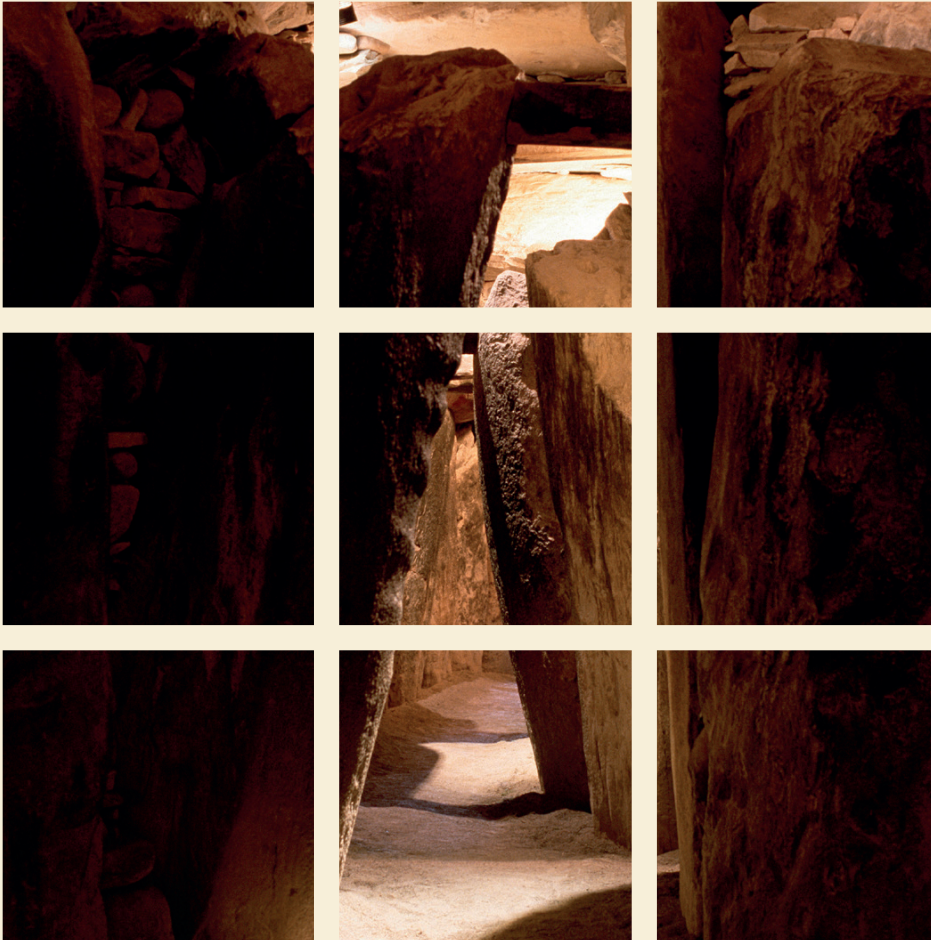


HANNAH ARENDT'S

Forgotten Spatial Ontology



Aoife Mc Inerney

Research Institute for Philosophy,
Theology and Religious Studies

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Hannah Arendt's Forgotten Spatial Ontology

Aoife Mc Inerney

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at 10:30 am

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

To be of the world

This project endeavours to read Hannah Arendt as a spatial philosopher and, as such, exposes the depth in which she contends with the spatial elements of existence. The urgency to think about space was, for her, connected to the modern tendency to think in terms of processes. Arendt understands processes as invisible rules that are able to explain the world in which we live. For Arendt, processual thinking inhibits phenomenal space. This inhibition calls for the rethinking of concepts such as earth and world, traditional metaphysics, the idea of process, and even life. Beyond the confines of academic discourse, situating Arendt within the discourse of philosophy of space renews the relevance of Arendtian philosophy for environmental ethics and the challenges posed by climate change. Through sustained attention to the spatial themes in Arendt's philosophy, this dissertation shows the applicability of her work to the increasing problem of displacement and homelessness due to climate related disasters, as well as discussions concerning what we owe the earth in terms of moral duties. In this way, her work has surprising relevance for environmental ethics, as, for Arendt, it is impossible to speak of the world without acknowledging our shared duty towards it and each other.

Our author may seem an unlikely choice for such a topic which raises the question: why single out Hannah Arendt on the issue of spatial ontology in the first place? The answer, I argue, is that without sustained attention to this component of her work — which tends to be overlooked — much of what Arendt has to teach us about worldly existence is lost.¹ In particular, her understanding of the phenomenality of living beings, that is, of appearance as the defining feature of life, remains out of reach. In fact, Arendt was among the first of her generation to recognise the importance of the spatial elements of existence. Mustafa Dikeç notes she was “one of the pioneers of such ‘space talk’” well before the ‘space turn’ in the 1980’s.² In general, the topic of space has been neglected. When we do think about space our conception of it is often defined as ‘empty space’, as geometric space, or even colloquially as something that is simply filled with air. Few understand how much work Arendt has devoted to the topic of spatial existence.

¹ Exceptions to this are the works of Kelly Oliver, Barnard Debarbieux, and Patchen Markell whose work I refer to throughout the dissertation. See Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World: Philosophy After the Apollo Missions*, (New York: Columbia University Press. 2015); Barnard Debarbieux, “Hannah Arendt’s spatial thinking: an introduction.” *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 5 no. 4, (2016); Patchen Markell, ‘Arendt’s Work: On the Architecture of “The Human Condition”’ *College Literature* 38, no. 1 (2011).

² Mustafa Dikeç, “Space as a mode of political thinking”, *Geoforum* 43, no. 4 (2012): 670.

Arendt knew first-hand the experiences of displacement and the precarity of statelessness as she herself was stateless for 18 years. She fled Germany, where she was detained for distributing anti-National Socialist material, for Paris in 1933. With her husband, Heinrich Bluecher, she arrived in the U.S.A. in 1940, where 10 years later she eventually received citizenship. She gave an account of her experiences of being a refugee in an essay called “We Refugees,” originally published in the small Jewish journal *Menorah* in 1943. To have a place to which we can belong and in which we can be recognised is a central concern of her work. This impulse leads Arendt to eventually declare that “[l]iving beings, men [sic] and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world*.” This project asks: what does it mean to be of the world à la Arendt? Arendt is a philosopher of particulars, she is not speaking about universal Being but fundamentally located, that is, spatialised existence. As such, she begins with the plural nature of earthly existence. She influentially asserted that human beings exist in the plural, castigating the revered notion of Man in the singular, choosing to begin instead from the preposition that human beings arrive in a space that is already inhabited by others. Arendt would extend this principle beyond human beings to the non-human. Nothing exists in isolation, hence, plurality is the law of the earth.

This project is dedicated to the premise that we are of the world for the following reasons. First, the fundamental connection between humanity and the earth is called into question. A consequence of this is that it becomes difficult to think our connection to the earth in a meaningful way. The second reason resides in the social and political imperative to re- situate ourselves within the new, emerging picture of the earth and the natural world. The inability to comprehend our place in the world has led to the series of climate disasters occurring at an accelerating pace. These events create new challenges, namely, that in rendering areas uninhabitable, large swaths of the population are forcibly uprooted and displaced from their homes. This dissertation contends that recognising the spatialised fundamental structure of existence sheds light on experiences of displacement and homelessness for which Arendt’s work is a helpful resource.

Uprootedness, Arendt warned, was one of the major problems of her time. It also is of ours. As such, the first premise — difficulty in understanding our place within the natural world — is further worsened by rapid change occurring in the earth itself. The habitability of the earth is decreasing which in turn affects our relationship to it. It may seem to us that the earth is undergoing a rebellion against the conditions inflicted on it. Displacement is not new. After the Second World War, the need for a new classification of asylum seeker led to the United Nation’s 1951 Refugee

Convention and its 1967 Protocol.³ However, increasing global environmental disasters have shown we need to further extend definitions and protections to those forcibly displaced due to climate related disasters. The situation of climate refugees is not sufficiently captured in economic terms (immigrant) nor even humanitarian (displaced persons, climate refugee). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, climate refugees are not covered under the internationally accepted reason for seeking asylum. Currently, the Convention only pertains to those who are at fear of persecution due to race, religion, political opinion and who are reasonably unable to seek asylum in their own countries.

Since 2008, approximately 376 million people have been displaced because of climate disasters and this number is projected to double by 2050, reinforcing calls for environmental disasters to be classified and properly addressed.⁴ Currently, 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in zones which are highly vulnerable to climate change.⁵ Yet current data is incomplete. Most empirical research focuses on internal displacement, creating a gap in what we know concerning cross-border migration. Efforts to formally acknowledge the connection between biosphere degradation and forced migration are ongoing. Moves to afford humanitarian protections to people displaced as a consequence of climate change continue to encounter obstacles even at a definitional level. Other obstacles issue from resistance concerning who is to blame and who holds primary responsibility, and hence is liable, to offer protection to climate refugees. This debate constitutes a burden of proof for those seeking refuge. The bestowal of rights and protections entail a clear cause and effect between one nation in one part of the world and events in another.

In Arendt, we find a resource for understanding our place in the world, and why misunderstandings persist today. Namely, Arendt highlights the reductive approach with which we understand not only nature but phenomenal reality itself. Because of the epistemic faith we continuously place in our dealing with the world,

³ Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as “a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him— or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.” In “The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol”, accessed July, 11, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4ec262df9.pdf>

⁴ “The concept of ‘climate refugee’: Towards a possible definition,” European Parliamentary Research Service, accessed June 29, 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698753/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698753_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698753/EPRS_BRI(2021)698753_EN.pdf)

⁵ “IPCC, 2023: Summary for Policymakers,” Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report, accessed February 1, 2024 https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf

we have subverted a crucial aspect of worldly existence, its sheer phenomenality. Apprehending phenomena is to render them in terms of an ongoing development. This acts upon the stability of worldly phenomena, transforming them into sheer movement. This denigrates the inherent meaning of events within their original context and instead situates them in an overarching process.

Arendt offers a remedial course of action in her reconceptualisation of earth-world that begins with acknowledging the obvious circumstances of our spatial embeddedness. Her celebrated notions of plurality, multi-perspectivism, and positionality are made possible because we are first and foremost spatial beings. Space and existence are inherently meaningful, not empty and abstract. In this way we are *of the world*, we are not simply *in* it nor is it simply *around* us. Being of the world entails ethical responsibility for the earth that complements environmental ethical theory.⁶ If we are to reevaluate our relation and engagement with the earth, surely we cannot, even in our most noble attempts to save it, take the spatial conditions of life on this planet as a secondary feature. Nor can we think of life and what we owe to living beings in the absence of the very condition of what makes life possible in the first place. Thinking spatially, as Arendt did, prevents us from taking a reductive approach to both the biggest problem of our time.

Arendt's insights are based in her own experiences of statelessness. Being an outsider has shaped her approach to philosophy. Reluctant to be completely defined by one tradition, her work displays an idiosyncratic style and unique perspectives on both the events of her time and authors within the history of philosophy whose thought she regularly engages. It is to her unique methodology we now turn in order to situate and place her thought in the context of the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions.

⁶ Attfield summarizes the core of environmental ethics as "the study of the ethics of human interactions with and impacts on [objective encompassing systems of nature]." Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics : An Overview for the Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 15; Peter Singer defines environmental ethics as "a field of applied ethics concerned with the natural environment, including its instrumental value for human beings and other animals and its possible intrinsic value." Peter Singer, "Environmental Ethics", accessed May 17, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/environmental-ethics-philosophy>

Hannah Arendt's methodology: hermeneutic phenomenology

Much ink has been spilt characterising Hannah Arendt's work. Her style of philosophy is itself a challenge to the Western tradition's prioritisation of absolute Truth and anaemic methodological rigour which she believed obscures the very phenomena we wish to understand. Her work has been praised for the manner in which her thought challenges some basic metaphysical suppositions that are the bedrock of traditional philosophy. For instance, increasingly popular is the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to Arendt's *vita activa*,⁷ as well as her philosophical anthropology of the human condition.⁸ Other influential features of her work include her quest to "think through the breach in tradition" characterised by the modern condition,⁹ and her defence of the *bios politikos*.¹⁰ Her alternative concept of power has proved instrumental to those who seek to instantiate public relations without reliance on hierarchical and strategic socio-political structures,¹¹ as well as the forms of social cohesion and togetherness it engenders.¹² Her insight into the nature of evil and the mechanisms of totalitarianism is still relevant today,

⁷ See Michael Marder, "Nativity, Event, Revolution: The Political Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44, no. 3 (2013): 302-320.; James G Hart, "Hannah Arendt: The Care of the World and of the Self," *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy. Contributions to Phenomenology*, 47 (2002).

⁸ See Veronica Vasterling, "Hannah Arendt," in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. Luft, S., & Overgaard, S. (Routledge 2011): 86-7, 84; Veronica Vasterling, "Plural Perspectives and Independence," in *The other: feminist reflections in ethics*. ed. Helen Fielding, Hiltmann Gabrielle, Olkowski Dorothea & Reichold Anne. (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007): 246; Marieke Borren, "A Sense of the World': Hannah Arendt's Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21 no. 2 (2013): 227, 235-36; Paul Ricoeur, "Action, Story and History: On Re-Reading *The Human Condition*," *Salmagundi*, no. 60 (1983): 60-72.

⁹ Antonia Grunenberg, and Adrian Daub, "Arendt, Heidegger, Jaspers: Thinking Through the Breach in Tradition," *Social Research* 74, no. 4 (2007): 1003-28; See *The Human Condition* Introduction by Margaret Canovan, in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1958): vii-xx.

¹⁰ Jacques Taminiaux, "Bios politikos and bios theoretikos in the Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 4 no. 2 (1996), 215-232.

¹¹ Amy Allen, "Solidarity after identity politics: Hannah Arendt and the power of feminist theory," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25 no. 1(1999), 97-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019145379902500105>; Jürgen Habermas, and Thomas McCarthy. "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," *Social Research* 44, no. 1

¹² Ken Reshaur, "Concepts of Solidarity in the Political Theory of Hannah Arendt," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 25, no. 4 (1992): 723-36; Allen, "Solidarity after identity politics" 97-118; Sophie Loidolt, "Hannah Arendt's Conception of Actualized Plurality," *Phenomenology of Sociality*, (Routledge 2015): 42-55.

over 70 years after it was original published.¹³ All have in common an appreciation of how her work challenges common convictions, be they intellectual or political. She is an outsider both in terms of a disciplinary methodology and what was considered 'normal' in her social and intellectual milieu.

Some turn to her work out of a sense of vexation with traditional philosophy and what are often perceived to be its metaphysical distortions.¹⁴ A prominent example is her idea of plurality, which, as mentioned in the introduction, is understood as uniqueness and equality. This stands in opposition to the traditional emphasis on a singular and an epistemologically accessible human essence.¹⁵ A growing body of literature frequently makes recourse to Arendt's conceptualisation of the human conditions and the activities that arise from them.¹⁶ And yet Arendt remains an enigmatic figure within the philosophical canon.¹⁷

Despite its challenges, her methodology is neither arbitrary nor idiosyncratic but deeply influenced by hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions. Accounting for Arendt's spatial ontology renders her perceived idiosyncratic use of traditional philosophical concepts more intelligible and convincing. Arendt moves away from classical ontology and metaphysics. For her, traditional metaphysics is belied by the notion that the world as it appears actively conceals the true world, which resides behind appearance. Accordingly, the intelligibility of the world lies not in things as they appear to ordinary experience but through deconstructing and destroying appearances to arrive at their causal, and hence true, origin.¹⁸ Phenomenologists reject the traditional dualism between subject and object, and dichotomies like the world and the individual, and hence they never attempt to analyse any phenomena from a completely detached position. Phenomenology recognises the inherent

¹³ Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Why Arendt Matters*. (Yale University Press, 2006); Borren, 'A Sense of the World'; Grunenberg, 'Arendt, Heidegger, Jaspers'; Serena Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: A Phenomenology of Human Rights*. (New York: Routledge 2007).

¹⁴ See Vasterling, "Hannah Arendt" 82-91; Dana R Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. (Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ See Loidolt, 'Hannah Arendt's Concept of Actualized Plurality'; Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

¹⁶ See Borren, "A sense of the World" 227, 235-36; Kieran Bonner, "Arendt's Multi-Perspectivism and the Tenderization between Place and Space" in *Place, Space and Hermeneutics* ed. B. Janz (Springer 2017): 214, 217; Alice MacLachlan, An Ethic of Plurality: Reconciling Politics and Morality in Hannah Arendt. *History and Judgment: IWM JVF Conference Vol. 21*. (2006).

¹⁷ Kimberley Maslin also notes Arendt's difficult classification both personally and professionally in Kimberley Maslin, *The Experiential Ontology of Hannah Arendt*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020): 57.

¹⁸ Laura Boella, "Phenomenology and Ontology: Hannah Arendt and Maurice Merleau-Ponty," in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective*, (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1993), 172.

relatedness between subjects and their world. As such, the world is a central theme in both phenomenological and hermeneutic disciplines.

However, Arendt's relationship to the phenomenological tradition is not uncomplicated. Dermot Moran describes her method as "a species of phenomenology," with a special interest in phenomenology of public spaces as the space of appearances (*die Öffentlichkeit*).¹⁹ This interest in public space is because such space is understood to be the site of human action. This conception of action is inspired by the Greek notion of *praxis*. Our own interest lies in the phenomenological conception of these public spaces as sites of genuine action. This public rendering of action is, *pace* Moran, Arendt's real contribution to the phenomenological tradition.²⁰ What interested Arendt in the, at the time, new movement of phenomenology was Husserl's assertion '*Zu den Sachen selbst*', that is, to return to the thing themselves which was taken in its "anti-historical and anti-metaphysical implications."²¹

Arendt's role in the phenomenological movement is perceived largely as deconstructive in the sense she sets out to "dismantle" traditional metaphysics as the source of a serious discrepancy between the world in which we live and our capacity to think or to remove ourselves temporarily from our engagement with the world in order to reflect.²²

In this way, Arendt is far removed from classical or transcendental phenomenology, *à la* Edmund Husserl, for whom the main question of phenomenology was to account for the fact that subjectivity can know objectivity, or in Husserl's own terms: "How are we to understand the fact that the intrinsic being (*das "an-sich"*) of objectivity becomes "presented," "apprehended" in knowledge, and so ends up becoming subjective?"²³ Arendt was critical, to put it mildly, about the possibility of transparent, absolute subjectivity as well as the existence of a successful, systematic study of features of consciousness *qua* phenomenological method. Arendt displays no desire, let alone a belief, in a knowable, essential content of

¹⁹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to phenomenology* (New York: Routledge 2000), 287.

²⁰ Moran avers that Arendt actually proposes a new, third category in how human beings relate to their world. In distinction to the traditional categories of *Zuhandensein* and *Vorhandensein*, Arendt proposes 'action' as an essential mode of being in world (Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 289).

²¹ Arendt, *Life of the Mind II*, 9. See also Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 288.

²² Arendt, *Life of the Mind I*, 25.

²³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul/Humanities Press, 1970), 169.

experience. She cautions strongly against any impulse to conclude that even some features of existence are subjectively constituted and that the study of the acts of consciousness can lead us to a more authentic experience of the world. Thus, she rejects the various methodological reductions which the founder of phenomenology saw as imperative to the movement. Husserl's later work, *Crisis of European Sciences* (1936), with its introduction of the *Lebenswelt*, is particularly significant for the second generation of phenomenologists, the most significant of whom is Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl and Arendt's teacher. The lifeworld represents the ever-present background of cultural knowledge in any given community. This background is always taken for granted and as such, requires thematic elucidation, which is a goal of phenomenological research.

Heidegger's radical break from his mentor's instantiation of phenomenology is anti-Cartesian and anti-epistemological. Relevant for our purpose here is Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world as an *engaged* mode of existing in a world that precedes and exceeds human beings. Being-in-the-world issues a direct challenge to dualistic conceptions of human-environment relations. In contrast to these conceptions, human existence, or in Heideggerian parlance, *Dasein*, is always already engaged in a world of historical and cultural meaning. Charles Guignon explains that "Dasein is an entity that is unique among other entities insofar as it is defined by a relation it has to itself."²⁴ Due to this original condition of human existence, it is not necessary to perform a series of abstract reflections in order to know what a thing is. This, in fact, would be to distort the essence of thing under consideration. Even other people are always already in the world (*Mitwelt*) and we encounter their being in the world in the way we understand or experience things of the world — that is, in an uncomplicated and meaningful manner.

This manner of being there as immediately meaningfully experienced is referred to as 'disclosedness'. Thomas Sheehan summarises this point in Heidegger nicely: "When things are discovered in such a relation with human beings within a given context, they make sense. And world is the concatenation of relations which brings that about."²⁵ For Heidegger, one can engage with the world and with the realisation of one's existence in an authentic and inauthentic manner. Heidegger believed that the public nature of the world, while a necessary condition of existence, also contains the possibility of leading one to an inauthentic existence.

²⁴ Charles Guignon, "Authenticity and the Question of Being", in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self*, (Routledge, 2014): 10.

²⁵ Thomas Sheehan, "What, after All, Was Heidegger About?" *Continental Philosophy Review* 47 no. 3-4 (2014): 256.

This inauthenticity is brought about through an engagement with the world and others that cancels rather than discloses Dasein's true nature. One such example of this corruption for Heidegger resides in the nature of the public realm. Instead of facing up to the fact of our existence, an anxiety-inducing task *par excellence*, the public realm, thwarts this effort and instead offers a more comfortable but inauthentic way of being. The un-individuated and 'fallen' nature of the world is the first major departure Arendt makes from Heideggerian phenomenology.

For Arendt, the public realm offers the opportunity to appear to others and hence become individuated, or in her words, to become a 'someone': "[...] it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and worse, who they are and what they can do[...]."²⁶ Arendt does in fact agree that there are modes of being together that are in that sense 'inauthentic'. This insight she credits Heidegger and his account of 'idle talk' and his conception of 'das Man' (the they), a sort of mob-like existence in which one's judgment is not one's own but dictated by conventions. Crucially, however, Arendt does not let this phenomenon define the public sphere. Instead, for Arendt, it is only in being together with others that people have a chance to show, even to create to a certain extent, who they are in their own identity. In this sense, the world for Arendt has an intrinsic, shared publicness to it. Her phenomenological rendering of world as the space of appearances is not the same of the world as the horizon of perception.

For Arendt, the world is not an irrelevant backdrop to the phenomena in question. Instead, the world forms a meaningful context in which it is possible for phenomena, events, and actions to appear. The phenomenological world is the prescientific world where meaning is simultaneously created and established. In this way, phenomenologists believe that the effort to move beyond appearances, beyond phenomena, to uncover a truer state of affairs is a mistake. The belief that the appearance of something initially conceals the real nature of the thing belongs to the old metaphysical fallacies and is the basis of modern science. Phenomenologists hold that the world as meaningful is directly accessible and contestable (hence the emphasis on hermeneutics) to those who live in it.

Arendt, in keeping with the spirit of phenomenology, holds that human existence is co-original with having a world. Marieke Borren brings this important point to bear in her analysis of the nature of common sense.²⁷ This co-originality once again

²⁶ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, viii.

²⁷ Borren, 'A Sense of the World' 2013.

precludes any dualism in the form of subject-object dichotomy, in this case, where the subject is the individual and the object is the environment. Like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Arendt begins from the recognition that human beings are not *in* the world but *of* the world. The consequences of this means it is impossible to cleanly separate each from the other and arrive at a better understanding of either. But unlike many other philosophers of her time, Arendt took her recognition of the conditions of existence a step further when she instantiated the notion of plurality as a basic and fundamental fact of worldly existence.²⁸ This is to say that Arendt not only acknowledges the worldly context of existence but also the fact that this world is shared with others, without whom our experiences of the world would be incomplete.

One of the core principles of phenomenology is that experience is necessarily limited. It is impossible to perceive a thing all at once, that is, to achieve a total and perfect grasp of an object. Instead, we encounter the world and all in it in a partial but no less meaningful manner. This phenomenological partiality stems from the fact that we inhabit different and changing positions in the world. Not only does this lead to different physical perspectives but also to subjective, experiential perspectives which need to be communicated in order to be known to others. Hence the world for Arendt as a phenomenologist contains difference and sameness: one and same world supports multiple and even conflicting experiences. Arendtian action as both speech and deed is paramount to her philosophy. In particular her emphasis on communication not as consensus-seeking but as a distinct mode of being in the world has been influential. With this, we now turn to the role of communication, interpretation, and contestation in Arendt.

A sort of hermeneutics: talking to shadows

Arendt's intention was to offer a plurality of perspectives on any issue. The sheer variety of interpretations, approaches, intellectual 'camps' which her work facilitates is not a weakness of ambiguity but the core of what she offers philosophy. To this end, the positions she takes in her work never remain the same throughout a text. True to her idea of 'objectivity', Arendt inhabits multiple perspectives — often without alerting her reader to the perspectival shift — in order to illuminate a matter from different, sometimes even contradictory dimensions. Examples are replete throughout her oeuvre but for our goal here I draw attention to those that occur in *The Human Condition* and the *Life of the Mind*. Both of these texts exhibit a fluidity of thinking which moves often seamlessly, sometimes abruptly, from

²⁸ Arendt, *Life of the Mind I*, 20.

one point of view to another.²⁹ For instance, *The Human Condition* describes the activities of the *vita activa* not only as they appear to another — labour appears as futile to work, as meaningless to action; action as superfluous to labour and useless to work — but also as they appear from the point of the *vita contemplativa*. From the perspective of the latter, the active life is undependable, volatile and a distraction. For the *vita activa* it is the life of contemplation which seems irrelevant to the point of ridiculousness.

In this way, the characteristics of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* come to the fore. Each is perceived in terms of their relation to the other. Arendt even chastises Plato's inability to see from the perspective of the Thracian maid who laughs at the sight of Thales failing to notice the well at his feet because he sees only the stars above his head.³⁰ A methodological point of note is how this multiple perspective taking often makes it difficult to say with finality what a thing is because they change or alter depending on one's perspective. Thus, the *vita contemplativa* is shown both as the highest form of life and simultaneously an unworthy pastime.

The author bears witness to and enacts the irreducible diversity of perspectives and appearances made possible due to the spatial inhabiting of different locations. Here, positions do not refer to argumentative or dialogical position-taking but instead to the manner in which something appears based on one's perspective both spatially and experientially. A significant term for Arendt is 'dokei-moi' or the 'it-seems-to-me'. Arendt never explores an issue from a pure, objectivist stance but always from a partial, flawed yet lived perspective. Nothing is explored 'in-itself' or from a 'view from nowhere', for such an analysis would betray her criticism of the epistemological and metaphysical idea of Truth which is so starkly rebukes. So skeptical was Arendt towards this philosophical tendency that she grounds the plurality of perspectives in the ontological structure of consciousness or, in her words, of thinking. In order for one to think (which is different from cognition) one must be able to actualise the 'soundless two-in-one', in other words, thinking entails a conversation with oneself, as with the Socratic tradition. Arendt's entire works are the actualisation of this ability, she is recording her thought process as it moves through one issue to another, untangling problems and creating others.

²⁹ Arendt uses phrases such as "seen from this viewpoint" or "from this perspective..." when she explores a subject matter from another, often contrary position. For examples see *The Human Condition*, 15, 16, 44, 56, 69, 72, 88, 99-100, 108, 137, 157, 179, 213, 215, 236, 246, and 248. For *Life of the Mind*, see *Life of the Mind I*, 6, 20, 22, 26, 27, 38, 44, 57, 71, 72, 83, 87, 176, 200, 204-205, 209.

³⁰ Arendt, *Life of the Mind I*, 82.

However, Arendt also ‘converses’ with figures from the philosophical tradition, inviting their ideas into this intimate dialogue. Of course, this means she is dealing with authors as they are represented by tradition, and not primarily how they present themselves exegetically. This has led to much frustration and criticism of Arendt’s ‘skewed’ and unfair presentation of philosophical ideas and ideals. While at times Arendt’s lack of systematicity is lamentable, nonetheless, fixation on this point is to miss what she does offer: an honest reckoning of the consequences of the Western philosophical tradition, as they manifest outside the canon. Arendt may, in a way, be speaking to shadows when she performs an analysis, but, in her defence, some have cast a long shadow over tradition.

Yet, her method remains frustratingly evasive at times even for her most generous readers. Richard Bernstein believed that this was not accidental noting that Arendt never “discusses methodological problems” as she believed they had a tendency to neglect “substantive issues.”³¹ In other words, despite the importance of methodology in her work, Arendt intentionally fails to make her approach explicit so that the actual matters under consideration remain the central focus. The implications of her method bear consequences for the reception of *The Human Condition*. We find a brief note in the introduction:

The purpose of the historical analysis, on the other hand, is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins, in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of society as it had developed and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and yet unknown age.³²

Given this ulterior motive, Arendt is notoriously difficult to classify as an author. She has, on rare occasion, made this difficulty clear to the public, hesitantly describing herself as a political theorist, if anything. And yet, while her work lends itself to many approaches, philosophical, political, anthropological, historical, it remains nevertheless true that her works cannot be sufficiently defined by any traditional category. It is precisely these rigid characterisations that she resists. Concepts inherited by Western tradition, she avers, have become atrophied and now tend to obscure the true nature of phenomena. In order to uncover the original experiences that once inspired and informed tradition, Arendt found it necessary to break away

³¹ Bernstein, Richard J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 161.

³² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 6.

from traditional modes of thought and established disciplines. For this reason, Arendt is difficult to read for one seeking systematicity and clear classifications in her work. Ernst Vollrath described her as an “incomparable” thinker, rendering any attempt to classify Arendt in the known schools of philosophy and political theory futile.³³

And yet, her desire is not simply to dispel misapprehensions, prejudice, nor antiquated tradition. Convention, including prejudice, according to her contain kernels of wisdom founded upon past experience. In other words, it is not simply error and ignorance that leads to prejudice but a failure to examine and understand the underlying experiences which give rise to convention in the first place. “Upon closer examination, we realize that a genuine prejudice always conceals some previously formed judgment which originally had its own appropriate and legitimate experiential basis, and which evolved into a prejudice only because it was dragged through time without its ever being reexamined or revised.”³⁴ The *vita activa* along with the *vita contemplativa* are two such domains that, despite their overwhelming influence on both philosophy and politics, remain insufficiently examined and uncritically taken for granted.

This ‘taken-for-granted-ness’ is a feature of tradition and is the reason why it is difficult to critically engage with. It is a standard in the most authentic sense. Traditional standards are only ever appealed to, never called into question, and by which all current matters are judged to be right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. Standards draw their authority from the past, not from judgment. The danger of prejudice lies in the very fact that it is always anchored in the past—so uncommonly well-anchored that it not only anticipates and blocks judgment, but also makes both judgment and a genuine experience of the present difficult. If we want to dispel prejudices, we must first discover the past judgments contained within them, which is to say, we must reveal whatever truth lies within them.³⁵

This constitutes one of the primary concerns of *The Human Condition* and, subsequently, the justification for its unorthodox method. This methodology

³³ Ernst Vollrath, Hans Fantel. “Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking.” *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 160.

³⁴ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 101.

³⁵ Ibid.

is perhaps best described by the author herself as “pearl diving.”³⁶ Her thinking process is like a “pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past – but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages.”³⁷ In this case, the pearl diver is the thinker who metaphorically descends through the layers of the tradition of thought in order to reach the original source, a treasure hidden and sedimented over by time and thought, becoming further and further removed from the origin that inspired it. This is Arendt’s method of thinking with texts and historical figures that spur her into thought.

Those who wish to read Arendt in a fruitful manner would do well to understand her method. Explicating two dominant components of Arendt’s methodology shows her work to be neither unsystematic nor entirely idiosyncratic. Moreover, Arendt has inspired the methodology of this dissertation. While there is much to disagree with regarding some of her statements and conclusions,³⁸ this is not to diminish the valuable insights she has to offer. To appreciate this, however, one must follow her thought process to the end. This is not simply to acquiesce to everything she endorses but rather, like the pearl diver, to be patient in recovering what is valuable but lies hidden.

³⁶ Arendt’s description of Walter Benjamin, *Men in Dark Times*: “he knew, on the other hand, that there is no more effective way to break the spell of tradition than to cut out the ‘rich and strange,’ coral and pearls, from what had been handed down in one solid piece.” (Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 196)

³⁷ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 205.

³⁸ Arendt’s essay, ‘Reflections on Little Rock,’ has been rightly criticized for her evident failure to appreciate the socio-political dimensions at stake during efforts to reform the segregated American educational system to which the piece refers. Arendt herself issued a response to the piece in which she acknowledges her misjudgment on the matter. See Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” *Dissent*, (Winter 1959). Her seeming blindness and even lack of empathy towards the desegregation movement stems from the conceptual spatial distinction between the social and political realms. For her, segregation is a form of social discrimination which cannot adequately be resolved by political means. “Segregation,” she writes, “is discrimination enforced by law, and desegregation can do no more than abolish the laws enforcing discrimination: it cannot abolish discrimination and force equality upon society, but it can, and indeed must, enforce equality within the body politic.” (Arendt, *Dissent*, 50). In the case of ‘Reflections on Little Rock’ it appears Arendt has fallen victim to her own critique; never allow methodological rigor to misconstrue the meaning of events.

Dissertation overview

Arendt states that human beings are of the world, not simply in it. This dissertation attempts to understand the significance of this statement by developing an explicit interpretation of Arendt as a spatial philosopher. Arendt's work operates by calling into question the way in which humanity conceptualises and engages with the world. Her awareness of the primacy of our spatial embeddedness in the world acts as a unifying structure that affords an irreducible dignity to the world and those who live in it.

Arendt's view is distinguished from the dominant position that holds an instrumental and domineering logic, one which tends to abstract from our surroundings, taking them for granted. This process of abstraction neglects the spatially embodied component of worldly existence. Following Arendt, this dissertation argues that a sustainable relationship with the earth is possible only if we first acknowledge our original spatial positioning. Understanding her political philosophy necessitates understanding the different aspects of her spatial ontology, which thus far has been underdeveloped in the secondary literature.

Arendt claims that we, human beings, are *of the world*, not simply in it. When we think about our relationship to the world, we tend to abstract from our surroundings, taking them for granted and ultimately neglecting this fundamental component of existence. Contra attempts to see the earth as something to be conquered and mastered; our embeddedness in the earth renders such a move politically nefarious.³⁹ Such mastery relies on the possibility of inhabiting an 'objective' 'position' outside everyday human experience. Rejecting such an approach maintains that such a viewpoint is impossible. Instead, this dissertation argues that a sustainable relation with the earth is possible only if we first acknowledge our original, spatial positioning.

What Arendt brings to the table is to start with the self-evident, that is, she attempts to think through the embedded nature of worldly existence. For her, it is not only a question of who we are but of *where* we are that is significant. To this end, we miss something if we overlook the presence of a spatial ontology in Arendt's work. One of the difficulties of the topic of space in Arendt, is that she is often taken to not

³⁹ Kelly Oliver makes the nefarious nature of such projects explicit by providing an interesting comparison between the ideals of the One World and Whole Earth movements in the 1970's. The former relies on technoscientific optimism to unite all nations, whereas the latter emphasizes the organic connectedness of life on earth by virtue of a shared biospherical home. See Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World*, 15.

have anything to say on the topic beyond her now well-known dubious distinctions between earth/world, public/private, and social realms. Moreover, concerning the bifurcation of natural and artificial space, what Arendt is renowned to have said on the matter would seem to bar her from some of the most important debates pertaining to human-nature engagement.

The goal is to bring Arendt into these debates by showing that she has more to offer on the topic than she is currently given credit for. To achieve this, two initial moves are necessary. Chapter two engages with two common readings of Hannah Arendt's philosophy: the dualist and temporal interpretations. The dualist reading concerns Arendt's bifurcated notion of space, natural-artificial, public-private, and the infelicitous mix of the two, the social. It is necessary to nuance these rigid conceptual dichotomies in order to make space, as it were, for a different perception of Arendt, one which is, in fact, in tension with her own work and with the tradition from which she so heavily draws on in *The Human Condition*. The temporal reading deserved attention for the simple fact that it has received such sustained analysis in the reception of Arendt's thought. While important to her overall philosophy, often the focus on the temporal conditions of her work tend to be at the expense of the spatial. As an instantiation of this, I use the example of 'worldly freedom', a crucial concept for Arendt. Understanding Arendtian freedom requires we also understand what she means by contingency, which rejects deterministic conceptions of will and causal understanding of time. What receives less attention, perhaps because it is taken for granted, is the other side of the coin, the world in 'worldly freedom'. Arendt characterises the worldly component of freedom in terms of an 'insertion' *via* speech and action and hence is often described as a performative moment. However, the world is more than a stage in a performative sense — facilitating our political arrival. The world is a stabilising structure which is not only limited to artificial spaces.

Chapter three deals explicitly with the spatial philosophy at work in *The Human Condition*. We do so by looking at the major themes of the text in light of the topic of world- alienation. It starts by exploring the three 'rebellions' against earthly existence which ultimately lead to world alienation. These are rebellion against the limits of the earth, the conditions of labour, and the biological circumstances surrounding the creation of life. After establishing Arendt's concern with humanity's increasing alienation from the earth and the world, we turn to two central topics of the book: the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Much of Arendt's characterisations of world, earth, freedom, and action stem from a comparison between these modes of living. Acknowledging such goes a long way to nuancing

and understanding Arendt's, at times, idiosyncratic descriptions. The significance of the activities within the *vita activa* — labour work and action — for Arendt's entire work necessitates a sustained analysis of her most famous text. Her underlying concern is the estrangement of humanity from the conditions of human existence. This estrangement primarily takes the form of spatial alienation.

There is an urgency in taking the issue of our spatial conditioning seriously. As chapter four explains, Arendt was aware of the ways space can be pathologized. The main culprit here is what I refer to as 'processual thinking'. This form of thinking amounts to an engagement and understanding which undermines the stability of the world. Here, 'process' refers to various stages of becoming and it relies on the assumption that hidden causes lurking 'behind' phenomena are more reliable and thus truer than what actually manifests. This is key to the belief that technologically mediated knowledge is closer to truth than sense experience. In this way what is hidden is granted a higher status than what appears and that, moreover, process also implies the quality of progress. Modern thought, for Arendt, is best characterised by this ideal. This is to say that ideals of development, advancement, betterment, are contained within the process. Yet, rather than leading to humankind's betterment Arendt shows how the earth and the human condition of worldliness are endangered.

The fourth chapter traces the rise of processual thinking beginning with Arendt's historical exposition. I condense this thread in her work into 4 elements: historical time, hegemonic scientific worldview, subjectivation, and the process character of action. The key features of the rise of process are: 1. The chronological unfolding of time whereby history is cast in terms of historical process. Under this view, historical events are uprooted from their original context and history is now understood as an independent process. This independence is owed to internal laws, such as in Christian, Hegelian, Marxist, and evolutionary thought.

1. The hegemonic scientific worldview originates from doubt concerning our acquisition of knowledge. Ultimately, this concerns the unreliability of the sense initiated with Galileo's delivery using the telescope leading to 'disastrous blow' to confidence in the senses.
2. Subjectivation follows this radical doubt. It concerns the principle that we can only truly know what we have ourselves made. With this, we see the rise of the experiment and valorisation of interior processes. This move is a direct challenge to what Arendt understands as common sense. For us, the main point is that we have traded stability for certainty, which are not the same.

4. The process character of action develops the qualities of action I explain in chapter 3. Action contains the elements of unpredictability and even instability (we cannot control the outcomes fully). Because of this, humanity possess the capacity to set in motion deleterious forces that have the potential to endanger to conditions of life and earth.

The crux of Arendt's criticism resides in the fact that process ideology harms the ontic- ontological structures of the world, because it degrades them into moments of an overarching development. Arendt's remedy entails her anti-metaphysical project for which spatial framework is crucial. Using it she transforms conventional metaphysical ideals and renders them in spatial terms. To show how she does this, I focus on three key notions: life and death, time and reality. Recall, life and death for example, are reformulated in spatial terms as appearance and disappearance *from the perspective of the world*. The habitability of the earth is threatened, uprooting and displacing people from their homes. This problem will only worsen in the future.⁴⁰ A unique access to ecological debates, specifically the problem of displacement and homelessness, opens up in light of a reconsideration of Arendt's understanding of space. It becomes possible to explore the 'natural world' in light of a phenomenal ontology made possible by a spatial framework.

Having displayed Arendt's transformative use of space, chapter five explicates four aspects of her spatial ontology which are operational in her work. These are earth, world, nature, and human artifice. I take the time to show how these aspects reveal a more nuanced version of Arendt's understanding of space in contrast to the dichotomous distinctions she is usually associated with. Arendt uses this ontology to transform common metaphysical concepts into a specific spatial rendering. Categories such as birth and death, time, and reality undergo a re-grounding, of sorts, in order to combat the modern tendency of processual thinking. This chapter shows, through a nuanced account of Arendt's theory, the importance and complexity of her account of space, which is often overlooked in the reception of her work.

⁴⁰ A report by The future of climate migration concludes "Climate change is expected to lead to increasingly large-scale migration from vulnerable regions. The EU cannot overcome this challenge acting alone; it must encourage a global effort to prevent climate crises, identify the areas most at risk and help them build resilience, and deliver humanitarian relief to those driven from their homes." Eamonn Noonan and Ana Rusu, "The future of climate migration", European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729334/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)729334_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729334/EPRS_ATA(2022)729334_EN.pdf) accessed 16/05.2024

Chapter six shows how Arendt's understanding of life and nature is ultimately bound to a spatial framework that is most explicit in the first volume in *The Life of the Mind* but the germs of which are present throughout her work. Chapter six discusses the consequences of Arendt's spatial philosophy for ethical-environmental discourse. It shows Arendt's rejection of functionalist interpretation of living beings and their environment, which are largely informed by a kind of processual thinking. We reveal her alternative approach which places appearance as primary and interprets beings as *phenomenal* beings. It is a mistake, she claims, to place Being over appearing. An example of this hierarchy occurs in many discussions on environmental theory which are belied by the lack of a definitional consensus on what constitutes life. Understanding our spatial embeddedness as the common denominator allows an appreciation of living beings and the world in terms that are not over-reliant on dualisms or even consensus on what exactly something is in order for it to matter. What is gained from Arendt's intervention is the recognition of the insurmountability of the human condition as it pertains to our anthropocentric experience of world and what it means to be uprooted and made homeless.

This dissertation brings to the fore a serious concern regarding the instability of the world and worldly existence. This instability is brought about through human action that issues from a fundamental misunderstanding of the spatial nature of existence. Where else to turn to for the most recent and urgent example of this problem than the climate crisis. The current perspectives of long-term habitability of life on earth worsens with almost each passing day. While attempts to alleviate and mitigate the problem through technological innovation is part of the solution, it cannot be the only solution. It is not radical to say that this crisis is caused, in no small part, due to the way humanity has understood the world and its relationship to it. It is at this fundamental level that Arendt's philosophy has a place in our discourse today. The conclusion summarises my findings and reiterates the main arguments.

Chapter 2.

Hannah Arendt as a Spatial Philosopher

In asserting Arendt as a spatial philosopher, I problematise two dominant readings of her work. The first is what I refer to as the 'dualist reading', while the second concerns the privileging of the temporal aspects of her thought. In brief, the former commits the unfortunately common mistake of using *The Human Condition* (1958) as Arendt's definitive position on a number of issues. The most important issue for us is her spatial framework and in connection to this her concept of the natural. In other words, the dualist reading does not sufficiently capture what Arendt is doing. The result is a bifurcated notion of space that deals in dichotomies, for instance, earth is juxtaposed to world, public space to private space. I deconstruct this binary to reveal a tension in Arendt at the time of writing *The Human Condition* and the multifaceted conception of space that emerges. When it comes to Arendt's philosophical framework, this reading tends to overlook the significant and, indeed messy, aspects of spatial existence in *The Human Condition*, as well as in her later work namely, *The Life of the Mind* (1978).

The Human Condition is regularly read as Arendt's magnum opus and this perception has led many of her readers to take the framework of the text as Arendt's definitive theoretical stance, particularly concerning the spatial distinctions that support much of her analysis within the piece. I show that Arendt's conceptualising of the spatial qualities of existence harbours a philosophical depth that is sometimes missed. With closer attention we see that Arendt was struggling with this component of her thought as well as its consequences for most of her career. This means the spatial segregations she espouses do not remain consistent in her work and often exist in tension with other components of her philosophical framework. Take, for instance, what makes life uniquely human as opposed to mere biological existence. For Arendt, the active manifestation of plurality is essential to the ontological achievement of human status. This achievement is made possible in what she calls the 'space of appearances', that is, a space of free, non-coercive interaction between equal members of a community. The condition of this space is called a 'world' which stands in opposition to natural space. The status of humanity possesses a double ontology which is mirrored in the distinction between natural and artificial space.

In *The Human Condition*, there are two distinct senses of human life, the defining feature of which, I argue, depends on its relationship to space. Humans are at once biological beings and yet they transcend this very condition by transforming natural space to create artificial worlds, and thus there is a tension in Arendt's conception of life. In its relation to nature:

Cyclical, too, is the movement of the living organism, the human body not excluded, as long as it can withstand the process that permeates its being and makes it alive. Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear, until eventually dead matter, the result of small, single, cyclical, life processes, returns into the over-all gigantic circle of nature herself, where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition.¹

Natural or biological life is dominated by a process of consumption and reproduction. "The word 'life,' however, has an altogether different meaning if it is related to the world and meant to designate the time interval between birth and death."² The world establishes the quality of stability and durability for human existence, without which the very concepts of birth and death would be impossible. "Birth and death presuppose a world which is not in constant movement, but whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible, which existed before any one individual appeared into it and will survive his eventual departure."³ The defining characteristic of this second sense of life is the possibility of transforming the events of one's life into a story, a biography. This narrative capacity is impossible without the permanence offered by the world.

The distinction between nature and artifice and the positive association of the latter may lend support to the perception that humanity must 'conquer' the natural to make room for the human world. However, this impulse is rejected in the last section of *The Human Condition*. There, Arendt discloses the events that she believes led to the phenomena of world-alienation. World-alienation began with "man [taking] full possession of his mortal dwelling place," by which she means the Age of Exploration (15th to the 17th century), during which explorers set out to discover new lands and chart the boundaries of the globe. However, this earthly domination has led not to the establishment of a human world (or worlds) but to the opposite: world-alienation.

