.

114 Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, XXII, 30.

115 "What is harsher than an executor? What more cruel and ferocious than his character? Yet he holds necessary post (*locus necessarium*) in the very midst of laws, and he is incorporated into the order of well-regulated state (*bene moderatae civitatis*); criminal soul (*animo nocens*), he is nevertheless, by other's arrangement, the punishment of evil-doers (*poena nocens*)." Augustinus, *De Ordine*, II, 4.12. In *Aurelii Augustini opera*, pars. 2.2. Corpus christianorum, Series Latina 29. Turnholt: Brepols, 1970. Translation mine.

116 "Among the modern political theorist, Carl Schmitt is the most able defender of the notion of sovereignty. He recognizes clearly that the root of sovereignty is the will: Sovereign is who wills and commands. See especially his *Verfassungslehre*." Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" In Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977, 296, note 21.



of Original Sin.”<sup>117</sup> Yet, Schmitt was also convinced that the old traditions of authority had been broken, but what was still left as the natural remnant of man, was in his view demonic flesh. And for Schmitt the acknowledgement of this demonism formed the very worldly wisdom of the great Catholic moral reason misrepresented by the anarchist Dostoyevsky in his cold image of the Grand Inquisitor<sup>118</sup> – as it had been “the self-confident grandeur of a spiritual descendant of the Grand Inquisitors”<sup>119</sup> that had made Donoso Cortés even magnify the natural evilness of man in his polemic “against atheist anarchism and its axiom of the good man.”<sup>120</sup>

But even without this kind of exaggeration, the truth that remains in the secularized world, derived from “the theological ground dogma (*Grunddogma*) of the sinfulness of the world and man,”<sup>121</sup> is the message of a pessimistic anthropology announcing the original demonism of man: “All genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil, i.e., by no means an unproblematic but a ‘dangerous’ and dynamic being.”<sup>122</sup> For Schmitt this dangerous demonism was in the last instance the only reason for the necessity of political authority, since otherwise this authority would really be purely demonic. Yet, because of the indisputable fact of the natural demonism, the authority is not demonic but absorbs this demonism into itself and, as a restricted demonism, works as the very restraining (*katechon*) power that holds back the demonism. As it holds back the demonic spirit of technology, this uncanny antichrist of the modern world that mistakes airplanes for angels.<sup>123</sup>

It is in her book *On Revolution* where the spirit of Carl Schmitt is most intensively present despite his visible absence from her notes in this time.<sup>124</sup> In fact the whole conservative polemics,<sup>125</sup> which Arendt sets against the French revolution, has to

117 Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986, 3.

118 Carl Schmitt, *Römischer Katholismus und Politische Form*. Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2004, 55.

119 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985, 57.

120 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 57.

121 Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002, 64.

122 Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 61.

123 See Carl Schmitt, *Theodor Däublers "Nordlicht"*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1990, 63.

124 From the *Origins of Totalitarianism* onwards Schmitt's thinking is constantly present in Arendt's political thought. Yet, it is in *On Revolution* that Arendt does not openly quote Schmitt at all. William E. Scheuerman has rightly emphasized the influence of Schmitt's constitutional theory for Arendt's (mis)reading of both the French and American Revolution. And even without having found specific references to the *Verfassungslehre*, he thinks that she may have been aware of its core claims. In fact, Arendt makes special reference to the *Verfassungslehre* in her essay “What is Freedom,” and was very aware of Schmitt's overall claims. See William E. Scheuerman, “Revolutions and Constitutions: Hannah Arendt's Challenge to Carl Schmitt.” In David Dyzenhaus (ed.), *Law as Politics: Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, 272.

125 In a note on de Maistre, Arendt herself noted that “conservatism and neither liberal nor revolutionary thought is polemical in origin and indeed almost by definition.” Arendt, *On Revolution*, 283, note 3. However, Arendt's own reading of revolution is clearly polemical.

be read in the light of Schmitt's thinking, which found "the political greatness of the French Revolution"<sup>126</sup> in its united national will. Arendt, who clearly followed Schmitt's interpretation by overemphasizing the role of this will in the French Revolution, saw in it at the same time, however, the most dangerous and apolitical element of revolution. Indeed, here again, far from being a good judge or theoretician of either the French or the American Revolution, Arendt's creativity shows itself in her ability to use the revolutionary heritage as material for developing new concepts for the thinking of power and beginning. For it was against the decisionist miracle of the united constituting will and against the whole Schmittian theory of sovereignty and revolution that Arendt tried to launch her more plural miracle of the shared beginning. In this way she tried to pluralize the very concept of constituting power, which according to Schmitt demanded the unity of decision.

Thus, for Arendt the Grand Inquisitor is not an allegory of counter-revolution, but instead a parable of the motivations which led the jurist Robespierre to the revolutionary terror in his constitutional thought. With the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoyevsky shows "openly and concretely, though of course poetically and metaphorically, upon what tragic and self-defeating enterprise the men of the French Revolution had embarked."<sup>127</sup> Thus, if in Schmitt's view the Greatness of the Catholic Inquisitors was their acknowledgement of the original sin, for Arendt the political "sin of the Grand Inquisitor"<sup>128</sup> was to set abstract pity against the singular compassion expressed by Jesus. Yet, Arendt also claimed that compassion should not belong to the political sphere either. And to make this other point she used the image of "the angel of God" taken from Melville's *Billy Budd*. For Arendt this was the classic story of the theoretical side of the French Revolution, since its lesson "followed from the reversal the men of French Revolution had made of the proposition of the original sin, which they had replaced by the position of original goodness."<sup>129</sup> In her view, the natural goodness as incarnated in *Billy Budd* can only come out of nowhere and be beyond virtue. And when it meets the wickedness beyond vice, it can only act naturally with the mute gesture of pure violence, as *Billy Budd* did. "Yet the angel must hang!"<sup>130</sup> as the incarnation of political virtue, Captain Vere, declares – since, as Arendt explains, from the political perspective of virtue, the Angel is as much a wrongdoer:

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126 "The political greatness of the French Revolution lies in the fact that despite its liberal and Rechtsstaat principles, the thought of the French people's political unity did not cease to be deciding directive even for a moment." Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*. London: Duke University Press, 2008, 102.

127 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 82.

128 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 85.

129 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 87.

130 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 84.

The tragedy is that the law is made for men, and neither for angels nor devils. Laws and lasting institutions break down not only under the onslaught of elemental evil but under the impact of absolute innocence as well.<sup>131</sup>

Hence, what was for Schmitt the core question of every political idea, the natural goodness or evilness of man,<sup>132</sup> is barred from Arendt's virtuous political realm, which lies beyond the mute expressions of the good and evil. Therefore, neither the image of the original sin nor original goodness can offer foundational support to the political realm that would equally exclude both satanic violence and the mute angelic gestures of absolute goodness.

It is true that before her so called political awakening, in her early dissertation on St. Augustine, Arendt had still claimed that the original sin constituted the very basis of the worldly love where "a community-in-sinfulness" grounds the third love, that of one's neighbor:

Humanity's common descent is its common share in original sin. This sinfulness conferred with birth, necessarily attaches to everyone. There is no escape from it. It is the same in all people. The equality of the situation means that all are sinful. "The whole world was guilty from Adam."<sup>133</sup>

But as early as in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, natural birth is no longer an equalizing but a differentiating factor that shows itself in political life as "the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is – single, unique, unchangeable."<sup>134</sup> Natural birth no longer grounds common equality, resisting and disturbing instead the artificial equality that is able to shine only in the public sphere. And yet, as we have argued all along, it still works as the silent ontological condition for the spontaneity of public speech and action.

## Mysteries (Exercise VI)

Now, Augustine's political theology of birth and death not only distinguished between the birth of the world (*principio*) and of the souls (*initium*), but also differentiated the second, spiritual birth and death from the primal natural ones. Whereas the natural birth and death were tied to carnal equality, the spiritual birth and death were connected to spiritual differentiation, to the last judgment and

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<sup>131</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 84.

<sup>132</sup> "Every political idea in one way or another takes a position on the 'nature' of man and presupposes that he is either 'by nature good' or 'by nature evil'." Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 56.

<sup>133</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 102.

<sup>134</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301.

divine grace. And in Augustine's peculiar soteriological scheme the unforeseen grace would in the end of the world save even the material body with the absolution of all carnality from the carnal, thus purifying the demonic passions from the purely angelic body of the arisen.<sup>135</sup>

Now, we find the distinction between two deaths and births also in Arendt, who was here influenced by Martin Heidegger. However it was from Augustine that the young Heidegger had in turn assumed the troubled (*molestia*) and restless experience of care (*cura*) as the fundamental experience of temporal facticity of life.<sup>136</sup> But in his passionate and demonic reading of Augustine Heidegger omitted the angelic existence of *beautitudo* towards which Augustine's thought had striven, as an erroneous Neoplatonic influence. And what remained of this non-Neoplatonic Augustine, was only the Christian passion, the experience of factual life, which Heidegger further reduced to the temporal tension of the mundane troubled human condition. In fact, Augustine himself had made the very opposite criticism of Neoplatonism, claiming that it is not the Platonic *daimons* that can steer us towards *beautitudo* but only the good angels, since the souls of daimons are agitated by the whirlwinds and tempests of passions.<sup>137</sup> And because the *daimons* share these passions with men, whereas pious men share with the angels the light of reason, the "men are to be put before demons because their despair is not to be compared to the hope of pious men."<sup>138</sup>

As had Carl Schmitt, also Martin Heidegger saved only the demonic experience from Augustine. For Heidegger, however, this was not the moral experience of evilness of man, but a more primordial experience of the potentiality-for Being-guilty (*Schuldigseinkönnen*), disclosed by the resolute experience of one's ownmost mortality as being towards the end (*Sein zum Ende*). It is this experience that retains the temporal structure of Augustine's experience of soteriological time, yet not as the hope of a future angelic *beutitudo*, but as an anticipatory possibility of the non-relational impossibility: "Thus death reveals itself as one's own most (*eigenste*), non-relational (*unbezüglliche*) not outstripped possibility (*unüberholbare*

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135 See Augustine, *Enchiridion de Fide, Spe et Charitate liber unus*. In J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 40.

136 Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, § 17. "Also this interpretation of *dasein* based on the phenomenon of care is not an invention of mine [...]. It was seven years ago, while I was investigating these structures in conjunction with my attempts to arrive at the ontological foundations of Augustinian anthropology, that I first came across the phenomenon of care." Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 301–2.

137 "animi daemonum passionum turbelis et tempestatibus agitentur." Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 15.

138 "Quoniam spei piorum hominum nequaquam illorum desperatio conparanda est." Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 15.

*Möglichkeit*).<sup>139</sup> Of course, Heidegger's existential (second) dying in its difference from mere natural perishing (*nur-verenden*) does not, as Augustinian spiritual "second" death, send the sinner to burn in the eternal hell, demanding instead, with a burning worldly angst, one to realize one's ownmost possibilities in this life. And what calls forth from this "death" is not the mysterious divine judgment of an unforeseen Grace but only the silent call of *Gewissen* as the empty inner daimon of *Dasein*. "The call of inner *daimon* (*ruft das Gewissen*) says nothing (*nichts*)."<sup>140</sup>

According to Arendt, it was the demonic call for passionate thinking without other end than thinking itself that made Heidegger "the secret king, who reigns in the realm of thought"<sup>141</sup> and made his name fly as Fama all over Germany,<sup>142</sup> blasting out its redemptive glad tidings: "thinking is alive again."<sup>143</sup> It was the passion for thinking, as much as the personal passion for a thinker, which Arendt received from her lifelong romance with Heidegger. And she was even ready to believe that it was mainly the Romantic "delusions of genius"<sup>144</sup> which made this passionate thought of demonic homelessness (*unheimlich*) grotesquely mistake the political gestures of *Führer's* "miraculous hands"<sup>145</sup> for a silent national home call.<sup>146</sup> As it was because of her fidelity to passion that the "girl from abroad"<sup>147</sup> was ready to make a reconciliation and forgive the national delusions of a thinker who

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139 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978, 294. Translation modified. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993, § 50, 250.

140 "Der Ruf sagt nichts aus, gibt keine Auskunft über Weltereignisse, hat nichts zu erzählen." Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 50, 250.

141 Arendt's letter 166 for Heidegger including her birthday speech for Heidegger. In Hannah Arendt & Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002, 182. Translation mine.

142 "Little more than a name was known, but the name made its way through all of Germany like the rumour of the secret king." Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 116, 180. Translation in Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*. London: Harcourt, 1998, 149.

143 "The rumor put it quite simply; thinking is alive again." Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 116, 182. Translation in Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, 151.

144 Or this is what Arendt wrote in 1956, just after the world and before their new reconciliation. "Heidegger is really (let us hope) the last Romantic [...] whose complete lack of responsibility is attributable to a spiritual playfulness that stems in part from delusions of genius and in part from despair." Hannah Arendt, "What is existential Philosophy." In Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994, 187, note 2.

145 According to Jaspers this was Heidegger's answer to him when he worried about Hitler's lack of culture: "Culture does not matter. Just look at his *marvelous hands*!" ("Bildung ist ganz gleichgültig, sehen Sie nur seine wunderbaren Hände an!") Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*. München: Piper, 1977, 101.

146 "The problem was not what our enemies did but what our friend did [...] they made up ideas about Hitler, in part terrifically interesting things! Things above ordinary level. I found that grotesque." Hannah Arendt, "What remains? Language Remains", 11.