It is in the nature of the human surveying capacity that it can function only if man disentangles himself from all involvement in and concern with the close at hand and withdraws himself to a distance from everything near him. The greater the distance between himself and his surroundings, world or earth, the more he will be able to

1. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 96

2. *Ibid.*, 97

3. *Ibid.*

survey and to measure and the less will worldly, earth-bound space be left to him. The fact that the decisive shrinkage of the earth was the consequence of the invention of the airplane, that is, of leaving the surface of the earth altogether, is like a symbol for the general phenomenon that any decrease of terrestrial distance can be won only at the price of putting a decisive distance between man and earth, of alienating man from his immediate earthly surroundings.⁴

The above quotation provides a clear sense of Arendt's trepidation concerning the "decisive distance between man and earth" as the price paid for humanity's ability to mentally (and physically) abstract themselves from their original spatial existence and transform this relation into a primarily abstract and idealised one. The result is the "alienating of man from his immediate earthly surroundings." Therefore, the final section of *The Human Condition* does not support the image of Arendt as sociocentric or anthropocentric. Instead, the author warns her readers about the connection between earth-estrangement, accelerated and exacerbated under modern conditions, and world-alienation or a condition of meaninglessness.⁵

It is important to note that Arendt often uses problematic, generalising terms such as 'modern science', the modern age, or 'the social sciences'. It is not clear if we fall under Arendt's classification of modernity. For her, modernity is not only an historical epoch, it is a way of thinking. I believe there are enough similarities between Arendt's critique and our time to maintain an analogy between the two. The point is that we still have much to learn from Arendt's critique of modernity, for, in the main, we are still talking about the same ideas, the same ideals and conceptions of truth and science since the time of the Enlightenment. In this way, Arendt's analogy still holds water and, moreover, remains helpful for readers today.

The temporal reading, on the other hand, promises more than it can deliver. This is not to undermine the significance of temporality in Arendt, rather, I argue that its reception tends to obscure a vital spatial presence of her thought. To this end, I offer a different reading of Arendt, one that places centre-stage the spatial implications of her thought. Take her conception of freedom as 'worldly', for instance, which was mentioned in the introduction.⁶ Much of the temporal reading focuses on the manner in which Arendt rejects a deterministic causal sense of history. The upshot

⁴ Ibid., 251.

⁵ This warning occurs even earlier in the sections on *homo faber* and work, whereby the process of fabrication becomes not a means to an end, but an end value itself. This in turn creates the condition of meaninglessness.

⁶ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 155, 167-168.

is a rejuvenated sense of 'worldly freedom', in which agency is restored to humanity and spontaneous action is once more within the realm of possibilities for human actors. Yet the term '*worldly freedom*' remains underdeveloped. Attention to the temporal nature of freedom alone cannot tell us exhaustively what it means to be free under the condition of earth and world.⁷ Indeed, while it is necessary to become 'unstuck' in time, this approach is unable to account for the conditions of public freedom, the other half of the equation, so to speak. To do this, we must examine freedom in its spatial manifestation. On Arendt's account, freedom is characterised by an 'insertion' into the world under intersubjective, non-coercive conditions. "Freedom," she writes, "needed, in addition to mere liberation, the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them in a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free men could insert himself by word and deed."⁸ Arendt's debunking of historical determinism is but half the story. Less attention has been devoted to understanding her emphasis on the spatial conditions of freedom's actualisation. The phenomenological import of the 'space of appearances' is a good start, however, Arendt's sense of world has become almost synonymous with performative acts in intersubjective and artificial conditions. I aim to restore the different aspects of her spatial ontology that underpin this vital feature of her philosophy. Taking this route through her thought goes a long way to nuancing Arendt's understanding of spatial ontology as well as her later reconsideration of natural and non-human existence. The main point is that much of what Arendt has to offer resides in her spatialisation of human existence, like worldly freedom, plurality, and even life and death. The ontology of earth, nature, and world have a unique significance according to this reading as well as overlooked relevance for the growing concern for a moral ecological theory.

Thus, as a subsequent move, I apply these recovered aspects of an ontology to debates concerned with the status of non-human, environmental entities and their moral implication. The discourse on environmental ethics is dominated by two opposing theories concerning whether the natural world has only instrumental value or whether it possesses intrinsic value. The former holds that, in as far as we can appreciate or value the natural world, it is ultimately due to their usefulness, directly or indirectly, to human interest. For example, there are rows of trees which grow in my neighbourhood. When I hear a neighbour mention, them it is always in the context of the additional sense of privacy they offer residents, so much so that reference to the trees have become virtually synonymous with the value of privacy.

^{7.} Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

^{8.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 148.

Their recognition seems to lie solely on their ability to provide residents with an additional sense of privacy. On a larger, economic scale, the natural world is, first and foremost, a resource for industry. Under a modern industrial paradigm, the value of the natural is immediately rendered in terms of monetary and economic value. We see not a forest but a resource for wood, not a lake but fish to market or even an outsource for industrial waste. Here, the usefulness of the natural world does not exceed its role as a provider of materials for the construction of a human artifice. "Biodiversity today is largely framed around this instrumental value and two concepts in particular: either as a resource to be discovered, measured, and alternately protected, utilized, or capitalized [...] or as an ecosystem asset and service essential for human well-being and sustainable development."⁹

Intrinsic value theorists maintain that the value of the natural world is not reducible to human interest, that is, nature has a non-dependent worth and dignity that exists beyond human beings. Such a position holds that by virtue of their existence, nature generates a direct moral obligation on humans to respect and uphold the integrity of the non-human. The lives and habitats of bees are protected because of the right non-human entities have to exist unmolested regardless of the function they play in, say, pollination or biodiversity.¹⁰ Efforts to secure respect between the human and non-human without recourse to human interest, often entails the ideals of respect, love, and appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of nature.

Both positions harbour difficulties when it comes to establishing a convincing environmental ethic. "In contrast, modernist ontology's focus on human use value and its attendant processes of privatization and economization forecloses the myriad other ways in which people interact with the world and erases long-standing relationships to place."¹¹ We begin with the instrumental account and its acknowledgment of the disequilibrium and destruction of the natural environment due to human activity. This activity is propagated and guided by utilitarian principles in which the value of a non-human entity is derivative of its use to human goals and desires. The instrumentalist approach to environmental ethics proposes that a true account of human interest must recognise the manner by which the integrity of the natural world is vital to human existence and

^{9.} Walker DePuy, Jacob Weger, Katie Foster, Anya. M.Bonanno, Suneel Kumar, Kirsten Lear, Raul Basilio, and Laura German, "Environmental governance: Broadening ontological spaces for a more livable world." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 5 no. 2 (2022): 954.

^{10.} John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value." *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (1992): 119–37; Holmes III. Rolston, "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" *Ethics* 85, no. 2 (1975): 93–109.

^{11.} DePuy, et al., "Environmental governance: Broadening ontological spaces for a more livable world," 956.

human flourishing. Therefore, a thorough utilitarian ethic necessarily entails the recognition and protection of the non-human, for it is in the interest of everyone to live in a habitable world. The main issue of such an approach goes something like the following: can we really solve a problem using the same thinking that created the problem in the first place? If it is our perspective of nature as primarily, if not solely, useful for human interests that gave rise to the current deleterious human-nonhuman relationship, can a moderated version of the same principle ameliorate the situation?¹² Furthermore, because value is derivative of the role a thing plays in the context of human interest, what is to prevent its substitution with another thing that fulfils the same function? By this logic, I can afford, say, less vegetation in my environment if I can maintain oxygen and carbon dioxide levels artificially. What incentivises a farmer to keep cattle if meat is produced synthetically and cheaply, and if she can make more money by selling her land to investors? In other words, if our ethical standards to the world are founded solely upon human interest, is there not a risk of fungibility of non-human entities?

The counter-position, appealing though it may be for those of us who instinctually move to recognise the independent integrity of the natural world, is no less problematic. The main obstacle occurs after this recognition, for even once the dignity of the natural is established that does not necessarily entail any moral obligation to act in its interest. Furthermore, my very ability to recognise the inherent dignity of the natural, devoid of any human interest, remains questionable. Returning to the example of the trees growing in my neighbourhood, my appreciation for them, and subsequent lamentation when some are removed, I justify in terms of their evaluative properties. In other words, I experience the trees as beautiful and therefore feel their absence as a loss. Yet, the aesthetic category is itself an anthropocentric value, meaning the quality of beauty or ugliness depends on human presence.

It would seem, then, that on the one hand we have a problem of being *too* anthropocentric in our relation to the non-human. While on the other, the opposite problem arises, in the effort to establish the independent dignity of the non-human we risk disconnection and indifference. Despite the fact that her work has by and large been perceived to be at best irrelevant and at worst “incongruous” to contemporary ecological consciousness,¹³ Arendt’s entry into this debate comes

¹². Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949; Richard Routley, and Val Routley, ‘Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics’ *Environmental Philosophy*, Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy, (1980): 96-189.

¹³. Simon Swift, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 101.

precisely at this juncture. Her notion of 'conditioned existence' begins with the recognition that existence is essentially spatial. This goes beyond the obvious fact that everything that exists, exists in space — *à la* Aristotle. Its significance lies in a type of *relational* ontology between life and world. This relation is behind her esoteric use of 'appearances' instead of entities, organisms, beings, etc. Her reckoning with the spatial conditions of life on earth allow us to better appreciate what she meant by conditioned existence.¹⁴ Her emphasis is instead on the *positionality* of experiencing beings. This means that, given the fact that everything that happens does so in a location and, thus, in a relation to the fundamental site of earth/world, one needs to become sensitive to the way this relationship manifests. Regardless of what we think about the existence or human essence (or nature), the *structure* of human existence is necessarily conditioned by one's environment or world. There is an essential alterity that constitutes our situatedness, or in Arendt's words, 'life as it is given on this earth.' She laments the modern impulse to replace this alterity with manmade, that is, anthropocentric conditions in order to know reality (or 'Truth'), for this would be to change the world into a laboratory where conditions are determined, controlled, and hence knowable. Such an artificial space would not render true knowledge but only mirror the anthropocentric condition, a circumstance in which humanity "confronts himself alone"¹⁵ and not reality itself.¹⁶ This means that reality is a worldly phenomenon that is accessible to human beings in a limited, yet anthropocentric manner. The attempted eradication of the condition of anthropocentrism for the sake of knowing reality paradoxically leaves nothing but the artificial, the human, devoid of anything beyond itself, and as such, a deformed representation.

The relevance for environmental ethics is clear: the value of worldly existence is neither dependent nor independent of the anthropocentric but a structural condition accessible through recognition of our worldly, spatial embeddedness. Only by respecting these conditions do we attain a sense of the objective, only by upholding the alterity of the world and the conditions of life on this earth can we recognise ourselves in it. It is in the matrix of spatial, worldly existence that we learn about ourselves and our environment, to view one without the other is to distort and misrepresent the most intuitive existential experience, i.e.,

^{14.} Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

^{15.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 277 (quoting *The Physicist's Conception of Nature*).

^{16.} Arendt's point is that 'physical reality' seems to require a purification of worldly experience in order to be able to assess empirical reality: "To understand physical reality seems to demand not only the renunciation of an anthropocentric or geocentric world view, but also a radical elimination of all anthropomorphic elements and principles, as they arise either from the world given to the five human senses or from the categories inherent in the human mind." *Ibid.*, 265.

what it is to take place. Perhaps one reason why Arendt has been under explored within environmental discourse is due to the dominant reception of her work as naively dualistic.

The temporal reading

One of Arendt's most poignant accusations of Western metaphysics is the manner in which it subjects time, causality, and history to an overarching determinate process. This process is defined by a chronologically unfolding *telos*. What is at stake in this view is no less than human freedom itself, for such a position necessarily denies the Augustinian principle of *initium*, of human beings as capable of beginning something new.¹⁷ Under such a view, human agency is reduced to a *Fata Morgana*, an illusion of will. Arendt takes a remedial course of action against this paradigm. Within this context, two main readings of temporality in Arendt occur in the secondary literature. The first concerns the existential implication of features of contingency, natality and mortality which have been neglected by traditional philosophy. These features are endangered by political circumstances and theoretical neglect, and therefore Arendt attempts to rescue these qualities of existence from the modern world and traditional philosophy. The second, on the other hand, focuses on mitigating the consequences of natality and the contingency of existence. The ability to limit and partially control the unpredictability of the future is sought through institutional means. In this way, politics is both the site of freedom and the means to restrict and even eradicate freedom a such.

A good example of our first category is Veronica Vasterling, who credits Arendt for her unique exploration of the traditional metaphysical conceptions of time, which contain Western ideals of freedom.¹⁸ Arendt performs a metaphysical deconstruction of the idea of contingency and necessity in order to rehabilitate contingency as a feature of human existence. "The specific achievement of Arendt's

¹⁷. For more on Arendt's conception of beginning and her critique of absolutes see Adam Lindsay's "Hannah Arendt, the Problem of the Absolute and the Paradox of Constitutionalism, Or: 'How to Restart Time within an Inexorable Time Continuum'" in which Lindsay discusses the 'paradox of constitutionalism', the apparent antagonism between stability and novelty, in light of Arendt's attempt to think these opposed temporalities together. Instead, Arendt approaches constitutional beginnings "as a 'disruption' to the commonplace temporalizations we attribute to our political vocabulary [...]", arguing for the compatibility of stability and novelty. Adam Lindsay, "Hannah Arendt, the Problem of the Absolute and the Paradox of Constitutionalism, Or: 'How to Restart Time within an Inexorable Time Continuum'." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 43 no. 10 (2017): 1022–44.

¹⁸. Vasterling, 'Contingency, Newness, and Freedom', 135.

work [...] is to provide an extensive phenomenological elucidation of the political consequences of the metaphysical hierarchy and its underlying conception, or, rather, denial of contingency and newness.”¹⁹ Vasterling contends that Arendt’s rejection of the metaphysical valorisation of the unchanging and eternal over contingency means freedom is realised as a worldly reality actualised within the political arena.²⁰ Likewise, Peg Birmingham, in her article ‘Holes of Oblivion: The Banality of Radical Evil’, discusses totalitarianism in light of the mechanisms it deploys to transform human beings into something they are not: static, predictable entities. In other words, totalitarianism is the attempt to remove the condition of natality and contingency from human existence. Birmingham warns of the inherent danger of losing one’s humanity under efforts to stabilise human nature, that is, to likewise eliminate the feature of plurality and the reduction of humanity to biological species. Not only does this eradicate the uniqueness of each individual but it also destroys any opportunity for the achievement of a sense of immortality through community remembrance. In other words, the reduction of the individual to a biological determined entity condemns humanity to the anonymity of biological processes. The result is that history is devoid of actors, of human agency, becoming instead a handmaiden to transcendental processes. It entails the oblivion of the human being as a distinct and unique individual and forecloses the possibility of transcending death through memory.

For Birmingham, the remedy to human mortality lies in the second interpretation of temporality concerning political institutions. Political institutions are made to withstand beyond any one individual lifespan. Institutions act as a bridge between generations, becoming part of the common world. As such, institutions transform time from the cyclical temporality of the natural world to the rectilinear temporality of the human world. This, Birmingham avers, enables humanity to transcend mere biological existence and become “fully human.”²¹ In this way, institutional temporality plays a significant role in the deconstruction of metaphysical biases as well as in the achievement of the human status. Likewise, Benhabib finds similar meaning in Arendt’s notion of historiography. Arendtian storytelling — as opposed to the neutral and anaemic recording of history as mere facts — is an attempt to overcome oblivion.²² Once more, this oblivion refers to the eradication of any and all possibility of being remembered as an individual and hence overcoming the anonymity of death.

^{19.} Ibid., 146.

^{20.} Ibid., 143.

^{21.} Peg Birmingham, ‘Holes of Oblivion: The Banality of Radical Evil’, *Hypatia* 18, no. 1 (2003): 80-103.

^{22.} Benhabib, ‘Redemptive Power of Narrative’, 181.

Paul Ricoeur also devotes considerable attention to the existential conditions of temporality. His philosophical-anthropological approach to Arendt is based on the temporal condition of man.²³ Ricoeur, like others, believes the key to unlocking Arendt's critique of the modern ages lies in the temporal features of the *vita activa*. Ricoeur writes, "I deliberately choose to disentangle the temporal traits characteristic of the categories of labour, work and action from the more controversial and polemical assessment of the state of modern man."²⁴ The justification behind this approach concerns the categories of the *vita activa* as historical, and not, as Ricoeur points out, transcendental in the Kantian sense.²⁵ Such an approach places the project of immortalisation at the focus of the *bios politikos*, making storytelling and history political activities.²⁶ Special attention is given to the poet as the one whom the "permanence of human greatness relies wholly on."²⁷ Yet, Ricoeur acknowledges that the mnemonic service of the poet is possible because "the city is already 'a kind of organised remembrance.'"²⁸ The city acts as a stabilising entity and hence a condition of possibility of memory and history. Despite the essential role of the city space the topic features little in the piece, instead focusing exclusively on the temporal dimension of the Greek *vita activa*.

John McCumber provides perhaps the clearest example of reading Arendt's political theory as a way to partially control and stabilise humanity's future. McCumber holds that the primacy Arendt gives to ancient Greek culture is part of "continental philosophy's temporalised approach: its view that everything is in time."²⁹ Arendt, McCumber claims, takes philosophy's most important task is to orient us to the past.³⁰ In this framework, Arendtian notions of promise and forgiveness are devices by which the unpredictability of time can be controlled.³¹ Furthermore, McCumber believes it is the purpose of the *polis* and politics to perform what he calls the "'finitisation' of the future," which amounts to reducing the infinite possibilities of a person's life to something more specific: "Political life is, thus, for Arendt, a compact

23. "By philosophical anthropology I mean an inquiry aimed at identifying the most enduring features of the temporal condition of man - those which are the least vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the mode" in Ricoeur, 'Action, Story and History', 60.

24. Ibid., 61.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 68: "In this sense, politics expresses man's ultimate attempt to 'immortalize' himself or herself."

27. Ibid., 69.

28. Ibid.

29. McCumber, 'Activity and Morality', 202.

30. Ibid., 222.

31. Ibid., 222-223.

to finitise the future.”³² In this way, McCumber places Arendt in the long line of philosophy’s valorisation of the temporal conditions of existence. In contrast to McCumber’s focus on the past, Irene McMullin avers that Arendt’s conception of time and immortality offers a helpful critique of modern age. McMullin, inspired by Arendt, diagnoses the modern age as a “mnemonic failure” that modern consciousness presents as a form of “collective *amnesia*.”³³ This amnesia undermines the public sphere or political realm, resulting in the loss of the “evaluative dimension of communal memory.” This loss of memory is due to two main factors: first, the proliferation of technology, and second, the normative breakdowns characteristic of modernity. McMullin argues that a virtue ethical perfectionism could help overcome this breakdown.³⁴

Adam Lindsay takes up the notion of Arendtian constitutionalism in order to address a tension between novelty and stability that inheres in the idea. Neither bound to absolutist nor relative notions of temporal beginnings, Arendt’s idea of founding in a constitutional context threads a fine line between stability and novelty. Lindsay proposes that Arendtian constitutionalism is better rendered as a “‘disruption’ to the commonplace temporalizations we attribute to our political vocabulary.”³⁵ Here again this argument is buttressed by the assertion that “humans are temporal creatures who recognize our finitude in the world.”³⁶ The main concern regards the capacity of human beings to create new beginnings, or in other words, the possibility of being free.

Yet, Arendtian freedom is worldly freedom. While more recent attempts to read Arendt within the phenomenological tradition do well to illuminate Arendt’s notion of world, the deeper spatial components of world are overlooked. Take for instance Arendtian freedom. Freedom is not only a matter of deconstructing absolutist, deterministic historical time but a distinctly spatial phenomenon: “Freedom, wherever it existed as a tangible reality, has always been *spatially limited*. This is especially clear for the greatest and most elementary of all negative liberties, the freedom of movement; the borders of national territory or the walls of the city state comprehended and protected a space in which men could move freely.”³⁷ Against the tendency to read the presence of space as a necessary, if not obvious, constituent of any ontological-existential framework, the emphasis Arendt places

³². Ibid., 233-224.

³³. McMullin, ‘The Amnesia of the Modern’, 91.

³⁴. Ibid., 91-92.

³⁵. Lindsay, ‘Hannah Arendt’, 1024.

³⁶. Ibid., 1037.

³⁷. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 275 (emphasis added).

on the spatially limited, protected, and tangible qualities of world set her apart from other philosophers of her time. Again, the use of the term 'public freedom' is not accidental. Arendt was at pains to emphasise that freedom is not an inner realm nor is it merely a free will but rather a "tangible, worldly reality," a public space where freedom becomes visible.³⁸ This visibility does not concern an appearance to individual or collective consciousnesses, but a *worldly visibility*, which is different.

This move takes us beyond the established reception of the political "space of appearance," as a space in which human uniqueness, equality, and discourse are made possible to the ontological dynamics that make these achievements possible to begin with. The suspicion in only focusing on one side of a complex relationship is that it tends to skew the essential dynamics of such a relation. We have witnessed such a deformation in the reception of Arendt as possessing an overly simplified picture of the natural world. Arendt is not a philosopher of universals but uniquely attentive to the particular and situated qualities of the world. Despite the range and depth of her work, one feature remains consistent: the establishment of boundaries. Without the presence of boundaries many things are not possible, including freedom and equality, as she states: "Freedom in a positive sense is possible only among equals, and equality itself is by no means a universally valid principle but, again, applicable only with limitations and even within spatial limits."³⁹ An unforeseen outcome of this direction of Arendt's thought are the consequences it bears for human rights particularly when faced with problem of statelessness.

Arendt's genius lies in the transformation of the conventional abstract language of 'inalienable rights' and transnational institutionalisation of said rights. Authors have rightly utilised Arendt's work as a departure point when offering some much-needed critique on the matter. Ethicist Hille Haker notes how after the First World War and the subsequent increase in the number of stateless peoples, international efforts to effectively respond to this situation was obstructed by the "political structure of international law that was still centred on the sovereignty of nation states."⁴⁰ Arendt's point is that the Declaration recognizes 'merely' natural bodies and hence is not connected to a properly political body.⁴¹ "The stateless people were as convinced as the minorities that loss of national rights was identical with loss of human rights, that the former inevitable entailed the latter."⁴² That is to say that "the

³⁸. Ibid., 124.

³⁹. Ibid., 275.

⁴⁰. Hille Haker, 'No Space. Nowhere. Refugees and the Problem of Human Rights in Arendt and Ricoeur', *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* 8 no. 2 (2018): 24.

⁴¹. Ibid., 25.

⁴². Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 292.

loss of home and political status become identical with expulsion from humanity altogether.”⁴³ This topic is discussed further in the third chapter (page 57). Arendt maintains a special relation between worldly belonging, political recognition, and human dignity. The condition of statelessness is a twofold loss: the loss of home, that is, of belonging to a place and the loss of political protection as a result.

What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one. Suddenly, there was no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be disseminated, no territory where they could found a new community of their own. This, moreover, had next to nothing to do with any material problem of overpopulation; it was a problem not of space but of political organization. The second loss, which the rightless suffered, was the loss of government protection and this did not imply just the loss of legal status in their own, but in all countries.⁴⁴

It is impossible to speak of Arendt’s theory without invocation of a spatial dimension.⁴⁵ These metaphors go beyond the role of doing simple linguistic ‘heavy lifting’ to help communicate the more abstract components of her thought. Such a position risks misrepresenting essential dimensions of her work. For, in addition to deconstructing specific metaphysical barriers, the spatial elements of Arendt’s philosophy offer a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomena of ‘world’ that is central to her thought. While the significance of the temporal dimensions of Arendt’s thought is not to be diminished, this approach can only go so far when it comes to understanding the importance of ‘world’ for Arendtian philosophy. The ideals of freedom, plurality, and natality are recognised as ‘worldly’ phenomena; however, relatively little attention has been given to this.

The dualist reading

The Human Condition operates on an ontological distinction between natural and unnatural space. As mentioned, unnatural space is designated by the term ‘world’ which refers to distinct boundaries between nature and spaces which human

⁴³. Ibid., 297.

⁴⁴. Ibid., 293-294.

⁴⁵. For instance, her works are replete with references to the ‘space of appearance’, ‘public and private realms’, ‘the social’, earth, world, *polis*, *oikos*, and territorial boundaries.

activity has transformed into an artificial environment. This distinction comes down to things which exist with, and things which exist without, human intervention. Bowring, for instance, avers that “Arendt’s philosophy seems to revolve around a rigid dichotomy of nature and culture, organic life and human worldliness, and her hierarchy of activities—labour, work, and action—is partly ordered according to the degree of distance from the physical demands of nature that the higher activities express.”⁴⁶ This is a conventional characterisation, which is often presented in terms of a nature-culture dichotomy, and is a potential of human beings exclusively. The dualist reading of the *vita activa* sets nature and world in opposition to each other. Nature is continuously trying to reclaim what mankind has removed from her, “its constant, unending fight against the processes of growth and decay through which nature forever invades the human artifice, threatening the durability of the world and its fitness for human use. The protection and preservation of the world against natural processes are among the toils which need the monotonous performance of daily repeated chores.”⁴⁷ The cultivation of artificial boundaries entails quotidian maintenance. The human world must perpetually be upheld against the forces of nature.⁴⁸ Whereas the natural world views the activity of man as an act of violence, “an element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and homo faber, the creator of the human artifice, has always been a destroyer of nature.”⁴⁹

Many Arendt scholars attempt to utilise this antiquated nature-world dualism for more fruitful, if ultimately unsatisfying, ends. For instance, Angela Last investigates the relevance of Arendt’s work in light of debates concerning materialism. Last argues that Arendt is a helpful intervention in materialist debates, specifically at the juncture of the inherent risks of de-individualisation and dehumanisation.⁵⁰ In spite of Arendt’s “disturbingly unfashionable and unoriginal” distinction between earth-world, it is the key to “conceptualising ‘worldliness’ as a political attitude.”⁵¹ According to Last, “[d]espite, or in some ways, because of Arendt’s phobia of matter, her concept raises important questions about individuality, plurality and the location of agency in the face of dehumanisation.”⁵² Last appears to set her

⁴⁶. Finn Bowring, ‘Arendt after Marx. Rethinking the Dualism of Nature and World.’ *A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 26 no. 2 (2014): 278.

⁴⁷. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 100.

⁴⁸. This contrast with nature extends beyond *The Human Condition*. See Tijmes’s ‘The Archimedean Point and Eccentricity’, 238. Pieter Tijmes, ‘The archimedean Point and eccentricity: Hannah Arendt’s philosophy of science and technology.’ In *Technology and the politics of knowledge* eds. Andrew Feenberg and Alastair Hannay, (Indiana University Press.1995): 236-251.

⁴⁹. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 139.

⁵⁰. Last, ‘Re-reading worldliness’, 72.

⁵¹. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁵². *Ibid.*, 82.

analysis up in line with the dualist reading of *The Human Condition*. Again, Last emphasises “[...] the earth- world distinction is not only key to her [Arendt’s] intervention in materialism, but also to conceptualising ‘worldliness’ as a political attitude.”⁵³ According to Last, ‘earth’ represents the material realm whereas world connotes fabrication and ‘interspace’. Last identifies a “distrust of matter” in Arendt’s philosophy of the human condition.⁵⁴ For our purpose, once again we see that Arendt’s relevance relies on her spatial framework of *The Human Condition* which, according to Last, “leads Arendt to some alarming conclusions.”⁵⁵ Last takes the necessities of biological life and its connection to having a physical, material body as anti- political or anti-worldly: “First of all, worldliness expresses a profound distrust of matter and a desire for order.”⁵⁶ Instead, emphasis is given to constitution of world as thoroughly intersubjective, purified of external and potentially tyrannical biological or causal forces: “Although worldliness constitutes the foundation of human activity in that it is about common care for ‘what lies between people’, there seems to be no room for safely admitting matter other than as an outside or interspace.”⁵⁷

However, the author’s anti-materialist reading of worldliness ignores the repeated emphasis Arendt places on the products of *homo faber* and the objects erected through fabrication. Take the following statement by Arendt: “Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are about some *worldly objective reality* in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent.”⁵⁸ Arendt’s famous notion of the ‘in-between’ is “no less bound to the objective world of things than speech is to the existence of a living body.”⁵⁹ If Arendt truly did not permit materialism in her conceptualisation of worldliness, then one would indeed be strained to understand what exactly makes this intangible, purified ‘in-between’ worldly in the first place.

I believe Last’s analysis is founded on an oversimplified separation of earth and world in *The Human Condition*. If we take earth to signify the material, physical, and biological components of human existence, as Last does, and world to exclude these elements, then not only would Arendt’s insistence of world and worldliness

^{53.} Ibid., 75.

^{54.} Last is one of the few readers that acknowledges Arendt’s absence from geographical discussions of materiality and space (Last, ‘Re-reading worldliness’, 74).

^{55.} Last, ‘Re-reading worldliness’, 75.

^{56.} Ibid., 78.

^{57.} Ibid.

^{58.} Arendt, *Human Condition*, 183 (emphasis added).

^{59.} Ibid.

be at odds with the very idea of world as that which necessarily contains matter and objects, but also the significance Arendt places on fabrication and tangibility as a stabilizing component would need to be disregarded. Understandably, many readers utilise these distinctions in a well-meaning attempt to make Arendt relevant for environmental debates, and in this endeavour Last is by no means alone.

Anne Chapman argues for four distinct ways in which nature matters to human beings based on the spatial framework of *The Human Condition*⁶⁰ Chapman's analysis centres on two interpretations regarding Arendt's concept of nature as world or earth. This distinction, Chapman continues, allows us to understand several ways in which nature has value for humanity. The result has surprising relevance for environmental issues, from which Arendt is traditionally occluded. From the founding spatial distinction of earth-world arises four ways in which nature has meaning to us. Chapman summarises the four values as follows: "the earth which we are part of, as all other biological organisms are; it is the source of raw materials for building a world; natural things form part of that world, and finally, nature is that which is given from outside humanity, without which unconditional gratitude would not be possible."⁶¹ Chapman avers, in reference to Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, that the ambiguity of the natural in Arendt's thought is resolved by accounting for the complexity of the earth-world distinction and its relation to the natural.⁶² I find this reading to be unsatisfying, for it ultimately relies on feelings of gratitude for what is not created but given to humanity, i.e. nature. As I outlined in the first section of this chapter, humanity is capable of providing for its needs artificially. As Arendt put it, humanity "seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given."⁶³ As such, our very ability to appreciate this givenness is endangered.

Chapman takes the interpretation of the earth-world distinction a step further than Last. She suggests "another more basic account of the distinction between the world and the earth in Arendt's thought. Here the world is that which appears, as distinct from that which is given. This account is basically Kantian: the earth is the noumena, and the world the phenomena."⁶⁴ According to Chapman, this allows readers to interpret Arendt as making a phenomenological distinction rather than a strict spatial one: "It should be clear that in both these accounts the world and

^{60.} Chapman, 'The Ways that Nature Matters', 433-445.

^{61.} Ibid., 443.

^{62.} Ibid.

^{63.} Arendt, *Human Condition*, 2.

^{64.} Chapman, 'The Ways that Nature Matters', 436.

the earth are not spatially distinct from each other.”⁶⁵ For the earth to be part of the unappearing, unintelligible noumenal realm would mean that humanity can have no direct relation to the earth. For this reason, Chapman’s solution remains unconvincing. This is clearly not the case for Arendt. In fact, it is the idea of detachment from earth that she disparately combats, for it essentially hinges upon interpreting earth as both anthropocentrically accessible and simultaneously inaccessible. Let us explore this reticence towards claims to non-anthropocentric models of reality so as to better understand why Arendt does not support a dualist reading of earth, even a Kantian one, as suggested by Chapman.

In 1963, Arendt published an essay in which she questions the distinction between the human as scientist and the interests of the common man.⁶⁶ The distinction relies on “the humanist’s concern with man, as distinguished from the physicist’s concern with the reality of the physical world.”⁶⁷ The scientist must renounce a prescientific experience of reality.

To understand physical reality seems to demand not only the renunciation of an anthropocentric or geocentric world view, but also a radical elimination of all anthropomorphic elements and principles, as they arise either from the world given to the five human senses or from the categories inherent in the human mind.⁶⁸

Consequently, it is the scientist for whom “man is no more than a special case of organic life and to whom man’s habitat—the earth, together with earthbound laws—is no more than a special borderline case of absolute, universal laws,” according to Arendt.⁶⁹ In other words, the strictly empirical-physical approach to reality necessitates a perspective in which not only the earth but humanity itself becomes dislocated from original experience and scaled down in order to achieve a universal framework or perspective. Arendt’s concern is clear: separation or dislocation from the earth, a possibility only since the modern age, is a serious point of criticism for Arendt, not, as Whiteside proposes, something Arendt endorses.

^{65.} Ibid., 437.

^{66.} Arendt notes that “[t]his question was asked for a ‘Symposium on Space’ by the editors of *Great Ideas Today* (1963) with special emphasis on what ‘the exploration of space is doing to man’s view of himself and to man’s condition. The question does not concern man as a scientist, nor man as a producer or consumer, but rather man as *human*.’” (Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 29)

^{67.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 265.

^{68.} Ibid., 265.

^{69.} Ibid., 266.

Arendt laments that rather than this being a cause if not for concern then for reflection, this ability to detach and dislocate ourselves from our earth condition is instead seen as “the glory of modern science that it has been able to emancipate itself completely from all such anthropocentric, that is, truly humanistic, concerns.”⁷⁰ As a consequence, lived experience undergoes a sort of denigration, because it is required “to renounce sense perception and hence common sense, by which we coordinate the perception of our five senses into the total awareness of reality.”⁷¹ Such degradation is observable in the manner in which we think and engage with the earth. The earth, under this framework, becomes not a potential home but a prison. That is, in contrast to sensual experience and the sense of reality it provides, the scientific perspective transforms and in some cases redacts the familiar features of existence by which we understand our world and our reality.

At this point, it is important to clarify what Arendt means by anthropocentrism. While she uses the term in a different, more utilitarian context in *The Human Condition*,⁷² we get a better sense of the meaning of the term in the above essay. The anthropocentric conditions Arendt speaks of in this piece refer to the insurmountable feature of subjectivity in the quest for objectivity. Both epistemologically and existentially, our subjective experiences of reality can never be totally eradicated in order to achieve an objectivist rendering of the world. In this way, anthropocentric does not imply a biased perspective of reality which tends to favour humanity but rather refers to the fact that experience for human beings always encompasses a subjective, that is, in this case, human element.⁷³ Arendt was all too aware that attempts to obtain the objective at the price of the subjective, that is, to be rid of all anthropocentric conditions, is impossible and the very attempt dangerous.

The removal of the anthropocentric features of human existence is to risk losing the original sense by which things have meaning for human beings in the first place. This attempted ‘removal’ is carried out in both the scientific effort to explore reality from a neutral position, the Archimedean point, as Arendt puts it, and the literal distancing of humanity from the earth, the primordial human condition. “In other words, notions such as life, or man, or science, or knowledge are prescientific by

^{70.} Ibid.

^{71.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 266.

^{72.} Arendt, *Human Condition*, 151, 155.

^{73.} Ibid., 157-158. See also Anne Fremaux, ‘The Value of Nature – a critical account of anthropocentrism in politics’, part 3. *The New Polis: Critical Theory | Social Analysis | Political Philosophy and Theology*, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://thenewpolis.com/2019/03/06/the-value-of-nature-a-critical-account-of-anthropocentrism-in-politics-part-3-anne-fremaux/>

definition, and the question is whether or not the actual development of science which has led to the conquest of terrestrial space and to the invasion of the space of the universe has changed these notions to such an extent that they no longer make sense."⁷⁴ What takes their place are concepts that belong to the realm of causal determination the essence of which can never appear, for "[t]hey are not phenomena, appearances, strictly speaking, for we meet them nowhere, neither in our everyday world nor in the laboratory; we know of their presence only because they affect our measuring instruments in certain ways."⁷⁵ For Arendt, the earth is that which is given, à la Whiteside, but this is not to conclude that it exists beyond the ordinary experiential realm. The rigidity of these segregations hides something of greater philosophical interest which occurs beneath them, so to speak. Arendt's theory of spatialisation is crucial to her project of deconstructing conventional metaphysical conceptions of reality, which, in her view, actually obscure and distort reality. The consequence of this distortion is a profound and existentially detrimental alienation from both earth and world.

It is clear that a deep and pervading concern with earth/world alienation permeates Arendt's thought and motivates her writing. This in fact is the route explored by authors such as Bernard Debarbieux, Kerry Whiteside, P. Howell, Anne Chapman, Paul Ott, Kenneth Frampton.⁷⁶ Each of these authors explore the spatial relevance of Arendt's work, and there are authors who even find the relevance for politics more generally.⁷⁷ Given the significance of spatial ontology, the following is an elaboration of the recent reconsideration of the status of space in her work. However, what each author has neglected in this endeavour is a *holistic* account of Arendtian space as well as an account of the manner in which her spatialised philosophy rejects traditional metaphysical categories. By holistic I mean accounting for how fundamental notions of her work develop throughout

^{74.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 268.

^{75.} *Ibid.*, 266.

^{76.} Bernard Debarbieux. 'Hannah Arendt's Spatial Thinking: An Introduction' 2017; Kerry Whiteside, 'Hannah Arendt and Ecological Politics' in *Environmental Ethics* 16, no. 4 (1994); Kerry Whiteside, 'Worldliness and Respect for Nature' *Environmental Values* 7 (1998): 25-40; P. Howell, 'Public Space and the Public Sphere: Political Theory and the Historical Geography of Modernity' in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 11, no. 3 (1993): 303-22; Anne Chapman, 'The Ways that Nature Matters' 2007; Paul Ott, 'World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature' in *A Journal of Philosophy & Geography* 12, no. 1 (2009): 1-16.; Kenneth Frampton, 'The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects: a Reading of The Human Condition' in *Hannah Arendt, the Recovery of the Public World*: 101-30. (St. Martin's Press, 1979).

^{77.} For example see Soren C Larsen and Jay T. Johnson. "Toward an Open Sense of Place: Phenomenology, Affinity, and the Question of Being." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 3 (2012): 632-46.

her life.⁷⁸ The dominant reception of her work is disproportionately restricted to *The Human Condition*. The danger of such a skewed reception is that it overlooks the profound and exciting transformation in both her spatial and existential ontologies. The consequence of this negligence is that Arendt's philosophy is practically barred from current discussions of ecological crises. This project aims to rectify this unfortunate oversight by offering an account of Arendt's spatial ontology that does not rely only on the antiquated framework of *The Human Condition*. This framework promotes a bifurcation of space which is largely perceived to be problematic. Frazer, for instance, notes each of these concepts of space in Arendt and the tensions arising from their differences. The problem of this approach is that these multiple concepts amount to discontinuities that are contradictory and must be bridged by the individual in everyday life; an arduous if not unrealistic task.⁷⁹

Mustafa Dikeç draws attention to how Arendt's concept of plurality is spatialised in terms of the capacity of unique human beings to create specific spatial ontology in their interaction with one another: "Plurality in Arendt is a space-making plurality, understood as a political relation rather than a numerical or ontological matter."⁸⁰ Reconsidering the spatial elements of politics reveals the relevance of space beyond mere metaphor. Such consideration takes into account not only that we as political agents act into physical space but also how action can "make spaces, both topographic and conceptual (for example, discursive or institutional spaces)."⁸¹ The conclusion supports the important role space plays in the conceptualisation of politics. The upshot of 'thinking spatially' is that it allows one to see "connections or disconnections that cannot always be deduced rationally from the givens, seeing something new, generating new relations and openings."⁸²

Belcher and Schmidt take this 'thinking spatially' into discussions of climate change. The authors contend that Arendt's work provides critical resources for engaging in debates concerning 'the political' in the Anthropocene.⁸³ Once more, this relevance for ecological debate is grounded in a reading of *The Human Condition*. Belcher and Schmidt argue that the "overarching theme of *The Human Condition* is to draw

^{78.} Specifically, her last and unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind*, holds a special relevance for our topic. We develop this topic later in chapter 6.

^{79.} Elizabeth Frazer, 'Hannah Arendt: The risks of the public realm.' *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 12 (2009): 221.

^{80.} Dikeç, 'Space as a mode of political thinking', 671.

^{81.} *Ibid.*, 674.

^{82.} *Ibid.*

^{83.} Oliver Belcher and Jeremy J Schmid, 'Being earthbound: Arendt, process and alienation in the Anthropocene' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 39, no.1 (2021): 103-1.

out the implications of being earthbound in light of capitalism, modern science and technology (particularly nuclear technologies).⁸⁴ Through an exploration of Arendt's 'ontology of process', the authors argue that, contrary to Arendt's aversion to scientism, science is a form of action and thus is political for Arendt. The significance of humanity's 'being earthbound' led Arendt to renounce all anthropomorphic elements and principle, resulting in the indispensable position of science as a form of action in the Anthropocene. "A political ontology of 'process' and 'earth alienation' examine, respectively, how Arendt [...] developed two senses of 'being earthbound' that make the political coordinate to capacities of acting into nature."⁸⁵ This claim references *The Human Condition's* emphasis on how the political realm is formed by the artificiality of human activity as acting into nature. This reading raises concerns not just on an exegetical level but also through what I take to be the illegitimate rendering of science as a form of Arendtian action. Such a move is overly reliant on novelty at the expense of other criteria.

Patchen Markell is one notable exception to dualist interpretations of Arendt. In contrast, Markell argues that *The Human Condition* in fact suffers from a 'territorial' reading where strict boundaries are imposed between the activities of the *vita activa*. Markell raises the following criticisms of this interpretation. First, such readings are at least partially based on 'selective' passages, leading to an overemphasis on the segregation of concepts and structures.⁸⁶ This dissertation offers a more comprehensive study of Arendt's spatial philosophy, including other major publications which demonstrate the complexities and potential of her work. Markell advocates for a "radical reconsideration of the architecture of *The Human Condition* [...] through a close reading of several key parts of Arendt's book."⁸⁷ This dissertation complements and extends these efforts by exposing the junctures and nuances of Arendt's spatial thinking throughout her life's work. Second, Markell claims that Arendt is not only performing a *separation* through her conceptual distinctions, but that these distinctions also present us with conjunctions which join together interconnected elements of her intellectual framework. Accordingly, the triad of the *vita activa* is better understood as the "fraught conjunction of two different pairs of concepts — labour and work, and work and action — which operate in very different ways and serve quite different purposes in Arendt's book."⁸⁸

^{84.} Ibid., 104.

^{85.} Ibid., 105.

^{86.} "Arendt's drive toward territorial purification seems strongest, as when, early in the book [...] she declares that 'each human activity points to its proper location in the world' (1958, 73)." (Markell, 'Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of "The Human Condition"', 17)

^{87.} Ibid., 18.

^{88.} Ibid.

Instead, the territorial reading, by which Markell understands as segregating enterprise, is replaced by a “relational” architecture that investigates connections and interdependence of things. In this way, Markell argues for the dual function of work as a relational structure within the *vita activa*. “Where work had originally been presented in terms of the production of physically durable artifacts — in contrast to labour’s provision of material for immediate consumption (1958, 136–37) — by the end of the chapter Arendt has supplemented physical durability with ‘permanence,’ which is a function of the ‘memorability’ of tangible things (170).”⁸⁹ Likewise, this project elucidates how different elements of Arendt’s spatial theory are interdependent of one another. Moreover, the explicit phenomenological rendering of Arendt’s philosophy provided here opens up the possibility

to explore the features of her thought as lived-through. That is, as structures that are experienced and as well as conceptual apparatuses. Markell rightly points out that both readings — the territorial and relational — respond to different concerns. He writes:

For in the end, the territorial and anti-reductive architectures of *The Human Condition* respond to two different intuitions about what threatens political freedom in modernity: one focuses on the destruction of socially and institutionally differentiated spaces in which people can exercise, and experience the meaning of, public freedom; the other is concerned with the prospect that, in struggling to preserve such differentiated spaces, we may insulate them so tightly from their social settings that they become vacuously self-referential, and thus politically impotent.⁹⁰

To this we add another interrelated threat involving the total destruction of habitable space on the earth. Here habitability has two senses. The first is literal, signifying the suitability of the environment for living beings. The second, refers to the ability to make one’s habitat a home in a meaningful way. Both senses involve the political as we can no longer afford to see them as separate, as Markell rightfully states. This project, then, does not seek to enforce hermetically sealed boundaries within Arendt’s thought. Rather, it shows, as Markell notes, the points of productive tension within her philosophy and ultimately a more complex and nuanced account of spatial existence in Arendt.

⁸⁹. Ibid., 32.

⁹⁰. Ibid., 36–37.

Conclusion

The reception of Arendt's work tends to fall into one of two popular interpretations. The first we called the dualist reading which interprets the spatial features of her philosophy as primarily dichotomous, demarcating a rigorous distinction between artificial and natural space. The main critique of this approach is that it does not sufficiently capture what Arendt is doing. The result is a bifurcated notion of space that is at once antiquated and problematic. In addition to it being an overly simplistic view of how humanity interacts with the world, it propagates beliefs of human exceptionalism in terms of humankind's unique ability to create meaningful places in the world. Arendt is simply wrong to offer this conception as she does in *The Human Condition*. The following chapter will explore this problem in detail in order to show that, while Arendt is guilty of these problematic assumptions, she is also uncomfortable with them. This discomfort is most visible in her final work.

The second interpretation, the temporal reading of Arendt, while promising, tends to overly expose the temporal features of her work at the expense of others particularly the spatial. To be clear, the critique here is not that this interpretation is erroneous but simply points to a disequilibrium in the reception of Arendt's work. This project aims at a restoration of this balance in its attention to the spatial ontology that is also constitutive of Arendtian philosophy. This should not undermine the manner in which time and space work together in her thought. A prominent example of the co-constitutive nature of space-time in Arendt is her notion of worldly freedom. Worldly freedom is manifest in the space of appearances in which one has both bodily, spatial freedom to move and be seen and free in terms of future possibilities.

These conditions are not met in the circumstances of statelessness. Here the political and existential import of having a place coincide. In this way, understanding statelessness necessitates that we transcend modern understanding of the environment at that which is merely useful (intrinsic valuable) and that which is in and of itself meaningful, independent of any and all relation to it (extrinsic value). To lose one's home, one's place in the world cannot be sufficiently captured by either view of humanity's relation to the world. Arendt's point was that in losing home entails the further loss of humanitarian protections. The spatial uprooting of human beings leads to a legal and political uprooting and dislocation. So connected are these that the loss of one entails the loss of the other.