147 "I have never considered myself a German woman, and have long since stopped considering myself a Jewish woman. I feel just like what I am now, after all, the girl from abroad." Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 48, 76. Translation in Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, 60.

answered her with a poem: “Stranger from abroad, live in beginning.”<sup>148</sup> And surely, Arendt never gave up the passionate thinking of the beginning, starting her birthday speech “Martin Heidegger at 80” with the quote from Plato: “For beginning that dwells among men is divinity that saves everything.”<sup>149</sup> However, for Heidegger, who always tried to begin thought again from its very beginning, beginning always means thinking through the end. Whereas from the very beginning, Arendt wanted rather to think the end through the beginning and so favor the birthday deities over the angels of death in the experience of human “historicity.”

St. Augustine had written that the life of mortals should rather be called death than life since our lifetime is nothing but a race towards death (*cursus ad mortem*) and that as soon as we begin to live we begin to die.<sup>150</sup> In his *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger cited this Christian truism from a late medieval poem by Johannes von Templ, where the figure of Death gives lessons to the Bohemian Ploughman, who is mourning the death of his worldly love: “As soon as a human has life, he is old enough to die.”<sup>151</sup> But at the end of the same lessons Death also warns the Ploughman about woman’s vanity: “Have you not read where Hermes, the sage, teaches that a man should beware of beautiful women.”<sup>152</sup> This, however, Heidegger did not cite, even though he had written that vanity meant dwelling in the present for the sake of the present and thus belonged to the inauthentic temporality of falling as the very counter-phenomenon of the authentic moment of vision given by the existential lessons of Death.<sup>153</sup> However, it was the beauty and greatness (*Schönheit und Größe*) of the young Arendt, which once in a rainstorm in Marburg had, as moment of vision (*Augenblick*), struck the Ploughman of Being as demonic and had never since left his thought: “Beloved Hannah! The demonic (*dämonische*) struck me.”<sup>154</sup>

Arendt herself, of course, never accepted the lessons of Death, but openly defended vanity as an authentic principle of shared life, writing that: “a life without [...] vanity [...] is literally dead world; it has ceased to be human life because it

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148 From Heidegger poem to Arendt: *Das Mädchen aus der Fremde*. Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 50, 80.

149 “Archê gar kai theos en anthrôpois hidrumenê sôzei panta.” Plato, *Leges*, 755a. In *Platonis Opera* – recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit Ioannes Burnet. Tomus V, pars II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937.

150 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIII, 10.

151 “Als schiere ein mensche lebendig wirt, als schiere ist es alt genug zu sterben.” Johannes von Tepl, “Der Ackermann aus Böhmen.” *Der TOT*, XX. Heidegger quotes: “Sobald ein Mensch zum Leben kommt, sogleich ist er alt genug zu sterben.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 48, 245.

152 “Hastu nicht gelesen, wie Hermes, der weissage, lernet, wie sich ein man hutten sol vor schonen weiben.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 48, 245.

153 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 68 c.

154 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 3, 14.



is no longer lived among men.”<sup>155</sup> And it was the very virtues of the vanishing temporality that Arendt’s natal thought set against the traditional philosophical thought of mortality. However, this thought of natality seemed to follow the very same structure as Heidegger’s thought of mortality. Thus, for Arendt, birth constitutes one’s ownmost and impossible possibility which no-one can take from the other. And whereas for Heidegger the courage before death makes possible the resolute decision in life and frees one to act, for Arendt the courage before birth makes possible the free initiation into the public sphere: “Courage liberates men from their worry about life for the freedom of the world. Courage is indispensable because in politics not life but the world is at stake.”<sup>156</sup> And as for Heidegger the resolute courage is not courage in face of natural death, also for Arendt the first birth takes place in mute darkness, whereas it is only the “second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our physical appearance.”<sup>157</sup> Lastly, parallel to Heidegger, to whom the call of death is silent, the birth is a mute mystical experience for Arendt, lying beyond the sphere of speech: “Because man does not know where he comes from when he is born and where he goes when he dies.”<sup>158</sup> In fact, it is in the case of birth and death that Arendt refers to the most sublime and mysterious rituals known in the Ancient World:

Eleusinian Mysteries [...] concerned the unspeakable and experiences beyond speech were non-political and perhaps unpolitical by definition. That they concerned the secret of the birth and death seems proved by fragment of Pindar: *oide men biou teleutan, oiden de diosdoton archan*.<sup>159</sup>

According to Arendt, “conceptually, we may call truth what we cannot change, metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us.”<sup>160</sup> And to be sure, for Arendt the natural birth is our silent ground and mystical truth, which does not belong to the revelation made in public speech but which nonetheless ontologically grounds our political actions as their hidden truth that can be experienced only in unspoken wonderment: “Truth, be it ancient truth of Being or the Christian truth of the living God, can reveal itself only in complete

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155 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

156 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 156.

157 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176. “In modern times it is not uncommon to find people holding, with Schopenhauer, that our mortality is the eternal source of philosophy, that ‘death actually is eternal source of philosophy [and that] without death there would scarcely be any philosophizing.’ Even the younger Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* still treated the anticipation of death as the decisive experience through which man can attain an authentic self.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 79.

158 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 63.

159 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 63.

160 Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics.” In Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977, 264.

human stillness.”<sup>161</sup> In the words of young Wittgenstein, a birth is the inexpressible (*Unaussprechliches*), it “shows itself; it is mystical.”<sup>162</sup> Or as Arendt herself writes:

This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, *volo ut sis* (I want you to be) without being able to give an particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation.<sup>163</sup>

But when Arendt quoted *volo ut sis*, as the unconditional affirmation and mysterious gratitude for the given, she was not actually quoting Augustine, since the phrase does not appear verbatim in his writings. Instead, she was quoting Heidegger, who sent her this quote – which Arendt kept as a “deep secret/ pregnancy (*geheimnis*)”<sup>164</sup> in her soul – in reference to their passionate love. According to Heidegger this love had forced them into their ownmost existence (*eigenste Existenz*), after Arendt had “become a saint (*Heilige*)”<sup>165</sup> by having stood “completely revealed (*offenbar*)”<sup>166</sup> for the philosopher, who could only write:

This time all words fail me – and I can only cry and cry – and the why cannot be answered either – it sinks – waiting in vain – in thanks and faith. “Now I will do what the angel bids.”<sup>167</sup>

## The Archeology (Exercise VII)

But although the naked existence and birth in itself is for Arendt the unspeakable and mysterious natural truth, it is redeemed only in its revelation in speech, i.e. in that “second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our physical appearance.”<sup>168</sup> For contrary to the catholic conservatives, such as Schmitt and Voegelin, Arendt affirms the possibility of worldly political salvation. This happens when the expression of the “who” in public speech and action redeems the silent mysteries of “what” given us in birth:

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161 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 15.

162 “Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984, 6.522.

163 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301.

164 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 18, 33. Translation mine.

165 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 15, 31. Transl. in Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, 20.

166 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 15, 30. Transl. in Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, 20.

167 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 15, 30. Transl. in Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, 20.

168 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

This disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds [...] the affinity between speech and revelation is much closer than between action and revelation, just as the affinity between action and beginning is closer than between speech and beginning, although many, and even the most acts, are performed in the manner of speech.<sup>169</sup>

In this way Arendt can claim that it is actually revelation in speech and not the mystical birth that constitutes the proper beginning in the human affairs. She states that this is crystallized in the first announcement of the Gospel of John: *en archê ên ho logos*.<sup>170</sup> Thus it is again the Christian announcement of the New Testament that Arendt sets against the message of the Old Testament, where “Cain slew Abel and Romulus slew Remus; violence was the beginning and, by same token, no beginning could be made without using violence, without violating.”<sup>171</sup> According to Arendt, “violence is by nature instrumental”<sup>172</sup> and cannot properly begin anything. It needs a justified goal, but cannot form a founding power or ground any founding as legitimate.<sup>173</sup> The critique of founding violence is of course directed against the Weberian definition of the state as the political entity that is defined through its specific means (*spezifischen Mittel*), i.e., its capability to hold a regional monopoly over legitimate physical violence.<sup>174</sup> But it is still more clearly turned against Schmitt, who in his criticism of the Weberian statist definition of politics attached politics even more firmly to the existential possibility of violence, i.e. to the intensity of the distinction between friend and enemy. For Schmitt, the very parable of Cain and Abel from the Old Testament crystallized the world historical tension that arises necessarily from the demonic violence and not from angelic revelation.<sup>175</sup> Against this demonic genealogy of violence Arendt created her own political gospel of the beginning as an angelic archeology, i.e. the discourse (*logos*) of beginning (*archê*).

But also this archeology includes its own specific tension between the beginning as foundation and preservation, between pure spontaneity and endurance,

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169 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

170 In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1). “The conviction, in the beginning was a crime – for which the phrase ‘state of nature’ is only a theoretically purified paraphrase – has carried through the centuries no less self-evident plausibility for the state of human affairs than the first sentence of St John, In the beginning was the Word, has possessed for the affairs of salvation.” Arendt, *On Revolution*, 20.

171 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 20.

172 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*. San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1970, 51.

173 Arendt, *On Violence*, 51.

174 Max Weber, “Politik als Beruf.” In *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*. Potsdam: Institut für Pädagogik der Universität Potsdam, 1999, 397.

175 “Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. This is how the history of humanity begins. This is what the father of all things looks like. Here is the dialectical tension that keeps world history in motion – and the world history has not yet come to its end.” Carl Schmitt, *Ex Captivitate Salus*. Köln: Greven Verlag, 1950, 90. Cited in Mika Ojakangas, “Carl Schmitt’s Real Enemy: The Citizen of the Non-exclusive Democratic Community?” *The European Legacy*, Vol. 8, No 4, 2003.

between *initium* and *principium*. For the pure affirmation of the *initium*, which in the last instance guarantees the existence of natural spontaneity, does not yet solve the problem of the beginning (*principio*) of the world, since in the world an action can survive only by its endurance in a further, common action. And Arendt holds that this tension of the beginning was articulated in its “classical clarity” in ancient Greek and Latin, where there were two verbs that designated “what we uniformly call ‘to act’.”<sup>176</sup> These words were:

*arhei*, to begin, to lead and finally to rule, and *prattein*, to carry something through, [and] *agere*, to set something in motion; and *gerere*, [...] the enduring and supporting continuation of past acts.<sup>177</sup>

The proper condition for political freedom and action is in Arendt’s view this archeology of beginning and enduring, since political action is not a phenomenon of the will but constituted by the capability “to call something into being which did not exist before,”<sup>178</sup> and at the same time, to make that beginning endure in a further action. In its turn the endurance of beginning is guaranteed by its principles, since “what saves the act of beginning from its own arbitrariness is that it carries its own principle within itself.”<sup>179</sup> Thus even though proper political action is “neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will,”<sup>180</sup> it is still illuminated by the light of inspiring principles. These principles are virtues like “the honor or glory, love of equality,”<sup>181</sup> manifesting the universal and inexhaustible guiding spirits of the performing action.

In fact, these inspiring and guiding principles are those very powers and virtues (*Potestatum et Virtutum*) which the Christian angelology of Pseudo-Dionysius situated in the middle order of celestial intelligences designating powerful and unshakable virilities (*incommutabilem virilitatem*).<sup>182</sup> But if for Dionysius this angelic virility emanated from the supreme divine power, according to Arendt the virility of these principles, which constitutes the middle order of worldly action, radiates only from the virtuous performance itself and only as long as this performance lasts. The performance itself constitutes the political history of mankind as a series of unexpected acts. And this angelic “chain of miracles”<sup>183</sup> can heal the “broken chain”

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176 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 165.

177 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 165.

178 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 151.

179 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 212.

180 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 152.

181 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 152.

182 See Dionysius the Areopagite, *Celestial Hierarchy*. In *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, vol. 2. London: James Parker & Co, 1897, chap. VIII.

183 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 169.

of the lost tradition, but only if the links of the chain connecting the miraculous voids of virtuosity are forged from the inexhaustible virtues, i.e. the angelic powers of enduring principles. It is this second birth, the rebirth into the radiance of enduring angelic publicity of the changeable human world, which redeems the silent mysteries and unchangeable truths of the first births and cries.

## The Child (Exercise VIII)

However, life and love as such are not redeemed in this publicity, since in their singular existence they cannot transform themselves into shining angelic virtues, remaining instead hidden divine mysteries. Heidegger's *Volo ut sis* was indeed for Arendt the highest affirmation of love, which she even compared to the love of God, who loves his creatures unconditionally and "without desiring them,"<sup>184</sup> i.e. loves them as parents love their children. Or as Heidegger loved her "girlish essence"<sup>185</sup> as Arendt's singular enduring strength: "Child – you have now attained all that again and will never lose it. You will have your childhood no longer as mere gift of nature, but as the ground of your soul and the strength of your being."<sup>186</sup> Whereas Arendt always affirmed the spontaneous beginning as the strength of childhood and up until her last writings agreed with Duns Scotus that the mental faculty of will that could freely and spontaneously assert the affirmation of love was in its very groundlessness the most godlike faculty of man.<sup>187</sup>

But meanwhile she had also become convinced that this godlike mental faculty of beginning should belong as little to the mature political sphere as children, girlish students, or romantic philosophers. Not only because for her "politics is not like the nursery"<sup>188</sup> but also because political freedom is not born from the mental freedom of the will with its *principium individuationis*, but from the shared capability of power with its plural principles. And where the experiences of power as ability are the original Greek political experiences, the experiences of volition, "Hebrew in origin, were not political and did not relate to the world."<sup>189</sup> Yet the very difference between Hebrew volition and Greek power can be discovered only in their common mixture,

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184 "The willing ego when it says its highest manifestation, 'Amo: Volo ut sis', 'I love you; I want you to be' – and not 'I want to have you' or 'I want to rule you' – shows itself capable of the love with which supposedly God loves men, whom he created only because He willed them to exist and whom he loves without desiring them." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 136.

185 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 1, 12. Translation mine.