In the context of climate change and environmental ethics, there are legitimate concerns that focuses on intergenerational equity are ineffective in holding current contributors to climate change responsible. This severely hampers the ability of international efforts to successfully mitigate climate change. Esmeralda Colombo, in "The Politics of Silence: Hannah Arendt and Future Generations' Fight for the Climate," offers a helpful analysis of the problems of the intergenerational, temporal approach to the climate crisis:

A further preambular provision [in the Paris Agreement] on human rights does not offer an appropriate umbrella for the protection of children, now and in the future, for at least two reasons. First, it is not settled in international law that generations yet to be born enjoy human rights connected to climate change. Second, the Paris Agreement's recital on human rights is intrinsically weak as it is aimed at state actions to address climate change rather than their contribution to climate change. In fact, in the making of the COP21 Agreement, the triad constituted by the US, Norway, and Saudi Arabia strongly opposed the inclusion of human rights in the operative provisions.⁹¹

As such, "[c]ommitments toward future generations have thus limited effects in the realm of international realpolitik."⁹² The inability to formally define what constitutes a climate refugee is an indictment of our understanding of the relationship being human beings and the world. This dissertation opens with Arendt's claim that we are *of the world*, not only in it. We must understand how the world and existence coincide together order to better address the plight of climate refugees. Arendt offers the resources to help us in this endeavour.

One manner in which Arendt offers a productive approach to this issue is her phenomenological impulse to begin thinking from worldly events. These occurrences inspire her to think critically about an issue in the context of its broader relevance for the world. It is not surprising then that *The Human Condition* begins with the consideration of the recent events of her time and what they mean for humanity and the world in general. In the following chapter we look closely at these events which, generally speaking, do not garner more than a passing mention in much of the secondary commentary on Arendt's thought. The purpose of this

^{91.} Esmeralda Colombo, "The Politics of Silence: Hannah Arendt and Future Generations' Fight for the Climate." *Icl Journal* 17 no. 1 (2023): 45.

^{92.} *Ibid.*, 51.

dedication is to explicate Arendt's lifelong concern with humanity's relationship to the earth itself. Furthermore, as we have seen in the temporal reading of Arendt, attempts to explore the spatial ontology in her work often remain bound to her 1958 text which does not account for the significant changes in her last work. As such, it is helpful to explore *The Human Condition* paying explicit attention to the spatial elements of the text.

Chapter 3.

The Terrestrial Nature of the Human Condition

A useful example of Arendt's phenomenological methodology occurs in the opening of *The Human Condition*. Many readers have devoted attention to the analysis of the *vita activa*, particularly of her theory of action,¹ and her analysis of the modern world.² The following section focuses explicitly on events discussed in the opening of *The Human Condition*, for they not only show our author's dedication to real events in her analyses but introduce the theme of spatial ontology through her conception of earth-alienation. The contrast between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition* is stark if one accepts a continuation of the genealogical analysis Arendt began in her first work.³ Yet, her phenomenological allegiance to events can help us understand the apparent differences between the two texts, for each text is motivated by particular phenomena rather than simple theoretical interest. *The Human Condition* begins with a provocative focus on three particular events: the launch of Sputnik (the first earth-born object to be launched from the earth into the universe), the effort to artificially create life, and the increasing automation of labour. These events amount to an existential rebellion against life as it is given, that is, life under the conditions of the earth. These events are doubly significant because, first, they not only point the *unheimliche* nature of existence, but second, these so-called rebellions exemplify the fact that the conditions of human life are not static. Rather, even what is considered the most fundamental feature of life on earth can be acted upon and changed. The possibility of this change is not a question for Arendt. She is concerned with what these changes mean for human life and indeed all life on this earth. Through Arendt's recounting of these rebellions 'against life as it is given' we begin to discern the special role that the earth, as a primordial condition of existence, occupies in her philosophy.

Hence, the following brings to focus the discussion Arendt initiates concerning different technological developments occurring around the time she was writing. These advances are illuminated in a different light by the author. Neither negative or

¹ Shmuel Lederman, for instance, recognises the dominance of 'action' in the Arendtian literature, see Shmuel Lederman, 'Agonism and Deliberation in Arendt' *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 21, no. 3 (2014): 327-37. Similarly, Dana Villa states "a basic and inescapable self-contradiction at the heart of her theory of action" (Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 84). Also, see Mary Dietz, *Turning Operations*, New York & London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002. And Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

² For Serena Parekh, world-alienation is the defining feature of the modern age for Arendt (Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 3).

³ Villa poses the following "One large question remains: how did Arendt go from wanting to fill a gap in the analysis of OT (by means of a book project on the "proto-totalitarian elements in Marx's thought") to the altogether different and more inclusive project of THC?" (Villa, *Arendt*, 120).

positive in themselves, Arendt makes her readers aware of an 'existential uneasiness' which undergirds these feats. This uneasiness is a result of perceptible changes in the relation between humanity and the earth. No longer experienced as a home in the increasing vastness of the universe, the earth is instead a limitation to be overcome in the pursuit of knowledge and, perhaps more so, in the awareness that anything is permissible if it is for the sake of progress. Arendt is not offering another critique of modern science and technology. She does not endorse the usual critique of humanity's increasing unnaturalness. In fact, she accepts the ever-present ability of human beings to alter their environment to such a degree that the conditions of human existence are fundamentally changed. In truth, what disturbs our author is the absence of any discussion as to whether or not such changes are desirable. Put otherwise, she notes a failure of understanding, not of what is possible for humanity – we know our limitless potentiality all too well – but rather of the price of such radical possibility. This cost, as Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves writes, is the price of a two-fold alienation.⁴ We become doubly alienated from the conditions of existence, for we are not only estranged from the world as the meaningful site of action and speech but so too we are estranged from the very earth itself. The differences between these two sites of alienation are made clear by d'Entrèves. His description of world alienation is rendered in the helpful terms of the "loss of the sense of being at home."⁵ This loss is manifest and exacerbated by the "restriction of the public sphere,"⁶ which essentially means the loss of meaning and common-sense engagement with the world.

The second dimension of modern alienation concerns the way we perceive and value the earth. Arendt traces the beginning of this earthly estrangement to the historical exploration of the earth in the 16th and 17th centuries. The 'discovery' of America and the conquest of the globe initiated a profound shift in humanity's perception of space. All these elements are discussed in this chapter, the aim of which is to place centre stage a deep concern with humanity's understanding and hence engagement with the spatial conditions of existence. For although these matters traditionally appear as abstract, Arendt's genius is to show through real life events that such issues are manifest and hold very real consequences when left unattended. Her concern is with the conditions of earth and worldliness, and she attempts to understand how these features of existence, once perceived as necessary, have come to signify an obstacle to progress. This task takes her from

⁴ Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, (New York & London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1994).

⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

⁶ Ibid., 37-38.

the modern world to Antiquity and the Enlightenment, and returning to Modernity with a renewed understanding of humanity's current trajectory.

In light of this historical retracing, the second part of this chapter focuses on the vital distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. The reason we pay particular attention to this is because the conceptual separation of the *vita activa* from the *vita contemplativa* is central to how she characterises different forms of space, for example, the space of appearances, the *polis*, and even her understanding of world. Before we get to this point, it is helpful to first discuss the aforementioned events which provoked Arendt into thinking about earth and world alienation along existential lines. Our goal in this chapter is to trace Arendt's understanding of how earth (and world) came to be conceived as obstacles to human progress.

The repudiation of global limits

The Human Condition begins with events that inspired Arendt to “think what we are doing.”⁷ She believed that these events are manifest instances of a deeper rebellion against the conditions of human existence — that is, existence as it unfolds in the context of the earth. In the ensuing discussion regarding the satellite launch the tone is foreboding. The mood around this great historical achievement “was not triumphal; it was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which riled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth toward the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making.”⁸ Rather than a celebration in the presence of humanities' greatest technological achievement, Arendt understood this historical event radically different than many of her peers. For her, it marked an exponential development in what she perceived as one manifestation of *humanity's rebellion against life as it is given on this earth*. Humanity, which has always pushed the boundaries of given existence, has begun to take “the first ‘step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth.’”⁹ And although it is possible to detect historically the various traditions and sentiments that take a critical stance on the inherent circumstance of human life, the events of the 20th century mark a decisive acceleration. For example, Arendt declares that while the Christian tradition has viewed the earth as a “vale of tears” filled with suffering, and that while philosophers have for some time viewed the human body as a prison of the mind, nobody, that is until recently, thought of the

⁷. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5

⁸. Ibid., 1.

⁹. Ibid.

earth as a prison of the human species.¹⁰ Given this, *The Human Condition* begins with a question: “Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?”¹¹ That is, should the advent of modern age be marked by “the wish to escape the human condition,”¹² and to escape not only the earth, but also the conditions of life as it is given on this earth. This question is the impetus that drives the analysis of *The Human Condition*. The answer, as we shall see, lies not in the technocratic or social development of our age but firmly in the political. In other words, it lies in our ability to understand and deliberate what these events mean for us, not in our capacity as scientists or experts but as local citizens, and whether or not we wish to pursue our current path.

These are political matters of the first order because they concern speech as meaningful communication in distinction to the inaccessibility of modern science to the general public.¹³ An important point to note here is that while Arendt is rather critical of what she believed to be the ‘meaninglessness’ of the language of modern science, she is not saying that modern science is irrational and hence unintelligible. She is speaking from a strictly political perspective whereby language or speech is inherently meaningful because it appeals to common sense. In her own words, “[w]herever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being.”¹⁴ Given this, one must keep in mind while reading that Arendt is concerned with the events that the *The Human Condition* discusses from the perspective of human beings as political beings, that is, people endowed with the capacity for speech, action, and engagement with the world. These capabilities, however, are threatened by modern conditions. As Lederman has it, “all of Arendt’s works, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to *The Life of the Mind*, can be seen, at least to some extent, as different ways of facing the phenomenon of alienation from the world.”¹⁵ When we attend to these features of her thought, the significance of spatial ontology in her analysis of alienation becomes discernible. Let us turn to these rebellions as Arendt described them.

^{10.} Ibid., 2.

^{11.} Ibid.

^{12.} Ibid.

^{13.} Ibid., x.

^{14.} Ibid., 3.

^{15.} Lederman, ‘Agonism and Deliberation in Arendt’, 334.

The first rebellion: the earth

The first successful satellite launch was born out of a long-held desire to escape, not only the earth, but the conditions that go with being 'earthbound' creatures. What does this desire to escape the earth mean? Does our author not simply misinterpret one of the greatest achievements of humanity? I argue that she does not. In her interpretation of Sputnik, Arendt does not deny the existence of other, more positive experiences of the same event. In fact, she is aware that the meaning of this event is unusual when compared to how most perceive it. So, what does she mean by humanity's repudiation of the earth? To understand this, one must first understand Arendt's notion of earth, a concept that is underdeveloped in the text, particularly when one compares it to the concept of world. Despite its lack of ostensive analysis, the text argues earth is an essential feature of life. "The earth," Arendt states, "is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice."¹⁶ Let us focus on this statement as it is usually glossed over due to perhaps its apparent obviousness.

The earth is the "quintessence" of the human condition because it alone provides for the necessities of all life. Arendt makes reference to the ease with which living beings on earth have space to move and air to breathe, that is, a habitat without effort or artifice. It provides for the biological needs of all living organisms. And yet, a tension exists here in Arendt's notion of earth's suitability for life, because humans also need a world. If it were only a matter of providing for these needs one could, in time, very well do so artificially. One could recreate the conditions necessary for life in complete independence from earthly circumstances. This seems to be the trajectory and goal of the sciences. However, this is not only the matter of biological need which is at stake for Arendt. Nor is it a matter of ability or technological capacity to engender artificially such conditions. For Arendt, the human condition does not only refer to 'objective' conditions of life but also to our ability to create and maintain a relationship with the world. Thus, despite the fact that all biological needs are met in one place, human beings have, for some time now, come to see the earth — the original context of life — as a kind of imprisonment.

There are no ostensive reasons that would merit such a perspective in the sense that all the needs of living organisms are provided for. Thus, there is no necessity driving humanity to look outwards away from the earth and towards the universe. There is no material deficiency or insufficiency at the biological level where a basic

¹⁶. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2.

need is not met. Moreover, in addition to the provision of life's necessities, the earth offers the opportunity to become a home for its inhabitants, that is, it offers the possibility of becoming a site of meaningful interaction. Through human activity the earth is bestowed with meaning and specific, cultural sites are created. Hence, inserted into and arising out of this natural context is the human artifice. Here the term 'world' is used to distinguish between the boundaries of the natural and the artificial world. Referring to humanity's capacity to create and erect a world of its own, founded upon but distinct from the natural world, Arendt distinguishes between the natural world, which we will call earth, and the world of manmade things. Against the natural earth, then, stands the human world. This is the artificial context created by human beings and includes not only manmade structures like houses and public buildings but also consists of social and political relationships. We are born on this earth and into an artificial world that in turn separates us from the natural. The construction of a world is done so in order to offer a permanent dwelling along with the demarcation of artificial boundaries of private and public spaces. We constitute the human world in these spaces and with it, for the Arendt of *The Human Condition* at least, we separate and distinguish ourselves from the natural. Here, we detected Arendt's human exceptionalism, something that permeates *The Human Condition* and propagates the dualistic interpretation of her work.

The distinction for Arendt is nevertheless important for understanding the different elements of alienation that occur in the modern age. The separation of the natural from the unnatural is born from a desire to be free from the necessities that life imposes. Basic needs such as food, water, shelter, etc., demand that requirements be met on a reoccurring basis. The dictates of life's necessities drive humanity's desire to change its original circumstance. For Arendt, however, this would be to look a gift horse in the mouth, as the expression goes. It would amount to humanity taking "a gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself."¹⁷ It suggests that something strange and undesirable has occurred in humanity's relationship to the original circumstances of life, that is, to the earth. Arendt calls this 'alienation'. With this concept in mind, it becomes possible to understand the event of the first space launch as an event which was influenced by tradition.

Arendt does not reduce the launch and the technological feat it demonstrates to a larger process that has its own historical origin. It is not simply another moment in a mechanical, determined process. While her interpretation of modern

¹⁷. Ibid., 2-3.

science is over-simplified, she was careful not to reduce events to totalising, causal explanations. The point was to illuminate what is truly original even in the mundane.¹⁸ She was well aware that the event was unique and significant, given that she called it an event 'second in importance to no other', but the novelty of the occasion, for her, does not lie in the impressive technological achievement. "What is new is only that one of this country's most respectable newspapers finally brought to its front page what up to then had been buried in the highly non-respectable literature of science fiction."¹⁹ In light of this event, we come closer to what was truly spontaneous about the occasion. It was not the technological feat but, rather, the first public acknowledgment of what such a feat meant for humanity that was novel. She falls neither into the camp of techno- optimism and marvels at humanity's technological progress nor does she fall prey to a kind of existential pessimism. Instead, she makes a political turn, a move facilitated by the spatial awareness of the earth's place in the universe. Arendt never doubted humanity's capacity to alter the circumstances of life or, as it is commonly referred to, our capacity for 'development'. What was important was the opportunity for the politicisation of the potential consequences of this occasion. It was the first appearance, the first public questioning of its meaning, that strikes our author. It was the expression of man having taken "the first 'step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth'"²⁰ appearing in a popular newspaper that draws Arendt's attention and sets her thinking. She writes: "The banality of the statement should not make us overlook how extraordinary in fact it was"²¹ and that "far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter,"²² it struck right at the heart of a phenomenon she herself had been preoccupied with for some time. It marked the first public acknowledgement of a process that was until then part of other traditions, albeit in another guise; for example, the theistic belief of life on earth as a prior stage to an eternal, transcendent life, or the tradition of philosophical idealism.

Arendt had an astute sense for opinions, sentiments, and movements which were not yet publicly or 'officially' recognised but which nevertheless possessed the potential to someday burst forth onto the political scene. Whenever public discourse dismisses these fringe movements either as crackpot theories or even stupidity, it does so at the risk of ignoring experiences of the population who, rightly or wrongly, find expression in various fringe ideas. Accounting for this feature sheds

¹⁸. Young-Bruehl mentions this feature of Arendt's work in Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Why Arendt Matters* (Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁹. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2.

²⁰. Ibid., 1.

²¹. Ibid., 2.

²². Ibid., 1.

light on Arendt's peculiar singling out of a brief comment made by an American journalist.²³ It was the recognition of something that had been occurring but never explicitly acknowledged until that moment. It was the acknowledgement of a feeling of no longer being at home on the earth, that is, of having become estranged or alienated from the world *and* now the earth. With this public confirmation, it was now possible to trace historically various elements that have manifest in the phenomena of earth and world alienation, features which, for Arendt, characterise the modern age itself. These events are the 16th and 17th centuries' exploration of the earth, the processes of expropriation and wealth accumulation initiated with the Reformation, and the progress of scientific and technological development beginning with Galileo and increasing exponentially since.

Three great events stand at the threshold of the modern age and determine its character: the discovery of America and the ensuing exploration of the whole earth; the Reformation, which by expropriating ecclesiastical and monastic possessions started the two-fold process of individual expropriation and the accumulation of social wealth; the invention of the telescope and the development of a new science that considers the nature of the earth from the viewpoint of the universe.²⁴

To understand humanity's rebellion against the earth, we focus specifically on the exploration of the earth and the development of the new science. We deal in detail with each of these phenomena in the following chapter. For now, a brief overview will suffice, for within each of these phenomena are the beginnings of the modern age's alleged alienation from the earth.

The exploration and consequent mapping of the earth had a significant effect on humanity's relation to space and hence to the earth. One of the consequences was a vitiation of the earth, which no longer acted as a limit to human enterprise. Rather than a consolidation of boundaries, earth exploration seemed to dissolve

²³ The full quotation to the unnamed American journalist is as follows: "The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first 'step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth.' And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had been carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia's great scientists: 'Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever.' [...] What is new is only that one of this country's most respectable newspapers finally brought to its front page what up to then had been buried in the highly non-respectable literature of science fiction (to which, unfortunately, nobody yet has paid the attention it deserves as a vehicle of mass sentiments and mass desires)." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1-2).

²⁴ Ibid., 248.

any natural limits to human activity, especially those of imperialism and capitalism. The result was that with enough ingenuity humankind could conquer the globe and live in a world where speed has conquered distance. "Men now live in an earth-wide continuous whole where even the notion of distance, still inherent in the most perfectly unbroken contiguity of parts, has yielded before the onslaught of speed."²⁵ Speed had conquered space. This had the paradoxical effect of diminishing the spatial immensity of the earth. Our relationship underwent a 'shrinkage' regarding our experience of space. This accomplishment has come at the cost of a literal and metaphorical distancing from the earth itself. In the literal sense, space has been conquered as a boundary both horizontally, with geographical exploration, and later, vertically, when mankind physically left the earth altogether to explore the universe. The metaphorical sense points to an existential shift in our understanding of our place in the universe. This overcoming of earthly and geographic boundaries incurs the cost of a loss of perspective and subsequent alienation. "Only now has man taken full possession of his mortal dwelling place and gathered the infinite horizons, which were temptingly and forbiddingly open to all previous ages, into a globe whose majestic outlines and detailed surface he knows as he knows the lines in the palm of his hand."²⁶ The decrease of terrestrial distance is achieved at the expense of alienation from earthly surroundings.

It is in the nature of the human surveying capacity that it can function only if man disentangles himself from all involvement in and concern with the close at hand and withdraws himself to a distance from everything near him. The greater the distance between himself and his surroundings, world or earth, the more he will be able to survey and to measure and the less will worldly, earth-bound space be left to him.²⁷

It would seem that the actual distance of Sputnik from the earth represented an abstraction of humanity from the world. The capacity of humankind to explore the universe requires an abstraction and disentanglement from the primordial existential condition, that is, from the earth. This abstraction is no mere mental exercise but a manifestation of the growing desire for humanity to escape the limitations of the human condition. Important for now is to note the cost of this abstraction or withdrawal. It is not a more accurate vision of humanity's place in the universe but its estrangement from the conditions of having a place to begin with.

^{25.} Ibid., 250.

^{26.} Ibid.

^{27.} Ibid., 251.

These conditions are the features of life on earth and while some are rendered in the language of biological necessity, they are not unchanging. The point Arendt makes is that an inalienable feature of human existence is the capacity for change born out of the condition of natality. The cost of freeing ourselves from the conditions of the earth, however, is a grave form of alienation. Conquering the boundaries of the globe and beginning a voyage into the universe represents an alteration in the way humanity sees the earth. No longer is the earth a home. It now becomes a limit to human activity. This limitation is overcome at the price of alienation, that is, the estrangement of humankind from the earth and the conditions of living on it.

The second rebellion: life as it is given

With the creation of an artificial world humanity erects boundaries in an effort to distance itself from its original circumstances. However, there is one condition that stubbornly connects human beings to the natural world. This is the conditions of life as it is originally given. Contra the world of human beings, Arendt states that “life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms.”²⁸ The circumstances that accompany life on earth are shared with all living entities. That is, conception, gestation, birth, and death are essential features of life itself. The essential nature of the life process precludes freedom. As such, humankind has increasingly interfered with this process in an effort to gain control and hence freedom from these natural conditions. For Arendt, this interference does not simply affect our sense of autonomy over the biological, but actually amounts to yet another rebellion against a fundamental structure of existence.

The desire to be liberated from biological constraints, not only those surrounding birth but the longevity of the species’ lifespan, amounts to humanity’s efforts to “cut the last tie” to nature. This effort is paradigmatic of the attempts to recreate the life process by artificial means. The ability to do so would bring about an alteration in the human species itself, a “future man.”²⁹ This future man, Arendt tells us, “seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given.”³⁰ This statement refers to the desire to not simply to augment but to completely alter the original circumstance of human life. Humanity’s wish to escape the human condition is expressed in the willingness to interfere and manipulate the most fundamental processes of life. That we, as a species, no longer desire to be “among the children of

²⁸. Ibid., 2.

²⁹. Ibid.

³⁰. Ibid., 2-3.

nature" is the "same desire to escape from imprisonment to the earth."³¹ This desire does not originate in scientific or technological development. Rather, the inverse is true: "They [scientific achievements] show that men everywhere are by no means slow to catch up and adjust to scientific discoveries and technical developments, but that, on the contrary, they have outsped them by decades."³² It is interesting to think about whether this would still be the case today given the immense speed of technological change and its direct impact on our everyday life. Nonetheless, here lies another of Arendt's insights. That is that these capacities were dreamed of long before they could have been actualised or that "science has realized and affirmed what men anticipated in dreams that were neither wild nor idle."³³ This realisation points to an important tension between human existence and the worldly circumstances surrounding it.

A full analysis of life and its connection to labour occur in the sections on the *vita activa*, yet now we can perhaps better see why Arendt felt there was a need for such an analysis in the first place. It seems as though humanity in their endeavour to fundamentally change the conditions under which life is created is yet another manifestation of the rejection of the human condition. This rejection is, like the rebellion against the earth, traced historically to changes in the public and private spheres. More concretely, Arendt focuses on the consequences of the industrial revolution and the liberation of humanity from labour. The Judeo-Christian tradition views labour as a punishment issued by God for an act of disobedience, humanity's original sin. This punishment extends to the circumstances of birth in which the body experiences pain of laboriousness of childbirth. The effort to remove these conditions of the creation of life are explored in terms of their theological relevance but from an existential perspective. For it is not the rejection of God Arendt writes of but of the human condition.

What are traditionally viewed as inherent features of human existence have become limitations, that is, obstacles to be overcome so that humanity may free itself from any condition it has not itself made. This desire concerns not only the desire to be free from the confines of the globe but extends to the very circumstances under which life is created and brought into the world. The effort to artificially alter the circumstances of life's creation is not a moral issue for Arendt. Her concern, once more, lies with the underlying impulse of such a move. Put more precisely, Arendt is concerned with humanity's desire to liberate itself from

31. Ibid., 2.

32. Ibid., 1.

33. Ibid., 2.

the human condition without an understanding of what exactly that means.

The third rebellion: the necessity of labour

The final rebellion is against the process of labour. Automation is continuing to change the structure of our societies. In Arendt's own words, with: "the advent of automation, which in a few decades probably will empty the factories and liberate man-kind from its oldest and most natural burden, the burden of labouring and the bondage to necessity. Here, too, a fundamental aspect of the human condition is at stake."³⁴ It perhaps comes as no surprise to her contemporary readers that automation should be problematic for large sectors of society. But again, Arendt's insightful appraisal of the challenges posed by technological developments came at a time when attention was on the increasing possibility of being liberated from the need for manual labour.

In addition to the previously mentioned circumstances surrounding life stands the condition of labour. "Labor is the human activity grounded in biological necessity — the necessity to sustain and produce life."³⁵ Automation is replacing the need for many people to engage in most forms of labour. The labouring process has for a long time been the primary source of income in the modern age. While the desire to escape the necessity of labour is not new, the ability to liberate large portions of the population from this process is unique to modernity (post-industrial revolution). Rather than lead to a more equal distribution of wealth, or even shorter working day and hence more time for other activities, the productive capacity of labour was fed back into the process itself, generating greater productivity as well as greater expropriation:

What was liberated in the early stages of the first free laboring class in history was the force inherent in "labor power," that is, in the sheer natural abundance of the biological process, which like all natural forces—of procreation no less than of laboring—provides for a generous surplus over and beyond the reproduction of young to balance the old. What distinguishes this development at the beginning of the modern age from similar occurrences in the past is that expropriation and wealth accumulation did not simply result in new property or lead to a new redistribution of wealth, but were

³⁴. Ibid., 4.

³⁵. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 207.

fed back into the process to generate further expropriations, greater productivity, and more appropriation.³⁶

Labour is the means by which the physical necessities, the biological, 'natural forces' of life are provided for. Labour and life are closely connected. Yet labouring is an undesirable activity, not only because it constitutes hard work with short lived reward, but because the time taken to labour could be spent on other, 'higher' activities. For this reason, at least in Antiquity, labour was perceived as an activity fit for beasts, slaves, and women, in other words, for those whose capacity to be human was naturally limited.³⁷

Humanity has always striven to be free of the need to provide for life's necessities through labouring. The modern age's successful automation makes this desire an ever- increasing reality. And yet, Arendt states that this fact is not as positive at it seems at first. For, according to her, the modern age has glorified labour with detrimental consequences. The society of the modern age is a labouring society and the popularity of Marx's teachings resulted in the rise of the labourer and thus a society constituted primarily by labourers. Under the circumstances of the labouring process all are equal in the sense that no distinction occurs against the backdrop of the necessities of living. According to this view, everyone needs water, food, shelter, a decent standard of living, etc., hence a labouring society is the ultimate egalitarian society. But a society whose conception of living is tied to the ideal of labouring cannot stand in good stead against the rapid change the advent of automation brings. It is, Arendt writes, a "self-defeating enterprise,"³⁸ for without the need to participate in some form of labour the society of labour has lost its highest capacity. Whereas the need to escape the necessity of labour, common throughout human history, was sought for the sake of other, more worthy activities, for the society of labourers no such activities were available. In this way, "[t]he modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has

^{36.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 255.

^{37.} Soirely missing from Arendt's work is a sustained account of both slavery in general and the role of gender precisely in conceptions of labour. Both are used as justification to deny others access to public spaces, and as Arendt makes clear, to civil and humanitarian rights. See Maria Robaszkiewicz, and Michael Weinman, *Hannah Arendt and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), for a fruitful discussion of Arendt's lacuna on these topics. Specifically the ninth chapter, 'Thinking With and Against Arendt about Race, Racism, and Anti-racism', does not merely chastise Arendt for "not thinking about race in these moments of her work" (191) but encourages critical dialogue with Arendt's failures claiming, "We, as her readers, are to judge" (194).

^{38.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 4.

resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society.”³⁹ What is at stake in our increasing success in this endeavour is the paradoxical loss of the highest activity in modern society. Labour (and hence life) have taken the place of political action as that which gives meaning to human existence. Here lies Arendt’s criticism of Marx, whom she sees as largely responsible for this situation. The main problem resides in Marx’s conviction that the defining feature of human beings is their capacity to labour, placing this activity at the centre of his political theory: “What Marx understood was that labor itself had undergone a decisive change in the modern world: that it had not only become the source of all wealth, and consequently the origin of all social values, but that all men, independent of class origin, were sooner or later destined to become laborers, and that those who could not be adjusted into this process of labor would be seen and judged by society as mere parasites.”⁴⁰ To a degree, Arendt would agree that labour is indeed an activity human beings have in common, but to say that labour is the most important activity that human beings are capable of is to ignore the individuating and self-actualising possibility of action.

Marx has turned traditional philosophy on its head when he proposed to make labour and work the central concern for politics. Tradition perceived the necessity of labour as a barrier to freedom which was achieved in action and political discourse, in other words, labour and freedom were opposites. “As the elementary activity necessary for the mere conservation of life, labor had always been thought of as a curse, in the sense that it made life hard, preventing it from ever becoming easy and thereby distinguishing it from the lives of the Olympian gods. That human life is not easy is only another way of saying that in its most elementary aspect it is subject to necessity, that it is not and never can become free from coercion, for coercion is first felt in the peculiarly all-overwhelming urges of our bodies.”⁴¹ Hence Marx places centre stage what history had barred from the political sphere. This development makes the effort to abolish labour through technological artifice all the more troubling for Arendt, for in doing so humanity risks eradicating that which is supposed to be inalienable. The point Arendt is making is simple: not everything done in the name of progress will necessarily be progressive. It seems society is determined to abolish the very activity that it values the most.

³⁹. Ibid.

⁴⁰. Hannah Arendt, ‘Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought’ *Social Research* 69, no. 2 (2002): 278-79.

⁴¹. Ibid., 285.

[T]he perfect elimination of the pain and effort of labour would not only rob biological life of its most natural pleasures but deprive the specifically human life of its very liveliness and vitality [...] That the life of the rich loses in vitality, in closeness to the “good things” of nature, what it gains in refinement, in sensitivity to the beautiful things in the world, has often been noted. The fact is that the human capacity for life in the world always implies an ability to transcend and to be alienated from the process of life itself, while vitality and liveliness can be conserved only to the extent that men are willing to take the burden, the toil and trouble of life, upon themselves.⁴²

I believe what lies behind Arendt’s diagnosis here is a fear of large groups of people becoming, once more, superfluous. The condition of superfluosity is explored in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Peg Birmingham argues that “Arendt provides a genealogy of the political- economic production of superfluosity that begins at the outset of modernity and finds its extreme form in the Nazis’ death camps.”⁴³ This will be further discussed in chapters four and five.

The politics of belonging

These passages in *The Human Condition* alert readers to ongoing efforts to be free of the human, or earthly, condition. There are two specific points of note. The first is that Arendt does not offer a simple critique of technology. She rather cautions against the desire to change the essentially terrestrial conditions of life. Her point is best understood, then, in a spatial framework. Hence, these rebellions against the human condition manifest particular forms of alienation. The political, historical, and moral structures that temporarily lent support to human existence collapsed over the course of the twentieth century. Under these circumstances, the impotence of human nature as a unifying and stabilising force is discernible. The rebellions, according to Arendt, indicate a fundamental shift in humanity’s engagement with the world and how human beings understand their place, quite literally, in it. The second point of notice is that Arendt draws the reader’s attention to a different, more cautious, perspective of these developments, one that is otherwise easily missed in the fervour of technological progress. Rather, she asks the reader to reflect on humanity’s current and future trajectory in light of the events of the twentieth century. The fact that no such discussion is on the horizon,

⁴². Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 120-1.

⁴³. Birmingham, ‘Hannah Arendt’s double account of evil’, 148-49.

not in Arendt's time and very late in our own, is for her indicative of the failure to comprehend human existence as worldly existence. This failure of comprehension is symptomatic of the modern age itself and of various breakdowns of the tradition that is constitutive of the modern world. What she ultimately offers is a moment to think unclouded by the elation of technological achievement and progress to consider these feats from the perspective of the earth.

Moreover, Arendt reminds her readers of the political nature of these events and their consequences. To say that these problems are political problems one must understand Arendt's conception of political freedom for which the importance of a spatial ontology is evident in the following quote:

Political concepts are based on plurality, diversity, and mutual limitations. A citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries. His [sic] rights and duties must be defined and limited, not only by those of his fellow citizens, but also by the boundaries of a territory. Philosophy may conceive of the earth as the homeland of mankind [sic] and of one unwritten law, eternal and valid for all. Politics deals with men [sic], nationals of many countries and heirs to many pasts; its laws are the positively established fences which hedge in, protect, and limit the space in which freedom is not a concept, but a living, political reality.⁴⁴

In other words, the issue of earth-alienation cannot be addressed by scientific or technocratic means, because it is a political matter of the first order. The above quotation illuminates the necessity of limitation in the form of existential conditions. To be a citizen, and not only a member of the human species, entails a particular relation to space in the form of territory, homeland, and the juridical boundaries of law that limit and hence make possible freedom. Yet, the price of progress seems to require the rejection of limitation and the fundamental alteration of the human condition.

Chapter two (page 31) discussed one such manifestation of this alienation in the attempt to establish a doctrine of human rights. After the events of the first half

⁴⁴ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 81-82. Arendt's writing is regrettably gendered, as evinced in the title of the text quoted above. She often uses the gendered term 'Men' to stand for all human kind. My approach to this problem is twofold. First, I make clear in my analysis when and where Arendt is referring to humanity — as is often the case — and when she means men. Second, as demonstrated in the above quotation, when using a direct quote I alert the reader to her antiquated use of gendered terms.

of the twentieth century, the need for a transnational guarantee of human dignity became apparent. This guarantee could no longer be based upon the ideals of natural law. As Arendt and others have warned countless times, life in and of itself, that is bare life, is not desirable under any and all conditions. Human life must have dignity and a minimum quality of life regardless of country, faith, race, or gender. Dignity and quality of life are human rights and are instantiated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The problem, as Serena Parekh explains, is that the politics of the 20th century has prioritised the judicial dimension of human rights over the ontological.⁴⁵ What this means is that a fundamental right, the right to a place in the world where one's actions have meaning and consequence, has been neglected. Instead, following Parekh, the multitude of covenants, international declarations, and institutions cannot successfully address the "paradox of human rights." If a person has to rely only on the fact that they are human in order to secure their rights, these rights become simultaneously unattainable because there is no community which can guarantee them. Arendt's point is that there is nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of human beings without the assurance of belonging to a political community.⁴⁶ The loss of a place in the world deprives one of the capacity for meaningful action, in losing out on a fundamental part of the human condition.⁴⁷ Again, the human condition is not an inalienable condition. As Arendt's analysis of the launch of Sputnik shows, human beings are capable of altering even the fundamental conditions of life on earth. Hence, there is nothing truly inalienable from human beings.⁴⁸ This, for Arendt, constitutes the problem of human rights that rely on the fact of one's humanity in order to be granted. In her eyes, something more fundamental must first be assured, namely, a place in the world to which we are assured we belong. This is a clear sign of the spatial ontology at play in her work. Given the connection between political rights and territoriality, arguments which seek to defend such rights would benefit from an analysis of the spatial nature of existence.

To understand how it is humanity has arrived at this crucial juncture, Arendt explores in historical and philosophical terms how Western political values have

^{45.} Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 12.

^{46.} Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 299.

^{47.} Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 29.

^{48.} Parekh is right in stating that the "reality of the world affects human existence as much as human existence creates the world." (Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 49). However, Parekh's conclusion of this fact is to say that humanity is never fully conditioned but remains in a "process of becoming." This latter statement by Parekh goes against Arendt's repudiation of viewing humanity as a process instead of human beings in their plurality, as well as against her own efforts to provide a grounding of under modern conditions, particularly increasing superfluosity.

changed. A thread that runs through Arendt's work is the distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Understanding the differences between these modes of life is crucial when it comes to understanding the various distinctions and definitions she goes on to make, most pertinently between different spaces. With this in mind, we now turn to Arendt's description of the *vita activa* in more detail. Having discussed the events that inspired *The Human Condition*, we are better placed to understand why Arendt gives the attention she does to Ancient Greece and the ideals of the *polis*.

The *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*

The methodology of *The Human Condition* makes it easy to succumb to the view that Arendt espouses a return to the ideals of the ancient Greek city-state.⁴⁹ The seemingly unsystematic method of her thought means it is easy to overlook significant features of her philosophy, as she herself often devotes comparatively little time to their full explanation. This note on methodology is important for understanding why Arendt spent so much time discussing the long-gone ideals of the ancient Greek city-state. The turn to the *vita activa* was not taken in order to re-establish its values or political order, nor was it done out of personal preference by the author.⁵⁰ Instead, if we believe Arendt herself, she was 'led' to the analysis of the *vita activa* by retroactively tracing the historical and conceptual shifts in the Western thought, paying particular attention to moments where tensions arise between two or more different understandings of our place in the world.⁵¹

^{49.} James Hart writes: "The Greeks whom Arendt appropriates believed that the criterion of being is appearance." James, G. Hart, 'Hannah Arendt: The Care of the World and of the Self' in *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2002), 89. Jürgen Habermas finds a weakness in Arendt's communicative concept of power that ultimately resides in the fact that she "remains bound to the historical and conceptual constellation of classical Greek philosophy" (Habermas, 'Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power', 7). See also Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 289: "Her understanding of the Greek polis and the dramatisation of action in Greek tragedy provided the model for her analysis of the nature of being-in-the-world, and the requirements for a life lived in public."

^{50.} Arendt does not support any hierarchical order between the two conceptions of living. She writes: "If, therefore, the use of the term *vita activa*, as I propose it here, is in manifest contradiction to the tradition, it is because I doubt not the validity of the experience underlying the distinction [between contemplation and action] but rather the hierarchical order inherent in it from its inception." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 16-17) Again, "My contention is simply that the enormous weight of contemplation in the traditional hierarchy has blurred the distinctions and articulations within the *vita activa* itself" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 17).

^{51.} Dana Villa argues that Arendt's hope in distinguishing activities of *vita activa* was to install a new appreciation of human plurality and the world of appearances (Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 17).

Her phenomenological method is imperative here. As Grunenberg puts it: “Behind the historical narratives that run through Arendt’s book, there lies a profound engagement with philosophical thinking and its relation to the world. Arendt investigated the breach in tradition, which had its origin in the split between philosophical thinking about the world and acting and judging in that world.”⁵² Her focus on one historical aspect may be justified by recalling Arendt’s dedication to the experiential underpinning of all political ideals or intellectual movements. That is, she was never satisfied by superficial examination of phenomena. She knew that to understand why something came about the way it did, one must trace the roots of phenomena to their original, that is, experiential source in the world of acting and speaking human beings.

Attention to the *vita activa* is therefore not based on supremacy, i.e., on superiority or preference.⁵³ Instead, it is an attempt to rectify an imbalance between two interconnected ways of life according to the Greeks. This means that Arendt does not actually argue for a hierarchy in the activities of the *vita activa* or in those of the *vita contemplativa*. The purpose, rather, is to reveal how such hierarchies have blurred the distinctions between the activities, and how, as a result, one way of life, the *vita contemplativa*, came to dominate the active life of the citizen.⁵⁴ Given that Arendt clearly states the aim of her method, it is a mistake to read the message of *The Human Condition* as a plea to return to the past. “Arendt harbors no nostalgia for recovering the Greek experience.”⁵⁵ To understand *The Human Condition* as a justification and argument for the reinstatement of historical ideals is not only anachronistic, it also obscures the original depth of her thought. With this in mind, let us revisit Arendt’s discussion of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* in order to address the accusation that Arendt’s philosophy is overly indebted to the ideals of the ancient Greek city-state. Many of her readers believe that this historical preference causes an imbalance in the author’s perception of the modern world and apparently leads to “alarming” and “antiquated” conclusions.⁵⁶

^{52.} Grunenberg, ‘Arendt, Heidegger, Jaspers’, 1022.

^{53.} For contrast, see Dana Villa’s reference to Habermas’ ‘consensus’ reading of Arendt which emphasises her distinction within the *vita activa* between labour and work on the one hand, and action and speech on the other (Villa, ‘Postmodernism and the Public Sphere’, 712). Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, for instance, describes Arendt’s prioritisation of action within the *vita activa* as her attempt to recover feature of human existence which have been lost in tradition (Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hanna Arendt*, 66).

^{54.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 17.

^{55.} Birmingham, ‘Holes of Oblivion’, 82.

^{56.} Last, ‘Re-reading Worldliness’, 75.

The *vita activa*, or *bios politikos*, is founded on the belief that the best life possible is the life devoted to public participation.⁵⁷ Such participation is possible among equals and hence was restricted to citizens. It constitutes the realm of human affairs and its proper location is the *polis*, which enables citizens to come together in the form of communication, persuasion, and action. In other words, the *polis* constitutes the location for an active, public existence shared with other citizens. For Arendt, “the *vita activa*, human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something, is always rooted in a world of men and of manmade things which it never leaves or altogether transcends.”⁵⁸ In this way, public life is actualised in specific, non-coercive modes of being together. This mode of living is coextensive with freedom and, as such, departs from a traditional notion of freedom as synonymous with sovereignty. Rather, freedom is a public and hence intersubjective achievement. In a negative sense this freedom was perceived to be founded upon the inherent unpredictability of human affairs. The active life entails the paradoxical condition that one can never organise a community to such an extent as to eliminate the unpredictability inherent in human affairs. To do so would be to undermine the novelty made possible by participation in public life.

By contrast, *vita contemplativa*, or *bios theoretikos*, is devoted to the solitary contemplation of an eternal and absolute truth.⁵⁹ It requires conditions of quiet stillness and liberation from worldly distractions. Contemplation requires the total cessation of worldly activities. Sustained by a sense of wonder (*thaumazein*), it asserts that the best way to spend one’s limited time on this earth is in apprehension and silent appreciation of Truth, of matters eternal. In comparison to the stability and beauty of the cosmos, the active life, spent among volatile and fallible human beings, was a distraction from the absolute, for no human endeavour could equal the self-sufficient and eternal beauty of the cosmos. “The primacy of contemplation over activity rests on the conviction that no work of human hands can equal in beauty and truth the physical *kosmos*, which swings in itself in changeless eternity without any interference or assistance from outside, from man or god.”⁶⁰ Because contemplation was dependent neither on the presence of others nor on a worldly space for its actualisation, it was thought to offer a freedom superior to that of the public realm. Only the philosopher’s way of life could free humanity from the unpredictability of human co-existence. In this vein, Arendt traces a disdain for the active life to a pinnacle moment: the death of Socrates.

^{57.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 12.

^{58.} *Ibid.*, 22.

^{59.} *Ibid.*, 16.

^{60.} *Ibid.*, 15.

The trial of Socrates represents fundamental tension between a life dedicated to thought and the life of the citizen. In order to rescue philosophy from the mob the philosophical tradition subordinated the life of the citizen to that of contemplation. "We find it in Plato's political philosophy, where the whole Utopian reorganization of *polis* life is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher but has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher's way of life."⁶¹ Thus, according to Arendt, it is in the platonic tradition that we find the elevation of thought over action, of the *bios theoretikos* over the *bios politikos*.⁶² The hierarchy has since become sedimented in the Western philosophical tradition. Plato, it seems, believed it necessary to bring the *vita activa* into the service of the *vita contemplativa* since the trial of Socrates, after which the public was no longer only an obstacle to the life of thought but also a threat to its very existence. The death of Socrates was a harbinger for the death of the philosopher's way of life, that is, the *vita contemplativa*.

To rescue philosophy from the mob, that is, from those who do not understand its way of life, the philosophical tradition, beginning with Plato, subordinated the life of the citizen to that of the philosopher. The supposed superiority of contemplation obfuscated the articulations and values within the *vita activa*.⁶³ Whereas the *bios politikos* was once thought to have a dignity and self-sufficiency of its own, to be an end-in-itself, its subsequent subjugation to the *bios theoretikos* robbed it of this quality. Politics was placed in the service of contemplation as embodied by the philosopher king, who by political organisation makes possible the ultimate goal, the *vita contemplativa*. If we take this point into account, then Arendt's attention to *vita activa* is not based on supremacy but, instead, it is an attempt to rectify an imbalance. The *vita activa*, the active life, is derived in relation to the *vita contemplativa* or the life of contemplation.⁶⁴

These differences notwithstanding, both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* originate from a common source or concern. Beginning from the recognition that to be human is to be mortal, both aim towards the achievement of immortality. In other words, both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* aim at overcoming death, albeit in different ways. The manner in which they do this can be understood by the distinction between immortality and eternity. While the mortality of human

^{61.} Ibid., 14.

^{62.} Ibid., 17, 85.

^{63.} Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 17-25.

^{64.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 16.

existence may seem boringly obvious, better understanding it requires situating this mortality in what the Greeks understood as an immortal world.

In accordance with this distinction, both nature and the Gods are without death. The natural world, through the repetitive process of life, ensures that death is not final but life is continuously reproduced. This cyclical movement of the natural world stands in contrast with the rectilinear movement of human life. While humankind as a species belongs to the natural world and so endures in deathless repetition, the human being in their individuality does not share in this natural immortality. The Greek gods, too, do not die but subsist in space and time. This manner of immortality differs from the idea of an eternal God who exists outside space, time and the lives of human beings. "Against this background of nature's ever-recurring life and the gods' deathless and ageless lives stood mortal men, the only mortals in an immortal but not eternal universe, confronted with the immortal lives of their gods but not under the rule of an eternal God."⁶⁵ Due to the ontological deficiency of human existence, the only way human beings could attain immortality was, first, through the production of objects which could endure beyond relatively short human lifespan, and second, through the enactment of deeds, words, and biographies that deserve to be preserved. Immortality was an achievement of mortal actors, it was earned and hence not automatically given as in the case of the natural world and the Gods.

The indispensable quality of this human immortality resides in its worldly character. Human immortality means to deserve a place on this earth and in this world in which one establishes a home. The active life follows this sense of immortality through remembrance and the addition of manmade things into the world. In the course of living with others and creating something, whether it be an object or a story, which lasts longer than the individual lifespan of a person, a human being attains what Arendt describes as "earthly immortality."⁶⁶ Personified in the Homeric tradition, this means of conquering death relies solely on the presence and endurance of a world in which one can act with significance and with others and whose work is spared from futility. The ways in which philosophers were thought to achieve this ultimately led to the prioritisation of contemplation over action. According to Arendt, this had a significant impact on not only the tradition of thought but also on the status of the world.⁶⁷ Significantly, human immortality does not share the same connotation of eternity, understood as existence beyond time and space. It lacks this sense of

^{65.} Ibid., 18.

^{66.} Ibid., 21, 55, 250-51.