186 Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 19, 35. Translation in Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, 24.

187 "The miracle of human mind is that by virtue of the Will it can transcend everything [...] and this is the sign of man's being created in God's image." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 136.

188 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 279.

189 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 63.

in the Hellenistic Christian experience of St. Paul, who uncovered with his “I will but cannot,” that “to will” and “to be able” are not the same. Whereas it was Augustine – “the first Christian” and “the only philosopher the Romans never had”<sup>190</sup> – who in his inner struggle with this mental experience found the autonomous faculty of will and thus became “the first philosopher of the will.”<sup>191</sup>

But as much as Arendt would praise this Christian discovery as the very discovery of the mental organ of spontaneous beginning, it remained for her apolitical as an inner mental disposition and isolated philosophical experience. And yet she also claimed that beside the Christian, inner mental struggles, we can find in Augustine a more Roman and hence, political experience of freedom as well:

In his only political treatise, In *De civitate Dei* [...] Augustine [...] speaks more from the background of specifically Roman experiences [...] and freedom is conceived there not as an inner human disposition but as a character of human existence in the world.<sup>192</sup>

This more political experience of the beginning is not found in lonely mental struggles, but in the already mentioned Augustinian philosophy of birth, where the concept of *initium* affirms the birth of each man as an initial beginning because “in each instance something new comes into an already existing world.”<sup>193</sup> Indeed, Arendt keeps insisting that Augustine should be seen as a positive thinker of birth, even if in fact it is hard to find a thinker more hostile to man’s natal condition. For Augustine the natural birth and infancy are demonic phenomena even worse than death:

For who would not shrink from the alternative, and elect to die, if it were proposed to him either to suffer death or to be again an infant? Our infancy, indeed, introducing us to this life not with laughter but with tears, seems unconsciously to predict the ills we are to encounter. Zoroaster alone is said to have laughed when he was born, and that unnatural (*monstrosus*) omen portended no good to him.<sup>194</sup>

But whereas the image of a laughing child was a monstrous omen for Augustine, in his *Also sprach Zarathustra* Nietzsche used the same image as a positive metaphor for the supreme affirmation of life as innocence of all becoming. Arendt, who noticed the strange similarity between Nietzsche’s and Augustine’s conceptions of the will argued, however, that about Augustine’s conception “Nietzsche certainly knew nothing.”<sup>195</sup> But in fact Nietzsche knew it very well, and

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190 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 84.

191 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 84–110.

192 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 167.

193 Arendt, “What is Freedom”, 167.

194 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XXI, 14. Translation in *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine* URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.html>.

195 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 161.



his great philosophic-poetic work reads as an anti-Augustinian treatise that fully consciously sets the rhythm of Dionysian dithyrambs against Augustine's temporal salvation hymns, i.e. against all those Preachers of Death that "hardly are born when they begin to die."<sup>196</sup> As Arendt herself noted, Nietzsche's "shift from the I-will to the anticipated I-can, which negates the Pauline I-will-and-I-cannot and thereby all Christian ethics, is based on an unqualified Yes to Life."<sup>197</sup>

And it is clearly Nietzsche who sets the philosophy of innocent birth against Augustine's inborn guilt. In Nietzsche's gospel of the cosmic child, the anxiety of Christian guilt and resentment are overcome by the natural innocence of becoming itself: "Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a play, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yes-saying."<sup>198</sup> This glad tidings redeems the *greatest weight* (*Das grösste Schwergewicht*) that is included in the "thought experience"<sup>199</sup> performed by the malicious demon in *Gay Science*.<sup>200</sup> Also Arendt noted that "Innocence of the Becoming" is not "drawn from a mental faculty [but] rooted in the fact that we indeed are 'thrown' into the world."<sup>201</sup> However, in the case of Nietzsche, she did not accept this childish celebration of birth, but suddenly saw it as being even more Christian (apolitical) than Augustine's supposed Roman celebration of initiation. For she claimed that in spite of the pagan clothes, Nietzsche's anti-Christian demon that affirms life itself as the highest good is in fact deeply Christian. Thus Nietzsche, the self-appointed anti-Christ, would be the anti-Christ in a properly Christian sense, as the best imitator of Christ:

The reason why life asserted itself as the ultimate point of reference in the modern age and has remained the highest good of modern society is that the modern reversal operated within the fabric of a Christian society whose fundamental belief in the sacredness of life has survived, and even remained completely unshaken by, secularization and the general decline of Christian faith. [...] [It is] the undisputable fact that only when the

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<sup>196</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*. In *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) 4. München: DTV, 1999, I, § 9.

<sup>197</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 163.

<sup>198</sup> "Unschuld ist das Kind und Vergessen, ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja-sagen." Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, I, § 1, 31, 7–9.

<sup>199</sup> For Arendt calls it a thought experience that implies the experimental return to the ancient concept of cyclical time that challenges the very notion of Will, whose project assumes rectilinear time. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 166.

<sup>200</sup> "What, if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a God, never have I heard anything more divine!'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, § 341, 194.

<sup>201</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 170.

immortality of individual life became the central creed of Western mankind, that is, only with the rise of Christianity, did life on earth also become the highest good of man.<sup>202</sup>

However, according to Arendt it was not only Nietzsche who equates Life and Being with his *Ewige Wiederkunft*, but this equation is made also by Bergson with his *L'Evolution créatrice* and Marx with his *Stoffwechsel mit der Natur*. It is this equation that makes these three thinkers the three greatest representatives of modern life philosophy, itself born from the secularized Christian idea.<sup>203</sup> But she goes even further to assert that this celebration of the “sheer bliss of being alive – love of life – laboring and consuming, with happy and purposeless regularity,”<sup>204</sup> was not only a secularized Christian idea, but the very experience of the Old testament: “The Old Testament [...] held life to be sacred and [...] neither dead nor labor to be evil.”<sup>205</sup> And in the modern world where the shining experience of the shared world was itself at stake, was it only the sacredness of life, the labor of life, and the natural cycle of births and deaths that seemed to remain? Against this demonic cycle of life (*zoe*) Arendt invented his own airy and aeonic angelology based on the ever appearing and disappearing life-duration (*aion*) of the biographical life (*bios*).

## Appearance (Exercise IX)

This political angelology does not equate being and life, but instead states that “being and appearing coincide.”<sup>206</sup> Thus according to the transcendental aesthetics of this appearing being, the beginning arises from non-appearance, literally out of nowhere. “The beginning has, as it were, nothing whatsoever to hold on to; it is as though it came out of nowhere in either time or space.”<sup>207</sup> But whereas in the sphere of life itself (*zoe*), the appearance and disappearance of life belongs to the natural cycle of life and death, it is only in the aeonic vertical life, in the life of the linear *aion* (which in medieval theology was associated with the angelic life) that the proper human appearance in the world takes place. This linear life (*bios*) – “with recognizable life-story from birth to death”<sup>208</sup> – arises from the cyclical life (*zoe*) and “by the rectilinear course of its movement [...] cuts through the circular movement

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202 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 313–316.