^{67.} See Ricoeur, 'Action, Story and History', 60-72.

transcendence, which is familiar in philosophical and religious thought after the rise of Christianity in the West.

The *vita contemplativa*, on the contrary, is devoted to the eternal, to matters which are unchanging by nature and which lie beyond the senses of human beings. It requires total stillness and detachment from the world in order to conceptually behold universal truth. This way of life leaves behind, if only momentarily, the world of human affairs in order to overcome both the contingency of humanity as well as the distraction it poses to the life of contemplation. The total stillness required for contemplation stems from the nature of the eternal which, according to the Greeks, is *aneu logon*, a speechless wonder which defies communicability. It means that this way of life concerns itself with matters that are necessarily unworldly, and even antagonistic to the world of human affairs. In contrast to the *vita activa*'s emphasis on the productive capacities of humanity, the *vita contemplativa* stresses the human capacity for thought. However, contemplation has little to do with the 'reckoning of consequences' associated with reason. Instead, it connotes a sense of beholding truth, a strictly passive activity performed in isolation. Epitomised in the parable of the Cave, beholding truth requires turning away from the world of human affairs to a realm outside or beyond it.

The philosopher's experience of the eternal, which to Plato was *arrheton* ("unspeakable"), and to Aristotle *aneu logon* ("without word"), and which later was conceptualized in the paradoxical *nunc stans* ("the standing now"), can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men, as we know from the Cave parable in Plato's Republic, where the philosopher, having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect "singularity," as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others.⁶⁸

The singularity of the *vita contemplativa* is destructive of the plurality inherent in the *vita activa*. The public, political nature of the active life is sustained by the presence of others who witness and give meaning to acts that would otherwise be forgotten and so remain without significance. The intersubjective quality of the *vita activa* is so crucial that to be without it meant the same as death in the sense of ceasing to exist for the Greeks. It is this death-like feature that is required by contemplation even if only for a short duration. "Politically speaking, if to die is the same as 'to cease to be among men,' experience of the eternal is a kind of death,

^{68.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 20.

and the only thing that separates it from real death is that it is not final because no living creature can endure it for any length of time.”⁶⁹ Whereas action with others is essential for the immortality offered by the *vita activa*, it is inadequate and disruptive to the life of contemplation. As such immortality and eternity entail two different ways of life even if both originate in the fact of human mortality. This topic is discussed further in chapter four. It is important to establish the relation between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* for the analysis of the activities of the former.

With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Christian belief in an eternal afterlife, the striving for immortality at the heart of the active life was replaced by the promise of everlasting life not of this world. With the loss of earthly immortality, the status of the human world also changed along with the activities that are part of the *vita activa*. The discussion of these activities takes up a sizeable portion of *The Human Condition* and received much attention in the literature. Yet, we must keep in mind our earlier note concerning the methodology of *The Human Condition*. While significant to the conceptual structure of the text, the activities of the *vita activa* are there to help her readers understand the modern world. The point of Arendt’s excursion into the domains of the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* is to show how the perception of each in the quest for deathless existence ultimately led to the prioritisation of contemplation over action. The active life sought a sense of immortality through remembrance and the addition of manmade things into the world.

The active life, comprised by three fundamental activities, becomes an important moment of spatial delineation. The themes of earth and world have appeared as endangered space in the modern age, something which has not improved in the 65 years since its publication. These circumstances did not develop overnight, as it were. Arendt believes the circumstances of our modern alienation began with the strife between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, and, according to Arendt, with the eventual victory of the latter over the former. Important for our goal are the two different modes of immortality that arise out of these two ways of life, because the manner in which immortalisation is achieved depends on the space in which immortalizing activities are undertaken.

The following section provides an overview and description of the components of the active life as Arendt defines them. Throughout, the spatial relevance of each

⁶⁹. Ibid.

activity and its correlative human condition is emphasised. For now, we deal only with matters as Arendt describes and defines them.

The topology of the *vita activa*

The activities that comprise the *vita activa* correspond to the different domains of the human condition.⁷⁰ These conditions are common to each and every human being either as a potentiality or an actuality. As Paul Ricoeur notes, the distinctions of the *vita activa* are historical structures and not to be taken as categories in the Kantian sense.⁷¹ What Arendt does invoke are the five elements of the human condition: earth, life, worldliness, natality and mortality, and plurality. Parekh notes the significance of Arendt's notion that human beings are, what Arendt calls, 'conditioned beings' in the sense that humans are changed by both what they make themselves and the world in which they live.⁷² From these conditions arise the activities of labour, work, and action.⁷³

As explained earlier in this chapter, labour attends to the immediate demands of biological existence. It is most closely connected to the body "whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor."⁷⁴ All living things must engage in activities that are aimed at survival and because of this are repeated daily. This lends labouring the quality of a certain futility, for the products must be used and consumed with immediacy. For instance, the effort to secure food must be repeated as long as the life process continues. Therefore, labour, in distinction from work, "never designates a finished product,"⁷⁵ for the goal of labour is the continuation of the life process which necessarily uses up and consumes products made for survival.⁷⁶ As such, labour is shared among all living things and so intimately connected to nature. Furthermore, because life compels us to labour in order to survive, this led to the traditional disdain for the labouring activity.⁷⁷ The necessity of labour is experienced in opposition to freedom. This necessity and

^{70.} Ibid., 5, 7.

^{71.} Ricoeur, 'Action, Story, and History', 61.

^{72.} Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 111.

^{73.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

^{74.} Ibid.

^{75.} Ibid., 80.

^{76.} Ibid., 88.

^{77.} Ibid., 83.

absence of freedom exists wherever the activities of life dominate, such as they do in natural spaces.

Labour, then, concerns the basic condition of life itself. This sense of life has nothing to do with individual life (*bios*) but unfolds across the biological spectrum of the species. The circumstances of life indiscriminately demand that certain conditions be continuously fulfilled. Labour refers to a range of tasks undertaken for the survival and reproduction of life. This qualification applies to all living things, and as such, is shared by all living entities. The *telos* of labour is life but life itself is never a final product, what is carried out in its name, for instance, eating, sleeping, securing a place of safety, and reproduction, must all be repeated often on a daily basis in order that the conditions of living be met and life to persist. For this reason, Arendt ameliorates the noun 'labour' to the gerund 'labouring', connoting the quotidian repetitiveness of the activity. The qualities of labour are dictated by the conditions of life. Because life itself is the goal, labour 'never designates a finished product' for whatever is created through labour is for the sole purpose of the life process. Accordingly, another key feature of the life process is consumption. Life necessarily uses up and consumes products made for survival. It is most closely connected to the body "whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor."⁷⁸ Labour produces 'nothing but life' and so is the least worldly and most natural activity of the *vita activa*.⁷⁹ The necessity to perform labour is shared among all living things and so intimately connected to the natural world. Natural and biological forces extend the qualities of repetition, consumption, biological corporeality, and a sense of futility in exchange for the continuation of the species. These features also act as barriers that confine life to anonymity and to an eternal reoccurrence of the same in terms of the repetition of the same tasks again and again.

Historically, this element of coercion has been a key feature of labour, leading to the traditional disdain for all tasks performed in necessity.⁸⁰ The need to labour in order to provide the biological conditions of life was experienced in direct contempt of freedom, where to be free meant to be without any coercion, be it by the will of another or the indifferent conditions of life itself. For this element of necessity and hence absence of freedom exists wherever the activities of life dominate, such as they do in natural spaces. The human species, as long as they engage in activities connected with the biological life process, is known as *animal laborans* and remains

⁷⁸. Ibid., 7.

⁷⁹. Ibid., 96.

⁸⁰. Ibid., 83.

without any meaningful distinction from other animal species. *Animal laborans* is bound to the life process not only by the conditions of life but also in their mentality. This means that *animal laborans* is partially defined by their disengagement with the world. For *animal laborans* all things exist primarily for the life process and so it is consumption that is the order of the day under this attitude. Breaking free of the natural conditions which compels life to labour requires a different activity and the actualisation of another condition, that is, the activity of work and its quality of worldliness.

In distinction to the natural environment of *animal laborans*, the activity of work refers to the capacity to create a separate, artificial space. Work is defined by a sense of permanence and stability. Through this activity human beings construct places that are distinct from the natural world and relatively free from the life process. We create a world in the sense of a distinctly human space where transcendence of the life process and the ephemeral quality of natural space is overcome to a certain extent. This achievement comes about through the fabricating activity by which objects are created and added to the world. The significant features of these objects lie in their permanence and relative independence from the person who made them. The permanence of the object means they have the potential to last longer than the lifespan of their creator. The durability of the fabricated object, be it a chair, a building, or a work of art, is what lends the human world its transcendence from the metabolic processes of nature and so provides the opportunity for action that is not determined by the necessity of life and labour. The activity of work provides possibility for earthly immortality and freedom in action. Hence, nature and world are distinguished not only by their objective features but also by the types of activities appropriate to them. "This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together."⁸¹ The term 'natural world' is an oxymoron to the Arendt of *The Human Condition* for a world is a distinctly and exclusively human space. Arendt's stark human exceptionalism is rather glaring at this juncture.

There are several features of work which stand in opposition to labour. The first is that of production. Work produces something that exists beyond the activity itself, an object. Whereas labour only 'produces' life, work produces tangible things. These objects are not consumed but instead are used. As such, proper engagement with the objects of production does not wear them out or use them up in the way that

⁸¹. Ibid., 52.

bread must be quickly consumed if it is to fulfil its purpose of sustaining the life process. The productive capacity of work is referred to as fabrication and is based upon the Greek concept of *poiesis*, also known as making. Fabrication is a process guided by a *telos* specific to the end goal, obvious examples include the making of furniture, of crafts, and even feats of architecture. The significance lies not so much in the particular object which has been made but the commonality of the making process, which, unlike labouring, has a beginning and end and is guided by the model or idea (*eidos*) of the object. It was this experience of fabrication, these features common to all production, that influenced Plato's doctrine of ideas.⁸² The 'idea' inspires and oversees the production of the object, be it a chair, a work of art, or a piece of medical equipment; all moments in the process of production refer back to the original model. What is significant about this characterization is that, accordingly, fabrication offers an element of control and reliability that action in particular cannot, as we will soon see. Markell reaffirms the importance of the category of work in the structure of the *vita activa*. Specifically, Markell criticises the tendency to see the significance of work in the *vita activa* as reducible to what is produced: "The substitution of making for acting, in other words, is problematic in part because it reduces work itself to the production of mere use objects, disarticulating use from appearance and thus also disarticulating work from action." Markell's reading of *The Human Condition* exposes the manner by which the activity of work acts as a buttress between labour and action, supporting rather than separating them: "In short, to interpret Arendt's critique territorially, as an effort to enforce a rigid separation between work and action, would be to confuse the traditional philosophical representation of work with the phenomenon itself; and it would thus risk the irony of delivering us by a different route to the very destination Arendt sought to escape."⁸³

Work exceeds the idea that inspired it. Work always produces something beyond the process itself. The fabrication process ends with the existence of the object. As such, work, through its capacity to produce things, is instilled with a quality of independence that labour is not. This independence lies in the finished object which exists autonomously from both creator and the fabricating activity. In other words, once created, the object does not rely on its maker in order to exist, the maker will eventually perish but that which they created does not. Once made, the things produced by work possess an ontological status independent of both maker and activity. The essence of the maker, worker, or fabricator, is captured by the term *homo faber*. The key feature of *homo faber* is the instrumental attitude

^{82.} Ibid., 142.

^{83.} Patchen Markell, 'Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of "The Human Condition"', 35.

crucial to its operations. *Homo faber's* engagement with the world is one defined by the category of means-to-end, meaning everything the worker comes in contact with immediately assumes the function of a means to some further aim. In this way, *homo faber* instrumentalises the world, making the categories of usefulness and sustainability the ultimate standards.⁸⁴ The utilitarian worldview inherent to *homo faber* produces a paradox because all activity assumes a further end thus there can be no final end or ultimate purpose. This paradox originates in *homo faber's* ability to create a world distinct from the natural world via the addition of human-made objects, of things whose tangibility transforms the natural, cyclical environment, conferring instead the qualities of durability, independence, and worldliness. "Work provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness."⁸⁵ Let us look at this last feature in more detail.

The tangible products that are the outcome of the fabrication process "install a lasting domain" beyond the ephemerality of the natural, biological conditions of life.⁸⁶ Whereas the environment of *animal laborans* is forever defined by the cyclical movement of natural forces, the activity of work ruptures this cycle, creating the opportunity to transcend the anonymity of biological life. Hence work creates a distinct, artificial space known as a 'world'. World connotes a distinctly human, and hence unnatural, space where human existence can partially transform experiences of the life process and where the ephemeral quality of natural spaces is overcome, at least to a certain extent. Because the products of work do not diminish with proper use, they lend the world a sense of both durability and permanence, in comparison to the consumptive life process. Their independence from their maker allows them to establish a shared reality beyond the activity itself. This permanence is what bestows the world with a transcendence from the metabolic processes of nature and so provides the opportunity for forms of action that are not determined by the necessity of life and labour.

Inseparable from this feature of permanence is the equally important stability that the world provides human existence. The stability of the world comes from its ability to withstand both the forces of nature and the consumptive life process of human beings. Again, the products of work, provided they are properly used, do not disappear from the world. This stability gives the world the only real objectivity

^{84.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 153.

^{85.} *Ibid.*, 7.

^{86.} Taminiaux, 'Bios politikos and bios theoretikos in the Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt', 217.

possible for human beings. This objectivity is experienced as 'sameness', that is, as a consistent identity of objects and world in relation to one another.⁸⁷ Against the background of the natural world, against the repetition of seasonal change, growth and decay, destruction and reproduction, the artificial world stands as a relatively permanent structure. This permanence makes possible the identity and individuality of objects and people as well as the features of the natural world.

Only when they enter the man-made world can nature's processes be characterised by growth and decay; only if we consider nature's products, this tree or this dog, as individual things, thereby already removing them from their "natural" surroundings and putting them into our world, do they begin to grow and to decay.⁸⁸

The features of the natural environment and the human world become manifest in relation to one another. The relative permanence of the world is experienced as such in contrast to the continual change of natural environments. Even the growth and decay of biological life is not an 'objective' feature of existence but appears as such from the perspective of individual life. The solidity of worldly things, their existence outside the process of life and fabrication, facilitates an enduring and individual identity that is impossible outside of the human world. The sameness retrieved from an object forms the space in which people, their own subjective states notwithstanding, develop a consistent identity. In other words, the solidity of the human world, arising from the products of fabrication, is the condition of having shared, common spaces as well as an individual identity that others can recognise.

The presence of the world has a paradoxical effect on human interaction, for it both "binds and separates humans. It binds them because it is their commonality; it separates them because its durable transcendence."⁸⁹ The worldliness of human existence is the outcome of the work of *homo faber*. The world not only alters the living conditions of human beings but also their mortality. Without the stability of a world that exists beyond an individual's time on earth, memory and history would be impossible. In this way, the productivity of work offers the potential for human immortality through both the construction of the human artifice and the possibility of being individualised and remembered by an enduring community. This was the inspiring principle behind the construct of the ancient Greek city-state.

^{87.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 137.

^{88.} *Ibid.*, 97-98.

^{89.} Taminiaux, 'Bios politikos and bios theoretikos in the Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt', 217.

However, according to the ancient Greeks, one must prove, through what they say and what they do, the uniqueness of their identity and worthiness of being remembered by those who come after them. These are the conditions that constitute what Arendt calls earthly immortality, which is discussed further in the next chapter. The final activity in the *vita activa* concerns this 'worthiness' and it involves an activity that is different from both labour and work. This activity is called action.

Despite the commonality of the term, this sense of action is unfamiliar to, what Arendt would call, our 'modern' understanding of what it means to act. Inspired by the Greek principle of *praxis*, the qualities of Arendtian action are necessarily different from the goal-oriented activities of labour and work. Consider what she says in the following: "The normal, hackneyed word our language provides for this talent is 'action.' Action is unique in that it sets in motion processes that in their automatism look very much like natural processes, and action also marks the start of something, begins something new, seizes the initiative, or, in Kantian terms, forges its own chain."⁹⁰ It is nonetheless a mistake to take this quality of action to mean that it possesses the same goal-oriented mentality as labour and work. Whereas each of the former activities of the *vita activa* are geared toward a desired outcome, the sustenance of life in labour, the production of objects in the case of work, action possess a curious uselessness. This futility is not accidental, it is an essential quality. Action is not teleologically determined, meaning it is primarily neither instrumental or 'useful', nor productive. It is undertaken for an altogether different motive: self-disclosure. Genuine action, precisely because it is neither utilitarian nor obligated by external conditions, actualises the appearance of an individual or actor. "This actualization resides and comes to pass in those activities that exist only in sheer actuality."⁹¹ Appearance refers to the disclosure of a person's identity only in an intersubjective context. Ultimately, action contains a revelatory quality. This revelation can only take place in the presence of others who also distinguish themselves through their actions. It is because action is performed in an arena of other actors that any objective goal behind the original impetus to act is thwarted, rendering action futile in this utilitarian sense. Despite this futility, true action reveals something about the actor's identity, no matter how inconsequential the act may seem. Because action does not have its ultimate source 'outside' the actor, action differs once more from labour and work. Both labour and work aim at something beyond the activity itself which it establishes as the greatest possible outcome of human existence. The greatest good according to *animal laborans* is

^{90.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 113.

^{91.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 208.

life, for *homo faber* it is the finished product. Yet, only in the case of action is the activity itself its *raison d'être*. Precisely because the initiative to act is neither bound by necessity nor guided by instrumentality, it bears a distinct archaic quality.⁹²

It is through action, as a mode of being together, that life, in an individualistic, non-biological sense, is manifest. Yet this manifestation of one's life as distinct from the life of the species is possible only in the human artifice, that is, in the world. The world provides a space for the human condition of plurality. As Arendt so often states, action is founded on the condition of plurality, which means this sense of action is not possible without the presence of others who are, at the same time, distinct yet equal. The importance of these qualities cannot be overstated. Without the quality of distinction, Arendt tells, there would exist no need for speech, all communication would be unnecessary as we would all be completely alike. And yet, were we completely different communication and co-ordinated action would be impossible.⁹³

Distinction is not to be mistaken for otherness. Everything that exists is in some sense distinct from everything else in existence. Otherness, while part of plurality, exists in the multiplicity of inorganic objects. It is only in human beings that both otherness and distinction come together resulting in genuine uniqueness. "Human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings"⁹⁴ and is the result of particular modalities of being together with others. In other words, human uniqueness is an activity and not a pre-given fact. As Sophie Loidolt points out: "Instead of the rather unsupported claim that we are unique simply because we belong to the human species, it turns out that 'uniqueness' is the result of an active encounter of singular accesses in the plural, by speaking with one another and by acting together."⁹⁵ Or as Arendt herself sates, "human nature is only 'human' insofar as it opens up to man the possibility of becoming something highly unnatural that is man."⁹⁶

Action is impossible without the presence of other people.⁹⁷ This element of intersubjectivity is shared by neither labour nor work. In fact, both labour and work necessarily involve degrees of isolation, of 'unrelated-ness' to both company

^{92.} For further reading on the archaic quality of action see Loidolt, 'Hannah Arendt's Concept of Actualised Plurality'.

^{93.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175.

^{94.} *Ibid.*, 176.

^{95.} Loidolt, 'Hannah Arendt's Conceptualisation of Actualised Plurality', 46.

^{96.} Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 455.

^{97.} "Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188)

and world.⁹⁸ The labouring activity actually requires that the labour be carried out in isolation. This does not mean they work completely alone but that the mere presence of others under the conditions of labour does not constitute genuine togetherness. Labour force, according to Arendt, is based on the idea of 'oneness' in terms of the species rather than the distinctness at the centre of human action. In other words, the productive power of labour is founded on the multiplication of the biological strength of a species, not on the plurality of unique individuals coming together. The labouring activity is based not on equality but on sameness. This sameness occurs at the level of a species, a group which is biologically determined and indistinguishable from any other member. Work, while it does not require or facilitated the presence of others, is less isolated than labour because, through the production of objects in the human artifice, it remains connected to the world, even indirectly. The maker of objects needs only materials upon which to work on and the idea or model of the product in mind. *Homo faber* does not need the company of others to complete the process of fabrication.

The repetitive process of labour and the instrumentality of work are both marred by anonymity. The labourer must remain a mere member of the species, and the worker is invisible once the object has been produced. It is only in action and interaction that the condition of plurality is actualised and uniqueness appears in the world. That is, action possess a revelatory quality in that it always, to some degree, discloses who the actor is, a feat which neither labour nor work can accomplish. Speech and action that reveal somebody's identity are called modes of appearance. Both speech and action make the identity of the subject manifest in the world. This manifestation means who somebody is, is revealed to others who in turn bear witness to this revelation. Young-Bruehl captures this sentiment:

The light that comes from a person's works enters directly into the world and remains after a person dies. Whether it is large or small, transitory or enduring, depends upon the world and its ways. Posterity will judge. The light that comes from a person's life—spoken words, gestures, friendships—survives only in memories. If it is to enter into the world, it must find a new form, be recorded and handed down. A story must be made from many memories and stories.⁹⁹

So crucial are these modes of appearance Arendt states that a life devoid of action and speech is dead to the world and even that it ceases to be human life because it

^{98.} Ibid., 212.

^{99.} Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, x.

is no longer spent in the company of others.¹⁰⁰ A life without action is not only 'no longer human', it is no longer worldly. Action is connected not only with issues of revelation in terms of identity, but also with the revelation of the world. The human condition of worldliness, made possible by the work of *homo faber*, does not simply refer to the existence of the world but to an existential feature of human life. In other words, it is not enough to simply exist in the world, one must also engage in it. "In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced."¹⁰¹ This engagement is achieved by initiating, through speech and acts, something entirely new. It refers to an action which not the result of causal factors and is not determined by forces at play beyond the actor. Action carried out in shared, artificial spaces discloses characteristics of the world which would not be known in isolation.¹⁰²

To qualify as a genuine act the motivation behind action must have its origins in the person themselves. Thus, action is a true beginning; it is an event that would not have occurred had its initiator not chosen to act. Because the reason for the act cannot be entirely accounted for by environmental, historical, or biological factors, it can only be said that it occurred because of who somebody, the actor, is. The revelatory feature of action means this is a beginning of *somebody*. It is the manner in which human beings "insert themselves into the world."¹⁰³ If we follow Arendt on this, then a person's identity is not of a determined nature but is instead actualised and manifest in a world where human togetherness and thus action is possible. This beginning of somebody, of a unique identity, belongs to the human condition of natality and is the source of freedom. The concept of natality refers to the fact that each person, no matter their varying circumstances, has the potential to bring something completely new into the world; it is change itself. As such, natality is synonymous with the beginning each human life contains. Without this spontaneous beginning or potential for change, freedom could not exist, as every action would simply be a re-action, a reducible and isolatable moment in a series of predetermined events.

^{100.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

^{101.} *Ibid.*, 173-74.

^{102.} Habermas writes: "Communicative action is the medium in which the intersubjectively shared life-world is formed." (Habermas, 'Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power', 8.)

^{103.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

If genuine action evades the categories of instrumentality and causality, where then does it come from, from what source does it originate? According to the pre-platonic Greeks, action is motivated by the desire to distinguish oneself from others. This distinction was judged in terms of greatness, that is, in terms of how extraordinary one's actions and words appeared, not in terms of consequence, but in terms of uniqueness. "Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement."¹⁰⁴ Genuine action is a rupture in the ordinary, breaks from the mundane, and is unrepeatable, for "action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*."¹⁰⁵ The desire for greatness and remembrance was so influential that "it became the prototype of action for Greek antiquity and influenced, in the form of the so-called *agonai* spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states."¹⁰⁶ This individualistic notion of action is thought to be at odds with the sense of togetherness that Arendt equally espouses. Yet her concept of plurality rescues her from this flaw as human plurality is not reliant upon isomorphic relations but essentially entails difference and equality. Moreover, this inherent agonism is offset by the existence of the city-state, that is, the boundaries of the *polis*.

Because action is a true beginning and because it occurs among others who also act, the outcome of action is notoriously unpredictable. In fact, so unreliable are the consequences, the actors themselves do not have any privilege knowledge or agency concerning outcome. To begin something, to 'insert' oneself into the world and in the course reveal who one is, is a risk that requires courage to undertake. Not only can one not control the outcome of one's actions entirely, one does not even control how it is they will appear to others. In other words, the manifestation of identity not only requires an intersubjective space, it also entails a sense of vulnerability to the actor themselves. This vulnerability stems from an inability to 'make' our identity as we make, say, furniture, it means we cannot totally control how we appear to others. The only privileged position there is concerning the repercussions and holistic meaning of an act or event belongs to the historian.

^{104.} Ibid., 206.

^{105.} Ibid., 205.

^{106.} Ibid., 194.

In contradistinction to fabrication, where the light by which to judge the finished product is provided by the image or model perceived beforehand by the craftsman's eye, the light that illuminates processes of action, and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end, frequently when all the participants are dead. Action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants.¹⁰⁷

The reason why the 'backward glance of the historian' is to be preferred when discerning the meaning of events over that of the actors involved in their creation concerns the boundlessness intrinsic to action itself. Due to the fact that action is neither undertaken for utilitarian reasons

nor necessity, as well as the fact that it is performed among others who also act, the eventual outcome is impossible to foretell in its entirety. Only time and distance from the event are capable of revealing the impact the initial act contained. Every action, even in the "smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation."¹⁰⁸ The unpredictability and boundlessness of action presents a problem in terms of establishing a sustainable, organised manner of living together without forfeiting the opportunity for distinction and uniqueness. Limitations to the endless possible outcomes of action needs to be implemented in such a way that freedom to act in the sense of a true initiation is not stifled nor the act itself easily forgotten. This protection and mnemonic endurance are achieved by the organisation of political communities in the form of the *polis*. Only the *polis* could help not only guarantee the opportunity to act and relative safety from its consequences, but also provide the possibility of being remembered. In other words, the *polis* was a means for immortality.

The organization of the polis, physically secured by the wall around the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws—lest the succeeding generations change its identity beyond recognition - is a kind of organized remembrance. It assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men, who outside the *polis* could attend

^{107.} Ibid., 192.

^{108.} Ibid., 190.

only the short duration of the performance and therefore needed Homer and “others of his craft” in order to be presented to those who were not there.¹⁰⁹

This potential for immortality through future generations of a community is maintained by both physical and legal boundaries that exceed and precede the single human lifespan. They exist not as a form of domination or rulership but as a stabilising guarantee of a community's continued existence. The conditions of natality and plurality, of beginning and action, make the realm of human affairs unpredictable, spontaneous and frail. “In other words, men's life together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most futile of human activities, action and speech, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made ‘products’, the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable.”¹¹⁰

Such a guarantee is needed because the community is threatened by the members themselves. The addition of each new member, the birth of every human being, and the ever present potential for action means it is necessary to establish things which stabilise the realm of human affairs and limit the outcome of action. Despite the stability offered by the world, it can “never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself.”¹¹¹ As long as genuine action is to remain so, human beings will never be able to regulate and control their effect on the world entirely. “Action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries.”¹¹² In other words, the unpredictability of action is essential and, as such, is insurmountable. This unpredictability is “not simply a question of inability to foretell all the logical consequences of a particular act, in which case an electronic computer would be able to foretell the future, but arises directly out of the story which, as the result of action, begins and establishes itself as soon as the fleeting moment of the deed is past.”¹¹³ From the perspective of the *vita contemplativa*, action is beset by chaos and futility, which endangers the opportunity to live a life devoted to the stillness of the eternal. Due to this threat to contemplation, philosophers and statesmen alike sought to impose a different model on the realm of human affairs in order to reign in the unpredictable nature of action among plural agents. “It has always been a great temptation, for men of action no less than for men of thought, to find

^{109.} Ibid., 198.

^{110.} Ibid., 197-98.

^{111.} Ibid. 190-91.

^{112.} Ibid., 190.

^{113.} Ibid., 191-92.

a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents.”¹¹⁴ It is clear that Arendt has a deep concern for the durability and stability of the world particularly under conditions of the modern world. Modernity is characterised by the desire to know, without doubt or error, what something is. As such, the modern age can be said to be antithetical to spontaneity and contingency.

Nevertheless, despite the threat action poses to the world, the world itself would be incomplete without it, and this is one of Arendt’s most astute points. Neither *homo faber* nor *animal laborans* can constitute a world in its most public sense. For neither utility nor life satisfies the need for a meaningful existence for neither amounts to what Aristotle refers to as an end in itself.¹¹⁵ *Animal laborans* is condemned to the diurnal wants and needs of the life process, a Sisyphean endeavour whose highest value is life itself. Whereas *homo faber* schematises the world in terms of means and ends, it also transforms and reduces the status of the world to mere functionality. The utilitarianism of *homo faber* condemns both humanity and world to endless instrumentalisation. In contrast, the *raison d’être* of action is endogenous, or, alternatively put, the purpose of acting is for action’s sake. Again, we discern an Aristotelian influence here. The desire to act must not lie in some external good beyond the activity itself but is desired for the exercise of the activity itself.¹¹⁶ Thus somewhat paradoxically, one does not choose to act in order to attain meaning for this would fall prey to instrumental action but, rather, out of the desire to initiate a new beginning of some sort. The meaning instilled by action is a ‘by-product’ in an accidental sense. It is simultaneously secondary and yet crucial to the entire endeavour. The conditions of possibility for action requires a specific place for its manifestation: the human artifice. As stated earlier, action is possible only among equals, which neither hierarchy inherent in the activities of labour and work can offer. Hence, meaning is not given but achieved and depends for its accomplishment on the existence of a *polis*, that is, a place fit for action.¹¹⁷ But these spaces of meaning are fragile and as such, vulnerable to processes occurring both outside and even within it.

^{114.} Ibid., 220.

^{115.} Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, eds. Christopher J. Rowe, and Sarah Broadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002):1079a.

^{116.} Ibid., 1176b.

^{117.} Arendt: “The original, prephilosophic Greek remedy for this frailty had been the foundation of the polis. The polis, as it grew out of and remained rooted in the Greek pre-polis experience and estimate of what makes it worthwhile for men to live together (*syzen*), namely, the “sharing of words and deeds,” had a twofold function.” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 196)

Action correlates to the common, public world but the relation between the two is even deeper, for action both needs and actualises the public realm. In order for the public realm to become truly a public space depends on the presence of people willing to act and present to witness what each person as actor and spectator reveals about their own identity and the world. Without both the interlocutory and revelatory qualities of action common, shared space of the human world would cease to be. “Thus, action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it.”¹¹⁸ In this way, action instils the lives of those who participate in public life with meaning. In the actualisation of both personal identity and relationship to others, the world itself becomes a place of meaning.

These indispensable elements of public spaces are not shared with natural or private space. Meaningfulness is exactly what the natural world is deficient of, for “[u]nlike the practices, events, actions and states of affairs which make up the human world, the phenomena of nature are not inherently meaningful.”¹¹⁹ This view presupposes an ontological and spatial hierarchy between the various realms of human existence. As mentioned, the different activities of the *vita activa* correlate with a distinct realm or domain. Some readers tend to downplay the spatial constituent of these demarcations, preferring instead to emphasise the different attitudes or mentalities appropriate to each activity. For instance, Elizabeth Frazer writes that the spatial metaphor in Arendt’s work is not to be taken literally for “the concept of ‘public’ is not primarily one of a demarcated space.” Instead, Frazer suggests seeing the different “domains” in terms of “changes in our attitude and conduct to others.”¹²⁰ But this view raises problems of its own, for it is beholden to a form of introspection Arendt warns that the modern thinking is apt to do. This critique forms a significant discussion in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Arendt is commonly read as attempting to preserve and rejuvenate the conditions of the original meaning of action. Her historical and overly simple tripartite analysis of the *vita activa* is meant to uncover this original sense of action and its challenges in the modern world. The spatial demarcation of the activities of the *vita activa* points to the topographical and dispositional nature of Arendt’s understanding of

¹¹⁸. Ibid., 198.

¹¹⁹. Vasterling, ‘Hannah Arendt’, 84.

¹²⁰. Frazer, ‘The risks of the public realm’, 210.

the active life. The commonality and solidity of the world is established through the activities and location of the *vita activa*. While labour tends to the material necessities of life, work transforms the world into 'a place fit for action'. It is the purposefulness of the world for action that Arendt was concerned with. The following chapter details another reason for her attention to the public, worldly conditions of modernity. Arendt is responding to another, distinctive threat against action and the ability to live a meaningful life. This threat is the phenomenon of what I call processual thinking and its connection to ideals of progress. We can now see one of the crucial distinctions between the nature and world in Arendtian terms is the quality of permanence and durability each possesses. This analysis is jarring when compared to contemporary accounts of nature and biological life. I agree with Chapman when she points out that Arendt would seem to have reversed the relation between the human and natural world where the natural world threatens the human world, and not the other way around as we understand it.¹²¹ Yet, it was Arendt's concern with the durability of the world, with the structures and institutions that comprise it, that led her to characterize the world in this way. In short, the stability of the world is under threat. Yet the main source of this danger arises not from the natural world but from the ideology of process and the forms of thinking that arise from it.

¹²¹. Chapman, 'The Ways that Nature Matters', 433.

Chapter 4.

Being and Process

"Invisible processes have engulfed every tangible thing, every individual entity that is visible to us, degrading them into functions of an over-all process."¹

^{1.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 63.

Arendt was acutely aware of the ways in which space is transformed, pathologised and endangered. This endangerment is evinced in the challenges presented by climate change. The climate crises are connected to a deeper threat belonging to the modern ideals of progress and mechanisations of *process*. The notion of process as the defining feature of our time emerged at the beginning of the modern age and continues to shape our world with increasing acceleration. Hailed as a force of progress, humanity, it was believed, was set on the path of eventual emancipation. Arendt was among the first to detect the deleterious consequences of such blind faith. First, we must answer the question what process is for Arendt so that we may, in turn, understand the critique and the alternative she offers. As discussed in the previous chapter, Arendt was motivated by a deep concern with the stability of the world. The current chapter shows that the main threat to stability is the modern and pervasive understanding of *processual thinking* and the belief that process almost always implies progress.

Broadly, process refers to that which is in various stages of becoming or Being.² Its ontology is ambiguous, its status is one of 'development' and its presence is always future-oriented. It is founded, at least partially, on the assumption that the hidden operations of phenomena are more reliable than the visible, experiential realm. Subsequently, this gives rise to the belief that technologically mediated knowledge brings one closer to the truth than embodied experience. Truth is placed in a realm beyond sense experience, accessible through the unfolding of time and technological intervention. In this way the hidden operations of worldless phenomena are granted a strange visibility while simultaneously eschewing the original phenomenality of the subject matter.

Our concern is how modern thinking is characterised by a deep-seated belief that progress is processual in nature. It means that development is understood to unfold through hidden, often automatic mechanisms and that interpreting and intervening in these operations is the key to better and better circumstances for humankind. Arendt states that this belief is not neutral but actually possesses a deleterious effect for the world and the human condition of worldliness. The defining character of the modern age is the faith in process as the invisible law of the universe.

² Hyvönen refers to this feature of Arendt's work as "process-frame" by which "the structures of the common world are subsumed to semi-automatic, invisible, all-embracing processes, against which concrete and individual events, deeds, and things are seen as functions at best." Hyvonen, Ari-Elmeri. "Invisible Streams: Process-Thinking in Arendt." *European Journal of Social Theory* 19, no. 4 (2016): 540.

Arendt makes the connection between process and progress in her early analysis of power. In the course of her historical exploration on the rise of imperialism in inner-Europe during the 18th century, she describes how the principle of unfettered capital accumulation gave rise to the need for a new politic, one that could support the economic goals of the new bourgeois class. The decline of the nation-state was driven by the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie whose indifference to politics changed once it became apparent that current political structures were no longer amenable to wealth accumulation.³ As she puts it, they (the new politically emancipated bourgeoisie) found there existed “national limitations to its economic expansion.”⁴ One such limit was inbuilt into the concept of the nation-state itself. A nation-state derives its legitimacy from popular consent given by a largely homogeneous public. The conquering of new, alien territory and peoples was akin to a structural and existential crisis for a nation founded on a coherent national identity. Arendt goes so far as to make a distinction between empire-building and imperialism, where the former is capable of extending public law and even citizenship to culturally diverse groups, which the latter cannot, at least not without risking the national identity. Expansion as *raison d'être* of politics is the principle of imperialism, she claims, which differs from empire building because (at least for the Romans) it was technically possible to politically integrate and become a citizen.⁵

Expansion for expansion's sake defies the inherent structure of the nation-state and has its origin in the realm of business, that is, in economics instead of politics. The principle of any economic enterprise is not simply to maintain but to increase one's investment. In this way, economic activity is founded upon a principle of growth. This economic growth was so successful it, along with over-production, created the myth of “superfluous” money — meaning domestic investment was no longer as profitable — enabling society at the time to forget that it is not the case that “money had begotten money, but men had made things and money.”⁶ The human dimension of this enterprise was eschewed, giving rise instead to the myth of an autonomous market that operates according to internal and reliable processes. But all growth meets limits. It was in the face of national-fiscal boundaries that, according to Arendt, society discovered that power alone could facilitate the pursuit of perpetual wealth accumulation.

^{3.} Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 123-124.

^{4.} Ibid., 126.

^{5.} Ibid., 125, 130.

^{6.} Ibid., 137.

This insight was owed to the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes who, Arendt avers, was the first to articulate the correlation between endless property accumulation and the accumulation of power as the motive of all human behaviour. In this context, Laura Bazzicalupo explains that “Hobbes thus designs *ex novo* an absolutely rational, abstract and artificial form which can guarantee coexistence. The genesis and the foundation, for Arendt the crucial moment for politics, in Hobbes are of a logical and poetic nature, a model originated in a logical and temporal space which is purely theoretical.”⁷ The never-ending motion of power corresponds to never-ending accumulation of capital, to which all political bodies appear as a hinderance. Power could appropriate wealth by becoming the permanent essence of politics. But this principle creates instability. In fact, for Arendt, the instability of the community founded on power finds its philosophical correspondence in the endless process of history.⁸ The never-ending accumulation of power necessary for the accumulation of capital became the “progressive” ideology of late 19th century.⁹ Power, Arendt states, as the stabilising force for economic laws made the notion of “progress” irresistible. Again, Bazzicalupo summaries the point helpfully: “This is the paradoxical heterogenesis of the ends that sweeps away a mechanism that tries to make men predictable and a stable form and is instead overwhelmed by the constant increase of power. Its dynamism and the fact that it is always a process are the two aspects of bourgeois economy that infect the form of the state and make it unstable.”¹⁰ Significant for our purposes are the shared self-perpetuating feature of the phenomena: of territorial expansion, capital accumulation, and political power. The promise of the 18th century notion of progress was that it was intended to culminate in the emancipation of humanity by mastering the present and controlling the future.¹¹ However, “progress ideology” was shaken once people realised that the conditions of the earth, with its physical boundaries, could not support a never-ending process, leading, in turn, to catastrophic instability.¹²

⁷ Laura Bazzicalupo charges Arendt with misreading of Hobbes defending his political work as designed for theoretical, not practical, purposes: “Paradoxically however, especially on the basis of Arendt’s crude analysis of Hobbes’ thought in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the modern state, the Leviathan born out of an artifice to attain order and stability, is instead an intrinsically unstable entity embarked on an eternal devouring conflict.

⁸ Two particular characteristics attributed to Hobbes in Arendt’s historical work of 1951 provoke this instability: (1) in Hobbes the public good derives from private interest, (2) the political body is based essentially on the accumulation of power.” In Laura Bazzicalupo, “Hannah Arendt on Hobbes,” *Hobbes Studies* 9, no. 1 (1996): 53.

⁹ Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, 143.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹¹ Bazzicalupo, “Hannah Arent on Hobbes,” 54.

¹² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 143.

Given the breadth and scope of Arendt's critique of process, I offer a fourfold analysis which characterises 'the rise of process' and its subsequent influence on spatial existence. The rise of process is Arendt's term for the different historical and intellectual elements that led to the dominance of processual thinking. Together these elements culminate in movements that jeopardise existence on several spatial-ontological aspects. Take, for one, Arendt's warning that truly public spaces are in a stage of atrophy which in turn leads to alienation between communities and the lived world. Today the very habitability of spaces is endangered on a global scale. This means not only that the possibilities of living a distinct individual life (*bios*) are under threat but so too is existence as a species (*zoē*). This pertains not only to humanity but to all living beings. Thus, the following elaborates four components that crystallised in the modern faith in processual-progress. These are categorised as follows:

1. **Historical Time.** Historical time refers to the manner in which the meaning of existence is allegedly revealed chronologically, that is, in the temporal unfolding of the historical narrative. Prior to the modern age, this faith in process did not exist in the form it does today. In *Between Past and Future* (originally published in 1961), Arendt pays particular attention to the historical changes and shifts in the Western tradition in terms of values, technology, imperialism, and theistic belief. The outcome is an insightful but sobering sense of foreboding.
2. **The Hegemonic-Scientific Worldview.** The unrivalled success of the scientific method alongside technological development have displaced the primordial experience of the world. By this, faith in the corporeal ability to know reality through ordinary sense perception is undermined by the supposed superiority of the truth-revealing capacity of 'science'. The result was the degradation of phenomena as appearance and hence, as Arendt argues, meaningful experiences of reality. She concludes that doubt is characteristic of the modern age. The origins of this characteristic can be traced historically to two events of particular significance: the invention of the telescope and Descartes' *omnibus dubitandum est*.¹³
3. **Subjectivation.** Subjectivation is a consequence of the sense of doubt discussed in point two. It is a form of world-alienation. It is an attempt to found a relationship to reality which is incontrovertible.¹⁴ The increasing

^{13.} Ibid., 144.

^{14.} The consequences of which are most fully explored in Kierkegaard's piece by the same title (Søren, Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong. *Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus. Kierkegaard's Writings*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

doubt in the capacities of the senses created a need for a more secure and reliable way of knowing the world. This epistemological guarantor resides, not in the experience of the world or worldly objects, but rather in “sensation qua sensation.”¹⁵ Our shared access to reality, achieved through varied experiences of a common object, no longer constituted an indubitable method for knowing the true nature of the world. Instead of looking ‘outward’, as it were, to the world where one inevitably encounters error and illusion, people began looking ‘inward’ to the purely subjective. Subjectivity, also referred to as the inner life, soul, or mind of a person, was believed to be the only experience one has primordial epistemic access to. For this reason, one may doubt one’s worldly experiences and knowledge, but one’s ‘inner life’ remains beyond dispute.

4. The Process Character of Action. Arendt remarked that action, too, partakes in the framework of process. In this way, action contains, if you will, the seeds of its own destruction for it possesses the qualities of both unpredictability and irreversibility.¹⁶ Hence, once action is initiated, result in a chain-like series of events. In other words, action itself contains processual qualities. Arendt takes up this analysis in what she calls ‘acting-into-nature’.

These elements result in the loss of meaningful reality and the condition of worldliness in the quest for unchanging truth. As indicated in the quotation that opens this chapter, this trade-off between meaning and truth harms the ontic-ontological structures of worldly existence, “degrading them into functions of an overall process.” To this, Arendt responds by fostering a renewed recognition of the spatial qualities of existence. However, before we can understand the remedial course of action taken by Arendt, we must first examine the elements of process and its ideological prominence in the modern age. We take this analysis a step further than Arendt by making explicit what is implicit in her work: the spatial consequences of the rise of processual thinking. With a change in the understanding of time, a change in spatial relation is also initiated. Such a change inaugurates a sense of ‘world-alienation’ and ‘earth-alienation’.

Both signify an estrangement from existential components of life. The crucial move in this development involves the loss of faith in our perceptual ability to know reality and truth. Confronted with such a loss, the culmination of various factors, mankind began an insatiable quest for epistemic certainty, for unshakable knowledge, for

^{15.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 53.

^{16.} Ibid.

unchanging and eternal 'Truth'. In this search nothing is left untouched, not even time and space.

Historical time

The essay 'The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern' is invaluable to those who wish to understand Arendt's critique of the modern understanding of history.¹⁷ The piece traces the transition and eventual split between the ancient and modern notions of history. The consequences allegedly result in the isolation of historical events from their original context, enabling the reconstruction of history as an independent process. This independence means history is bound neither by the uniqueness of circumstance nor the inherent meaning of its subject matter but is instead motivated by its own internal laws, making it *indirectly* meaningful to human affairs. The historical unfolding of events is understood as a grand narrative of human development. While there are theoretically different ways in which this occurs — Hegelianism, Marxism, Darwinism — for Arendt, they all share a common denominator: the primary agent of change is the time-process itself. The following reconstructs Arendt's argument that the modern age is defined by the belief in a form of processual time, that "[t]he modern concept of process pervading history and nature alike separates the modern age from the past more profoundly than any other single idea."¹⁸ Yet, this belief is neither neutral nor without consequence, for it comes at the expense of spontaneity, individuality and reality.

We begin with Arendt's juxtaposition of 'Antiquity' with 'Modernity', the defining criteria of such a move being their eschatological projects. With 'Antiquity' Arendt loosely refers to Ancient Greece, particularly during the years 800 to 400 BC.¹⁹ During this period, Greek city-states saw the introduction of written history in conjunction with the oral tradition as well as an increased complexity of art. 'Modernity', on the other hand, signifies the 18th century onwards, with particular significance given to the project of the Enlightenment. The former has a more narrow focus on the politics of the ancient Greek city-states, while the latter is broadly Western with an emphasis on rationalistic faith and technological development. The desire to overcome eternal anonymity unites both historical epochs in the sense that they

^{17.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 232: "In this aspect of action—all-important to the modern age, to its enormous enlargement of human capabilities as well as to its unprecedented concept and consciousness of history—processes are started whose outcome is unpredictable, so that uncertainty rather than frailty becomes the decisive character of human affairs."

^{18.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*.

^{19.} *Ibid.*, 63.

share a resistance to the mortal status of human existence. Both projects contend with this existential condition and it is within this framework that Arendt performs her analysis.²⁰ Both epochs are viewed through an eschatological framework along with the consequences for understanding and developing a notion of history. Thus, despite temporal and geographical distance, Arendt analyses both eras in terms of the quest for immortalisation, that is, in terms of the possibility of overcoming death via historical projects. So significant is this feature for Arendt it shapes a significant part of her understanding of the notion of history.²¹ We will discuss this in detail shortly. First, we deal with the proposed relevance mortality and immortality have for the concept of history and, by extension, the eventual processual understanding of time.