203 “The greatest representatives of modern life philosophy are Marx, Nietzsche and Bergson, inasmuch as all three equate Life and Being.” Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 313.

204 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 106.

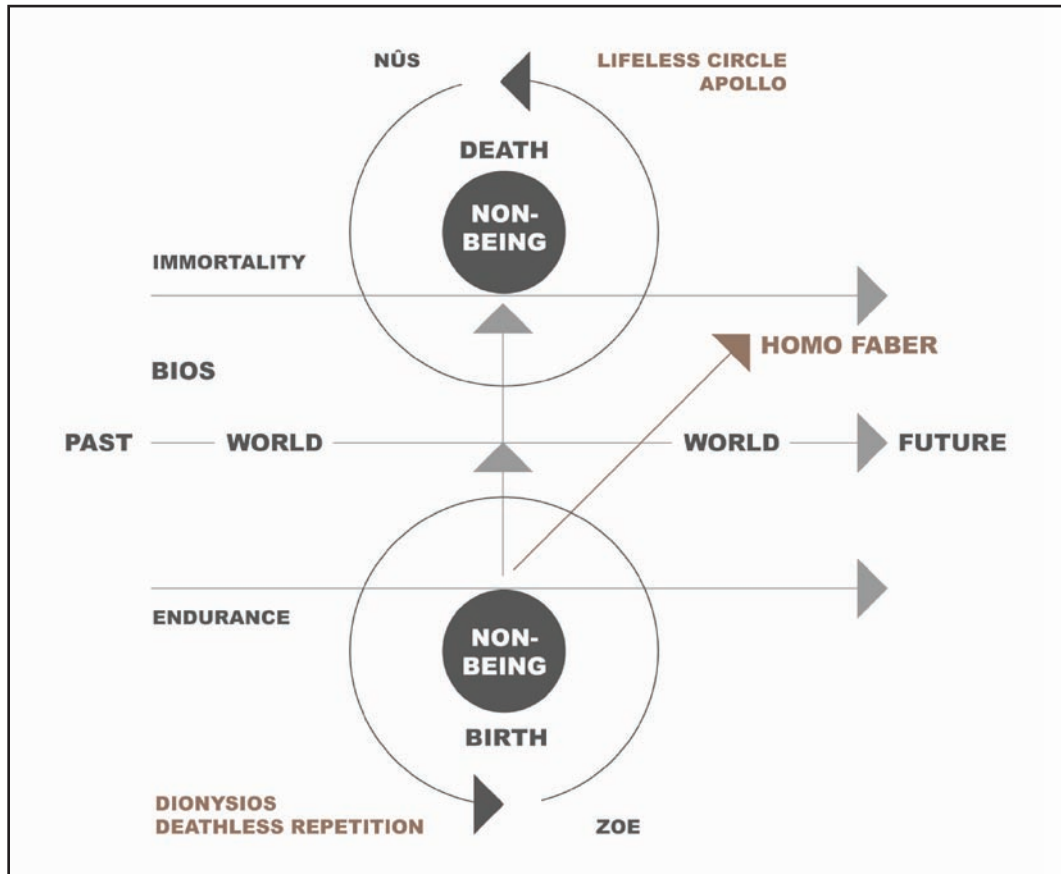
205 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 197.

206 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 11.

207 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 206.

208 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19.

of biological life.”<sup>209</sup> Yet from the perspective of this rectilinear appearance it is not only life itself (*zoe*) that forms a cyclical circle, but also the pure thought (*nûs*) detaches itself from the line of appearance and circles around itself. If we were to make a sketch of this trilogy of life forms, there would be the lifeless circle of thought (Apollo) that cuts the linear appearance from above and the deathless repetition of life (Dionysius) that cuts it from below. And between these demonic circles Arendt sets the sphere of the world as the rectilinear space for the enduring appearance of men. (See diagram.)



Picture 1.

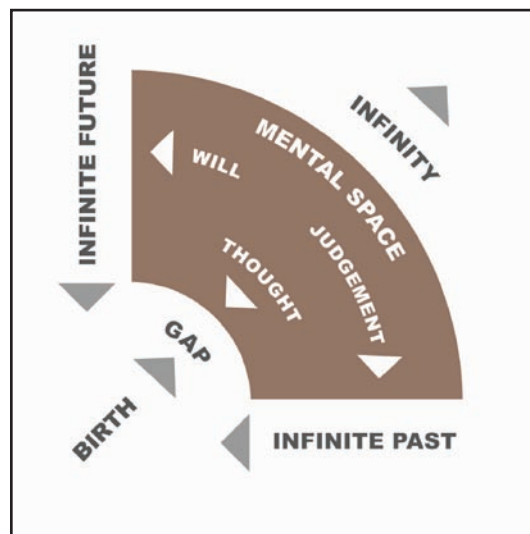
In the *Human Condition*, Arendt's priority was to save this enduring appearance of men from the cycles of life itself (*zoe*), whereas in *The Life of the Mind* she concentrated more fully on the relation that the spiritual sphere of mind had with temporal appearance. According to her, the experience of this relation is crystallized in Kafka's late little story called *Er (He)*, which she had used as the guiding spirit of her untimely reflections in *Between Past and Future*. She had also send this aphorism to Heidegger, who claimed to have agreed with Arendt's interpretation if one just kept in mind that the time-space it describes cannot be considered

<sup>209</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19.

something extra-temporal or extra-spatial.<sup>210</sup> For Arendt, Kafka was a writer who used thinking for struggle<sup>211</sup> and “Er” was a story that tried to narrate the experience of the very struggle that thinking itself faces with time.

Kafka, by sheer force of intelligence and spiritual imagination, created out of a bare ‘abstract’ minimum of experience of a kind of thought-landscape which, without losing in precision, harbors all the riches, varieties, and dramatic elements characteristic of ‘real’ life.<sup>212</sup>

According to Arendt, Kafka’s “Er” parable “analyzes poetically our inner state in regard to the time, of which we are aware when we have withdrawn from the appearances and find our mental activities recoiling characteristically upon themselves.”<sup>213</sup> The moment in which this spiritual sphere of inner time sensation manifests itself is the *nunc stans*, the standing moment as a gap of time where two antagonistic forces battle; other coming from the infinite future and other from the infinite past. Now, if we situate this “parallelogram of force” in the above mentioned political trilogy of life forms, we can see that here the eternal cycle of life and its fertile potentiality belong as the sphere of “physics” to the lower side of the battle-field. Whereas the potentiality of thought (and it is only from here that the gap can be sensed as a struggle between past and future) takes place just above the battle, opening towards the “track of non-time” and towards “metaphysics.” (See diagram.)



Picture 2.

<sup>210</sup> Arendt & Heidegger, *Briefe*, b. 99, 162.

<sup>211</sup> See Arendt’s 1944 essay, where Kafka is represented as a conscious pariah who uses thinking as his weapon. Hannah Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition.” In J. Kohn and H. Feldman (eds.), *Hannah Arendt: The Jewish Writings*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. On Arendt’s early interpretations of Kafka see also her 1946 essay. Hannah Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew.”

<sup>212</sup> See Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 10.

<sup>213</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 202.

What cuts here into the linear course of appearing life, is not only the physical birth arising from the cycle of life (*zoe*), but also the spiritual judgments emanating from the space of thought. Again this thought space is itself divided according to a trilogy of faculties, i.e., thought, will, and judgment. But whereas the faculty of thought opens towards atemporal infinity, the faculties of will and judgment intend towards the temporal lines of past and future. The anticipating will turns towards the future and the judging judgment turns towards the past.

Although Arendt claims that the thought space is always tied to the temporal succession of appearances, she also argues that these faculties in themselves (thought, will and judgment) are spiritually self-contained and autonomous.<sup>214</sup> In the last instance they are ends in themselves, nothing but pure (*haplos*) faculties. For it is reason's own need to think that is the beginning and the end of thinking, and "nothing other than the Will is the total cause of volition."<sup>215</sup> Lastly, judgment is pure when it realizes that it cannot depend on any rule and discovers the pleasure of judgment in itself. But why does Arendt posit these purely angelic, spiritual faculties, which are pure (*haplos*) and self-contained as Plato's gods?<sup>216</sup> Nietzsche would certainly protest here, claiming that this is nothing but pseudo-theological thought trying to pass judgment on life. According to Nietzsche, we should instead judge the angelic faculties from the perspective of living and not set about again on "the honeymoon of German philosophy" when "all the young theologians of the Tübingen seminary ran off into the bushes – all looking for 'faculties'."<sup>217</sup> For Nietzsche the whole idea of specific faculties was tautological, since it explained a particular potentiality by making it a particular potentiality (faculty). Hence we should not ask how faculties are possible, but why we should believe in them in the first place. And for Nietzsche, the faculties were invented only for the purposes of preserving beings of our kind. They were in fact false judgments belonging only to the perspectives of the living. Those that went searching for faculties confused inventing and discovering, since the faculty of will was not discovered but invented for the sake of punishment.

Arendt however claimed that in *The Life of the Mind* she was writing the very history of the faculties discovered in the course of historical existence. And even

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214 "I call these mental activities basic because they are autonomous." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 70.

215 Here Arendt is quoting Duns Scotus. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 12. Whereas in the case of thinking she usually refers either to Kant or Heidegger.

216 "Each of them being most beautiful and best abides always purely (*haplos*) in his own form." Plato, *Respublica* 381c. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5–6. London: William Heinemann, 1969.

217 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, 13. Translation modified. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. In *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) 5. München: DTV, 1999, I, § 11, 25, 2–5.

she agreed with Nietzsche what came to the odd “ghostliness” (*Geisterhaftigkeit*)<sup>218</sup> of German idealism. For her this ghostliness was not, however, caused by the faculties but, on the contrary, by the “ingenuous exclusion of man and man’s faculties in favor of personalized concepts.”<sup>219</sup> These concepts were no longer metaphors of thought or faculties, but “personified forces” acting behind the backs of real men. Furthermore, although Arendt admitted that the faculties might be metaphysical fallacies, she did not want to simply destroy them. Instead, she read them as riddles containing the only clues we have for the specific experiences of thought itself, which should not be reduced to the optics of life itself. In fact, Arendt did not want to invent or discover faculties, but to dismantle the covers of metaphysical fallacies in order to save the experience of real potentialities contained in them. “Not to destroy the ‘rich and strange’ which can probably be saved only as fragments”<sup>220</sup> was Arendt’s “angelic” message to the demonic forces of history even if this message was announced by an angel without wings.

### Ariel (Exercise X)

According to the famous parable of *Phaedrus*, a mortal is defined as a living being whose soul has lost its natural wings, literally shed its feathers (*pterrorueō*).<sup>221</sup> Whereas it is the thinking (*dianoia*) of philosophers that had the right to re-receive the wings of the soul to the extent that this thought endeavors to remember the divine lighting, i.e. what makes the gods divine.<sup>222</sup> To be sure the metaphors of “flight of soul” and the “wings of thought” had since been used to describe the efforts of thinkers and poets to raise above all earthly things.<sup>223</sup> The danger Arendt saw in this effort was forgetting our earthbound condition, which in modern times expressed itself more in the sciences than in philosophy.<sup>224</sup> For science had made it possible that a man-made thing could circle around the earth with celestial bodies, and for Arendt the launching of Sputnik was an event “second in importance to no

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218 Friedrich Nietzsche, “Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1885.” In *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) 11. München: DTV, 1999, 41(4). Arendt quotes this fragment (§ 419 in *The Will to Power*) in *The Life of the Mind*, where she uses Nietzsche’s metaphor of “rainbow-bridges of concepts” to criticize German idealism. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 157.

219 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, 157.

220 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 212.

221 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246c. In *Platonis Opera – recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit Ioannes Burnet*. Tomus II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905.

222 Platon, *Phaedrus*, 249c.

223 See Pierre Hadot, “The View from Above.” In Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as Way of Life*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995.

224 See especially Hannah Arendt, “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man.” In *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.



other.”<sup>225</sup> Yet the danger was not only the military danger posed by the cold war “Conquest of Space” and it did not lie in these kinds of technological angels as such, but instead in the fantasy that according to Arendt accompanied them, i.e. the desire to overcome the very earthbound condition of men.

For Arendt, the phenomenologist, the view from above is always problematic, whether the case in question is astrophysics or political philosophy. Thus, instead of sharing the Platonic dream of wings, she emphasized how Xenophon’s Socrates used the metaphor of wind “to explain the thinking activity,”<sup>226</sup> also noting how Heidegger “speaks of the storm of thought.”<sup>227</sup> For Arendt, thinking cannot grow wings in order to fly towards the sun, since it exist only as the storm or the calm, in the very gap between past and future. Yet, whereas the medieval theological mind had followed the Neo-Platonist quest in trying to illustrate the higher spiritual spheres of thought with its angels, the modern “historical mind” had been interested in those very storms between past and future. And in order to express the relation thought had with the historical temporal tempests, it had also used metaphors of the winged creatures. The most famous of these modern “wings of thought” is of course Hegel’s *Owl of Minerva*, who “takes flight only when dusk (*Dämmerung*) begins to break.”<sup>228</sup> For only when the tumults of the day are shown in their past grayness, the owl can catch its prey and recognize with its night vision that in the end “reason rules the world,”<sup>229</sup> i.e. legitimate the outcome of these storms. Against this owlish “justification of the ways of God”<sup>230</sup> Nietzsche will affirm his own aristocratic sovereign eagle – the “proudest animal under the sun”<sup>231</sup> – that falls upon our historical existence from the soaring heights as it attacks the clumsy philosophical owls from high above. Arendt expressed no sympathy either towards legitimating owls or destructive eagles, but was rather taken by Walter Benjamin’s “Angel of history.” In his famous reflections on the concept of history, a copy of which he trusted in Paris to Arendt’s own hands, this winged figure from a watercolor by

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225 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1.