Amnestic death

For the ancient Greeks, immortality should not be taken to mean eternal life but, rather, to overcome the *anonymity* of death. To be forgotten was a fate worse than dying. This forgetfulness meant not only that one no longer walks the earth but makes it as though they never had. It means an irrelevant life of no real consequence to one's fellows, where the achievements, experiences, actions of the individual are committed to oblivion and their name along with it. It is this condition of forgetfulness, of eternal anonymity that was the true price of death and had to be overcome at all costs, even paradoxically, at the cost of one's life. Thus, in the absence of an assured afterlife (or at least the absence of a satisfying one), the question became not how to live forever, but how to escape the forgetfulness inherent in the condition of mortality. Not death but being forgotten was the true mark of mortal beings.

According to the pre-platonic tradition, mortality, the "hallmark of human existence,"²² arose in juxtaposition to the natural world (*kosmos*). The natural world *in toto* persisted beyond the individual, human lifespan and, by definition, existed independent of human activity. This perceived ontological independence in conjunction with its transcendent durability is, of course, born from an anthropocentric perspective. Against the eternal cosmos only the life of the individual bore the mark of mortality and so has no place among the immortal world. Its ontological status meant the natural world has no use for immortal remembrance. "Since the things of nature are ever present, they are not likely to be overlooked or forgotten; and since they are forever, they do not need human

^{20.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 41-105; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 41, 82-3, 194, 205.

^{21.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 48.

^{22.} Paul Ricoeur, for instance, states the storytelling, in Arendt, ought to be understood in terms of immortalisation (Ricoeur, 'Action, Story and History', 69). For Benhabib, historiography is an attempt to overcome the oblivion of death (Benhabib, 'Redemptive Power of Narrative', 181).

remembrance for their further existence.”²³ In contrast, deathly amnesia was the assumed fate of humanity unless they could prove themselves worthy of being remembered beyond their demise. Whether it be bestowed by fate, fame, or fortune, escaping the oblivion death entailed action and speech deemed worthy of being remembered.²⁴ Hence, the potential for immortality resided in the capacity to leave something behind after death. This ‘leaving behind’ refers not only to material things but, for instance, a legacy or, in Arendtian terms, a story.

This sense of immortality originates in two interrelated aspects of spatial ontology. These ontologies are spatial, because they are tied to different places: on one hand, the world, on the other, the realm of the Gods. The former is the space where all life unfolds while the latter is defined precisely by the fact that it is not limited by life’s timespan. Yet, human beings have the potential to be individuated, that is, to be a somebody, a ‘who’. The bare life of human beings (*zoē*) is ruled by the drive for survival and dominated by the process of consumption. Masschelein describes this sense of life as one “associated with fecundity, and aims at growth, increase, extension, appropriation, and the satisfaction of all its needs.”²⁵ that human beings, as a biological species, belong to the recurrent life cycle and through this possess a natural immortality. However, this is the immortality of the species, not of the individual.²⁶ To be a person, on the other hand, meant to exist in a meaningful relation to the world. Out of this relationship a distinct *bios* crystallises. One form this *bios* may be expressed through is a biography, in fact, it is this potential to have one’s time on earth retold as a story, generation to generation, that marks our specific humanity according to Arendt. In her words, “[t]he mortality of man lies in the fact that individual life, a *bios*, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life, ‘*zoē*.’”²⁷ Ricoeur endorses this view when he states that a life story is what is created between events initiated by an actor in conjunction

²³. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42.

²⁴. Ibid.

²⁵. See the section *The dualist reading* in chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of the qualities of Arendt’s notion of speech and action.

²⁶. Jan Masschelein, ‘World and Life’, *Interchange: A Quarterly Review of Education* 29, no. 4 (1998): 373.

²⁷. Aristotle, *De Anima*, Translated by Mark Schiffman. (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2011): 415b13: “All things reach for this, and for the sake of this do whatever they do according to nature (“for the sake of” being twofold: *for* what is aimed at and *for* what is benefitted). Since then, it is unable to share in the eternal and divine by way of continuity, because perishable things do not admit of persisting as the same thing and one in number, each thing shares in the way in which it is able to partake (one more, another less). So it persists not as the same thing but as one like itself, not one in number but one in form.” Also Aristotle, *Oeconomica*,. Translated by G. Cyril Armstrong, no. 287 (Loeb Classical Library, 1936):1343b24, and Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42.

with the interplay of circumstances created by a web of relations. Because of these co-dependent conditions, everyone is the hero of the story without being the author or sole creator, which highlights that stories are not fabricated in the agentic sense of *homo faber*.²⁸

Because of the presence of a stable community who witness and bear testimony to someone's actions, one leaves behind stories of endeavours, events, and memorable deeds, in other words, an (posthumously) actualised biography. This bequeathing is possible only in a community of witnesses who both bear judgment and testify to one's actions during their lifetime. The existence of an enduring community is, as discussed, predicated on the presence of the human artifice, which carves out a space away from the monotony of natural world. Recall, the immortality of the natural world stems from the fact that it is replaced and replenished in the eternal movement of the seasons and the reproduction of species. Against this eternal background stands human artifice and the *polis*. The stability and transcendence of these artificial spaces originates in and is sustained by the *poiesis* of *homo faber*. The conditions of stability and durability provided by the human artifice in turn create the conditions for remembrance.²⁹ Because the subject matter of history is comprised of extraordinary deeds and words that disrupt the ordinary, these deeds and words culminate in events worthy of remembrance, meaning they persevere the singularity of events and actions of the agents.³⁰ Human remembrance is the key to immortalisation, along with the works of human hands that establish a space of remembrance in the form of the *polis*.³¹

The Greek *polis* is often characterised by the agonistic spirit of the political arena. Agonistic principles are founded upon the belief that only the quality of greatness or *arête* were worthy of immortalisation. *Arête* refers to "things that possessed an emerging, shining quality which distinguished them from all others and made glory possible."³² In terms of the individual, the quality of greatness is manifest

^{28.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 18-19

^{29.} Ricoeur, 'Action, Story and History', 67.

^{30.} See page 64 of this dissertation for more on the topic of remembrance.

^{31.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 43.

^{32.} It is worth noting that the boundaries of the polis were not a rigid spatial separation from the surrounding world but instead took shape with and around neighbouring cultures. For instance, historian Robin Osborne writes that "[t]he culture of the Greek polis is not a culture found simply within the boundaries of what is present-day Greece, nor is it limited to those places described by the second century AD traveller Pausanias in his 'Guide to Greece'; it is a culture which grew up as much in communities found on the coasts of Asia Minor, the Black Sea, Italy, Sicily, southern France, Spain and Cyrenaica as in mainland Greece itself." Robin Osborne, 'The polis and its culture' in *Routledge History of Philosophy Vol. 1: From the Beginning to Plato*, eds. Taylor, C.C.W., Parkinson, G.H.R., and Shanker, S. (London & New York: Routledge, 1997):13.

through their actions as “the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words.”³³ Extraordinary occurrences were committed to memory and the actions of those involved, whether the person or cause was victorious or not, took centre stage at heart of events. That is to say, *arête* has little to do with outcome, with winning, with victory over one’s adversaries. Greatness, the rupture of the ordinary, was present equally among the victors and the vanquished. Because the actor remains at the centre, not simply as the origin of events but as the person whose presence illuminates events, it was impossible for the ancients to think of any event as distinct from the actors involved. “Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement.”³⁴ Herodotus in this regard is exemplary. In recording the Persian War, Herodotus sought to “preserve that which owes its existence to men ... lest it be obliterated by time.”³⁵ So, heroic acts, whether victorious or not, would not be forgotten and remain unknown to those who had not witnessed them.

Arendt commemorates the impartiality of protohistorian Thucydides, who, in presenting his record of events, never purged history of the multiple perspectives that it necessarily consists of. This is what I take to be the value of Arendt’s narrative conception of history: it is the difference between being able to narrate something in all its complexity without recourse to reductive explanations. The latter is bound to a causal frame in which events appear as necessarily connected *as process*. In contrast, for Arendt, necessity is an illusion owed to a modern understanding of history. Because the actor necessarily animates events, history is impossible in the absence of an actor and the illumination their perspective provides. Thus, under this paradigm, history cannot be separated from those involved. History for the ancient Greeks is never nameless and the particular never subsumed by the whole. The purpose of recording the extraordinary is to rescue the names and achievements of the actors, which makes for the content of history. The fabric of history is woven by many historians out of stories of human endeavours, of triumphs and honourable defeats. The sole criterion being that the event, the act, the words performed display true greatness and in doing so disrupt the mundane and defy the quotidian rhythm of the ordinary. In light of this, history presents not a continuum where each part necessarily causes what comes after, regardless of context and content. Instead, the ancients understood the content of history as a series of *interruptions*. Thus, for Arendt, storytelling and history are intrinsically connected. Yet this is not the simplistic view whereby history is synonymous with

³³. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 47.

³⁴. *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁵. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 206.

storytelling. Nor is it the reporting and recording of events as we have come to know it. Storytelling, in Arendt's hands, becomes a methodological device in which the plurality of experiences, even of the same event, is preserved. The modern conception and uses of history maintains that good historiography unities events into a continuous, linear recollection. Above all, it demands the voice of the historian is one of detachment in order to remain objective in their pursuit of 'what happened'.

This methodology leaves no room for alternative impressions or, more importantly, varying judgements. It purges historical events of the plurality of voices and experiences that nonetheless remain the fabric of history. Arendt often refers to the Homeric tradition of storytelling as the origin of historiography. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain one of the first written recordings of historical events. This sounds strange to modern ears particularly given the mythical status of both texts. Yet, this distinction mattered little before the fifth century.³⁶ The purpose was to prevent the names of those involved from being forgotten. As Taran Kang phrases it, storytelling "fortifies the spirit in the face of adversity and prevents the past from falling into oblivion."³⁷ Storytelling is not only an individualistic endeavour, despite Arendt's agonistic setting. It also serves the community as a whole, for it helps reconcile us with reality even when doing so is painful.³⁸ Rather, as Benhabib argues, storytelling "must be viewed as an 'exercise' in thought, the chief task of which is to dig under the rubble of history and to recover those 'pearls' of past experience, with their sedimented and hidden layers of meaning, so as to cull from them a story that can orient the mind in the future."³⁹ The point of Arendt's ancient Greek ventures is to redeem and resuscitate a contingent and humanistic understanding of history in general. Central to this understanding of history, Arendt emphasises, are the disruptive and extraordinary qualities of action: firstly, the uniqueness of both the circumstances for, and the identity of, the actor, and secondly, the communicability of events to an audience, a community that witnesses, remembers, and retells what happened in the name of those involved. This is to say that the relevant sense of

^{36.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 41.

^{37.} Robin Osborne writes: "What is notable is that the immediate past, what we would call 'history', has little or no exemplary role in archaic Greek art or literature. The distinction between 'myth' and 'history' with which we operate is not a distinction made by any Greek writer before the late fifth century." (Osborne, 'The polis and its culture', 14)

^{38.} Taran Kang, 'Origin and Essence: The Problem of History in Hannah Arendt,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 1 (2013): 140.

^{39.} Benhabib argues that it was Arendt's attempt at understanding the phenomenon of totalitarianism that ultimately led Arendt to develop her idea of political theory as storytelling. See Benhabib, 'Redemptive Power of Narrative', 170.

history is ultimately a project of immortalisation. It is an activity, not a passive phenomenon, an achievement never independent of human interaction.⁴⁰

It is these very qualities that Arendt argues are lost at the dawn of the modern age. "In the modern age history emerged as something it had never been before. It was no longer composed of the deeds and sufferings of men, and it no longer told the story of events affecting the lives of men; it became a man-made process, the only all-comprehending process which owed its existence exclusively to the human race."⁴¹ This description of the modern concept of history as a process reveals Arendt's ambition to reinstate contingency and freedom in human action.⁴² Yet doing so requires a rejection of the teleological explanations that define history as process. It is to this accusation to which we now turn.

Active and passive immortality

The primary differentiation between the ancient and modern projects of immortality is the capacity for individuation. Arendt indicts the modern concept of history as being antithetical to the conditions of plurality. Her accusation rests on two main features of modernity: life as highest good and objectivity's 'extinction of the self'. These qualities are the crystallisation of several historical shifts beginning with the Christian-Hebrew tradition and resulting in modern time-consciousness. The Christian-Hebrew tradition placed an unprecedented emphasis on time-sequence, which was believed to contain the "historical unity of planned salvation." Unlike the Greek *polis*, salvation from death was intrinsically embedded in human existence in the form of the human soul. Humanity itself became the criterion for transcendent, everlasting life. Immortality was bestowed on a metaphysical basis, meaning regardless of identity, morality, and faith, the promise of a life after or beyond one's earthly condition would be actualised; it was only a matter of time itself. In this way, chronology takes on a new significance. "If human life on earth follows a divine plan of salvation, then its mere sequence must harbor a significance independent of and transcending all single occurrences."⁴³ Because this sense of immortality does not rely on who a person proves themselves to be, but only on the metaphysical essence of humanity, I call this sense of immortality 'passive immortality' compared to the 'active immortality' of the *polis*.

⁴⁰. Benhabib, 'Redemptive Power of Narrative', 170-171.

⁴¹. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 71.

⁴². Ibid., 58

⁴³. See Veronica Vasterling 'Contingency, Newness, and Freedom'.

Whereas active immortality was predicated on the stability of the human artifice, passive immortality assumes the opposite. It posits the perishability of the world itself and the futility of human affairs along with the vanity of political endeavours. Accordingly, no empire can withstand the ruin of time; only the immaterial soul is bound for eternal salvation. The fall of Rome, 'the Eternal City,' was the reaffirmation of the Christian doctrine that only God is everlasting, not the works of man.⁴⁴ No political structure can endure forever, only humanity is immortal.⁴⁵ This metaphysical immortality altered the perception of historical time. Because of the significance bestowed on sheer chronology irrespective of events, the unfolding of time 'swallowed' the original meaning that arises out of human activity, subduing all to two major events: the birth and death of Christ. Considered together, this marked the beginning of historical time as without beginning or end. Now time itself is understood as issuing bi-directionally from one event. In other words, past and future proceed indefinitely from one source. This rendering of historical time Arendt calls a 'twofold infinity' and the consequences were devastating to the realm of human affairs for it robbed action of the capacity to be unprecedented, spontaneous, and meaningful, a capacity that, she explains, is natural to beginning.

It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. Thus, the origin of life from inorganic matter is an infinite improbability of inorganic processes, as is the coming into being of the earth viewed from the standpoint of processes in the universe, or the evolution of human out of animal life. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.⁴⁶

Thus, the Christian measure of time was antithetical to the condition of human natality. Recall, natality refers not only to the fact of being born but also to the capacity to act spontaneously, as the quote explains. Yet, according to Christian time, significant events lay in the past, and tradition had to refer to these continuously. Through this, the perception of humanity was effectively transformed. No longer did it represent

^{44.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 65.

^{45.} "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" ("Ephesians 2:8-9", Biblia accessed July 16, 2024, <https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/ephesians/2/8-9>).

^{46.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 72.

the irreducible uniqueness of human beings, it now stood for a monotonous presence, or 'earthly immortality', that is, the immortality of *zoē*.⁴⁷ In her words, this "twofold infinity of past and future eliminates all notions of beginning and end, establishing mankind in a potential earthly immortality."⁴⁸ This 'earthly immortality' signifies the bifurcation of human beings from the ability to act and initiate events of their own. Now the distinguishing quality of humanity resides in their ontology alone, rendering action and speech superfluous in terms of immortalisation.

Passive immortality is intricately bound to the Christian-Hebrew calendar, which is dedicated not simply to marking the passage of time but to reaffirming the significance of the past. For instance, the liturgical year in Roman Catholicism is constituted by two modes of time: *santaturala* and *temporale*. *Temporale*, the ritual observance of seasonal and holy days, is dedicated to the revelation and redemption of Christ, which is "made present at all times."⁴⁹ The ritualistic and cyclical character of the Church calendar is dedicated to the recognition and glorification of its founding. The consequence is that history is devoid of the individuality and irreducibility of actors. Furthermore, in the absence of a teleological structure, the productive capacity of fabrication becomes sterile and the permanence of the world is jeopardised. Void of distinction beyond its founding, the twofold infinity of time, according to Arendt, "establishes a time-space in which the very notion of an end is virtually inconceivable." In other words, the features of the work process that sustain the *homo faber* and the capacity to build and maintain a world are endangered. Because of the separation of action and history, the "immortalizing process has become independent of cities, states, and nations [...]. Instead, "it encompasses the whole of mankind"⁵⁰ regardless of circumstance. Without the ability to create and maintain the objective features of the human artifice political and institutional structures are undermined and ultimately 'dissolved' in an indiscriminating temporal flow.

^{47.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177-178.

^{48.} Arendt also uses the term 'earthly immortality' in *The Human Condition* to refer to immortalisation through work and action, "Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm, is possible." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 55). However, the sense of earthly immortality in 'The Concept of History' is negative and refers to the temporal continuation of 'mankind' in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

^{49.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 68.

^{50.} Paul VI, 'Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy', Chapter 5, section 102. Promulgated 1963 by the Vatican. Accessed March 27, 2023. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

They have brought us back to the common origin of both nature and history in the modern age and demonstrate that their common denominator lies indeed in the concept of process no less than the common denominator of nature and history in antiquity lay in the concept of immortality. But the experience which underlies the modern age's notion of process, unlike the experience underlying the ancient notion of immortality, is by no means primarily an experience which man made in the world surrounding him; on the contrary, it sprang from the despair of ever experiencing and knowing adequately all that is given to man and not made by him [...] The notion of process does not denote an objective quality of either history or nature; it is the inevitable result of human action.⁵¹

This independent and indifferent flow of time Arendt calls *process*. Now we arrive at an important junction. Arendt writes: "In the modern age history emerged as something it never had been before."⁵² The glorification and potential immortality of antiquity become moments in an overarching process.⁵³ Whereas the ancients believed in the permanence of the worldly institutions and the durability of objects, permanence was now entrusted to a temporal process, in distinction from the stability of worldly and political structures. In short, meaning, salvation, and glory was derived from the past and its worship, which ultimately meant the extinction of newness. The future, likewise, is determined by a repetition of the past in Jesus' second coming and the eventual 'end of days', the cessation of earthly existence and transformation of a person's corporeal existence to the eidetic. In this vein, public spaces, once vital to the immortalising project, were rendered inconsequential and suffered as a result. Not what one did, what one said, or even what one bore witness to was thought to be defining, rather, it was one's faith, one's worship and worldly sacrifice that defined one person from another. This distinction comes in the form of the divine judgment bestowed by God after one's death and is based not only on the morality of the soul but the faith of the believer.⁵⁴ From the perspective of the world, the only enduring feature was humankind itself. But the sanctity of life is derived from its transcendence. Human life is sacred and could not be destroyed lest one incur divine punishment. To take life is the gravest sin according to the Christian-Hebrew religion and it entails a direct violation of God's will. Despite its

^{51.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 75.

^{52.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 62. The "they" in the quote refers to the "latest developments in the natural sciences." (Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 61-62)

^{53.} *Ibid.*, 58.

^{54.} *Ibid.*, 81.

religious origin, the sanctity of human life prevailed even after secularisation and the systematic challenging of religious doctrine during the 19th and 20th century.

Secularisation had a profound effect on both public and private realms.⁵⁵ The separation of religion from politics was a complex and agonistic process involving the rejection of the Church's authority, replacing superstition with the rational method of Enlightenment science, and, perhaps most importantly, the rising dissatisfaction with the theistic origin of the world. Humanity's place in the universe was no longer certain, and certainly no longer at the centre of a divine creation. This uncertainty was not limited to the ontological or even the private realm of subjective faith, but had a direct manifestation in the political. According to Arendt, the main consequence was the loss in traditional authority. Political institutions derived their legitimacy from the authority of the Church. This is true of any monarchy for which the basis of the sociopolitical hierarchy is rooted in the existence of God. For Arendt, the undermining of tradition and religion resulted in the loss of a stable authority even for the secular realm. "Historically, we may say that the loss of authority is merely the final, though decisive, phase of a development which for centuries undermined primarily religion and tradition."⁵⁶ Yet, the separation of church and state was far from clean; there existed many residual remains after this historical shift. For her, one of the biggest and enduring consequences occurred to the status of the sanctity of human life.

Life as the highest value

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt characterises the modern age as a period of several reversals, primarily, the reversal of the activities of action and labour, and contemplation and action. These reversals were meant to challenge traditional convention. However, these challenges were not a total success as each reversal necessarily remained within the paradigm it was supposed to critique and ultimately dismantle. For even critiques operate within the tradition's schema and so remained bound to the framework it ostensibly rejects. This was the case during the period of secularisation whereby the sanctity of life under Christianity was simply transferred into a new epoch. "In other words, the modern reversal followed

⁵⁵. "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (2 Corinthians 5:6–10, Biblia, accessed July 16, 2024 <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2-corinthians/5/6-10>)

⁵⁶. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 69.

and left unchallenged the most important reversal with which Christianity had broken into the ancient world, a reversal that was politically even more far-reaching and, historically at any rate, more enduring than any specific dogmatic content or belief. For the Christian 'glad tidings' of the immortality of individual human life had reversed the ancient relationship between man and world and promoted the most mortal thing, human life, to the position of immortality, which up to then the cosmos had held."⁵⁷ Life remained the highest value for secular society but a new justification was needed in the absence of a religious one. Support for a moral code, societal values, and the nature of the universe could no longer be derived from religious authority, and explanation had to meet the demands of evidential rationality. "Thus the political theorists of the seventeenth century accomplished secularization by separating political thinking from theology, and by insisting that the rules of natural law provided a basis for the body politic even if God did not exist."⁵⁸

During late antiquity, questions arose concerning the nature of history itself, about the fate of nations and the inevitable pattern of their rise and fall. It appeared as though these patterns were 'engulfed in a whole'. History, similar to mechanistic laws, seemed as though it, too, could be made to reveal its invisible motor, and in so doing become what it never was for the Romans and Greeks, that is, predictable. Like the rise and fall of empires and civilisations, the changing of the seasons, the birth and death of the natural world, it was only natural that history too should be subject to cyclical law. That is, it was assumed that history was a circular process comprised of endless birth and death of nations. "The historical movement began to be construed in the image of biological life."⁵⁹ The 'whole' in which history was engulfed was the whole of process similar to the life process. This newly constructed image of history could not have been further from Greek or even Christian tradition. "To the Christian, as to the Roman, the significance of secular events lay in their having the character of examples likely to repeat themselves, so that action could follow certain standardized patterns . . . For us, on the other hand, history stands and falls on the assumption that the process in its very secularity tells a story of its own and that, strictly speaking, repetitions cannot occur."⁶⁰ Consequently, "[s]o far as secular history is concerned we live in a process which knows no beginning and no end and which thus does not permit us to entertain eschatological expectations.

^{57.} Ibid., 93.

^{58.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 314.

^{59.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 70.

^{60.} Ibid., 43.

Nothing could be more alien to Christian thought than this concept of an earthly immortality of mankind.”⁶¹

Under this paradigm, what becomes of the immortalising project? If we can no longer actively achieve immortal *arête* through action, nor are we guaranteed eternal life on the basis of faith, has the secular world accepted human mortality? For Arendt, the answer is no. Even the process of secularisation could not rid humanity of the desire to overcome their mortal condition. We now come to the real significance of her point that life has become the highest value in politics and society. Like the Christian belief in the sacred, constant presence of human life, early modernity likewise saw the continuous existence of humanity as the ultimate goal. However, whereas Christians perceived the sacredness of human life in theistic terms and derived its legitimacy in the existence of God, the modern age did so on a strictly biological basis.⁶² In other words, what was important to the Christian tradition was the presence of an eternal human soul, for the secularised world it was the physical entity that ultimately mattered. The consequence was that immortality became a mere issue of biological life, of *zoë* and not of *bios*, or in Agambenian terms, ‘bare life’ was instilled with a sanctity and a *raison d’être* that it was intentionally deprived of historically. “The only thing that could now be potentially immortal, as immortal as the body politic in antiquity and as individual life during the Middle Ages, was life itself, that is, the possibly everlasting life process of the species mankind.”⁶³

The distinction between life with a transcendent or divine origin and the life of a biological species is paramount to Arendt’s insight into how we have come to understand the world and life in terms of process. Chapter three described in some detail the connection between biological and cyclical features of the natural world. With the introduction of processual thinking, life no longer refers to the immortal, repetitive, and monotonous essence of the natural world. Now it is injected with a sense of development where process insinuates progress. Once more, the only factor that controls this development is time. In other words, any progress of humankind, evolutionary or cultural, rational or sacred, is revealed in time and time alone. The idea of process as independent of world and action is detrimental to the world. As Masschelein summarises, “[t]he sacredness of life, in turn, implies the sacredness of the process, of labor, and of happiness as well. All these elements imply, if not a destruction, at least a repudiation of the world, which ultimately

^{61.} Ibid., 66-67.

^{62.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 68.

^{63.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 311-312.

means a forgetfulness of the fact that human life is the life of someone.”⁶⁴ In Arendt’s own words, “the modern age continued to operate under the assumption that life, and not the world, is the highest good of man”⁶⁵ but this life is now defined primarily as biological process.

The dislocation of meaning

We have seen how one of the ways the world is jeopardised by this processual framework is due to the manner in which action, events, and personal identity even, are robbed of their inherent meaning. Rather than meaning revealing itself in the context of the event or to the impartial eye of the historian, meaning was derived from the process itself. The intrinsic manifestation of events and appearances as meaningful is uprooted from the particular, assigned, instead to a universal intelligibility. On the one hand this move appears to offer ubiquitous accessibility and understanding while, on the other, the particularity of meaning is dislocated from the context from which it arises. From this perspective, “[w]hat was left was a ‘natural force,’ the force of the life process itself, to which all men and all human activities were equally submitted . . . and whose only aim, if it had an aim at all, was survival of the animal species man.”⁶⁶ Nothing could be further from the Homeric tradition than the idea of history as predictable movement. Arendt summarises this point in the following:

What is difficult for us to realize is that the great deeds and works of which mortals are capable, and which become the topic of historical narrative, are not seen as parts of either an encompassing whole or a process; on the contrary, the stress is always on single instances and single gestures. These single instances, deeds or events, interrupt the circular movement of daily life, in the same sense that the rectilinear *bíos* of the mortals interrupts the circular movement of biological life. The subject matter of history is these interruptions the extraordinary, in other words.⁶⁷

The loss of spontaneity and singularity in history brings about the loss of meaning. In other words, the conversion of events into moments of an overarching process means the significance of the event is subsumed by that of a predetermined process. “[History] cannot bestow meaning on particular occurrences either, because it has

⁶⁴. Ibid., 321.

⁶⁵. Masschelein, ‘World and Life’, 377.

⁶⁶. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 318.

⁶⁷. Ibid., 321.

dissolved all of the particular into means whose meaningfulness ends the moment the end-product is finished: single events and deeds and sufferings have no more meaning here than hammer and nails have with respect to the finished table.”⁶⁸ This emergence of meaninglessness Arendt locates at the root of all processual thinking. “What the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event and the universal meaning, have parted company. The process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance.”⁶⁹ Arendt argues that this movement culminated in time-consciousness, specifically, Hegelian time-consciousness. For her, it was Hegel who

... for the first time saw the whole of world history as one continuous development, and this tremendous achievement implied that he himself stood outside all authority-claiming systems and beliefs of the past, that he was held only by the thread of continuity in history itself. The thread of historical continuity was the first substitute for tradition; by means of it, the overwhelming mass of the most divergent values, the most contradictory thoughts and conflicting authorities, all of which had somehow been able to function together, were reduced to a unilinear, dialectically consistent development actually designed to repudiate not tradition as such, but the authority of all traditions.⁷⁰

Hegel, in his attempt to provide a rational unifying structure for human development, ended up reducing the very thing which Arendt saw as the condition of humanity: the existence of a plurality of perspectives and conflicting opinions. For their smoothing away of divergent, conflicting thoughts and experiences, Arendt charges the Hegelian and Marxist legacies with theorising away the essential and inevitable contradictions that arise amongst human beings.⁷¹ Be it the actualisation of a rational humanity or a classless society, human action became subject to the same ironclad laws as the physical realm.⁷² The price, Arendt argues, is human freedom and the ability to render events meaningful without recourse to any grand narrative. In fact, the similarity of terms between emerging grand narratives and the

^{68.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42-43.

^{69.} *Ibid.*, 79-80.

^{70.} *Ibid.*, 64.

^{71.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 28.

^{72.} “To think, with Hegel, that truth resides and reveals itself in the time-process itself is characteristic of all modern historical consciousness, however it expresses itself, in specifically Hegelian terms or not.” (Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 68)

new realms of science was not accidental. "The key words of modern historiography 'development' and 'progress' were, in the nineteenth century, also the key words of the then new branches of natural science, particularly biology and geology, one dealing with animal life and the other even with non-organic matter in terms of historical processes."⁷³ Once more, the underlying idea connecting what were once thought of as very different disciplines is the notion of process or progress, the inevitable and independent movement of something, usually towards an optimal state.

The true consequences of this move were manifest, for Arendt, in the totalitarian phenomenon, where laws, originally created to provide human action with stability, themselves were subverted to the eternal movement of process. In this matter it is worth quoting Arendt at length:

In the interpretation of totalitarianism, all laws have become laws of movement. When the Nazis talked about the law of nature or when the Bolsheviks talk about the law of history, neither nature nor history is any longer the stabilizing source of authority for the actions of mortal men; they are movements in themselves. Underlying the Nazis' belief in race laws as the expression of the law of nature in man, is Darwin's idea of man as the product of a natural development which does not necessarily stop with the present species of human beings, just as under the Bolsheviks' belief in class-struggle as the expression of the law of history lies Marx's notion of society as the product of a gigantic historical movement which races according to its own law of motion to the end of historical times when it will abolish itself.⁷⁴

The key issue here is that humanity, under processual ideologies, becomes a mere carrier of a higher force or ideal. This is to say, human beings are no longer perceived, as in the Kantian tradition, as 'ends-in-themselves', as agents in possession of independent thought and dignity. Under a processual framework, what matters is the overall manifestation of a transcendent ideal. This manifestation is never wholly revealed in the particular but only by comprehension of the whole as "the

^{73.} "Hegel claimed that the discovery of the dialectical movement as a universal law, ruling both man's reason and human affairs and the inner 'reason' of natural events, accomplished even more than a mere correspondence between *intellectus* and *res*, whose coincidence pre-Cartesian philosophy had defined as truth. By introducing the spirit and its self realization in movement, Hegel believed he had demonstrated an ontological identity of matter and idea." (Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 39)

^{74.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 61.

product of a gigantic historical movement.”⁷⁵ Mortality, the death of the individual, was likewise rendered meaningless and any quest for personal immortalisation or remembrance voided in light of the historical unfolding of process.

Yet, it was not only human action and dignity that suffered. Less attention is paid to the manner in which this processual development undermines the categories of reality and objectivity. Not only action as the spontaneous and public manifestation of freedom deteriorated with the rise of process but the very solidity of the common world began to disintegrate.⁷⁶ The manner in which history and even immortality changed during the modern age culminated in a new understanding of time as processual. What this implied was that the importance of history resided not in the preserving and recording of unrepeatable events but rather in the chronological movement of time. That is, the meaning of history is revealed in its unfolding, irrespective of content, leading to the degradation of worldly events.

The hegemonic-scientific worldview

The second characteristic of the modern age is defined by the omnipotent experience of a radical doubt. This doubt was not limited to the rejection of religion and superstitious dogma but, more importantly, extends to the experience of the world itself. Specifically, doubt arose with respect to the acquisition of knowledge about objective states of affairs. What people began to question was the capacity to know the truth based on sense experience and reason alone. This perceived unreliability of the senses became the motor behind the new sciences and the modern quest for epistemological certainty or truth, one that required the by-passing of unreliable human experience. This is to say that the suspicion of phenomenal reality “was powerfully stimulated by the modern age's doubt of the reality of an outer world ‘objectively’ given to human perception as an unchanged and unchangeable object.”⁷⁷ This ubiquitous sense of doubting, of unreliability, was co-original with technological and scientific developments: notably, the invention of the telescope and the subsequent proof of the heliocentric solar system. For Arendt, these moments are defining in the influence they bear on the modern perception of human knowledge. More radical perhaps is her critique of the technocratic, scientific worldview, which, she argues, is once more based on

⁷⁵. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 463.

⁷⁶. *Ibid.*, 463.

⁷⁷. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 64: “Invisible processes have engulfed every tangible thing, every individual entity that is visible to us, degrading them into functions of an over-all process.”

“process-framing,” to borrow a term from Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen.⁷⁸ The following is a reconstruction and elaboration of these events and how they led to this shift in epistemological faith. The main objective is to arrive at a clearer conception of how Arendt envisions her critique of process within the notion of modern science. Two competing epistemological models emerge for Arendt. The victorious model being the modern scientific method which is, at its core, a model of interference and derives its legitimacy from the ideals of process.

Prior to the modern age, knowledge of the world, or *kosmos*, was acquired primarily through the methods of contemplation and observation. Truth was arrived at through human rationality and sense experience, in other words, knowledge was disclosed by contemplative reason and the observation of an impartial observer. Contra philosophy’s ‘limits of reason’ or the boundaries of knowledge that arise from the structure of human consciousness, the epistemological crisis that defines the modern age is historical in origin, not rational.⁷⁹ It occurred because of contingent events that ultimately resulted in a new paradigm for science, one to rival the traditional paradigm. This shift began not with rational discourse or a prior discovery but with a man-made instrument, a relatively simply tool: the telescope. Arendt, however, does not place all significance on this invention alone but on the essential role it plays in the proof of heliocentric model of the solar system. Prior to the affirmation of the movement of solar bodies, the magnifying capacity of the telescope allowed people to see what was already possible under ordinary sense experience yet at a further distance. Galileo used this capacity to make what was once beyond the reach of ordinary sense experience accessible. What he discovered shook the very core of what was once thought to be true beyond refutation, that is, that the earth was located at the centre of the universe. Now what had been a stable and individually verifiable truth had been proven untrue, not by reason alone but with the help of a tool.

In other words, man had been deceived so long as he trusted that reality and truth would reveal themselves to his senses and to his reason if only he remained true to what he saw with the eyes of body and mind. The old opposition of sensual and rational truth, of the inferior truth capacity of the senses and the superior truth capacity of reason, paled beside this challenge, beside the obvious implication that neither truth nor reality is given, that neither of them appears

^{78.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 53.

^{79.} Hyvönen, ‘Invisible streams,’ *European Journal of Social Theory* 19 no.4 : 538–55.

as it is, and that only interference with appearance, doing away with appearances, can hold out a hope for true knowledge.⁸⁰

The problem, for Arendt, had not so much to do with a contradiction of ideas but in the fact that its discovery was owed, not to humanity's rationality, but to the capacity to invent tools: not to *animal rational* but to *homo faber*. It was not contemplation that changed the established worldview in the modern age but work. Not rationality but fabrication became the champion of humankind. Now, not only reason but experience became fallible, meaning truth was not reliably known through the relation between human and world but required *intervention*. The potential erroneous nature of sense experience led to the questioning and doubting of what humanity knew and could know about the world as given through experience. For, "when man, with the help of the telescope, turned his bodily eyes toward the universe, about which he had speculated for a long time seeing with the eyes of the mind, listening with the ears of the heart, and guided by the inner light of reason and learned that his senses were not fitted for the universe, that his everyday experience, far from being able to constitute the model for the reception of truth and the acquisition of knowledge, was a constant source of error and delusion."⁸¹ This 'constant source of error' required the introduction of what, for Arendt, is a method of interference: the modern scientific method.

There are two reasons why the concept of interference was important for Arendt. The first entails a reversal or even disequilibrium in the components of the *vita activa*. Because knowledge acquisition is now dependent on the capacities of *homo faber*, fabrication has become the most important component of the *vita activa*, subverting human action. Only the modern age's conviction that man can know only what he makes, that his allegedly higher capacities depend upon making and that he therefore is primarily *homo faber* and not an *animal rationale*, brought forth the much older implications of violence inherent in all interpretations of the realm of human affairs as a sphere of making. This has been particularly striking in the series of revolutions, characteristic of the modern age, all of which—with the exception of the American Revolution—show the same combination of the old Roman enthusiasm for the foundation of a new body politic with the glorification of violence as the only means for "making" it. Marx's dictum that "violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one," that is, of all change in history and politics, only sums up the conviction of the whole modern age and

⁸⁰. Even with Kantian epistemology, knowledge of the phenomenal realm or experiential realm was knowable and, importantly, reliable.

⁸¹. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 274.

draws the consequences of its innermost belief that history is “made” by men as nature is “made” by God.⁸²

The process of making gives what action by its very nature cannot: control. This sense of control becomes an epistemological value manifest in the dominance of the natural sciences. If, as the above quotation states, humanity can only truly know what we ourselves make, then it also stands to reason that we must insert ourselves into natural processes in order to know them too. This move is one of interference based on the distinction between what is artificially fabricated and what is not. The second reason resides in the manner which these technocratic values lead to world-alienation. The distrust of sense experience, of the world as it appears through original sense perception, leads to distrust in common sense and perceptible reality. As stated earlier, Arendt’s concept of reality requires intersubjectivity, communication, and diversity. Without being able to trust one’s experience and without being able to rely on the experiences of other’s, we become estranged from one another and the world.

Radical doubt

In summary of the foregoing, it may be said that according to Arendt the modern age is characterised by a radical doubt, a skepticism towards our capacity to know reality without error or illusion. This doubting was a repercussion of technological developments beginning primarily with Galileo and the heliocentric model of the solar system. As discussed above, Galileo’s confirmation of the heliocentric hypotheses was made possible with the use of a tool, the telescope. The knowledge yielded through instrumental interference was in such contradiction to common sense that it initiated the beginnings of an epistemic and cultural shift, the driving motor of which was a pervasive sense of doubt. The consequences of the perceived unreliability of the senses extends beyond epistemology into the ontological for what is ultimately at stake is the perceptible faith in the world. In Arendt’s own words, “[t]he modern astrophysical world view, which began with Galileo, and its challenge to the adequacy of the senses to reveal reality, have left us a universe of whose qualities we know no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments [...] Instead of objective qualities, in other words, we find instruments, and instead of nature or the universe — in the words of Heisenberg — man encounters only himself.”⁸³

^{82.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 54-55.

^{83.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 228.

What does Arendt intend by Heisenberg's phrase "man encounters only himself"? On Arendt's reading, it means humanity has forsaken the givenness of the earth and earthly nature in favour of something which was never promised to human existence: absolute certainty. As established in chapter two, contingency is not a hindrance to be overcome; it is rather the very condition of spontaneity and freedom. It belongs to the experience of fabrication, to *homo faber*, to know beforehand the outcome of the making process. To extend this certainty to the world and cosmos is our modern hubris, for in so doing we necessarily forsake the worldliness of the human condition. The transformation of spatial reality into 'numerical truth' operated as the guarantor of this certainty. "When, moreover, the same analytical geometry proved 'conversely that numerical truths [...] can be fully represented spatially,' a physical science had been evolved which required no principles for its completion beyond those of pure mathematics, and in this science man could move, risk himself into space and be certain that he would not encounter anything but himself, nothing that could not be reduced to patterns present in him."⁸⁴

Through technology, the *modus operandi* of *homo faber*, man encounters only himself in the sense that he has surrounded himself with objects of his own making. The world of *homo faber* is the artificial world of human-made spaces. Recall such spaces are zones of artificiality in which human activity is distinguishable from nature, so from that which is given and not created by humanity. In order to prove the validity of whether the earth revolves around the sun or vice versa, and since "both assumptions are in agreement with observed phenomena and the difference is only a difference of the chosen point of reference," what matters then is which position you take in reference to the observed phenomena; not validity *per se* but perspective is the defining criteria. This is the mistake of modern science according to Arendt, for it necessarily assumes the possibility of a universal standpoint that would guarantee the final validity of what is observed. Yet according to her, all we have done is moved our point of reference one step further away. We have dislocated ourselves from our earthly condition. "It rather signifies that we have moved the Archimedean point one step farther away from the earth to a point in the universe where neither earth nor sun are centres of a universal system. It means that we no longer feel bound even to the sun, that we move freely in the universe, choosing our point of reference wherever it may be convenient for a specific purpose."⁸⁵ This being cut-off is a sense of radical dislocation, a nowhere

⁸⁴. Ibid., 261.

⁸⁵. In this quotation Arendt is referencing the work of E. A. Burt (Edwin Arthur Burt, *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980):38. Cited in Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 266).

that Arendt calls the Archimedean point. The disclosure of the celestial bodies from Galileo onwards meant that this 'point', which is effectively a nowhere, was transferred from the earth to the universe. In this way "we have found a way to act on the earth and within terrestrial nature as though we dispose of it from outside, from the Archimedean point."⁸⁶ This handling of nature from outside, that is, from the position of the cosmos, exposes the earth to universal forces.

The handling of nature from outside, so to speak, makes our terrestrial existence a mere accident, for it can be overcome "by virtue of reasoning." Moreover, with the launch of Sputnik, this overcoming is no longer merely speculative but a perceptible reality.⁸⁷ We have begun to introduce universal forces into earthly nature and use "cosmic laws as guiding principles for terrestrial action." In this way, "world alienation determined the course and the development of modern society, earth alienation became and has remained the hallmark of modern science."⁸⁸ This newfound universal viewpoint is won through the mathematisation of nature in which perceptible reality is transformed and transferred onto formalistic models. The obvious strength of this move is that such models are meant to hold true everywhere regardless of contingencies. But this is also a weakness. Such abstraction is necessarily unworldly and with that, mathematics leaves behind its origin as "the 'science' of Being in its true appearance, but becomes instead the science of the structure of the human mind."⁸⁹ It ceases to contend with appearances in themselves and is concerned instead with hidden patterns. The modern notion of experiment, born out of radical doubt in sense experience and earth-bound experience, requires a cosmic standpoint 'outside nature' where one is free "from the shackles of earth-bound experience."⁹⁰ Humanity no longer observes phenomena as they are given but does so from an astrological viewpoint.

The rendering of space in formulaic patterns came into its own with the Cartesian search for certain knowledge. "When Descartes' analytical geometry treated space and extension, the *res extensa* of nature and the world, so 'that its relations, however complicated, must always be expressible in algebraic formulae,' mathematics succeeded in reducing and translating all that man is not into patterns which are identical with human, mental structures."⁹¹ Phenomena, Arendt's term for perceptible reality, morphed into imperceptible 'data', 'measuring instruments',

^{86.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 263.

^{87.} *Ibid.*, 262.

^{88.} *Ibid.*, 263. See chapter three, section 3.1 for this discussion.

^{89.} *Ibid.*, 264.

^{90.} *Ibid.*, 266.

^{91.} *Ibid.*, 265.

and mathematical patterns. And yet despite efforts to be free from our spatially conditioned existence, what we have done is move 'the eye of the mind', akin to having moved our bodily location.

Now the phenomena could be saved only in so far as they could be reduced to a mathematical order, and this mathematical operation does not serve to prepare man's mind for the revelation of true being by directing it to the ideal measures that appear in the sensually given data, but serves, on the contrary, to reduce these data to the measure of the human mind, which, given enough distance, being sufficiently remote and uninvolved, can look upon and handle the multitude and variety of the concrete in accordance with its own patterns and symbols. These are no longer ideal forms disclosed to the eye of the mind, but are the results of removing the eyes of the mind, no less than the eyes of the body, from the phenomena, of reducing all appearances through the force inherent in distance.⁹²

The distance Arendt is referring to above is not, and this is crucial, a privileged position from which it is possible to obtain an omnipotent perspective. Rather, distance simply reveals another form of appearance, for there is nothing behind appearance, as Arendt later argues. Not the status but the *location* of truth is changed under radical doubt of the modern age. Truth was no longer revealed in contemplation, in observation, but in active interference. The underlying, unifying mechanism of this sense of interference is the inner articulation of process, the 'how', and neither the 'what' or the 'why' as it used to be. "The shift from the 'why' and 'what' to the 'how' implies that the actual objects of knowledge can no longer be things or eternal motions but must be processes, and that the object of science therefore is no longer nature or the universe but the history, the story of the coming into being, of nature or life or the universe."⁹³ The shift to the 'how' of phenomena connotes a vital tension here, for in order to know the 'how' the implication is that one must look beyond or behind the manifest. That is, and this is Arendt's point, the essence of things has become separable from their worldly manifestation. Being and appearing have parted, and moreover, because of the processual nature of the 'how', Being is no longer conceived in static terms.

The poignancy of Descartes' doubt is fully realized only if one understands that the new discoveries dealt an even more disastrous

⁹². Ibid., 266.

⁹³. Ibid., 266- 267.

blow to human confidence in the world and in the universe than is indicated by a clear-cut separation of being and appearance. For here the relationship between these two is no longer static as it was in traditional skepticism, as though appearances simply hide and cover a true being which forever escapes the notice of man. This Being, on the contrary, is tremendously active and energetic: it creates its own appearances, except that these appearances are delusions.⁹⁴

The movement implied in process or the 'how', in this case, places phenomena in a state of fluctuation, in the sense that the 'objective' stability of objects is severely castigated. The unifying structure in this case becomes process itself. It deprived man as maker and builder of those fixed and permanent standards and measurements which, prior to the modern age, have always served him as guides for his doing and criteria for his judgment. It is not only and perhaps not even primarily the development of commercial society that, with the triumphal victory of exchange value over use value, first introduced the principle of interchangeability, then the relativization, and finally the devaluation, of all values. For the mentality of modern man, as it was determined by the development of modern science and the concomitant unfolding of modern philosophy, it was at least as decisive that man began to consider himself part and parcel of the two superhuman, all-encompassing processes of nature and history, both of which seemed doomed to an infinite progress without ever reaching any inherent telos or approaching any preordained idea.⁹⁵ Kathrin Braun likewise picks up on the political ramifications of this notion in the context of totalitarianism, Braun writes: "The totalitarian project is not only about scientifically understanding the laws of movement but about actively promoting the process of their unfolding."⁹⁶

To summarise: the cost of epistemological certainty gained through distance in the form of mental abstraction is humanity's situated, earthly condition. This move entailed the reconceptualisation of nature and worldly existence in formal, mathematical terms, i.e., the mathematisation of nature. The crux of the issue is not to say that abstract thinking and cognitive reasoning is purely negative – that would be a gross simplification of Arendt's analysis. Rather, it is the marginalisation of other forms of knowledge, especially experiential knowledge, in favour of logical, deductive reason. This severely reduces the worldly character of the human condition, the result of which is an egregious form of earth and world alienation.