226 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 174. In fact Xenophon does not use the metaphor of wind to describe thought as such but to describe how the invisible divine reigns in us. See Xenophon *Mem.* IV, 3, 14.

227 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 174.

228 “Beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. In *Werke*. Band 7. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1979, 28.

229 G. W. F. Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte.” In *Werke*. Band 12. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1979, 19.

230 Hegel, “Vorlesungen”, 27.

231 Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Vorrede, § 10, 27, 16.

Paul Klee describes metaphorically the new attitude of a historical materialist.<sup>232</sup> *Angelus Novus*, who “sees one single catastrophe”<sup>233</sup> in the chain of historical events, is of course the very opposite of Hegel’s Owl. But even though this patient seeker of historical happiness has claws and “razor sharp pinions,”<sup>234</sup> it is neither *Angelus Satanas*, “which joins the angelic and demonic forces of life,”<sup>235</sup> nor the sovereign eagle of the self-appointed Anti-Christ.<sup>236</sup> For this messenger that wants to prepare the space for the one who not only redeems but also subdues the Anti-Christ is the figure of profane, “airy” redemption, who wants to redeem the never actualized possibilities through an image of happiness that exists “in the air we have breathed.”<sup>237</sup>

Yet we should not mistake Arendt for Benjamin since Arendt did not want to be the manly materialist, who in control of his powers is “man enough to blast open the continuum of history.”<sup>238</sup> Instead in her similar search for origin as the historical *Urphänomen*<sup>239</sup> she identified with the figure of pearl diver. She used this metaphor

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232 At least for Arendt, whose interpretation of the Angel is very different from that of Gershom Scholem. In his very informative article about Benjamin’s angel the latter, however, uses all his wit trying to detach the angel from historical materialism in order to re-attach it to Jewish theology. See Gershom Scholem, “Walter Benjamin and His Angel.” In Gary Smith (ed.), *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988, 51–89.

233 Walter Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte.” In Benjamin, *Sprache und Geschichte. Philosophische Essays*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992, thesis 9. Translation “On the Concept of History”, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 392.

234 See Benjamin’s first “autobiographical” reflections on Klee’s painting. Walter Benjamin, “Agesilaus Santander.” (First and Second Version.) In M. W. Jennings *et al.* (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, 715.

235 Gershom Scholem, “Walter Benjamin and His Angel”, 69. Scholem interpreted Agesilaus Santander as an anagram of the angel of Satan, *Angelus Satanas*, which would have joined together the angelic and demonic forces of life. However, Scholem claims that the later historical angel that appears in “On the Concept of History” had already lost the satanic elements and is a purely melancholic figure. Giorgio Agamben had instead questioned the very existence of these satanic elements or at least their connection to the Angel’s destructiveness. For this destructiveness is not the opposite of, but belongs essentially to the Angel’s non-melancholic redemptive role. The destructiveness belongs to historical fulfilment and redemption. “The historical redemption appears as inseparable from the capacity to tear the past from its context, destroying it, in order to return it, transfigured, to its origin.” See Giorgio Agamben, “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption.” In Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

236 “The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer; he comes as the subduer of Antichrist.” (“Der Messias kommt ja nicht nur als der Erlöser; er kommt als der Überwinder des Antichrist.”) Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, thesis 6. Translation mine.

237 Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, thesis 2. Translation in “On the Concept of History”, 389.

238 Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, thesis 16. Translation in “On the Concept of History”, 396.

239 About the origin as the historical *Urphänomen*, see again Agamben, “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption.”

first to describe Benjamin's method of thought (thus replacing the *Angelus Novus*) and later chose it as the metaphor for her own method of thought.<sup>240</sup>

What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things "suffer a sea-change" and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as thought they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as "thought fragments" as something "rich and strange" and perhaps even as everlasting *Urphänomene*.<sup>241</sup>

For a pearl diver is not a winged creature that would fly away, against or along the storms of history but more like a mermaid that dives into the sea of history in order to save the crystallized souls of the drowned by bringing them back to the open air, as she allied this method of diving with the "airy" dance of Ariel. For it was from the dancing song which Ariel and the aerial deities perform in Shakespeare's *Tempest* that she borrowed the metaphor of these diving "objects" as sea-changed, rich, and strange pearls.

Full fathom five thy father lies; Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearls that were his eyes: Nothing of him that doth fade; But doth suffer a sea-change; Into something rich and strange.<sup>242</sup>

This dancing song of the illusionary "spirit of the air" that set the rhythms of Arendt's own redemptive thought differs as much from Dionysian dithyrambs as from Augustinian Hymns. And if Scholem claimed that Benjamin's genius was concentrated in his angel,<sup>243</sup> we could state that it is this aerial method of historical-spiritual exercises and the productive diving of the thought-pearls (and not her dark female uniqueness) that constituted Arendt's genius as Thinker.

## Afterthought

But is there after all some feminine plurality which we should recognize in this ingeniousness? And should we actually use the word *iuno* instead of *genius*? For in the Roman experience *iuno* was the feminine counterpart of genius, and when men on their birthdays sacrificed to the *genius natalis*, women offered wines and cakes to *iuno natalis*. However, these plural birthday deities were named as indefinite

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240 "It is with such fragments from the past after their sea-change, that I have dealt here." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 212.

241 Arendt, Hannah, "Walter Benjamin", 206.

242 William Shakespeare, *Tempest*. In Clark & Glover (eds.), *The Works of William Shakespeare*, vol. 1. London: Macmillan, 1863, act 1, scene 2.

243 Scholem, "Walter Benjamin and His Angel", 86.

plural *junones*, and they should not be mistaken for *Juno Regina*, the spouse of the sovereign Zeus. In fact in the ancient world the plural origin (*genos*) was rather the condition of both the private and the divine sphere, whereas the political sphere, far from wanting to bring this plurality to light instead demanded the homogeneity of origins, thus denying the impersonal heterogeneity expressing itself outside the political sphere. And if there was in Arendt's own thought a fallacy which covered up the rich and strange plurality of her productive mind, it was her conviction that it is only artificial mediation that guarantees plurality. So in spite of her Ariel spirit, in the end she could not affirm the productivity of the plural birthday deities but chose to look for the meaningfulness of life in the very hallmark of *Juno Regina*, in Judgment. By virtue of this turn the poetic thought of the plural muses was again clothed in the judge's cloak and the role of the muses was not only to sing the songs of men to the Gods, but to bear the messages of their father Zeus, the allegory of Judgment. "Homeric historian [poet/muse] is the judge [...] the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgment over it."<sup>244</sup> The plurality of the birthday spirits is overshadowed in favor of *Regina*, who passes her judgment over the affairs of men, while the glad tidings of plural births are substituted by the never ending reflective judgment that must take place each single day.

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244 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, 216.

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