^{94.} Ibid., 296.

^{95.} Ibid., 276.

^{96.} Ibid., 307.

"This is perhaps clearest in the development of the new science's most important mental instrument, the devices of modern algebra, by which mathematics 'succeeded in freeing itself from the shackles of spatiality,' that is, from geometry, which, as the name indicates, depends on terrestrial measures and measurements. Modern mathematics freed man from the shackles of earth-bound experience and his power of cognition from the shackles of finitude."⁹⁷ Doubt resulted in a "clear-cut separation of being and appearance."⁹⁸

Unfortunately, this is not the only alienating force at play. The following discusses a different alienating force, one that, in a manner of speaking, works in the opposite direction of the abstract, universal perspective of modern science. Not distance but a sense of proximity is the problem in what Arendt calls processes of 'interiorisation'. In contradistinction to the distance of the Archimedean point, interiorisation is a condition in which the human mind is concerned only with itself, devoid of worldly externalities. "The Cartesian solution of universal doubt or its salvation from the two interconnected nightmares—that everything is a dream and there is no reality and that not God but an evil spirit rules the world and mocks man—was similar in method and content to the turning away from truth to truthfulness and from reality to reliability [...] that even if there is no truth, man can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty, man can be reliable."⁹⁹

Subjectivation

Arendt draws a distinction between introspection and reflection. Introspection, she writes, is "the sheer cognitive concern of consciousness with its own content" the process of which "must yield certainty, because here nothing is involved except what the mind has produced itself; nobody is interfering but the producer of the product, man is confronted with nothing and nobody but himself."¹⁰⁰ Introspection operates without information external to the self; it deals with the self alone. The value of introspection follows from the principle of *homo faber*, in which instrumentality, and subsequent control over the making process, is a reliable source of knowledge as it owes its origin solely to human beings and not the external world. The preoccupation with the self as the ultimate sources of knowledge is "[o]ne of the most persistent trends in modern philosophy since

^{97.} Kathrin Braun, 'Biopolitics and Temporality in Arendt and Foucault' *Time & Society*, 16, no.1 (2007): 15.

^{98.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 264-5.

^{99.} *Ibid.*, 276.

^{100.} *Ibid.*, 279.

Descartes" and amounts to "an attempt to reduce all experiences, with the world as well as with other human beings, to experiences between man and himself."¹⁰¹ This "exclusive concern with the self" is likewise a response to the epistemological shocks of the Enlightenment. Following the new found belief in the modern experiment and deductive reasoning, "Descartes concluded that those processes which go on in the mind of man himself have a certainty of their own, that they can become the object of investigation in introspection."¹⁰² In this way, "modern philosophy had made sure through the process of introspection that man concerns himself only with himself."¹⁰³

It seems that this Cartesian attitude has paradoxically rendered irrelevant the very thing it was supposed to secure against all doubt: the world. This inner-worldly foundation of certainty can work only if it, at the same time, rejects the very externality of the world. In the previous section we discussed the over-reliance on mathematical, universal laws which resulted in earth and world alienation. This reliance coincided and aided the eventual interiorisation of worldly reality into mental processes.

Nothing perhaps could prepare our minds better for the eventual dissolution of matter into energy, of objects into a whirl of atomic occurrences, than this dissolution of objective reality into subjective states of mind or, rather, into subjective mental processes. Second, and this was of even greater relevance to the initial stages of the modern age, the Cartesian method of securing certainty against universal doubt corresponded most precisely to the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the new physical science: though one cannot know truth as something given and disclosed, man can at least know what he makes himself.¹⁰⁴

This certainty against doubt corresponded to the mode of experimentation whereby external conditions are altered and controlled. Both methods are united by a faith in human autonomy by which man can know what he makes.¹⁰⁵ Both of these methods, the modern experiment and introspection, are an attempt to remove doubt and attain certainty at the cost of worldly reality. The manner in which they do this differs. For experimentation, as stated, external factors are removed and

^{101.} Ibid., 280.

^{102.} Ibid., 254.

^{103.} Ibid., 280.

^{104.} Ibid.

^{105.} Ibid., 282.

the phenomena under investigation is thereby isolated for observation. This is a familiar notion to her contemporary readers: extraneous influences are removed so that there is no interference with the phenomena under observation, for any interference would render the results of the experiment void. Yet, Arendt's point is a delicate one concerning the status of truth's relation to the world. Under the conditions of the experiment, truth is attained at the cost of the world, for the world, in the form of extraneous influence, is precisely what is removed. Her point then is that knowledge procured under these conditions can never be the whole truth in a meaningful sense, but rather represented a partial, even mutated, 'truth', because the environment has been so altered. Again, it is worth saying that Arendt's task is not to question the validity of scientific knowledge. The success of the sciences is beyond doubt. Her goal is to draw attention to the unchallenged status of scientific truth as a complete representation of reality as a whole.

Under the conditions of the experiment, the original environment is manipulated into a controlled one, making the process we wish to examine isolatable. Only under controllable circumstances can knowledge be reliable. The process of interiorisation operates in a similar manner. Interiorisation means the turning away from the world to 'inward' processes of the mind, formally called logical reasoning. Arendt refers to this as the submerging worldly objects into the stream of consciousness, whereby the perceptible, 'objective' reality of the world is dissolved into the ever-flowing process of mental cognition. This move sacrifices the stability of worldly phenomena for the certainty of anthropocentric knowledge, what Arendt was referring to in the Heisenberg quotation where man encounters only himself. To use the metaphor of Archimedes, humanity has moved the Archimedean point into the self in this case, which amounts to nothing more than another artificial and controllable space or environment. "It has always been a great temptation, for men of action no less than for men of thought, to find a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents."¹⁰⁶ It would seem that reality is a price worth paying to assuage doubt: "Man, in other words, carries his certainty, the certainty of his existence, within himself; the sheer functioning of consciousness, though it cannot possibly assure a worldly reality given to the senses and to reason, confirms beyond doubt the reality of sensations and of reasoning, that is, the reality of processes which go on in the mind."¹⁰⁷ For Arendt, this thinking cannot substitute the tangible reality of the world.¹⁰⁸

^{106.} Ibid.

^{107.} Ibid., 220.

^{108.} Ibid., 280

Both these methods challenged our original way of being-in-the-world that we achieve through common sense. “For common sense, which once had been the one by which all other senses, with their intimately private sensations, were fitted into the common world, just as vision fitted man into the visible world, now became an inner faculty without any world relationship.”¹⁰⁹ This is the coordinating faculty of common sense, by which human beings come to inhabit a world in a meaningful manner. It does not involve artificially isolating parts of reality or withdrawing into the inwardness of the self. Under both conditions “[w]hat men now have in common is not the world but the structure of their minds, and this they cannot have in common, strictly speaking; their faculty of reasoning can only happen to be the same in everybody.”¹¹⁰ We arrive once more at Heisenberg’s statement on the loneliness of Man under conditions of certainty. To put this in more Arendtian terms, we forsake the plurality of the earth and world for the myth of Truth and the desire for certainty. “In other words, the world of the experiment seems always capable of becoming a man-made reality, and this, while it may increase man’s power of making and acting, even of creating a world, far beyond what any previous age dared to imagine in dream and phantasy, unfortunately puts man back once more—and now even more forcefully—into the prison of his own mind, into the limitations of patterns he himself created.”¹¹¹ Certainty, the complete removal of doubt is not part of the human condition. Where we once valued the conditions of earth, worldliness and plurality we have come instead to glorify the hidden processes of the mind and the modern experiment, neither of which can replace the stability of the reality of worldly objects, for certainty and stability are not the same.

The process character of action

Both the modern experiment and the process of interiorisation set us up for the final move in the rise of process and the forsaking of worldly reality: the unleashing of the process character of action. Arendt explains that the underlying mechanism of both natural and historical science, to which we might also add the process of introspection, “is the concept of process, and the actual human experience

^{109.} This sentiment reoccurs later in *Life of the Mind* where she writes: “What Merleau-Ponty had to say against Descartes is brilliantly right: ‘To reduce perception to the thought of perceiving . . . is to take out an insurance against doubt whose premiums are more onerous than the loss for which it is to indemnify us: for it is to . . . move to a type of certitude that will never restore to us the ‘there is’ of the world.” (Arendt, *Life of the Mind I*, 48-49).

^{110.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 283.

^{111.} Ibid.

underlying it is action. Only because we are capable of acting, of starting processes of our own, can we conceive of both nature and history as systems of processes.”¹¹² How does action, that which Arendt champions in the face of modernity, suddenly possess such destructive capability? This is due to action’s process quality. The very fact that natural sciences have become exclusively sciences of process and, in their last stage, sciences of potentially irreversible, irremediable “processes of no return” is a clear indication that, whatever the brain power necessary to start them, the actual underlying human capacity which alone could bring about this development is no “theoretical” capacity, neither contemplation nor reason, but the human ability to act—to start new unprecedented processes whose outcome remains uncertain and unpredictable whether they are let loose in the human or the natural realm.¹¹³ The process character underlying action stems from the conditions of natality and plurality. Recall how both conditions complement one another and lead to entirely new beginnings in the world. Each person has the innate capacity to begin something new because each and every human being is a beginning. Moreover, we act into a world which precedes and exceeds our own existence and is comprised of others meaning that we never act in isolation. These facts form the ‘web of relations’ which constitutes the fabric of our social, political and cultural world. We are born and act into this web of relations, meaning our actions, words and deeds, always have consequence, for they are perceived, are born witness by, and affect others. But the consequence of action is not the same as the outcome of determinable processes, as in the domain of natural sciences. The spontaneity of action as well as the fabric of relations make it so that the outcome of action is never entirely predictable, nor can it be controlled and brought under human mastery. For this reason, action has its own stabilizing forces: promise and forgiveness.¹¹⁴

The acts of promising and forgiving are mechanisms by which the reverberating outcome of action may be put to an end and originate in the quality of action itself.

They arise [...] directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes. If without action and speech, without the articulation of natality, we would be doomed to swing forever in the ever-recurring cycle of becoming, then without the faculty to undo what we have

¹¹². Ibid., 288

¹¹³. Ibid., 232. Again, “process, which is so highly characteristic of modern science, both natural and historical, probably had its origin in this fundamental experience of action [...]” (Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 85)

¹¹⁴. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 231-232.

done and to control at least partially the processes we have let loose, we would be the victims of an automatic necessity bearing all the marks of the inexorable laws which, according to the natural sciences before our time, were supposed to constitute the outstanding characteristic of natural processes.¹¹⁵

Forgiveness, then, is the opposite of revenge, where revenge consists of “acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process.”¹¹⁶ In other words, vengeance simply propagates and continues the act of the initial offense. Whereas forgiveness and even punishment “attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly.”¹¹⁷ The examples of promise and forgiveness as stabilising forces against the unpredictability of action are a helpful comparison to the efforts to remove these qualities entirely. The unpredictability of action was thought to be a fatal weakness for the space of appearances and the realm of human affairs. The attempt to remedy this in substituting making for acting leads to unleashing the process character of action into nature.

Similarly, the attempt to eliminate action because of its uncertainty and to save human affairs from their frailty by dealing with them as though they were or could become the planned products of human making has first of all resulted in channelling the human capacity for action, for beginning new and spontaneous processes which without men never would come into existence, into an attitude toward nature which up to the latest stage of the modern age had been one of exploring natural laws and fabricating objects out of natural material.¹¹⁸

According to Arendt, the attitude of modern science towards nature is one that endangers the earth. “Nothing appears more manifest in these attempts than the greatness of human power, whose source lies in the capacity to act, and which without action's inherent remedies inevitably begins to overpower and destroy not man himself but the conditions under which life was given to him.”¹¹⁹ For “Whereas men have always been capable of destroying whatever was the product of human

^{115.} Ibid., 243.

^{116.} Ibid., 246.

^{117.} Ibid., 240.

^{118.} Ibid., 241.

^{119.} Ibid., 230-231.

hands and have become capable today even of the potential destruction of what man did not make —the earth and earthly nature—men never have been and never will be able to undo or even to control reliably any of the processes they start through action.”¹²⁰ The ability to “start new unprecedented processes whose outcome remains uncertain and unpredictable” stems from the qualities of human action. Yet the features of instability and unpredictability seem counter-intuitive for, as we saw, understanding phenomena in terms of processes was in large part what facilitates a sense of control and mastery to begin with. Yet it is these very elements which carry forward and channel into the human world.¹²¹

Conclusion

Arendt de-naturalises and demystifies the concept of process as it is uncritically internalised by the natural sciences.¹²² Where “science discloses ‘happenings’ in processual time rather than revealing (stable) being.”¹²³ The danger of the rise of process is twofold. The first concerns the initial subjugation of phenomenal reality in favour of environmental conditions which we ourselves have artificially created. Within this framework, reality is an epiphenomenon waiting to be discovered under, behind, or beyond appearances. Such uncovering requires the interference of modern sciences or the denigration of uniqueness to overarching historical narratives in the case of history.¹²⁴ In other words, history “was no longer composed of the deeds and sufferings of men, and it no longer told the story of events affecting the lives of men; it became a man-made process, the only all-comprehending process which owed its existence exclusively to the human race.”¹²⁵

The second moment of danger resides in the very operation of processes. For “the process can continue only provided that no worldly durability and stability is permitted to interfere, only as long as all worldly things, all end products of the production process, are fed back into it at an ever-increasing speed. In other words, the process of wealth accumulation, as we know it, stimulated by the life process and in turn stimulating human life, is possible only if the world and the

^{120.} Ibid., 238.

^{121.} Ibid., 232-233.

^{122.} Ibid., 150.

^{123.} Oliver Belcher and Jeremy J Schmid, ‘Being earthbound: Arendt, process and alienation in the Anthropocene’, 108.

^{124.} Ibid., 109.

^{125.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 64.

very worldliness of man are sacrificed.”¹²⁶ The inherent movement of process can continue only so long as nothing interferes or gets in its way. Arendt claims that the biggest threat to process is the world itself and so it is the world that is placed in jeopardy for the sake of ‘processual thinking’. Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen places the danger of what he refers to as ‘process-thinking’ as even more urgent today than when Arendt wrote on the matter, given the frame’s successful implementation in marketing and commerce. “If anything,” Hyvönen claims, “process-framing is even more prevalent in contemporary behavioral sciences and market approaches than it was in Arendt’s time.”¹²⁷ Such comments underpin the growing urgency to raise critical awareness about ways we reconfigure phenomena with respect to process. Such an awareness would entail questioning the presumed ontological permanency of processes incurred at the cost of worldly structures.¹²⁸

What, then, is Arendt’s solution to such a deadly prognosis? Arendt’s answer resides, as the following chapter shows, in her attempt to reinvigorate appearances and their worldly, spatial dimension. She does so by performing a spatial metaphysics of her own, in which concepts such as life and death are grounded, so to speak, in the world. The result is a transformation from the way we usually think of life from the dominant functional, processual definition into a plural appearance that would be impossible without the stability and solidity of the earth.

^{126.} Ibid., 58.

^{127.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 256.

^{128.} Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, ‘Invisible streams: Process-thinking in Arendt’, 544. The previously cited paper provides a very helpful analysis of the technocratic and capitalistic manifestations of acting into nature. The authors argue that the economic and technological consequences of acting into nature have altered the very meaning of what it is to be ‘earth-bound’, that is, as we discussed in the previous chapter, what it means to be conditioned by the earth as the site of all life. This understanding is situated around Arendt’s notion of process which the authors discuss in light of its political ramifications. “For Arendt, understanding the political ontology of process requires tracking the transformations that enable action into nature across collisions of capital, science and technology.” Oliver Belcher and Jeremy J Schmid, ‘Being earthbound: Arendt, process and alienation in the Anthropocene’, 105.

Chapter 5.

The Spatialisation of Metaphysics

*"The new universality consists in feeling that the ground is in the process of giving way."*¹

^{1.} Bruno Latour *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans Catherine Porter (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018) 15.

The dominance of processual thinking has led to a subversion of appearances in which the status of phenomenal reality is degraded into an epiphenomenon. As we have seen, the consequence is a form of alienation, one that fundamentally alters how human beings relate to, and interact with, the world. For Arendt, the history of metaphysics has played a significant role in this. I believe that this is in fact the motivation behind her focus on spatial ontology. In her hands, recognising spatial existence acts as a counter-measure to the consequences of the tradition of metaphysics and to modern science. Both these practices perform a reductive explanation of worldly reality, often in terms of elusive and unappearing processes. These processes inadvertently emphasise an invisible commonality at the expense of the uniqueness of the phenomenal world, that is, the world of lived experience. Venerable speculations on the substance and quality of human nature have, in the main, served to dislocate and fundamentally misconstrue what it means to be alive. An example of this tendency is best seen in the domain of life itself. Attending to the spatial aspects of existence may help deconstruct the epiphenomenality of reality. It achieves this mainly due to the fact that space is primordially experienced as a pre-reflective component of worldly existence.

For instance, Max Jammer describes how early civilisations interpreted space anthropocentrically and not, as we have come to understand it, abstractly. Spaces were endowed with affective and localised meaning as well as practical signifiers. For example, the Sumerian main unit of measurement was based on the area of grain. "This designation indicates clearly that areal extension was in those times conceived from the aspect of the quantity of seed necessary for the sowing of the area in question, which means, in the final analysis, from the anthropocentric aspect of the labor involved."² The primordial experience of space is strengthened by anthropological evidence. This, I believe, is why Arendt makes space a core, if sometimes implicit, feature of her critical metaphysical project. I am not alone in recognising this impulse in Arendt. Debarbieux writes:

Arendt's spatial thinking relates to her overall project to distance herself from traditional philosophy keen to speculate on 'human nature' or to dwell on an abstract, metaphysical conception of men, seeking instead to ground her reflections in the idea that any human life, any human action, deserves to be interrogated in relation to its material basis, which takes spatial form or requires some kind of spatial arrangement.³

² Max Jammer, *The Concepts of Space, The Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 8.

³ Debarbieux, 'Hannah Arendt's spatial thinking', 353.

The goal in investigating this spatial arrangement is to act as an ameliorating force against the destructive tendencies of processual thinking. In our lives, space is the defining concern of both our time and for future generations. We have seen how space is increasingly endangered through the operations of capitalism, modern science, land expropriation, and forms of ideological thinking. The habitability of the earth is threatened by the drastically decreasing liveable spaces available. For this reason, it has perhaps never been so important that we think about the spatial quality of all existence.

This chapter is dedicated to understanding Arendt's alternative approach to metaphysics, through her spatialisation of fundamental metaphysical concepts. It exposes four interconnected aspects of the spatial ontology present in Arendt's early and middle work. By doing so I hope to show that, despite her reputation discussed in chapter one, Arendt actually had a more nuanced understanding of spatial ontology. Ultimately, her spatialising project is of surprising relevance for environmental philosophy and its political ramifications. The payoff is an alternative route to environmental engagement that is, at once, ethical but never dogmatic, and, importantly, one that avoids reductive recourse to explanatory processes. This non-reductive approach facilitates discussions of belonging and dislocation in light of global climatic events, which are not easily captured in the current conventional discourse.⁴ Recognizing the spatial quality of existence aids our understanding of humanity as connected and interdependent beings for whom the earth is not the background of human activity.

I offer three instantiations of Arendt's spatial project which I deem are the most important because they conceptualise some of the fundamental experiences of existence. As such, we examine the categories of birth and death, time, and reality. We see that these concepts only make sense for Arendt in their *spatial context*. Arendt's philosophy reveals a unique engagement with the concept of space whereby conventional notions such as existence, natality, mortality, and even time are subordinated to space. Under this framework, space is neither an abstract idea nor a transcendental ideal which has little or no bearing on real life. Space, rather, literally *grounds* these concepts by which we have come to understand existence in general. In her hands, metaphysical ideals undergo a *worldly* transformation.

The following makes this aspect of her philosophy explicit and hence nuances the reception of *The Human Condition* and its "disturbingly unfashionable" spatial

⁴ See section 1.2.

distinctions.⁵ Only after bringing this fundamental component to the surface of her thought are we better positioned to understand the consequences for the climate crisis. With this in mind let us now turn to the three categories birth and death, time, and reality, and see how Arendt's spatialisation of these concepts yields a much-needed revitalisation of irreducible appearance.

Spatialising birth and death

Birth and death are central to the idea of life. These features are shared across species as a universal condition. Arendt influentially held that birth and death are 'supreme events' of appearance and disappearance *in relation to the world*. With this, we witness the transformation of natality and mortality. Arendt moves away from discussing life and death in subjective terms for the simple fact that one cannot appear to oneself but only to others in the world. It is 'from the perspective of the world', whose features of durability and stability allow for appearance to manifest, that each 'new arrival' is experienced as a new appearance. This appearance is impossible without conditions of stability and a degree of permanence. Such qualities are absent in Arendt's account of natural space in the 1958 *The Human Condition*. "Birth and death," she explains, "presuppose a world which is not in constant movement, but whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible, which existed before any one individual appeared into it and will survive his eventual departure."⁶

Without the stability of the world, life as appearance is neither exceptional nor unique. In this way, biological life lacks any distinguishing feature, belonging instead to a changeless eternity. Recall from the discussion in chapter three that this is not the eternity of yet another transcendent space as with the theistic belief in an afterlife. This is an eternity of the "deathless repetition" of a life lived completely under the dictates of the life process. The life process is consumptive and because of it, the relation between living organisms and their environment, that is their spatial inheritance, is defined by metabolism.⁷ "A philosophy of life that does not arrive, as did Nietzsche, at the affirmation of 'eternal recurrence' (*ewige Wiederkehr*) as the highest principle of all being, simply does not know what it is

⁵ Last, 'Re-reading worldliness', 74.

⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 97.

⁷ See Jeremy Arnold for a helpful overview of the life process in Arendt's work in Jeremy Arnold, 'Caught in Penelope's Web: Transformations of the Concept of Life from the Human Condition to the Life of the Mind Transformations of the Concept of Life: Jeremy Arnold.' *Constellations* 23, no. 4 (2016): 609.

talking about.”⁸ Natural spaces that are dedicated to it are caught in a process of eternal reoccurrence. In distinction to the organic life of natural space, which is defined by the cyclical repetition of labour, life lived within the boundaries of the human artifice experiences time altogether differently:

The word ‘life’, however, has an altogether different meaning if it is related to the world and meant to designate the time interval between birth and death. Limited by a beginning and an end, that is, by the two supreme events of appearance and disappearance within the world, it follows a strictly linear movement whose very motion nevertheless is driven by the motor of biological life which man shares with other living things and which forever retains the cyclical movement of nature.⁹

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The changes, however, with the introduction of human artifice. Recognising the space in which life unfolds transforms the qualities of human existence in crucial ways. The presence of an artificial world disrupts the biological process, liberating humanity from her eternal reoccurrence, for, “[w]ithout a world into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other animal species.”¹⁰ Again, the establishment of a specifically artificial space, life and death as we know them, as the life of someone and the death of a person, become possible. This is to say that life and death become individualising, meaningful events which forever change the world that made them possible in the first place. Because these supreme events are primarily recognised in relation to the world, they are transformed and rendered phenomenologically as *appearance and disappearance*. The life cycle is transformed in the presence of unnatural space and is experienced as a form of arrival and departure in relation to the world.

Nature and the cyclical movement into which she forces all living things know neither birth nor death as we understand them. The birth and death of human beings are not simple natural occurrences, but are related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable entities, appear and from which they depart.¹¹

⁸. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 97.

⁹. Ibid.

¹⁰. Ibid.

¹¹. Ibid., 96-97.

Non-human animals, on the other hand, do die but their life, like their death, unfolds in the anonymity of a species. Death is only the *disappearance* of one member of the species.

In relation to a permanent location, the subjective, private qualities of the life cycle in nature are once more transformed from inwardness to communicability.¹² Whereas Arendt defines the life process as without distinction, life in a human world belongs always to a person as a unique appearance and whose disappearance from the world constitutes a singular event. In this way, it is no longer only in a metabolic, consumptive relation to space, but has the potential to be world building. Recall that for the ancient Greeks nature, including the life of non-human beings, and the gods possess an effortless immortality: they are bound to immortality by their essence as deity, whereas non-human beings, while they obviously perish, attain a sense of immortality through the species. Both pay a price for this eternal existence. The gods, and this point is significant, spend their lives not in an eternal, transcendent space beyond the reach of mortal men. Rather, they live as men live, in this world with the same passage of time and seasons. While the home of the Greek gods resides in Mount Olympus and not in the *polis*, they, and their home, nevertheless are partially subjected to the conditions of life on this earth. Indeed, for the Greeks, the gods were positively anthropomorphic, capable of jealousy, lust, love, and error. This stands in contrast to the Christian ideal of God, father of both heaven and earth.

This world-building capacity, which is fundamentally a spatial endeavour, offers the possibility of transcending, without total liberation, the anonymity of the life process. This impossibility of complete transcendence is experienced through the labouring activity as it corresponds to the human condition of life, even within the boundaries of the human artifice.

While nature manifests itself in human existence through the circular movement of our bodily functions, she makes her presence felt in the man-made world through the constant threat of overgrowing or decaying it. The common characteristic of both, the biological process in man and the process of growth and decay in the world, is that they are part of the cyclical movement of nature and therefore endlessly repetitive; all human activities which arise out of the necessity to cope with them are bound to the recurring cycles of nature and have in themselves no beginning and no end, properly speaking; unlike

^{12.} Arnold, 'Caught in Penelope's Web', 609.

working, whose end has come when the object is finished, ready to be added to the common world of things, laboring always moves in the same circle, which is prescribed by the biological process of the living organism and the end of its 'toil and trouble' comes only with the death of this organism.¹³

In other words, human existence undergoes significant experiential changes while in a particular relation to natural or artificial space. The spatial features of existence do not manifest as the mere background or contingent setting of human action. Arendt makes a significant argument for reconsidering the spatial qualities of human existence, not as a secondary, if necessary, feature, but to put it centre-stage, as it were. This important 'world-building' potentiality depends on the co-existence of natural space even in the crude sense of a resource from which to construct artificial space. It should be noted that the coexistence of nature and human artifice is necessary even on a utilitarian level. Moreover, the existence of both natural and unnatural space instantiates a basic sense of human understanding, for without comparison, the qualities, difficulties, and uniquenesses of life would neither be manifest nor experienceable to begin with.

This is one way Arendt offers a promising resource for those who endeavour to re- conceptualise earth's value. Human existence undergoes existential changes depending on which kind of space it unfolds in. So strong is Arendt's conviction on this matter that she believes that life and death as we know them, as inherently meaningful and singular events, would not exist without the distinct presence of artificial spaces, without the human artifice and the world. Furthermore, human existence would remain an anonymous member in terms of a natural species. Instead, the worldly rendering of birth and death is recast in phenomenological terms as appearance and disappearance. This last move is a direct breaking with more traditional metaphysical understanding of existence, for it neither relies on predefined, fixed substance nor does it suggest that one's appearance is separate from one's 'true' existence. We once again witness Arendt's prioritisation of the world as well as the desire to transform influential concepts that she deemed were un-worldly or antithetical to the world as the lived space of human existence.

¹³. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 98.

Space and time

Those who are interested in a philosophy of space often lament the trajectory of modern science and even philosophy itself with regard to the existential significance of space.¹⁴ Two of the defining features of modernity are the absolutising of space and time and the subjugation of space to time. Driven by the need to accurately navigate commercial ships in the 16th and 17th centuries, a race to master what were the vast, featureless, oceanic spaces ensued. Attempts at finding a solution ranged from astronomical navigation to consideration of the earth's rotation. The outcome of these efforts resulted in the total subjugation of space to time: to know where you are is to know when you are.¹⁵ Modern physics' space-time continuum is a contemporary example of how the modern world theorises and even distorts our relation to space. With these considerations and concerns Arendt is in complete agreement.

It is born out of a perceived ontological deficiency with the world that we act on and transform space. Recall our discussion in chapter three, where, as we saw, Arendt defines both mortality and immortality as a kind of *movement*. Immortality of nature is cyclical. Nature's rhythm is defined by cycles of growth and decay, by the regularity of seasonal change, and life under natural conditions exists in the eternal re-occurrence of the same. Furthermore, these spaces are characterised by natural forces, movements that are independent of human beings.

Yet, these qualities are experienced as such by mortals, that is, by human beings. From an anthropological perspective, existence under natural conditions resigns humanity to the anonymity of a species, where individuation is swept away by nature's cyclical rhythm. Human beings, because they possess the capacity for potential uniqueness, do not belong to the immortality of nature.¹⁶

This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order. Whenever men pursue their purposes, tilling the effortless earth, forcing the free-flowing wind into their sails, crossing the ever-rolling waves, they cut across a movement which is purposeless and turning within itself.¹⁷

^{14.} Max Jammer, for instance, recognises that the category of space proceeded that of time historically (Jammer, *The Concepts of Space*, 4). Edward Casey, addressing specifically the notion of place, remarks on the neglect of modern thinkers and the prioritisation of time and 'space-time': Edward S Casey. *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indiana University Press, 1993), xiv.

^{15.} Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 3-6.

^{16.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 18.

^{17.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42

For our purpose what is important is that for this temporal linearity to occur, natural space must be transformed. “The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words—which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves.”¹⁸ The disposition and work of *homo faber* produces a generative engagement with the world and the things in it. It stands, then, that human activity exists not in opposition *per se*, but as distinct from natural spaces and the forces that define them. In this way, the life of each individual appears as if they are proceeding in a straightforward manner toward the day of their inevitable disappearance from the earth, towards their death. The path between them is linear, which stands in contrast to the cyclical movement of nature.

This characterising of immortality and mortality in terms of movement is yet another subtle but significant break with traditional metaphysics. Arendt does not make recourse to talk of essences or transcendence. Human beings must devise the conditions under which immortality is possible for mortal beings. Their solution was the discovery of a distinctly *earthly* immortality, one that does not defy death but anonymity. Human immortality could be achieved by remembrance, that is, one could defy mortality in a sense if they were remembered and the story of their life passed down from one generation to another. “However, if mortals succeeded in endowing their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishability, then these things would, to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos, where everything is immortal except men.”¹⁹ The faculty of memory plays a crucial role in this entering into ‘everlastingness.’²⁰

Remembrance is prefaced by the existence of a community, which, in turn, requires the presence of a world with enduring institutions and customs. The establishment of a community necessitates that one transform natural spaces in which the forces of nature dominate and life itself is understood in terms of a species. When we act upon natural space, we transform and mould it into a habitat suitable not only for biological life (*zoē*), but for individual life (*bíos*). These spaces are artificial, in contradistinction to natural space; they owe their existence solely to human activity, and their purpose is to protect and endure against the forces of nature. Crucially, while immortality is traditionally conceived in relation to time, Arendt

18. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19.

19. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 43.

20. See Ricoeur’s discussion on the relation between the polis and remembrance on page 28.

flips this in a manner and instead places human immortality in relation first and foremost to space. A true community is possible only in artificial spaces and, while the degree of artificiality of these spaces may vary, they all have in common the fact that they possess a degree of permanence natural spaces do not. Accordingly, permanence alters relation to time, makes history possible but not history as a series of chronological, determined events. Thus, the paradox of action is overcome: "This paradox, that greatness was understood in terms of permanence while human greatness was seen in precisely the most futile and least lasting activities of men [...]."²¹

Inspired by the Homeric tradition, great actions rupture, interrupt and reform our temporal experience, but this possibility is founded upon human remembrance which, in turn, is founded upon a form of space. It is space that transforms the human experience of time as repetitive and Sisyphean into a linear construction out of which a distinct story arises.²² This is the story of a person's life, their biography. The conditions instantiated by the world create the conditions for remembrance from one generation to another, maintained in communities despite the chronological limitations of individual lifespan. Through community remembrance becomes part of history. Evidently, Arendt's notion of history is not common. History is not the chronological unfolding of successive events. Rather, it is plural, being comprised of the multiple, and sometimes, conflicting stories that arises from human affairs. Arendtian history is bound by neither causality or teleology, but is composed of the plural perspectives of actors inhabiting a world.²³

The specific spatiality of Arendt's notion of temporality resides precisely in this perspectival composition. Kelly Oliver likewise emphasises that for Arendt, a world is possible because we are able to take up a diversity of perspectives. Multiple perspectives are in turn possible because of the condition of plurality.²⁴ It is in virtue of our spatial condition that we can inhabit different and diverse perspectives through our locomotive capacities; that is, we can physically take up different positions in the world. This basic corporeal function is part of the practical structures of worldly experience perhaps best described by Merleau-Ponty: "By

²¹. Ibid., 46.

²². "The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19)

²³. Homi Bhabha is perhaps the most renowned theorist associated with the idea of plural perspectives as composite of culture. Bhabha's cultural analysis provokes a rethinking of definitions of identity, dichotomies of self and other, as well as challenging polarizing colonial discourse and has since become canonical in the field of post-colonial studies. See Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁴. Oliver, 'Earth and World', 90.

considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaceness of established situations.”²⁵ Similar to Arendt, Merleau-Ponty draws our attention to fact that the corporeal and temporal structures of existence get obscured and forgotten in spite of the fact that they form the fundamental compositions of experience itself.

Likewise, culture too is predicated on location. Location and world include culture for Arendt, à la early anthropological uses of the term culture which did not preclude nature. In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt sets out the connection between culture and world in her essay ‘The Crisis in Culture.’ Culture is an important aspect for Arendt and thus world is encompassing of it, not separable from it. The encompassing nature of the world is demonstrated in *The Life of the Mind*, where the world is extended to animals. Moreover, the common world is not given, we must work for it. That is, we must engage and interact with the world and others to establish and protect communities. The commonality or shared nature of the world is precisely what is endangered under totalitarianism. Under totalitarianism the world disintegrates because there is no possible sharing of it.²⁶ As Kelly Oliver has it: “A world is destroyed when a culture and its people are destroyed.”²⁷

Without shared, public spaces and objects, the capacity for political judgment is also jeopardised for we need a common and enduring place from which to perform judgments. “As such, the only non-social and authentic criterion for judging these specifically cultural things is their relative permanence and even eventual immortality. Only what will last through the centuries can claim to be a cultural ultimately object.”²⁸ The feature of worldly durability discussed in chapter three section 3.4 is extended to cultural objects which are not intended for consumption. Like metabolic processes, Arendt marks a distinction between entertainment and art akin to the difference between the products of labour and work. “Culture relates to objects and is a phenomenon of the world; entertainment relates to people and is a phenomenon of life. An object is cultural to the extent that it can endure; its durability is the very opposite of functionality, which is the quality which makes it

²⁵. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

²⁶. Arendt perhaps underestimates the ease with which facts can be established. Our own time in an era of ‘alternative facts’ has proved that facts do not speak for themselves.

²⁷. Oliver, ‘Earth and World’, 83.

²⁸. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 202.

disappear again from the phenomenal world by being used and used up.”²⁹ Note again her description in terms of the phenomenality of objects — they appear and disappear, rather than exist or not exist. This unconventional description is easier to understand in light of Arendt’s spatial ontology.

Take Arendt’s claim that beauty (in the sense of aesthetic objects) transcends time but never the world.³⁰ Products of art and culture endure through time indeed, but they could not appear to begin with were it not for the world as the common shared, discussed, and even contested, space. All objects, be they objects of art or products for consumption, are predicated on the fact that they must possess a physical shape through which they appear, whereas, of course, the products of human action are not.

Among the things which do not occur in nature but only in the man-made world, we distinguish between use objects and art works, both of which possess a certain permanence ranging from ordinary durability to potential immortality in the case of works of art. As such, they are distinguished from consumer goods on one hand, whose duration in the world scarcely exceeds the time necessary to prepare them, and, on the other hand, from the products of action, such as events, deeds, and words, all of which are in themselves so transitory that they would hardly survive the hour or day they appeared in the world, if they were not preserved first by man’s memory, which weaves them into stories, and then through his fabricating abilities.³¹

So, history requires humanity’s ‘fabricating abilities’ which co-constitute a worldly space for the very substance of history, memories and stories, to appear. The notion of history as the linear unfolding of a series of events relies first on the duration of a space which can manifest them.

This idea of time as cyclical may seem strange to a modern audience, but Arendt relies on a historical uncovering of this original experience of time. The immortality of the ancient world is very different from the promise of eternal life; the defining distinction being, yet again, *where* this immortality occurred. Whereas eternity offers a life beyond this world, the Greek immortality was thoroughly worldly: “Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life *on this earth and in this world*

²⁹. Ibid., 208.

³⁰. Ibid.

³¹. Ibid., 209.

as it was given, according to Greek understanding, to nature and the Olympian gods.³² Immortality does not transcend the planes of this earth, it remains bound to the world and exists within its borders. Because it stays within the world, the human experience of time is transformed and stands out as being mortal. “Embedded in a cosmos where everything was immortal, mortality became the hallmark of human existence.”³³ Again, “[t]his individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.”³⁴ This mortality stands in opposition to nature and its life process. “Men are ‘the mortals,’ the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of a species whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation.”³⁵ From the artificial space of the *polis*, the appearance of the natural world seems to rise and fall in a ceaseless series of epiphany and decay.

Space and experiential reality

In *The Human Condition*, we find distinct but interconnected ontological levels of experiential reality. The first level is called the *inter-est*: This refers to the physical, ‘worldly’ reality constituted by material things which relate and separate people in it. From this level arises interests which are common because they are related to the shared, tangible world. The second is famously referred to as the *in-between* and is comprised of human interaction in the form of speech and action. It is necessarily intangible and is referred to by Arendt as the ‘web of human relationships’, which we mentioned earlier. This second ontological layer, Arendt stresses, is bound to the first in the same way as speech is bound to the physical body. While it is possible to think them separately, in actuality we never experience them as independent of one another. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt is trying to do justice to the world as it is actually experienced by subjectivity, that is, in this case, by human beings.

Arendt’s use of the word ‘objectivity’ always appears in air quotes in the text. The purpose of this curious grammatical device is to signify that, for Arendt, the quality of what makes something objective is not the absence of human subjectivity. That is to say, it is not the purging of human presence in its relation to an

³². Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 18 (my emphasis).

³³. Ibid.

³⁴. Ibid., 19

³⁵. Ibid., 18-19.

object or phenomenon under investigation. In this way, objectivity for Arendt is synonymous with reality. Objectivity is paradoxical because it contains both alterity and isomorphic qualities. Alterity, for Arendt, recognises that objectivity must necessarily contain subjectivity. Subjectivity, for Arendt, is intricately connected to the capacity to take up different perspectives. Reality, then, depends on, and is comprised of, different locations in the world and the plurality of perspectives that guarantee it. Alterity is spatial, for “the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position.”³⁶

What prevents the infinite possible perspectives from becoming incommunicable to each other is the common object, the shared world: this is the isomorphic condition of the world.³⁷ Here, once more, we encounter the significance of space, for it holds the paradoxical condition of alterity and isomorphic conditions in relation. The things of the world both unite and distinguish, relate and separate human beings. Without having objects as common reference points for plural perspectives, reality would not be possible according to Arendt, for reality depends upon sharing a world.³⁸ Sharing does not mean holding the same position as another. In fact, because we all necessarily inhabit different locations in the world spatially, we necessarily have different perspectives. “Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.”³⁹ Objectivity does not arise from the elimination of difference but from accounting for the alterity contained in the human condition of plurality.

Only we who have erected the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us, who have built it into the environment of nature so that we are protected from her, can look upon nature as something ‘objective’. Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity.⁴⁰

^{36.} Ibid., 57.

^{37.} I disagree with Kelly Oliver’s conclusion of the existence of multiple worlds in Arendt. According to Oliver, “Worlds – plural – are the meaningful frameworks, literal and metaphorical, through which we interpret the world.” Oliver, “Earth and World,” 97. Whereas, for Arendt the world is what we have in common, our perspectives and meanings are plural. This is the significance of the role of the world in her thought. Phenomenologically, the world is an inexhaustible horizon of possibility necessarily *shared* with all living beings. The commonality of the world prevents a collapse into multiple-worlds.

^{38.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, ‘Truth and Politics’, 254; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 95, 183, 197- 199, 208.

^{39.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57.

^{40.} Ibid., 137.

Put differently, Arendtian objectivity is rooted in Homeric impartiality, that is, objectivity is constituted by different perspectives. However, in order to account for this difference, distance is required from my own position. Distance is dependent upon space. Impartiality refers to the capacity to relate our own original perspectives to those of others in a non-hierarchical manner. This capacity is best embodied by the historian. Therefore, even our imaginative projections and inhabitation of different perspectives is founded upon our experiences of space and the infinite different locations one can spatially inhabit, for “the public realm [...] more than any other sphere of human life guarantees reality of existence to natal and mortal men.”⁴¹

Having discussed the significance of the plurality of perspectives that arise from a diversity of locations, Arendt’s critique of what she refers to as the ‘Archimedean point’ becomes more understandable. In *The Human Condition*, ‘The Discovery of the Archimedean Point’ as well as the essay ‘The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man’, Arendt repudiates the notion of the epistemic ideal where the human being can somehow relocate themselves to a privileged point in which access to phenomena is total and independent of the observer. The impossibility of such a position is due to the existential condition of human existence in the world. Furthermore, Arendt shows that the pursuit of this privileged location is not harmless. It has led, in her time, to increased alienation and abandonment of the world, and in ours, abandonment of the earth. Permit me to quote Arendt at length on this matter:

If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of a mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the *many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality*. This can happen under conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case in tyrannies. But it may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor. In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the

⁴¹. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 228.

same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.⁴²

The above is a warning about the conditions under which Arendtian objectivity is destroyed. Radical isolation, hysteria, and tyranny reduce the plurality of experiences in the world, rendering experience as something private, utterly subjective, which in turn alters the world from something common to that which is uniformly experienced. Again, we discern a clear criticism of a modern, scientific epistemology whereby objectivity requires an 'extinction of the self' in order to arrive things as they 'truly are', independent of subjective experience.

As discussed earlier, action possesses a certain fragility and uncontrollability. Because of the conditions of natality and plurality, we can never know what the outcome of our actions will be and because action takes place in the world, in 'the web of human relation' and not in a vacuum, we cannot know in advance what other effects of our actions will have. In Arendt's view, this unpredictability of action, which defines both the public realm and human affairs, was undesirable for those who wished to stabilise human affairs for their own ends. With this critique her main adversary here is Plato, to whom she attributes the original subjugation of politics to philosophy.

At the beginning, therefore, not of our political or philosophical history but of our tradition of political philosophy stands Plato's contempt for politics, his conviction that 'the affairs and actions of men (*ta tōn anthrōpōn pragmata*) are not worthy of great seriousness' and that the only reason why the philosopher needs to concern himself with them is the unfortunate fact that philosophy—or, as Aristotle somewhat later would say, a life devoted to it, the *bios theōrētikos*—is materially impossible without a halfway reasonable arrangement of all affairs that concern men insofar as they live together.⁴³

In other words, the tradition political philosophy begins with subduing the realm of human affairs in the service of contemplation. Recall the discussion of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplative* in chapter three. These activities signify two distinct modes of living in the sense that each aims at a different end. The former has its end in the realm of public affairs where equality and freedom are actualised, whereas the latter is devoted to a 'transcendental freedom' in the sense

^{42.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 58 (my emphasis).

^{43.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 81-82.

that, according to this paradigm, freedom is achieved in the mind's capacity for rational thought. The active life culminates in a person being remembered by a community who will share the story of their deeds long after they have perished. The life of contemplation, on the other hands, seeks deathless eternity in the realm of changeless essences, which only thinking can give access to. We now turn to the effects this had on Western tradition and our conception of reality and truth.

Given the inherent instability of human affairs and its capacity to interfere with the *bios theōrētikos*, the public realm was in need of an organising feature in order to reduce this element of unpredictability. This desire underpins the attempt to replace action with fabrication, according to Arendt.⁴⁴ The instrumentalist worldview of *homo faber* was elevated to the highest capacity within the *vita activa*. The process of making entails a crucial element of control over the process and a predictable end result. The glorification of the fabricating process reached its pinnacle in the modern age, where:

the attempt to eliminate action because of its uncertainty and to save human affairs from their frailty by dealing with them as though they were or could become the planned products of human making has first of all resulted in channelling the human capacity for action, for beginning new and spontaneous processes which without men never would come into existence, into an attitude toward nature which up to the latest stage of the modern age had been one of exploring natural laws and fabricating objects out of natural material.⁴⁵

The attempt to 'eliminate action because of its uncertainty' resulted in a twofold degradation of politics. The first denigration was the perception that the origin of the political realm was tied to biological necessity (as with labour) and the second in the view that the end of politics resides in (the post-political) contemplation, that is, the goal of politics is to secure the *bios theōrētikos*.⁴⁶ Hence, from the point of view of philosophy, politics is a necessary evil in order to assure the optimal conditions for contemplation. The consequence of this move was the collapse of pre-political needs into politics, which was traditionally the realm of freedom in equality and participation. Now, the plurality and spontaneity of human beings are suppressed in favour of order and control.

^{44.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 229-230.

^{45.} *Ibid.*, 230-231.

^{46.} Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 83.

Moreover, along with the replacement of action for making, so too were the standards appropriate to contemplation superimposed on the political realm. The former deals with absolute truth, that is, with unchanging and timeless matters, whereas the latter is forever changing in the continuous flux of human relations. Here arises a contempt for public affairs, which still persists today in the common perception that politics and truth do not naturally belong together. Persuasion is the appropriate mode of speech in the public arena, for it aims at opinion, not knowledge. "Plato, in his famous fight against the ancient Sophists, discovered that their 'universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments' had nothing to do with truth but aimed at opinions which by their very nature are changing, and which are valid only 'at the time of the agreement and as long as the agreement lasts'. He also discovered the very insecure position of truth in the world, for from 'opinion comes persuasion and not from truth.'"⁴⁷ Since opinion is antithetical to absolute truth and politics is composed of a plurality of opinions, in a final act of denigration, the political realm no longer represented truth and hence reality. If one wanted to know the ways things really are, one instead had to disregard the public arena and locate truth elsewhere.

This impulse to uncover truth, which opinion seems to hide, is carried to its extreme in recent times. Throughout our tradition truth and fact were never in opposition to one another. While truth signified the logical operations of the mind, facts referred to events that had happened in the world and depended on witnesses (the historian, for instance) for them to become public knowledge. Hence, facts were more fragile than rational truth. In Arendt's analysis of modern the age, factual reality is continually sacrificed for the consistency of rationality. Take what she says in the following:

The most striking difference between ancient and modern sophists is that the ancients were satisfied with a passing victory of the argument at the expense of truth, whereas the moderns want a more lasting victory at the expense of reality. In other words, one destroyed the dignity of human thought whereas the others destroy the dignity of human action. The old manipulators of logic were the concern of the philosopher, whereas the modern manipulators of facts stand in the way of the historian. For history itself is destroyed, and its comprehensibility — based upon the fact that it is enacted by men and therefore can be understood by men — is in danger, whenever

⁴⁷. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 9 (references are made by Arendt to Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus*).

facts are no longer held to be part and parcel of the past and present world, and are misused to prove this or that opinion.⁴⁸

A sense of reality itself is in danger when worldly facts are intentionally obliterated for the sake of 'being right'. The most extreme form of this occurred during authoritarian and totalitarian government regimes where consistency of image and ideology was paid for with the price of reality. The sheer exposure to propaganda and confirmation by others of the lies told in order to maintain power and, perhaps more so, in order to attain the moral high-ground in the face of monstrous deeds was destructive of the human world and subsequently of experiential reality. Under these circumstances not only has factual objectivity been obliterated, with them too the common world. This destruction amounts to 'the twofold loss of the world', where world here means the human artifice and nature.

This twofold loss of the world, the loss of nature and the loss of human artifice in the widest sense, which would include all history has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass-society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still related to one another but have lost the world once common to all of them.⁴⁹

Both the artificial and natural realms are lost in the sense that they are devoid of meaning in the absence of processes which interpret them. "These processes, after having devoured, as it were, the solid objectivity of the given, ended by rendering meaningless the one over-all process which originally was conceived in order to give meaning to them, and to act, so to speak, as the eternal time-space into which they could all flow and thus be rid of their mutual conflicts and exclusiveness. This is what happened to our concept of history, as it happened to our concept of nature."⁵⁰ The consequence of this is loneliness, alienation, and the destruction of space itself. Here, the *in-between* of the world is at stake, the space between people which unites and distinguished them is jeopardised, and along with it the ability to establish meaning relationships with others.

48. Ibid., 9.

49. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 89-90.

50. Ibid., 89.

Objectivity, in Arendt's view, stems from its grounding in the world, that is, in the fact that something can be experienced, directly or indirectly, by others and shared between them. Through this communicating and sharing people 'guarantee' reality for and with one another. Reality is not something one can genuinely experience in isolation. That is why, "[u]nder modern circumstances, this deprivation of 'objective' relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness, where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form."⁵¹ In this way, objective reality too receives its spatial formalisation. Simply put, without a shared space, the stability of environment (*inter-est*), and meaningful speech between people (*in-between*), reality and objectivity suffer. Their access is barred and supplanted by forms of behaviour — which is not action — and 'idle' talk — which is not speech. These are experienced as mass loneliness and radical isolation from the world as the meaningful space of human interaction.

Fabricating truth

The consequences of the 'rise of *homo faber*' in modern society extend beyond the desire for increased stability in human affairs. The fabricating process has altered epistemological standards in the modern age. This move Arendt associates with the profound influence of Cartesianism on modern science's quest for epistemological certainty. The main issue is that certainty is thought to be achieved in total solitude, that is, that the *cogito*, deprived of an external world and of others, can attain an irrefutable foundation upon which humanity's search for truth may be built. This sentiment issued from and further grounded the 'mistrust of the sense'.

Descartes came to his rule because the then recent discoveries in the natural sciences had convinced him that man in his search for truth and knowledge can trust neither the given evidence of the senses, nor the 'innate truth' of the mind, nor the 'inner light of reason.' This *mistrust of the human capacities* has been ever since one of the most elementary conditions of the modern age and the modern world; but it did not spring, as is usually assumed, from a sudden mysterious dwindling of faith in God, and its cause was originally not even a suspicion of reason as such. Its origin was simply the highly justified loss of confidence in the truth-revealing capacity of the senses. Reality no longer was disclosed as an outer phenomenon to human sensation, but had withdrawn, so to speak, into the sensing of the sensation itself.⁵²

^{51.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 58-59.

^{52.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 54 (my emphasis).

At this point Arendt identifies a crucial turning point in both the philosophical and epistemological paradigms. With the loss of faith in the ability of the senses to reveal reality truthfully, a new and infallible method of discovering truth was necessary. If humanity could no longer rely on sense-given data, that is, if the appearance of the world cannot guarantee true knowledge, then the only remaining source of knowledge is the reasoning capacity of the intellect. This rational capacity of the mind deals not with worldly reality but operates according to 'inner' laws of logic, which Arendt states need not confirm its conclusions with the world but considers them to be self-evident. In fact, she warns that facts can be altered in order to 'confirm' and align with the dictates of reason. "In other words, the axiom from which the deduction is started does not need to be, as traditional metaphysics and logic supposed, a self-evident truth; it does not have to tally at all with the facts as given in the objective world at the moment the action starts; the process of action, if it is consistent, will proceed to create a world in which the assumption becomes axiomatic and self-evident."⁵³ This is to say that what changes under these circumstances is the world and not our understanding, whereas it ought to be the other way around. We reason to better understand the world as it is — only then can we act so as to change it for the better. Instead, "[m]an, in other words, carries his certainty, the certainty of his existence, within himself; the sheer functioning of consciousness, though it cannot possibly assure a worldly reality given to the senses and to reason, confirms beyond doubt the reality of sensations and of reasoning, that is, the reality of processes which go on in the mind."⁵⁴ This is the hubris of the modern age, according to Arendt.

The apparent reliability of cognitive processes was matched by the belief that true knowledge is derived from the process of fabrication, the realm of *homo faber*. Concerning natural science, Arendt claimed that "[h]ere too, thinking in terms of processes, on the one hand, and the conviction, on the other, that I know only what I have myself made, has led to the complete meaninglessness inevitably resulting from the insight that I can choose to do whatever I want and some kind of 'meaning' will always be the consequence."⁵⁵ The inherent unreliability of the senses originated in the discovery of the heliocentric model of the solar system. "The fundamental experience underlying Cartesian doubt was the discovery that the earth, contrary to all direct sense experience, revolves around the sun."⁵⁶ This revelation was achieved through technological intervention, the domain of *homo*

⁵³. Ibid., 88.

⁵⁴. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 280.

⁵⁵. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 88.

⁵⁶. Ibid., 54.

faber. The invention of the telescope placed within reach what had forever been beyond the experiences of humanity. This discovery revealed sense perception to be not only unreliable but disruptive. Due to this deception, the modern age of both philosophy and the sciences originated in the experience of doubt.

Modern philosophy began with Descartes' *de omnibus dubitandum est*, with doubt, but with doubt not as an inherent control of the human mind to guard against deceptions of thought and illusions of sense, not as skepticism against the morals and prejudices of men and times, not even as a critical method in scientific inquiry and philosophic speculation. Cartesian doubt is much more far-reaching in scope and too fundamental in intent to be determined by such concrete contents. In modern philosophy and thought, doubt occupies much the same central position as that occupied for all the centuries before by the Greek *thaumazein*, the wonder at everything that is as it is.⁵⁷

Doubt, while healthy at times, is, in its extreme, world-alienating, whereas wonder, *thaumazein*, is world-affirming, for it essentially draws one into the world. To wonder constitutes a relationship in which things and events in the world call out for further exploration. In contrast, the solution to radical doubt was the 'turning inwards' of humanity to the certainty of cognition and the reliability of the processes once only applicable to fabrication. Indubitable knowledge is arrived at through the workings of the mind and through technological means. In other words, the process of logic (rationality) and the process of making guaranteed humanity the certainty of reality without having to rely on worldly experience *per se*. The price of the certainty was humanity's further alienation from the conditions of earth and worldliness. In this way, "[t]he modern age, with its growing world- alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or as potentially man-made. These processes, after having devoured, as it were, the solid objectivity of the given, ended by rendering meaningless the one overall process which originally was conceived in order to give meaning to them, and to act, so to speak, as the eternal time-space into which they could all flow and thus be rid of their mutual conflicts and exclusiveness."⁵⁸ This alienation is experienced as radical meaningless, for *homo faber* continuously transforms ends into means and so is incapable of establishing an end-in-itself. Such an end-in-

^{57.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 273.

^{58.} Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 89.

itself was provided by action which, as stated, generates meaning as a by-product. For now, we note several ways in which worldly objectivity is undermined. True objectivity she derives from the Homeric tradition of impartiality.

The following discusses four aspects of spatial ontology within the framework of *The Human Condition*. The first aspect is earth as a human condition, meaning the primordial relation human beings have with their earthly environment. The second aspect are natural spaces which we distinguished from earth through the dominance of biological, cyclical processes. The third aspect was the human artifice which is the physical form and content of the human world. Its features are stability and durability which stand in contrast to natural space. Finally, the world is our last spatial aspect, for it combines not only human artifice (*inter-est*) but an additional phenomenological space: the space of appearances or the *in-between*. These distinctions are important when it comes to understanding the ways Arendt transforms traditional metaphysical categories into *worldly categories*. Understanding the various manners in which the reality of the world is jeopardised can only be done if we first understand her spatial, ontological project. The activity appropriate for the establishment and creation of the human world, the *inter-est*, has endangered the *in-between*, for it seeks to atrophy the space of appearances in order to establish stability.

Four aspects of Arendt's spatial ontology

Earth

A common misunderstanding of 'earth' is its materialistic interpretation.⁵⁹ This concerns the tendency to equate earth exclusively with a 'bio-physical' entity. Under this interpretation, the earth refers to the totality of material entities, organic and inorganic, which are by their nature empirically accessible. From this perspective, earth can be thought of as referring to the 'brute matter' of material existence and as such is, at least philosophically, not all that interesting.⁶⁰ However, I would like to draw the reader's attention to another understanding of earth, one that does not end at the materialist rendering. Instead, I propose earth should be read in the way Arendt first introduces it, *as part of the human condition*.⁶¹ This reading emphasises two features of earth: the earth i) as a particular existential component of life, and

^{59.} For instance, Debarbieux, 'Hannah Arendt's Spatial Thinking', 354.

^{60.} Debarbieux, 'Hannah Arendt's Spatial Thinking', 5.

^{61.} *Ibid.*, 4: "Literally understood, this first spatial ontology suggests that human beings 'take place' in a biophysical setting, in natural space, and interact with/in it through experience."

as an asymmetrical but reciprocal relation between humans and earth, and ii) as the only possibility of becoming a home, a condition by which one *belongs* to a place and a community. In this way, earth is the first and most fundamental aspect of spatial ontology. Understanding earth in the language of an empiricist-scientific tradition is not the exhaustive, let alone this primary way of understanding the earth, for Arendt.

1. Earth appears early in *The Human Condition* as a condition of human existence, which emphasises the terrestrial nature of human existence as “the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life.”⁶² For this reason earth is ‘the quintessence’ of the human condition. It is the original site in which existence unfolds and, consequently, constitutes the primordial experience of space. I believe Debarbieux, for one, succumbs to the common error of undervaluing the objective and empirical in Arendt’s philosophy, leading to a definition of the first aspect of spatial ontology as referring to the materiality of entities, which he titles “Taking place: bio-physical earth and the ontology of material entities and milieu.” In his words, this ontology “grounds her understanding of the pure materiality of objects, and the ‘biological life’ of animals and human beings.”⁶³ Yet this is not a neutral categorisation, as he continues: “For Arendt, these entities located in empirical space are of no interest in themselves. She refers to them only because they give a varying material frame to the human condition that is her real interest.”⁶⁴ Contra an interpretation of earth as an ‘ontology of material entities’, earth, following Arendt, is the quintessential human condition.⁶⁵ Without outright rejecting the empirical understanding, Arendt, nevertheless, is intentionally writing against an implicit background of the dominance of a physicalist interpretation. Arendt’s hermeneutic-phenomenological approach requires one to begin from lived experience and as such forecloses the possibility of understanding phenomena solely from a third-person, or objective account.

The earth as a condition of existence should not be taken primarily as, or exhausted by empirical interpretations. This does not mean that, for instance, geological, astrological, or physical-material approaches are fallacious but rather that they,

^{62.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52. See also Markell’s use of the term ‘territorial in his discussion of the spatial features of Arendt’s thinking. Markell, ‘Arendt’s Work: On the Architecture of “The Human Condition”’, 35.

^{63.} Debarbieux, ‘Hannah Arendt’s Spatial Thinking’, 4.

^{64.} *Ibid.*, 4.

^{65.} *Ibid.*, 3-4. See also: “A first spatial ontology Arendt refers to is related to ‘nature’, and the spatial arrangement of its objects and specific processes. This is the spatiality of ‘Earth.’”

firstly, do not constitute our first access point to experiences of the earth and, secondly, even tend to obfuscate this original experience. Here again we see a clear phenomenological current in Arendt's thought. Recognising the (asymmetrical) relation between earth, nature, human artifice, and world goes some way towards nuancing Arendt's understanding of natural and unnatural space. This is not to deny that a degree of distinction is upheld in her thought. Indeed, this is a necessary and productive feature of her work.⁶⁶ The earth and its contents are not simply 'there' for living beings. Instead, as Arendt makes clear in her later work, living things exist in relation to the earth, that is, earth and life have a bi-directional mode of influence with one another. Acknowledging this relationship means that the earth is obviously not a passive resource for biological and artificial activities. The earth is instead a dynamic entity and hence does not remain static nor maintains a constant equilibrium under any and all circumstances.

Likewise, life too is conditioned by the earth. Life is affected and shaped by the earth both in a biological and phenomenological sense. How we engage the earth creates meaning in our lives. This ecological meaning of the earth varies from one community to another, because the possibilities of engagement with the earth is potentially infinite. Despite this diversity of interpretation and interaction, the earth also provides commonality, for all life has in common that it occurs on, and is (to that extent) bound to, the earth. This is what Arendt meant in stating that the earth is the quintessential human condition: it is the dynamic, spatial condition of all life. This helps us understand why she chose to open *The Human Condition* with a discussion of the first satellite launch, which is discussed in chapter three, for it captured the sentiment of wanting to leave earth behind as it acts as a limitation for human activity. Furthermore, the dynamic quality of the earth means that the earth possesses a certain sense of activity. This qualified agency is grounded in the fact that, as we now know well, the earth is capable of undergoing auto-poetic changes that are independent of human design or desire. I do not mean to attribute a sense of will or conviction on the part of the earth, but this understanding challenges the idea of human mastery over the earth and the depiction of earth as a passive object of human activity. In other words, it rejects the anthropological hubris of human supremacy. Acknowledging this quality of the earth challenges the idea of solving current ecological crises through a simple advancement of technology alone. Ultimately, this idea requires humanity to eventually control everything, and claims it is only a question of time and technological progress.

⁶⁶ Paul Ott is one of the few philosophers to acknowledge a productive bifurcation in her notion of space (Ott, 'World and Earth' 2009).

2. The earth provides an opportunity for human beings to create a home, to establish a place in which one feels they belong to. This feature combines another human condition: the condition of worldliness. I will clarify the interaction between these two conditions below. For now, I want to draw attention to the fact that one is not automatically at home on the earth. As evinced in the discussion of humanity's space exploration in previous chapters, one can also become alienated from the earth. Hence, I use the word 'opportunity' when referring to a person's potential to be at home on the earth, for the opposite is also possible. The phenomenon of earth-alienation is even more of a concern than when Arendt first introduced the concept in the late 1950's. As the planet becomes increasingly inhospitable to life, humanity's sense of belonging to the earth is put in question. On the one hand, we are forced to acknowledge, as Arendt herself did, that the earth is the only place that we know of which can easily sustain life. On the other, one possible solution to our current crisis some say lies in extraterrestrial colonisation and even the mining of cosmic resources to maintain a habitable living conditions on earth.⁶⁷ It would seem as though we are finding ourselves in a similar situation as Arendt did when she described the sense of foreboding she felt during the first satellite launch. Will this crisis cut the last thread, tying the human species to their earthly habitat? To return to our first point, if the earth were simply the totality of material matter, then perhaps this would be possible. However, if we adhere to Arendt's understanding of earth as a human condition, then such projects remain dubious.

The natural world

Our next move is to better distinguish earth from nature. The exegetical basis for this is often subtle. As a preparatory remark, perhaps the clearest demarcation occurs in *The Human Condition* where Arendt performs a clear differentiation between world, earth, and nature.⁶⁸ Despite the frequency with which earth and nature are taken to be synonymous in Arendt's thought, I demarcate the two in a way which I believe is faithful to Arendt's overall interpretation.

^{67.} This sentiment is perhaps mostly famously espoused by physicist Stephen Hawking. In *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* Hawking writes: "One way or another, I regard it as almost inevitable that either a nuclear confrontation or environmental catastrophe will cripple the Earth at some point in the next 1,000 years which, as geological time goes, is the mere blink of an eye. By then I hope and believe that our ingenious race will have found a way to slip the surly bonds of Earth and will therefore survive the disaster. The same of course may not be possible for the millions of other species that inhabit the Earth, and that will be on our conscience as a race." Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (Bantam, 2018), 166.

^{68.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

It is clear by now that 'nature' designates spaces that are predominately governed by biological processes. It may be helpful to recall Arendt's reference to the Greek distinction between *physis*, things which are by themselves, and *nomos*, things that owe their existence to human activity, in order to help distinguish between things that are natural and unnatural.⁶⁹ Nature does not preclude some human activities such as labour, as we already discussed. This is what Arendt meant in stating that the things produced by labour are "the least worldly and at the same time the most natural of all things. Although they are man-made, they come and go, are produced and consumed, in accordance with the ever-recurrent cyclical movement of nature."⁷⁰ Arendt uses the example of the making of bread to illustrate this point. Despite the effort involved in making a loaf of bread, the product itself is either consumed within a short time or it will biodegrade. In either scenario, the product is returned to the life cycle. Under this paradigm of the natural, the defining qualities of natural things is their ephemerality, meaning that they are consumed or used up in a relatively short time, that they have no other end than that of life, and that they possess an instability (due to the cyclical operations of biological processes and, partly, to the first quality, that of ephemerality). The life cycle produces the qualities of ephemerality, repetition, and necessity, which take shape only in opposition to the human artifice. In contrast to the relative permanence of artificial space, "[t]he least durable of tangible things are those needed for the life process itself."⁷¹ For, "[a]fter a brief stay in the world, they return into the natural process which yielded them either through absorption into the life process of the human animal or through decay; in their man-made shape, through which they acquired their ephemeral place in the world of manmade things, they disappear more quickly than any other part of the world."⁷² It is precisely against these features of the natural world that human beings seek refuge. Existence in natural spaces is, to use Hobbesian parlance, nasty, brutish, and short. In an effort to achieve a degree of freedom from a solely natural existence, human beings must create artificial space. Artificial spaces are crucial to Arendt analysis of the human condition.

It is worth remembering that while each life cycle varies across species, they remain marked by anonymity, defined solely by the needs shared not only among members of the same species but all living things also. This means neither that human beings are confined to natural space, nor consequently that human presence is what makes a space unnatural. Such a distinction relies on the classification of human beings as either part of nature or separate from it, but for Arendt human beings

^{69.} Ibid., 15.

^{70.} Ibid., 96.

^{71.} Ibid.

^{72.} Ibid.

are both natural and unnatural, depending on which activities they engage in *as well as* on the spaces they erect and the relations between them. The price of life is the repetitive fulfillment of biological necessity and hence associated closely with the body. As such the relation between living things and natural space is metabolic and consumptive. Of course, it is not only destructive activities that occur here. Life urges reproduction and multiplication, not in terms of any one individual but of the species as a whole. Natural space does possess a kind of equilibrium in the sense that, without any artificial intervention, nature will automatically 'claim' more and more space. Nature tends to spread and even reclaim what was once taken from her. To witness the extent of nature's ability to take back space that were once unnatural, we need only look to what was once considered the most 'unnatural' and dangerous area on the planet: the Chernobyl exclusion zone in Ukraine.⁷³ Thirty six years after the deadly nuclear disaster the remarkable growth of wildlife in the 30km initial exclusion zone is well documented.⁷⁴ This extreme case illustrates Arendt's point concerning the capacity of natural processes to transform or reclaim unnatural spaces.

The life process which permeates our whole being invades it, too, and if we do not use the things of the world, they also will eventually decay, return into the over-all natural process from which they were drawn and against which they were erected. If left to itself or discarded from the human world, the chair will again become wood, and the wood will decay and return to the soil from which the tree

^{73.} See Orizaola, 'Chernobyl has become a refuge for wildlife 33 years after the nuclear accident' (Germán Orizaola, 'Chernobyl has become a refuge for wildlife 33 years after the nuclear accident'. Published by *The Conversation* on May 8, 2019. Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/chernobyl-has-become-a-refuge-for-wildlife-33-years-after-the-nuclear-accident-116303>). See also Euronews Green & AFP. 'The world's most unlikely nature reserve: Wildlife is thriving in Chernobyl'. Published by Euronews Green on May 9, 2021. Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2021/05/09/the-world-s-most-unlikely-nature-reserve-wildlife-is-thriving-in-chernobyl>. Even human inhabitants have returned (see Jennifer Kingsley, 'Life goes on at Chernobyl' (April 2021) accessed 16 July, 2024 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/life-goes-on-chernobyl-35-years-after-worlds-worst-nuclear-accident>).

^{74.} Anastasija Dadiverina interestingly attributes this resurgence of nature to the absence of humans, suggesting that human activity was more detrimental to wildlife than the initial nuclear disaster: "However, the most significant alterations of the ecological system are associated with the departure of person, and not with Chernobyl environmental effects." (Anastasija Dadiverina, 'Unique ecosystem: Chernobyl effects in nature'. Published by Chernobyl Guide on December 8, 2016. Accessed August 18, 2022. https://chernobylguide.com/chernobyl_effects/).

sprang before it was cut off to become the material upon which to work and with which to build.⁷⁵

As the above quotation suggests, human beings must create a place where it is possible to move beyond the repetitive activity of nature. Whereas earth is a condition of having a home, nature does not offer this possibility. The natural world is marked by competition, 'nature' does not exist in a delicate harmony as we like to believe, and humanity's relation to the natural is, according to Arendt, agonistic. The qualities of nature as they are presented in *The Human Condition* are agonistic, destructive as well as regenerative. Causality of such spaces are mechanical and repetitious, life seeks energy to sustain the life process, which it never transcends.⁷⁶

Natural spaces cannot offer sufficient stability to support the actualisation of human existence. Due to this, in the *The Human Condition*, natural space has a limited role to play in human existence. It acts more as a negative motivation to establish barriers against such spaces. Because the ontology of natural spaces is auto-poietic, they are experienced as a destructive force that attempts to return everything to nature. In order to escape nature's cyclical and rudimentary existence, human beings must establish a new space of their own making: the human artifice.

5

Human artifice

Margret Canovan states that "[a]t the heart of [Arendt's] analysis of the human condition is the vital importance for civilised existence of a durable human world, built upon the earth to shield us against natural processes and provide a stable setting for our mortal lives."⁷⁷ It is the task of the human artifice to do precisely this, to protect humanity for nature's ever encroaching processes and to stabilise the environment of human beings so that they perform activities and achievements beyond those that solely cater to biological necessity. While the human artifice and world are often used interchangeably, I make a distinction between the two, which I not only believe to be helpful, but which is supported by *The Human Condition*. The human artifice, while intrinsically connected, is not the same as world. The former refers to the physical constituent and boundary of the human world from the natural world. "The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment."⁷⁸ Thus one of the primary functions of the human artifice resides in demarcating a space which is separate from natural space. Its

⁷⁵. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 136-137.

⁷⁶. See Jeremy Arnold for a helpful overview of the life process in Arendt's work (Arnold, 'Caught in Penelope's Web', 609).

⁷⁷. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, xiv.

⁷⁸. Ibid., 2.

second function is, as Canovan states in the above quotation, to provide a degree of stability and durability to human existence. Because the human artifice is made of the products of *homo faber*, it is through the material solidity of such products that stability of environment is lent to human affairs. It is worth noting that the features of natural space take shape only in relation to the artificiality of the world, and vice versa. The things made for the maintenance of life are experienced as possessing a certain ephemerality in *relation* to the human artifice. Take the following statement by Arendt:

It is only within the human world that nature's cyclical movement manifests itself as growth and decay. Like birth and death, they, too, are not natural occurrences, properly speaking; they have no place in the unceasing, indefatigable cycle in which the whole household of nature swings perpetually. Only when they enter the man-made world can nature's processes be characterized by growth and decay; only if we consider nature's products, this tree or this dog, as individual things, thereby already removing them from their 'natural' surroundings and putting them into our world, do they begin to grow and to decay. While nature manifests itself in human existence through the circular movement of our bodily functions, she makes her presence felt in the man-made world through the constant threat of overgrowing or decaying it.⁷⁹

Contrary to the ever-changing natural environment, "the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life."⁸⁰ This ontological level encompasses the geo-physical separation of spaces. The upshot of the human artifice is that it provides the possibility for human beings to live a 'specifically human life'. "If nature and the earth generally constitute the condition of human life, then the world and the things of the world constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth."⁸¹ What is interesting, however, is how meaning is derived from location, that is, from the relationship between 'things and men'. Without this founding space the activities of human beings would be rendered 'pointless'. The point, then, is that appearances, if they are to be more than fleeting impressions, require a stable and enduring environment, which requires continuous maintaining against the forces of nature. "The protection and preservation of the world against natural processes are among the toils which need the monotonous performance

^{79.} Ibid., 97-98.

^{80.} Ibid., 137.

^{81.} Ibid., 134.

of daily repeated chores. This laboring fight, as distinguished from the essentially peaceful fulfillment in which labor obeys the orders of immediate bodily needs, although it may be even less 'productive' than man's direct metabolism with nature, has a much closer connection with the world, which it defends against nature."⁸² Arendt's description of nature as something from which protection is necessary sounds unusual to contemporary readers who, instead, understand nature as that which needs protecting. Yet, recall from chapter one on Arendt's methodology how her descriptions issue from, and are changed by, the perspectives and viewpoints she inhabits throughout her work. From the position of the human artifice, it is nature that encroaches upon its boundaries, attempting to reclaim territory from it.

Without proper acknowledgment of the spatial ontology of the human artifice, without accounting for the material 'thing-ness' which, in *The Human Condition*, can come only from the activity of *homo faber*, we overlook the very thing that maintains commonness and allows intersubjectivity and solidarity to exist. To maintain these spaces a "constant, unending fight against the processes of growth and decay through which nature forever invades the human artifice, threatening the durability of the world and its fitness for human use."⁸³ With the physical boundaries erected from the products of *homo faber*, theoretically, at least, human beings now have the opportunity to engage in a third activity: action. Action, like labour and work, occurs in particular spaces and while these spaces have the potential to exist wherever human beings are together, action needs the human artifice if it is to be a common feature of human existence. Together, action and the human artifice become a world.

The world

"Before men began to act," Arendt writes, "a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the polis and its structure the law."⁸⁴ World for Arendt signifies this space. It is an artificial space with a distinct socio-political community. Thus, the world is a thoroughly intersubjective space, founded upon and founding human engagement. Furthermore, the world does not refer to the entirety of existence at once. It is not a totalising concept, but is instead necessarily limited, perspectival, and contains difference. As James Hart has it, the world is not identical to all of us but is instead *common* to us all.⁸⁵ Or in Arendt's words, "the world, like every in-

^{82.} Ibid., 100-101.

^{83.} Ibid., 100.

^{84.} Ibid., 194-195.

^{85.} Hart, 'The Care of the World and of the Self,' 94.

between, relates and separates men at the same time."⁸⁶ The same world appears to each individual but the manner in which it appears, its manifestation, and how it is experienced always differs from person to person. Because of the plural and irreducible perspectives, the world is inherently communicable. Kelly Oliver pushes Arendt further on this point, to say that the human race depends on "the plurality of species and there is a human world only where there are interrelations between humans and other species."⁸⁷ Worldly spaces 'call out' to be spoken about, perceived, and experienced beyond what immediately presents itself to us. This worldly environment is, in turn, enriched by the plurality of possible perspectives.⁸⁸ The plurality of the world arises from three interrelated conditions. The first condition is the plurality of different locations and positions it is possible to inhabit that originates in any spatial relationship. The second condition is human plurality, which refers to the equality and distinctness of each and every human being. This plurality actualised in public spaces, formed by the human world.⁸⁹ Finally, there is the plurality contained in different forms of manifestation or modes of appearances.

Arendt's conceptual resistance to all reductive approaches to human identity is equally matched by her profound consideration for the worldly, existential condition of human beings. For Arendt, the world signifies an irreducible ontological relation between human existence and the space in which it unfolds. In summary, Arendt believes that reality, as a combination of interaction of human beings and the world, remains forever beyond the totalising control of systems of interference. "The insanity of such systems clearly does not only lie in its first premise but in their very logicity which proceeds regardless of all facts and regardless of reality which teaches us that whatever we do we can't carry through with absolute perfection."⁹⁰

^{86.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

^{87.} Oliver, "Earth and World," 90.

^{88.} Vasterling, 'Plural Perspectives and Independence' 2007.

^{89.} See also Loidolt, 'Hannah Arendt's Concept of Actualized Plurality' 2016; Vasterling, 'Plural Perspectives and Independence' 2007; Parekh, Serena. *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 2008; Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 1983; Hart, 'Hannah Arendt' 2002; George Kateb, 'Existential Values in Arendt's Treatment of Evil and Morality' in *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2007): 811- 854; Deirdre Lauren O'Mahony, *Hannah Arendt's Ethics* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

^{90.} Arendt, 'Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps'. *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 1 (1950): 50.

Conclusion

This chapter has reconstructed aspects of Arendt's ontology of space. In so doing, we find her notion of spatiality to be at once more nuanced and dynamic than usually afforded. Arendt uses her ontology to perform a spatialisation of metaphysical categories. This project re-grounds, as it were, universal concepts by elucidating their specific spatial embeddedness. This regrounding is a break with "modernist ontology's focus on human use value and its attendant processes of privatization and economization" which "forecloses the myriad other ways in which people interact with the world and erases long-standing relationships to place."⁹¹ To this end, we witnessed the transformation of the concepts of birth and death, space and time, and experiential reality. Her efforts to re-ground fundamental concepts of earthly existence make sense in light of processes of alienation and, subsequently, of dislocation which are only worsening. Arendt was one of the first to recognise and react defensively against these deleterious processes.

Decreasing access to public, habitable space is readily recognised perhaps most famously by philosophers such as Bruno Latour. Latour's following diagnostic captures this sentiment: "What is certain is that all find themselves facing a universal lack of shareable space and inhabitable land."⁹² We saw how spaces are shared through their accessibility to a plurality of people who can then take up different positions in the world. This diversity of position is enabled through bodily movement. These differences are in turn actualised through discourse. Latour shares this Arendtian insight on the essential nature of different locations as evinced in his criticism regarding the modern impulse to replace differing viewpoints with one universal perspective. "Shifting from a local to a global viewpoint ought to mean multiplying viewpoints, registering a greater number of varieties, taking into account a larger number of beings, cultures, phenomena, organisms, and people."⁹³ In Latourian parlance, the terms of local and global viewpoints are akin to Arendt's differentiation between common sense and science. Equipped with Arendt's spatial framework one can better appreciate the importance of taking into account a variety of perspectives not only "to maintain, to cherish a maximum number of alternative ways of belonging to the world"⁹⁴ but also for the planet.

⁹¹. DePuy et al., 'Environmental governance' 956.

⁹². Latour, *Down to Earth*, 15.

⁹³. Ibid., 18.

⁹⁴. Ibid., 21.

Yet, in spite of her move to recognise the value of nature along with its fragility, is she not vulnerable to instrumentalist critiques, where, in this case, nature is primarily a resource for activities of labour? After all, according to this view, stability is created through the human artifice, through its walls and laws and constant maintenance. Nowadays it is all too clear that the earth has a delicate stability itself. Arendt addresses this weakness (specifically in her work in *The Life of the Mind*), where her understanding of earth undergoes significant alterations. Whereas she only hints at the earth's status as part of the human condition in 1958 and even obfuscates it at times with nature, in her later work earth emerges as a significant component of her philosophical anthropology. The upshot is that earth and nature have a stability and dignity that they were denied in *The Human Condition*. Her later work offers a more nuanced and less anthropomorphic rendering of the natural world. In fact, for the Arendt of *The Life of the Mind*, the natural world is shown to offer the very qualities the Arendt of *The Human Condition* thought possible only under the conditions of the human artifice. While we have done much to nuance the spatial distinctions in her account, her early and middle work alone cannot absolve her from the myopic depiction of natural spaces and the instrumentalist reading of nature that issues from it. It is with this matter in mind that we turn to Arendt's last work.

Chapter 6.

Arendt's Spatial Ontology of Surfaces

In *The Life of the Mind* the natural world comes to take on characteristics of earth, nature, and even human artifice.¹ As such, nature possess the qualities of belonging, durability, phenomenality, and distinction, which previously were consigned to the interplay of human artifice and world. This has consequences for her understanding of non-human life and, as such, is of great relevance for discussions concerning environmental ethics. Whereas Arendt is known for her anthropocentric conception of world, here we show how she herself combats this perspective in her later work. Not only human beings but animals and nature too come to possess the uniqueness that was previously preserved for human action. Moreover, she localises this distinction in material appearances and not exclusively in speech and action as she did previously. Arendt's argument for extending these qualities is surprisingly located on the surface of things. In order to do so, Arendt must first contend with the functionalist interpretation of appearances whereby the way things appear, the shape and form they take, can be explained through utilitarian interaction with the environment. The problem with the existing over-reliance on biological conceptions of nature becomes clear in conversations concerning the value of non-human entities such as animals and entire ecosystems. The value of the natural world is often defined in terms of function within the broader ecological context. It concerns the equilibrium of natural systems within which each component has a stabilising effect. Simply put, you cannot remove one aspect without affecting the whole. This point is borne time and again when, say, the overhunting of one species has an indirect (often undesired) effect on the population of other species.

Arendt deals with this issue in an innovative way, refocusing the discussion away from function to an appreciation of plural appearances which are dependent firstly on a space in which to appear and secondly but relatedly on the manner in which they appear. We cannot make the move towards appearance without consideration

^{1.} Arendt's untimely death left *The Life of the Mind* incomplete. As such, the final text is comprised of a collage of her later work more than her final word on the topics the book discusses. Young-Bruehl's explains how "Arendt drew together many notes for University of Chicago and New School for Social Research courses on 'Basic Moral Propositions,' 'Thinking,' 'The History of the Will,' 'Kant's Critique of Judgment' and two essays, 'Truth and Politics' and 'Thinking Moral Considerations.' In Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's the Life of the Mind." *Political Theory* 10, no. 2 (1982): 278. Arendt planned to work this material into the Gifford Lectures and then into a book with three parts: 'Thinking,' 'Willing' and 'Judging.' Arendt's death in 1975 meant she never began Judging. The first two volumes of *The Life of the Mind* appeared posthumously in 1978, edited by Mary McCarthy; notes from the New School course on Kant, one of the main preliminary studies for 'Judging,' were included as an appendix to 'Willing.' Given how *The Life of the Mind* was composed, the text is best read not as the final word or end of the matter but as a beginning. Like Young-Bruehl demonstrates in "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's the Life of the Mind," despite the controversy surrounding the composition of the text, *The Life of the Mind* is an exercise in thinking itself along with Arendt and, at times, against her.

for the spatial conditions of appearances. The reason for this is simple: the manner in which something appears depends on both a plurality of witnesses and a plurality of locations from which a thing can be perceived. The payoff is an alternative and exciting reconceptualisation of nature and life away from purely biologicistic conceptions towards a phenomenal aesthetic. Importantly, casting life in terms of appearance should not be taken to mean life is inherently valuable because of its aesthetically pleasing qualities. Indeed, there is much about life and nature which can appear disturbing, strange, even revolting.² The point, instead, is that because both living and non-living things appear and are perceived in an infinite diversity of appearances to a plurality of spectators, human and non-human. They not only have a place in the world but are 'of the world'. This being of the world cannot be reduced to functional explanations or utilitarian exploitations, nor does it rely on recourse to subjective, aesthetic experiences and judgments. Let us look at this functionalist approach in detail.

Arendt and Portmann's critique of functionalism

Arendt claims that the dichotomy of 'truth versus appearance' emerges as a form of functionalism in which appearances are 'secondary' qualities.³ This frame results in a hierarchical differentiation of the hidden over the naturally manifest and hence, is a manifestation of a form of processual thinking. Such a differentiation is possible only by reducing phenomena to its 'lowest common denominator' and in so doing, forecloses the possibility of assessing phenomena as they manifest themselves.

It is obvious that consciousness of the predicament should be most acute in the sciences that deal directly with men, and the answer — reduced to its lowest common denominator — of the various branches of biology, sociology, and psychology is to interpret all appearances as functions of the life process. The great advantage of functionalism is that it presents us again with a unitary world view, and the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance, together with the old prejudice of Being's supremacy over appearance, is still kept intact, albeit in a different manner. The argument has shifted; appearances are no longer depreciated

² Laura Ephraim makes this point in her recent paper on Arendt's alternative aesthetic of life (Laura Ephraim, 'Save the Appearances! Toward an Arendtian Environmental Politics'. *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 3 (2022): 985-97.

³ Biological functionalism is an explanatory framework that attempts to explain why a thing has the characteristics it does in terms of its purpose or use in an overall system.

as 'secondary qualities' but understood as necessary conditions for essential processes that go on inside the living organism.⁴

While Arendt finds this move most pernicious in 'the sciences that deal directly with men', her point very much holds in disciplines that also deal with the non-human. The reduction of appearance to the lowest common denominator has the advantage of offering a 'unitary world view'. Instead of dealing with the plurality of the phenomenal world, the impulse to seek a unifying, if hidden, explanation for the sheer diversity of life has an obvious appeal. It bypasses the need to understand matters in their own terms, a process which relies on human 'understanding'. Instead, functionalism provides a 'blueprint' of sorts, by which one can explain and make sense of events in spite of apparent differences between them.

To counter this perspective, Arendt employs zoologist Adolf Portmann's research as a rebuttal to the dominance of the functionalistic view. In his research, "Portmann demonstrates with a great wealth of fascinating example, what should be obvious to the naked eye—that the enormous variety of animal and plant life, the very richness of display in its sheer functional superfluity, cannot be accounted for by the common theories that understand life in terms of functionality."⁵ Functionalism relies on the theoretical manoeuvre of assessing living beings from inner processes, processes which do not appear to the naked eye. Hence the prioritisation of the 'inside' over the superficial. Arendt maintains that such a move is erroneous stating "it is wrong to take into account only the functional process that goes on inside the living organism and to regard everything that is outside and 'offers itself to the senses as the more or less subordinate consequence of the much more essential, 'central,' and 'real' processes."⁶ However, one should not take Arendt to be denying the conclusions of scientific enterprise.⁷ Rather for her, the fallacy is to deem the scientific world view to be 'more true' than the world we naturally inhabit, that is, before we approach something 'scientifically'. The point is that the success of

⁴. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 27.

⁵. Ibid., 27–28.

⁶. Ibid., 28.

⁷. Ephraim claims that "Arendt's critique casts the natural sciences as antagonistic toward common sense and the common world insofar as participants seek to destroy or obscure earth's gifts of appearance." (Laura Ephraim, *Who Speaks for Nature?: On the Politics of Science*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 36) Whereas I generally agree that this is Arendt's critique of the natural sciences, it is also worth pointing out that this critique is more accurately applied to the *dominance* of the naturalist worldview and not natural science in and of itself. In other words, the scientistic approach is not inherently bad, Arendt's point has more to do with its inappropriate application due to our over reliance and blind faith in its ability to tell us the truth.

the sciences should enrich and inform the primordial lived-world, which is the world of appearance, first and foremost. After all, the “scientist, too, depends on appearances, whether, in order to find out what lies beneath the surface, he cuts open the visible body to look at its interior or catches hidden objects by means of all sorts of sophisticated equipment that deprives them of the exterior properties through which they show themselves to our natural senses.”⁸ Her concern, then, is the misappropriation of Truth to a hidden world, a world of causes which, while dependable, is simply not the world which humans and animals live in and experience.⁹

Modern science's relentless search for the base underneath mere appearances has given new force to the old argument. It has indeed forced the ground of appearances into the open so that man, a creature fitted for and dependent on appearances, can catch hold of it. But the results have been rather perplexing. No man, it has turned out, can live among ‘cause’ or give full account in normal human language of a Being whose truth can be scientifically demonstrated in the laboratory and tested practically in the real world through technology. It does look as though Being, once made manifest, overruled appearances — except that nobody so far has succeeded in *living* in a world that does not manifest itself of its own accord.¹⁰

Applying Arendt's spatial ontology to the above passage allows us to better understand the point she is — *how it ‘appears is the research problem,’*¹¹ to the category of judgment:

It follows from Portmann's findings that our habitual standards of judgment, so firmly rooted in metaphysical assumptions and prejudices— according to which the essential lies beneath the surface, and the surface is “superficial” — are wrong, that our common conviction that what is inside ourselves, our “inner life is

⁸. Ibid., 24.

⁹. Ephraim helpfully summarizes this point: “In her view, the primary political effect of the instruments, experiments, and mathematical techniques of the natural sciences has been to organize spaces of *disappearance*, where earth's visible surfaces are violated and the range of possible perspectives from which they may be perceived is narrowed.” (Ephraim, *Who Speaks for Nature?*, 36)

¹⁰. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 25-26.

¹¹. Ibid., 28. Here, Arendt is quoting Henry Herbert Williams 'article on the Will in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Arendt's italics).

more relevant to what we “are” than what appears on the outside is an illusion.¹²

Arendt chastises functionalistic perspectives whose “great advantage [...] is that it presents us again with a unitary world view, and the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance, together with the old prejudice of Being’s supremacy over appearance, is still kept intact, albeit in a different manner.”¹³ Laura Ephraim highlights how beholden we are to biological and hence, I argue, functional conceptions of nature: “Admiration for the appearances of nature no longer plays as significant a role in environmental political thinking and organizing as it once did [...] Modern environmentalism, by contrast, is motivated more by fear of death and extinction— and the duty to protect life— than desire for aesthetic experience.”¹⁴ As Ephraim has it: “For Arendt and Portmann, birds are colorful because, like humans, they are meant to see and be seen, purposes that only seem superfluous within a narrowly functionalist framework of survival or utility. Within Arendt and Portmann’s alternative, aesthetic frame, it becomes possible to recognize the *intrinsic* worth of displays by birds, flowers, humans, and other life-forms.”¹⁵ Arendt, following Portmann, reverses the priority of the ‘inside’ vs ‘outside’ dichotomy, for “it is wrong to take into account only the functional process that goes on inside the living organism and to regard everything that is outside and offers itself to the senses as the more or less subordinate consequence of the much more essential, ‘central,’ and ‘real’ processes.”¹⁶ It is on this level and not, say, on the level of rationality, that human beings can become distinct from other forms of animal life in *The Life of the Mind*. “It is precisely this self-display, quite prominent already in the higher forms of animal life, that reaches its climax in the human species.”¹⁷

Because Arendt sees nature as the Ur-process in the form of biological life, we now turn explicitly to her notion of life.¹⁸ Arendt discusses life in connection to the world

¹². Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 30.

¹³. Ibid., 30.

¹⁴. Ephraim, ‘Save the Appearances!’, 985.

¹⁵. Ephraim, *Who Speaks for Nature?*, 43.

¹⁶. Ibid., 28.

¹⁷. Ibid., 30.

¹⁸. “The true meaning of labor’s newly discovered productivity becomes manifest only in Marx’s work, where it rests on the equation of productivity with fertility, so that the famous development of mankind’s ‘productive forces’ into society of an abundance of ‘good things’ actually obeys no other law and is subject to no other necessity than the aboriginal command, ‘Be ye fruitful and multiply,’ in which it is as though the voice of nature herself speaks to us.” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 106, 126)

because for her the two are inseparable and isolating one from the other would be to run afoul of the very move she is critiquing. One reason the spatial significance of Arendt's thought is neglected may have something to do with the fact that she herself rarely discusses space in general. She is certainly not attempting a philosophy of space *sensu stricto*. The thematisation of space in her work almost always appears as particularised space, that is, as the *context* in which existence occurs and events unfold.

In *The Life of the Mind* the term 'world' is used more broadly than in earlier work. Ephraim also recognises the significance of this change in Arendt's understanding of world from *The Human Condition* to *The Life of the Mind*: "Arendt writes here of a single world, containing both the natural, organic entities and processes that she elsewhere associates with the earth, and the durable, artificial things that owe their existence to human work."¹⁹ The world is not the neutral and coincidental site of life. The world has a direct influence on all life and is 'felt as a conditioning force'. The consequences of this conditioning are borne out of the phenomenal nature of both the inorganic things of the world and living beings. Yet, despite the ubiquitousness of world as the context of existence, the "context qua context never appears entirely; it is elusive."²⁰ This is not to say that the world does not appear. The point, rather, is that there are particular modes of manifestations appropriate to it and accessible indirectly. In this way, the opening section of the first book of *The Life of the Mind*, 'The world's phenomenal nature' begins with the following recognition:

The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs.²¹

One cannot but be struck by the peculiar sense of world that is at stake. Here, Arendt breaks with utilitarian and functionalist ideas which approach both things and living beings in terms of an external teleology, that is, in terms of an end outside itself. The world's phenomenal nature means that the utter diversity of all the things in the world are united by the fact that they appear. The primacy of appearances does not exclude the possibility of empirical or theoretical approaches to what appears. The point is that these possibilities are derivative of our original experience and, for

¹⁹. Ephraim, *Who Speaks for Nature?*, 39.

²⁰. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 51.

²¹. *Ibid.*, 19.

Arendt, often occurs the cost of it. Cast neither in functionalist terms nor in light of their usefulness to human beings, the things of the world, 'natural and artificial, living and dead', are united by the fact that they appear. Hence, the things of the world are phenomenal, first and foremost for Arendt. To this end, all that can be said about their 'teleology' is that it entails interdependency in the sense that appearing necessarily implies others. From the perspective of the world, life is equipped for appearances and living things contain the necessary apparatus in order to 'be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled'. The diversity of appearances is met with a diversity of 'sense organs' capable of experiencing worldly phenomena. In this way, life 'fits' itself into the world, which is a home for each species regardless of difference in appearance. It is as if all things were designed to perceive and be perceived, to experience the sheer diversity of appearances, and to be experienced as appearing in return. This move constitutes a stark departure from her theory of the natural world in *The Human Condition*.

The importance of the phenomenal existence of all living creatures is captured by Arendt's assertion that "*Being and Appearing coincide*."²² That is, from the consideration of the *world*, things in it are meant to appear, to be experienced in the broadest sense by others. What is appears, and in this way ontology is accessible in appearances. We do not need to reduce these appearances or get beyond them in order to know what something is. That being and appearing coincide means there is no ontologically prior, hidden state of existence. There is no supreme, invisible cause that lurks behind what appears. This is to say no hierarchy exists between an un-appearing cause and an appearing effect. To the extent that we can speak of a reason for a thing's being, it lies exclusively in the fact it manifests for others. For, "nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular [...]. Plurality is the law of the earth."²³ In other words, existence is essentially plural, infinitely diverse, and irreducibly *spatial*. It is this space, in the broad sense encapsulated by the term 'world', that designates Arendt's priority in the majority of her work. Even our appearance at birth and our subsequent disappearance at death are phrased in terms of a supreme 'arrival' and 'departure' *from the perspective of the world*. "To be alive means to live in a world that preceded one's own arrival and will survive one's own departure."²⁴ Describing birth and death as arriving and departing from a primordial location suggests the primacy of these events not in individual, subjective terms but from the 'objective' perspective of the world.²⁵

^{22.} Ibid.

^{23.} Ibid.

^{24.} Ibid., 20.

^{25.} See the previous chapter for a full discussion on this topic.

Plurality means that appearance presupposes beings endowed with the capacity of recognising the infinite diversity of earthly appearances. "That appearance always demands spectators and thus implies an at least potential recognition and acknowledgment has far-reaching consequences for what we, appearing beings in a world of appearances, understand by reality, our own as well as that of the world."²⁶ In distinction from *The Human Condition*, where appearances presuppose a minimal level of stability in the form of an artificial world created by *homo faber*, now all appearance requires are the presence of others who can recognise and bear witness to them. Again, this statement marks an ostensible departure from the thesis of *The Human Condition* in which plurality is specific to human beings and is decidedly 'unnatural', requiring an artificial world for its actualisation. *The Life of the Mind*, however, shows the world as the site of all life to contain a philosophical dignity and depth of thought impossible in her earlier work. It seems Arendt decided to rectify this earlier thesis; book I of *The Life of the Mind* goes against much of the conventional image Arendt's readers have of her based on her magnum opus, *The Human Condition*. Plurality is now grounded in a phenomenal world and not in human artifice.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt shows just how fundamental the connection between the world and living beings is. "Living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world*, and this precisely because they are subjects and objects — perceiving and being perceived — at the same time."²⁷ Living things are 'of the world' and not just in the world, because all life is conditioned; living beings are 'conditioned beings'.²⁸ This means that existence never occurs in isolation but is always responding to an environment and a context. The context of all life — not just human life — is the world and the world is first and foremost the space of appearances. To this end, contra an intellectual tradition which makes the mystery of subjectivity a main concern, for Arendt, being 'of the world' actually reverses the priority between subjectivity and objectivity. The principle inspiring this reversal comes down to the primacy of appearances and draws its validity from her interpretation of world as a primordial, phenomenal space. Because subjectivity does not appear,²⁹ it is objectivity that is manifest and confirmed in the world.³⁰ At

²⁶ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 46.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

²⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10.

²⁹ While it is beyond our current scope, it would be important to explore how expression in Arendt relates to the issue of how 'inner states' obtain a direct, worldly reality.

³⁰ "Reality in a world of appearances is first of all characterized by 'standing still and remaining 'the same long enough to become an *object* for acknowledgment and recognition by a *subject*'" (Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 45–46).

this juncture, it is possible to detect Arendt's break from a more traditional strand of the phenomenological tradition, in a direction set out by Heidegger. Simplifying a great deal, classical phenomenology, which Arendt would have a direct familiarity with,³¹ aims to give an account of the subjective conditions of possibility for the constitution of objectivity; that is, it is concerned with an account of how it possible that consciousness can know something beyond or 'outside itself'. Inner conscious experiences are vital but not worldly, and as such, knowledge of them is obtained indirectly, that is, through reflection and introspection. The point, for her, is that all talk of subjectivity in conscious processes is an unnecessary detour to the world. For her, we are beings of the world and as such have immediate experiential access to it. Following Heidegger, Arendt is influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasises the intersubjective dimensions of experience.³²

All this is not to deny that Arendt was not only influenced by but took certain inspiration from the Husserlian concept of intentionality.³³ Phenomenological intentionality refers to the necessary structure of consciousness whereby subjectivity is directed towards things in the world, which it neither represents nor constitutes. However, once again Arendt reverses the traditional order of things. Rather than intentionality's emphasis on the subjective process of 'objective'³⁴ content, in Arendt's hands, it establishes the significance of objectivity *insofar as it appears to someone*.

Objectivity is built into the very subjectivity of consciousness by virtue of intentionality. Conversely and with the same justness, one may speak of the intentionality of appearances and their built-in subjectivity. All objects because they appear indicate a subject, and, just as every subjective act has its intentional object, so every appearing object has its intentional subject.³⁵

31. For a brief time, Arendt attended a course by Husserl. (Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World*, 62).

32. Vasterling, 'The Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach to Plurality', 159.

33. The concept of intentionality is much older than Husserl or his teacher Brentano. Nonetheless, it is less controversial to recognise the concept was popularised under Husserl. See Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl: A Historical Development*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 131-137, where J.N. Mohanty comments on the history of the concept of intentionality and the differences between Brentano's and Husserl's use of it.

34. I put this in air-quotes because the contents of subjectivity are obviously not always objective in the strict sense. I can also be conscious of things which are neither real nor temporally present, e.g., chimeras, optical illusions, and childhood memories.

35. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 46.

Not the invisible churning of the mind but the recognisable appearing of the world is accentuated. Arendt places objectivity centre stage and, as is traditional, subjectivity as well. Her goal is to combat the erosion of the solidity of the world brought about primarily through processual thinking. To this end, she performs several reversals as a technique which Arendt uses against the values instantiated by traditional philosophy and propagated in the social and political realms. Her first move is to establish the priority of appearances and their objective reality. This draws a contrast between her account of objectivity in *The Human Condition*: "Only we who have erected the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us, who have built it into the environment of nature so that we are protected from her, can look upon nature as something 'objective.' Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity."³⁶ As mentioned previously, Arendt's understanding of 'objectivity' differs from the traditionally empirical or positivistic usage. Important for our purposes here is the manner in which Arendtian objectivity has evolved from *The Human Condition* in which objectivity is connected to the stability of the artificially constructed human world.³⁷ In *The Life of the Mind*, however, objectivity is embedded in the existential conditions of life on this earth. Furthermore, the primary characterisation of objectivity is that it appears in a worldly context. Peter Cannavò underscores this point as he writes, "[w]ere we to abandon Earth and live encapsulated in life-support technology, human existence would lose an important external referent and source of purpose and seem ungrounded and subjective."³⁸ In this way, objectivity is a loaded term.

The phenomenal nature of life on earth is a result of the space in which existence occurs. Because the world is of a phenomenal nature, life too shares this primordial connection to appearances as a mode of existence. That we are beings of the world harbours consequences that have been overlooked or outright neglected.³⁹ Again, for Arendt, the main culprit responsible for this denigration is traditional metaphysics and the perennial quest for an invisible cause located behind or 'above' appearance.

³⁶. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 137.

³⁷. Recall Arendt's radical claim that "Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 137)

³⁸. Peter F. Cannavò, 'Arendt: Place, World, and Earthly Nature' in *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon*, ed. Cannavò, Peter F., and Lane, Joseph, (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2014) 262.

³⁹. For an educational approach to the recognition of spatial embeddedness in the environment see Thornton et al., 'Reflecting on Place: Environmental Education as Decolonisation' in *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 35, no. 3 (2019): 239-49, and Baird J. Callicott, 'Aldo Leopold on Education: As Educator and His Land Ethic in the Context of Contemporary Environmental Education.' *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 14 no. 1 (1982): 34-41.

Being and appearing: the fallacy of metaphysical superiority

In asserting the coincidence of being and appearing, as well as the phenomenal nature of the world, Arendt is going against a long tradition within both metaphysics and the empirical and social sciences which posit the priority of that which does not appear over what does. Cast in metaphysical terms, she rejects any tendency that would posit ontological, as well as epistemological, superiority of cause and effect. Such supposition maintains that if one desires to 'truly' know what something is, one must investigate beyond the surface. The belief that things as they truly are never show themselves without interference has led to the denigration of appearances, that is, of the world and the things that comprise it. For Arendt, this has led to the situation in which we no longer trust our senses to reveal the 'truth' of phenomena. But we did not get to this place overnight and Arendt provides a provocative historical and conceptual account of events that influenced — but not determined — our current situation. This section provides an overview of Arendt's argument against what she calls certain 'metaphysical fallacies' and contemporaneous attempts to offer a homogenising worldview.

Arendt is concerned with what tradition has absorbed and what, directly or indirectly, influences how we inhabit the world. An image emerges of a world split in two with a hierarchy between them. This two-world dichotomy is the most persistent of metaphysical fallacies because it is born of an unappearing ego in a phenomenal, appearing world. Indeed, the motivation for *The Life of the Mind* was to assess the validity of an originally un-appearing activity: thinking. Thinking is invisible from the perspective of the world, of a phenomenal space that includes other living beings. Yet, "[t]o conclude from this experience that there exist 'things in themselves' which, in their own intelligible sphere, as we 'are' in the world of appearances belongs among the metaphysical fallacies."⁴⁰ Because this 'fallacy' is derived from real experience, it appears to have an unquestionable verity. This experience has led to the denigration and subjugation of 'flawed' world experiences in favour of a verifiable, hidden realm accessible only to the human mind.⁴¹ This immateriality is the price paid for Truth. The realm of invisible causes emerges as superior to the world of appearances. Arendt's point, however, is that this is not simply a matter of forsaking appearance for truth. We do not simply live

^{40.} Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 44.

^{41.} "Kant stresses the 'immateriality' of the *mundus intelligibilis*, the world in which the thinking ego moves, in contrast to the 'inertia and constancy' of dead matter that surrounds living beings in the world of appearances." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 43.

in a world of appearances which we can opt out of safely in order to move among unappearing truth. Because we are of the world this has significant consequences for both ourselves, the spatial, material world of appearances, and reality.

As we saw, perhaps the biggest blow to the integrity of the world was dealt by the Cartesian tradition. According to it, in order to arrive at an incontrovertible proof of existence, both of oneself and only subsequently of the world, one has to first remove all fallible experience. This includes first all sensuous experience, and second, rationally derived 'facts' for even here one may be misled by a 'higher', malicious power. But for Arendt among others, proof of reality cannot be achieved in the absence of these faculties. The irony of the Cartesian method is that in the quest for undeniable truth, it dissolves the reality of the world itself, meaning even if one has found a 'region' beyond error and experience, it is not a place in which one would want to live, let alone whether or not it is possible:

that it never occurred to him that no *cogitatio* and no *cogito me cogitare*, no consciousness of an acting self that had suspended all faith in the reality of its intentional objects, would ever have been able to convince him of his own reality had he actually been born in a desert, without a body and its senses to perceive "material" things and without fellow-creatures to assure him that what he perceived was perceived by them too. The Cartesian *res cogitans*, this fictitious creature, bodiless, senseless, and forsaken, would not even know that there is such a thing as reality and a possible distinction between the real and the unreal, between the common world of waking life and the private non-world of our dreams.⁴²

Arendt's critique of Descartes points to the importance of the body in her philosophy in general, something which she has been criticised for omitting in her work.⁴³ In the absence of the body, experiences of reality are impossible. In other words, the body, and not the mind, provides the possibility of experiencing reality. "Reality cannot be derived; thought or reflection can accept or reject it, and the Cartesian doubt, starting from the notion of a Dieu trompeur, is but a sophisticated and veiled form of rejection."⁴⁴ The non-derivative status of reality is possible because human beings are conditioned by the world and the world is, first and foremost, a space of appearances. As such, Arendt is quietly but assuredly arguing for the

⁴². Ibid., 48.

⁴³. Allen, 'Solidarity after identity politics', 98.

⁴⁴. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 49.

irreducibility of bodily experience in the proof of reality. In opposition to a tradition which priorities the immaterial over the material, wordlessness over the world, a 'no-where' over a somewhere, Arendt asserts the spatial reality of existence which requires neither abstraction nor introspection to attest to its realness: "The reality of what I perceive is guaranteed by its worldly context, which includes others who perceive as I do, on the one hand, and by the working together of my five senses on the other."⁴⁵ Inspired by the Austrian zoologist Adolf Portmann's 'morphology', Arendt inverts tradition's priority of hidden cause versus the surface effect.

The profound, if provocative, assertion that 'being and appearing coincide' should not be misunderstood as positing an exhaustive, totalising appearing of entities. It does not mean that things appear in a straightforward, uncomplicated manner. Nor is it saying that we have unencumbered, epistemological access to phenomena. In keeping with the phenomenological tradition, phenomena appear in infinite adumbrations and never in totality. Arendt holds that the things of the world, insofar as they appear, do so differently to each individual. In other words, the coincidence of being and appearing does not mitigate the possibility of error in the everyday, common world. It is this lived world which a person must return to even if they choose to spend their time not among appearances but causes and ideas.

Living in the world of appearance, because it is our primordial condition, is unavoidable as it is the original circumstance of life on this earth. It may seem that Arendt, in asserting this fact, is reducing all things in the world to 'mere' appearance, that is, things are simply as they appear on first encounter. This, obviously is not the case and knowledge acquired through our experience with something may later turn out to be false. The crucial point is that such correction occurs at the cost of the initial appearance. The fact that we can never arrive at a region beyond appearance means attempts to move from appearance to, say, causes in order to obtain knowledge of the 'thing in itself', has an effect on the world, to the extent that persistent neglect of the phenomenal nature of the world over the past two centuries, particularly since the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, has certainly contributed to the present climate crisis.⁴⁶ A manifestation of this neglect of the world is the decreasing diversity of living creatures and habitable spaces.⁴⁷

⁴⁵. Ibid., 50.

⁴⁶. "Not the 20th century and the splitting of the atom, but the developments beginning in the 1450s and culminating in the Second Industrial Revolution and the rise of carbon-fuelled, extractive, consumer capitalism mark the beginning of human capacity to release uncontrollable natural processes." Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, 'Labor as Action: The Human Condition in the Anthropocene,' in *Research in Phenomenology* 50, no. 2 (2020): 250.

⁴⁷. "According to a UN Global Land Outlook assessment, more than 1 million species are now threatened with extinction, vanishing at a rate not seen in 10 million years. As much as 40% of Earth's land surfaces are considered degraded." In Simon Torkington, 'Nature and Biodiversity', accessed 27/05.2024 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/biodiversity-nature-loss-cop15/>

Arendt's spatial ontology of the surface

Arendt offers an alternative understanding of nature which breaks from the functionalist logic of the dominant contemporary depictions of life. As discussed in the opening of this dissertation, debates on what constitutes a firm foundation for the moral consideration of non-human entities and human-non-human relations is dominated by two strands. On the one side we have instrumental value theories which argue that the value of the natural world consists in its usefulness for human activity. Human beings should recognise and appreciate nature because of the important role it plays for human purposes. On the other side we have intrinsic value theorists who hold that the natural world is in and of itself valuable regardless of human beings and human activity.⁴⁸ Such a view often makes recourse to nature's aesthetic qualities. But this move too has been criticised for its reliance on anthropocentric values such as beauty.

However, a fundamental problem remains. One of the most persistent concerns facing environmental ethics is the matter of providing an acceptable definition of what life is and subsequently what characteristics a thing must possess in order to qualify as a living being. Definitions of life are contested and diverge amongst disciplines.⁴⁹ The difficulty for environmental ethics is that something must be shown to be alive before it can then be said to have intrinsic interests and hence be worthy of moral consideration.⁵⁰ Yet no clear and universally accepted definition of life exists. Moreover, even if we had such a definition, a problem would still remain as to how we should prioritise the needs and interests of one life over another.

⁴⁸. Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011); Rolston, 'Environmental Ethics'; Johnson, *A morally deep world*. Holmes III Rolston, 'Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World' in *The Broken Circle: Ecology, Economics, Ethics*, ed. Bormann, F. Herbert, and Kellert, Stephen R. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 73-96.

⁴⁹. For an overview of this debate, see Edouard Machery, 'Why I Stopped Worrying About the Definition of Life... And Why You Should as Well' in *Synthese* 185: 145-164. Specifically, Machery argues that projects attempting to definitively provide a definition of life are either "impossible or pointless" (Machery, 'Why I Stopped Worrying', 146).

⁵⁰. Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. (2011); Holmes III Rolston, 'Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World'. (1991). Lawrence Johnson influentially claims that ecosystems have interests too, not only humans and animals in Lawrence E Johnson, *A morally deep world*, 6-7.

In response, Anna Wienhues argues for a political, non-ranking biocentric ethics.⁵¹ However, she does not include ecosystems in her account of justice.⁵² Wienhues claims that “[t]he important normative distinction between living and non-living systems is that something – that is, an object, system or chemical process – that is not alive cannot be harmed or benefited in any meaningful way.”⁵³ In this way, Wienhues excludes non-living beings from direct claims to moral considerability.⁵⁴ Yet she also acknowledges the difficulty of defining life. Building on Agar’s argument, Wienhues writes: “In other words, depending on the field of enquiry different entities might be considered alive, but this diversity should not worry us too much because each discipline is looking at the concept of life from a different angle and with different aims.”⁵⁵

However, Wienhues is beholden to an interpretation of life as process, which harbours difficulties for those who wish to break away from this tendency. “Generally speaking,” Wienhues writes, “all living beings are open systems that interact with their environment by exchanging energy and matter.”⁵⁶ The problem that I believe Wienhues is representative of is the way moral theory is reliant on definitions of living beings in order to predict what is good, and hence morally required, for their flourishing. In Wienhues’ own terms, “flourishing embodies the idea of the good life which makes the ability to flourish central to understand what constitutes a living being. In the end, the idea of a good held by living beings is one way of showing that it makes sense to speak of the *wellbeing* of a living entity in contrast to any inanimate object which has none.”⁵⁷

51. Anna Wienhues’ political, non-ranking biocentric approach is a non-hierarchical evaluation of the moral considerability of life. In her own words: “By rejecting the building of a meta-ethical hierarchical order of difference that translates into differences in moral significance, it creates the possibility to look at human- nonhuman relationships more contextually without having predetermined how situations of conflict should be normatively resolved.” Anna Wienhues, *Ecological Justice and the Extinction Crisis: Giving Living Beings Their Due* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), 43-44.

52. Wienhues, *Ecological Justice and the Extinction Crisis*, 27.

53. *Ibid.*, 31.

54. It should be noted that Wienhues makes an important distinction between giving something moral consideration and justice. Wienhues theory does not forbid one from making ethically sound prioritisations of one ethical issue over another, but this move happens at the level of justice and not at the level of moral consideration: “Thus, as a matter of consistency all living beings have to be included into the realm of moral considerability which is *necessary but not sufficient* to include them into the realm of justice.” (Wienhues, *Ecological Justice and the Extinction Crisis*, 37)

55. Wienhues, *Ecological Justice and the Extinction Crisis*, 30.

56. *Ibid.*, 31.

57. *Ibid.*, 32.

Paul Ott addresses this issue from an Arendtian perspective, promoting an attitude of care towards nature: "I want to argue that Arendt advocates a different attitude that cuts across the traditional anthropocentric-biocentric divide. That attitude is one of 'loving care'."⁵⁸ Ott offers what he calls a "world mediated" approach by which he proposes, using Arendt's triad of human activities, an existential ontology that can do adequate justice to humanity's relationship with nature. Ott criticises the "obsession" environmental ethicists have for different strands of intrinsic value theory.⁵⁹ This move, Ott states, ignores the relationship from which ethical problems arise: the relation between human beings and nature. Thus, the question becomes an ontological one concerning *how* humanity is related to nature. Only after answering this question can we ask how we *should* relate to nature.⁶⁰ The problem, as I argue, is that humanity predominately relates to nature through processual thinking, which renders living and non-living things in terms of processes.

Arendt offers a way through this dilemma by providing a different understanding of life as 'epiphany'.

6

There are many perspectives in which this process can be seen, examined, and understood, but our criterion for what a living thing essentially is remains the same: in everyday life as well as in scientific study, it is determined by the relatively short time span of its full appearance, its epiphany. The choice, guided by the sole criteria of completeness and perfection in appearance, would be entirely arbitrary if reality were not first of all of a phenomenal nature.⁶¹

The consequences this harbours for environmental ethics, which are so reliant on processual understanding of life, is clear. What is relevant for understanding the intrinsic interests a being has is not inner processes but the world's 'completeness and perfection in appearance'. This is the world's 'epiphany', which is an aesthetic phenomenon, but not in the Romantic sense. The epiphanic appearance of the world would be impossible to reach without recognising the spatial conditions in which things appear. Arendtian epiphany derives its non-arbitrary status from the world because the world is first of all phenomenal in nature. Without recognising the spatial conditions of appearances, the criteria for how we understand life in particular is weakened. In short, it is necessary to have a spatial ontology of life

⁵⁸. Paul Voice, 'Consuming the World: Hannah Arendt on Politics and the Environment'. *Journal of International Political Theory* 9, no. 2: 186.

⁵⁹. Ott, 'World and Earth', 1.

⁶⁰. Ibid., 2.

⁶¹. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* I, 22.

because worldly reality is phenomenal in nature and it is this criterion which should guide our discussions and understanding of the natural world. This move also helps address concerns related to how Arendt relates the material conditions of life to environmental ethics. Paul Voice notes that “[w]hat is also not made clear is the link between Arendt’s concern with the material, biological aspects of human life and the implications of this for a specifically environmental politics.”⁶² Arendt’s understanding of human and non-human relations contains a relevance beyond living beings and hence extends to non-living, material entities for the very reason that they, too, appear.⁶³ Anne Chapman underscores this point when she claims: “All natural, non-human-created things that can appear in public (i.e. experienced by different people, from a plurality of perspectives) have the potential to be part of our world and we make them part of our world by paying attention to them.”⁶⁴

An example of where this spatial ontology is missing is in Laura Ephraim’s attempt to utilise Arendt in an effort to critique the naturalisation of life invoked by environmentalists. In her paper ‘Save the Appearances! Toward an Arendtian Environmental Politics’, Ephraim notes that admiration for nature no longer plays a significant role in environmental ethics. Rather, modern environmentalism is motivated by the imminent threat of extinction and the prospect of survival. Ephraim, using Arendt, proposes a shift from sole concerns of survival to an appreciation of aesthetic appearances. This appealing to aesthetics Ephraim’s

^{62.} Voice, ‘Consuming the World’, 179.

^{63.} Note that while inorganic entities do appear in a diversity of ways, their modes of appearance are not the same as the capacity of living being, especially humans, to appear: “All organic life already shows variations and distinctions [...] but only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself [...]” Yet Arendt clarifies “In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176).

^{64.} Chapman, ‘The Ways that Nature Matters’, 437. This point by Chapman was also referenced in Voice, ‘Consuming the World’, 187. Bonnie Honig also recognises this important implication of things and the stability they provide for the world. Honig underscores the democratic potential of public entities: “Public things are part of the ‘holding environment’ of democratic citizenship; they furnish the world of democratic life. They do not take care of our needs only. They also constitute us, complement us, limit us, thwart us, and interpellate us into democratic citizenship.” in Bonnie Honig, *Public Things: Democracy in Despair*. (Fordham University Press, 2017), 5. Honig emphasises artificial objects: “In the pages that follow, public things include universities, local, state, and national parks, prisons, schools, roads and other transportation systems, the military, governments, electricity and power sources, including hydropower, gas, and oil pipelines, and nuclear plants, air waves, radio and television broadcast networks, libraries, airport security, and more.” (Honig, *Public Things*, 4.) However, as I have made clear, following *The Life of the Mind*, it is appropriate to include natural things when considering public entities.

account could be taken as a call to return to Romantic notions of nature which values the natural world as a pristine, untouched world that is separate from the world of human beings. However, this is what Arendt and Ephraim argue against. As Ephraim writes: "The problematic legacy of Romantic nature aesthetics is best displaced by an environmentalism that would revalue, not devalue, nature's appearances."⁶⁵ Instead, Ephraim advocates for the recognition and appreciation of the strangeness of nature's appearances. She presses us to value nature not only for the sake of survivalist concerns or experiences of aesthetic pleasure but in light of nature's capacity to disturb and disrupt the logic of mass production and consumption that defines the modern economic and cultural attitudes. In her own words: "My call to 'save the appearances' presses environmentalists to inculcate receptivity toward and gratitude for earth's strange spectacles of life and to embrace a duty to augment the alterity that appears in nature with the plurality that appears in political action."⁶⁶

What I would add to this effort is a systematic account and recognition of the spatial components of life's 'appearingness'. Without it, even the most well-meaning efforts to break away from functional and processual conceptions of life in favour of an aesthetics of alterity runs the risk of understanding alterity as something within 'life itself' — and hence essentialises life — and not something which arise between things both organic and inorganic. "But held to the standards for earth's 'intrinsic worth' that Arendt has helped me to elaborate, *life's penchant for ever-changing, entertaining alterity* also has value for politics that differs from and complements the artificial stability of the world."⁶⁷ I believe this quotation points to a potential weakness in our proclivity to essentialise life even in the name of alterity. Arendt shows that the qualities of worldly phenomena are inseparable from the spaces in which they appear. Additionally, due to their spatial ontology, worldly phenomena are always open to change because they are situated in a pluralist environment. The infinite modes of appearing that this pluralist context engenders is considered superfluous from the perspective of functionalist and essentialist accounts of nature. In other words, world, as Arendt understands it, is not simply the diversity of the earth. This understanding is not only neglected but has become superfluous in the dominant perspective of processual thinking.

Finally, this reconsideration — of the phenomenality of appearances — draws an interesting juxtaposition between the problem of superfluousness on the one hand,

⁶⁵. Ephraim, 'Save the Appearances!', 985.

⁶⁶. Ibid., 986.

⁶⁷. Ibid., 994 (my emphasis).

which is underpinned by a type of processual thinking, and an appreciation of the surface on the other. Arendt, I believe, argues for a type of superficiality to combat notions of superfluosity. She does this by embracing surface appearances — which are superficial — for surface appearances are only superfluous from the perspective of processual thinking. Accounting for the spatial dimension, not only of all life but of all things that appear, disrupts and thwarts the propensity to think and derive value from invisible process which require the removal of the subject from the lived world of common sense and meaningful engagement. This removal or alienation as discussed, is very much part of the problem posed by environmental concerns.

Arendt's spatial ontology deconstructs the artificial-natural dualism she seemingly embraces in *The Human Condition*. The premise of this dissertation was simple: we need to start recognising and thinking in spatial terms if we are to meaningfully engage with the world. I have shown that the modern dominance of processual thinking makes recognising and appreciating phenomenal space all the more difficult and hence all the more urgent. Arendt is a surprising figure to turn to in order to elicit help in our current environmental crisis. Yet, for the reasons shown in this dissertation, Arendt's forgotten spatial ontology offers the chance to rethink and reengage with a world whose very appearingness is in grave jeopardy. Where species are wiped from the face of the earth and landmasses are disappearing at an alarming rate. Given this, I would add to Arendt's call 'to think what we are doing', we must also think from *where* we are doing. The answer will remind us that we are worldly beings, first and foremost. Her celebrated notions of plurality, multi-perspectivism, and freedom are made possible because we are spatial beings, for which space and existence are inherently meaningful, not empty and abstract. In this way we are *of the world*, not simply *in the world* nor is it simply *around* us. We are part of it.

The fact that the practical structures of worldly experience are fundamentally spatially embedded lends further significance to discussions of forced displacement. Our ontological, spatial constitution requires a space in which we belong. This *sense* of belonging is not captured by naturalistic conceptions of space, which hence impoverishes our understanding of what it is to be uprooted from our home and, as a species, from the earth.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this dissertation, we dealt with two popular interpretations of Hannah Arendt's work. In particular, the dualist reception of her spatial theory makes Arendt's understanding of space appear antiquated and irrelevant to contemporary discourse on the topic of human-nature relationships. Moreover, it causes tensions within Arendt's own work. Ephraim notes that the strong distinctions Arendt makes between earth and world in *The Human Condition* appear puzzling in light of her closely connected accounts of earth-alienation and world-alienation.⁶⁸ The goal was to complicate Arendt's reception, following authors such as Kelly, Markell and Debarbieux, as a spatial dualist to reveal the presence of a nuanced conception of space within her thought. Making this explicit helps to address an imbalance in the literature concerning the popular temporal reading of Arendt's work which is often carried out at the expense of the spatial components of her philosophy. Within the traditional philosophical canon, Arendt's recognition of phenomenal space addresses a second disequilibrium within the history of philosophy and science. Within these domains, space is regularly conceptualized as Euclidean, abstract, or empty.⁶⁹ Space is too often thought of as devoid of any meaning until human beings provide it with such. This is at juncture where Arendt's spatial theory is particularly useful because of the manner in which she recognises the phenomenality of spatial existence.

In pursuit of Arendt's spatial philosophy, it was necessary to provide a closer reading of her magnum opus, *The Human Condition*. This was the purpose of the third chapter. The goal was twofold: first, to provide an overview of some of the most important and controversial elements of her philosophy. And second, to read the text from a spatial lens so that we may better understand the pervasive forms of earth- and world-alienation which have only worsened in our time. To this end we paid particular attention to the several 'rebellions against the human condition' which form the backdrop of the 1958 text. These rebellions — against the conditions of earth, life, and labour — constitute what Arendt saw as the rejection of the earthly context of the human existence. This rejection is a pernicious form of modern alienation where the earth signifies a limit to human development. Insight into Arendt's phenomenological (and hermeneutic) methodology reveals she is a thinker who always begins from real, worldly events and responds to the urgency

^{68.} Ephraim, *Who Speaks for Nature?*, 37.

^{69.} For instance, Gerard Kuperus laments the way the Western tradition has largely ignored the importance of space, focusing instead on space as an empty abstraction in Gerard Kuperus, *Ecopolitical Homelessness: Defining place in an unsettled world* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

to think, not from an abstract and distant space or a removed, privileged position, but “from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears.”⁷⁰ We saw that thinking in the Arendtian sense is not cognitive or consequentialist but is aimed at understanding the imminent challenge to humanity and the world. This imperative is more urgent today in light of pending global climatic disasters and their environmental and humanitarian consequences.

The Human Condition is an exercise in thinking through world-alienation and the biggest obstacles to real political action. The fourth chapter was dedicated to an exposition of the logic behind forms of world-alienation: processual thinking. Processual thinking constitutes one of the biggest threats to both humanity and the earth. The threat it possesses is the subjugation and diminishing of phenomenal reality, that is, of worldly appearances. According to Arendt, the modern world is characterised by the tendency to reduce phenomena to invisible, unified, and knowable patterns. Perhaps even more egregious is the auto-poietic and teleological status assigned to processes. This means that not only are they often perceived to occur ‘naturally’, but they are also perceived as part of an overall development, which invokes an evaluative framework. This is to say that process is too often synonymous with progress, where progress implies the normative presupposition that what comes after will be better than that which precedes it. Processual thinking operates by acting upon and transforming the phenomenality of the world into consistent patterns which are used to make sense of events beyond, and, more to the point, often in contradiction to common experience. So egregious is this tendency that Arendt wrote: “The reason human beings will then perish, however, is not themselves, but, as always, the world, or better, the course of the world over which they no longer have mastery, from which they are so alienated that the automatic forces inherent in every process can proceed unchecked.”⁷¹ This passage highlights Arendt’s concern for the world against the ‘automatic forces’ human activity unleashes upon the world and over which they can never have total mastery. Thinking in processual terms, which aims to explain and define rather than understand and discuss, lures us into a sense of control over worldly events. However, this control is never total and its illusion comes at the price of lived, worldly experience. What is needed, then, is a different notion of space, not as empty but as inherently meaningful. This is what Arendt provides with her phenomenal account of space.

^{70.} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5.

^{71.} Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 107.

Understanding what is at stake within the hegemony of processual thinking, chapter five provided a discussion of Arendt's alternative, that is, spatial thinking. I showed how Arendt's spatialisation of traditional categories of birth and death, time, and reality, disrupts ways of thinking that denigrate appearances. I concretised Arendt's spatial thinking in my analysis of the four interconnected aspects of her spatial ontology in *The Human Condition*. The goal is to make readers aware of the various distinctions in her work that are often ignored by traditional readings. For example, in the opening of *The Human Condition*, there is a notion of earth that cannot be subsumed under nature. This is the feature of 'earth as a condition' of life in an existential sense rather than a strict geo-physical sense. We witnessed a transformation of these concepts through their spatial rendering. The result was an alternative understanding of the basic components of existence from eidetic to spatial. This move thwarts attempts to render phenomena exhaustively in processual terms because it prioritises what does appear over what does not or cannot. It grounds existence in the world and so acts as a remedy to the alienating forces of the modern condition.

The conclusion of chapter five identifies a problem within Arendt's spatial theory. Within her paradigm, the deficiency of nature comes down to its inherent instability. For her, the origin of the modern conception of process is founded on biological processes, which means that nature lacks the durability essential for the establishment of a world. The world, as shown, makes possible a particular human way of life. Spatially speaking, the former enables ephemeral appearances, whereas the latter facilitates more permanent and enduring ones. But this is not how we understand nature nowadays. After all, has the earth not shown that it too possesses a stability of its own, one that human activity has disrupted and upset?

The sixth chapter applied Arendt's spatial ontology to current environmental discourses which attempt to move away from functionalistic understanding of living being and the natural world. The crucial point is that these interpretations are unable to account for a significant aspect of world existence, its sheer phenomenality. For, as Arendt has it, "[n]othing perhaps is more surprising in this world of ours than the almost infinite diversity of its appearances, the sheer entertainment value of its views, sounds, and smells, something that is hardly ever mentioned by the thinkers and philosophers."⁷²

By way of conclusion, let us return to the matter of homelessness and displacement which we discussed in the introduction. In light of the work done to illuminate

⁷² Arendt, *The Life of the Mind I*, 20.

Arendt's sensitivity to how spatial embeddedness as a structure of existence, we can better understand, firstly, displacement as the loss of meaning and how one existential, that is, fundamentally, fits into place. The feeling of belonging intrinsic to having a place is vital to human beings because we are of the world, meaning we cannot and should not think ourselves as separate from our spatial embeddedness. And second, doing justice to this embeddedness requires an alternative, non-reductive way of thinking about the world. The modern tendency to explain events in processual terms compromises the solidity and stability of phenomena no longer anchored in sensory experience. The crises that we face now, environmental and political, stem from a failure to understand this relation. As Latour writes, "[m]igrations, explosions of inequality, and New Climatic Regime: these are one and the same threat."⁷³ Arendt has shown the consequences of this in the political realm, particularly in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where she exposed the process of mass-scale superfluosity of human beings. Birmingham explains how, in this case, the process of expropriation resulted in political and economic superfluosity:

Arendt argues that the law of expropriation not only marks the beginning of the "monstrous process of accumulation" but continues to animate the process as it picks up increasing force with the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, whose desire for unlimited acquisition and accumulation moves imperialist politics from the nation-state to the global stage, a move in which the economically superfluous within the nation-state align themselves with the very capitalist forces that created them, the alliance producing thousands of politically and economically superfluous human beings globally.⁷⁴

This global superfluosity has an obvious spatial element that is more urgent today. Currently, the UNHCR estimates that the global number of peoples who are forcibly displaced stands at 103 million.⁷⁵ Arendt makes us aware that a sense of belonging occurs where one has the possibility of being seen and heard at a political level. But this can only happen if one first has a space that they can call their own, that is, a stake in the world. Arendt recognises that space has meaning from the 'get-go' contrary to more naive accounts that understand space as either empty or geometric. This helps us improve our relation to the environment if we recognise the inherent dignity of the natural world. To appreciate the original appearance of life

^{73.} Latour, *Down to Earth*, 15. For a discussion of Arendt's work as a response to climate inaction, see Jill Hargis, "Hannah Arendt's Turn to the Self and Environmental Responses to Climate Change Paralysis," in *Environmental Politics* 25, no.3 (2016): 475–93.

^{74.} Birmingham, 'Hannah Arendt's double account of evil', 149.

^{75.} UNHCR, 'Refugee Statistics', last update: 13 June, 2024 <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

is to acknowledge an inherent meaning which propels us to protect natural spaces and create an awareness of human interaction. Phenomenological conceptions of space as we see in Arendt can help us with this task, for it distinguishes between empty, abstract space, allowing us to speak of the general conditions of spatial life prior to particularisation. Primarily because of processual thinking, the natural world stands to suffer a similar fate. Arendt's emphasis on appearance acquires a significance once we are made aware of processual framing or thinking that has come to define our age. Discerning processual patterns requires that one dispenses with surfaces. In other words, one must move beyond the appearance of phenomena. But we are appearing beings and we first need a world which can support appearances.

The introduction of this dissertation noted the fact that there is no currently internationally recognised definition of what a climate refugee is. I believe at least part of the difficulty is due to our historically informed notion of humanity as separate from the natural world. "Whether defined through its intrinsic and essentialized or increasingly monetized and commodified value, biodiversity as a concept is fundamentally separate and distinct from humanity."⁷⁶ Arendt helps us to understand the profound effects this separation has for humanity, especially when suddenly robbed of their place in the world which provides an essential visibility. "The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective."⁷⁷ The loss of habitable space entails a loss of visibility not only for human beings but also the world in general. This twofold loss is part of the increasing trend of rendering some living being as superfluousness to the overall process of survival. Combating this perspective entails a return to surface phenomena, that is, to the visibility of things for, as Arendt tells us, reality is, first and foremost, "of a phenomenal nature."⁷⁸ This helps us understand the sense of loss of reality and dis-orientation displaced peoples experience as a result of being uprooted from their homes. From their homes, and perhaps, one day, in light of the decreasing habitable space, from the earth itself.

⁷⁶. DePuy et al., 'Environmental governance', 955.

⁷⁷. Arendt, *Origins*, 296

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Appendix

Summary (English)

This thesis is a reconstruction of the spatial philosophy of Hannah Arendt. Despite the rich interpretations of her work, her readers tend to undervalue the extent to which she contends with the spatial constitution of worldly existence. According to Arendt, living beings are not merely in the world nor do we simply have a world, rather, we are of the world. This statement by Arendt demonstrates depth of the connection between living beings and spaces they inhabit. This dissertation clarifies what it means to be of the world as Arendt claims. It is unique in revealing a fundamental spatial ontology across Arendt's life's work.

The significance of this realization is best understood in the context of how we traditionally think of space. Perhaps when you first read the word 'space' instinctively the notion of empty space, for example 'outer' space, or mathematical space, as rendered by maps and navigational tools, immediately comes to mind. But these modes of spatial awareness are not our original experience of space. Rather, we inhabit space in such a way that we are co-constituted by it. In other words, who we are and how we live and act shapes and is shaped by our spatial environment. Arendt understood the philosophical consequences of this.

As set out in the *introduction*, failure to sufficiently acknowledge our spatial embeddedness has had political and ecological consequences. The availability of habitable space on the earth continues to decrease. Entire species are disappearing from the earth. Life, human and non-human, are being uprooted from their homes at an alarming rate, triggering a series of un-coordinated political responses across the globe. The insufficiency of our response to these challenges is owed at least partly by a failure to comprehend our existential constitution as part of the earth. This takes us beyond a means-to-end relationship with nature on a biological level.

Understanding what Arendt has to offer requires we attend to the reception of her work. The second chapter outlined two dominant readings of Arendt's philosophy. These were the dualist and temporal readings. Doing so allowed us to understand why Arendt is not traditionally included in discussions concerning our moral responsibility to the environment. In fact, Arendt is seen by some as antithetical to environmental discourse because of her apparent dichotomous conception of space: public/private, nature/world. Furthermore, the reception of Arendt's work tends to focus on the temporal aspects of her thought, at times at the price of the spatial significance of her philosophy. This dissertation addresses this imbalance.

Chapter three provided an overview and analysis of Arendt's most famous work, *The Human Condition* in light of the criticism of her bifurcated notion of space. It clarified key concepts in her thought such as plurality, natality, public and private realms, along with her critique of the modern age. The third chapter explored Arendt's text through a spatial lens in order to clarify the spatial ontology at work in her thought. Doing so also helped to clarify puzzling and sometimes contradictory descriptions of phenomena Arendt uses. It shows the importance of understanding Arendt's methodology when interpreting her work.

The fourth chapter dealt with Arendt's main critique of the modern age: process thinking. Accordingly, modernity is characterised by a tendency to abstract from our surrounds and reduce the world to moments in an overarching development. This process of abstraction and reduction lead to a sense of alienation from the world as well as deleterious environmental consequences. Along with Arendt, chapter four traces the historical and intellectual legacy behind process thinking, its successes and failures and what it means for our spatial condition. It analyses four aspects of process thinking: historical time, hegemonic-scientific worldview, subjectivation, and the process character of action.

Having set out the main problem as Arendt understands it, chapter five shows how she responds to process thinking in her work. It reveals the existence of a more complex and nuanced spatial ontology on her work. The most significant consequences of which occur in how Arendt transforms key metaphysical concepts of life and death, space and time, and reality as it is experienced. Chapter five provides a summary of four aspects of her spatial ontology: earth, the natural world, the human artifice, and the world. Separating and clarifying these spatial aspects allow her readers to better appreciate not only the importance of space for Arendt but also the tensions in her own understanding. This picture of Arendt is different from the one discussed in the second chapter.

Chapter six applies Arendt's spatial philosophy by including her in environmental debates. It demonstrates how her ontology challenges functionalists concepts of life. Instead, she advocates for an understanding and appreciation of phenomenal reality, that is, of the world and all in it as they appear in and of themselves. Rather than attempting to arrive at a 'true', purely scientific understanding of phenomena via invisible processes, for example biological processes, Arendt challenges us to engage with things as they show themselves in the world. To do so requires one not be over reliant on hidden mechanisms or reductive explanations. One helpful step to achieve this understanding is to think spatially. Appreciating the manner of how things manifest to us in a diversity of ways combats the tendency to invoke

reductive and totalizing explanations, instead attending to the visibility of the surface rather than invisible interior.

The dissertation concludes by returning to the political relevance of Arendt's spatial ontology, specifically to phenomenon of forced displacement and uprootedness. Weaknesses in our current understanding of the concept of homelessness, as evinced in our failure to agree upon a definition of what a climate refugee is, is in part due to a misunderstanding of the structures of worldly existence which are not captured by naturalistic conceptions of space. Importantly, the reductive approach usually applied to problem-solving may do more harm than good in certain contexts. It can lead to further alienation and the misrecognition of the nature of being uprooted from one's home and place on the earth. A fuller appreciation of the spatial conditions of world existence is a necessary start if we are to adequately respond to the biggest crisis of our time, a crisis which is fundamentally spatial.

Summary (Dutch)

Dit proefschrift is een reconstructie van de ruimtelijke filosofie van Hannah Arendt. Ondanks de veelzijdige interpretaties van haar werk, hebben haar lezers de neiging om de mate waarin zij de ruimtelijke constitutie van het wereldse bestaan ter discussie stelt, te onderschatten. Volgens Arendt bevinden levende wezens zich niet alleen in de wereld, noch bezitten ze simpelweg een wereld; levende wezens zijn een fundamenteel onderdeel van de wereld. Deze stelling toont aan hoe diepgaand het verband is tussen levende wezens en de ruimtes waarin zij zich bevinden. Dit proefschrift verduidelijkt wat het betekent om van de wereld te zijn volgens Arendts filosofie. Het is uniek in het onthullen van een fundamentele ruimtelijke ontologie in haar levenswerk.

Het onvoldoende erkennen van onze ruimtelijke verankering heeft verstrekkende politieke en ecologische gevolgen. Leefbare ruimtes op aarde blijven onmiskenbaar krimpen en complete plant- en diersoorten verdwijnen. Menselijk en niet-menselijk leven wordt in een alarmerend tempo uit hun oorspronkelijke habitat verdreven. Het resultaat is een wereldwijde golf van ongecoördineerde politieke reacties. De tekortkomingen van ons antwoord op dit vraagstuk zijn voor een groot deel te wijten aan het feit dat we onze existentiële constitutie als deel van de aarde niet voldoende begrijpen. Deze constitutie vereist meer dan een pragmatische en afstandelijke relatie met de natuur.

Om het nut van Arendt in deze context te begrijpen, moeten we aandacht besteden aan hoe haar werk is ontvangen en geïnterpreteerd. Dit proefschrift behandelt twee dominante lezingen van Arendts filosofie: de dualistische en de temporele benadering. Deze toelichting helpt ons te verklaren waarom het werk van Arendt vaak ontbreekt in discussies over onze morele verantwoordelijkheid ten opzichte van het milieu. Door haar schijnbare dichotomie in de opvatting van ruimte – publiek versus privé en natuur versus wereld – wordt Arendt door sommigen zelfs als een antithese van het milieudiscours gezien. Bovendien leggen interpretaties van Arendts werk vaak de nadruk op de temporele aspecten van haar denken, waardoor de ruimtelijke dimensie van haar filosofie vaak over het hoofd wordt gezien. Dit proefschrift beoogt om dit evenwicht te herstellen.

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Curriculum Vitae

Aoife Mc Inerney completed her doctoral research with the Department of Philosophy at Mary Immaculate College (Ireland) and Radboud University (The Netherlands). Her research centres on the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and its intersection with the phenomenological tradition. Her project focuses on the spatial framework in Arendt's philosophy, specifically concerning climate crises and the habitability of the earth for human and non-human life. Her research intersects philosophy, politics, and feminism. The Irish Research Council Postgraduate Scholarship funded her project. During her research, Aoife was also affiliated with Freedomlab thinktank for Dasyim Investment Bank (Amsterdam), where she conducted research for public and private entities on the philosophy of well-being and planetary boundaries. Her recent publications include "Arendtian understanding and Feminism" in *Purple Brains: Feminism at the Limits of Philosophy*, ed. Annabelle Dufourcq, Annemie Halsema, Katrine Smit, Karen Vintage's, Radboud University Press. 2024, and "*Reconceiving Solidarity in the Wake of Plurality*", Editors Dr. Maria Robaszkiewicz, Tobias Albrecht. Publisher: Springer. 2022

