

THE HERMENEUTIC SIGNIFICANCE  
OF HANNAH ARENDT'S CONCEPT  
OF POLITICAL ACTION

by

JOHN E. FALLADOWN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Department of Political Studies  
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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is directed toward the theoretical consistency of Hannah Arendt's concept of political action in relation to her articulation of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Within the context of this analysis two fundamental suppositions are explored. On the one hand, it is argued that Arendt's conceptualization of political action in the vita activa is a valid theoretical tool which is consistently applied within the general framework of her historical and political critique. On the other hand, I claim that her articulation of the vita contemplativa is inconsistent with her concept of action. This apparent tension between her understanding of political action and mental activities is attributed to her misconstrual of the role of metaphor in uniting the active life with the life of the mind. By providing an analysis which outlines the similarities between the functional characteristics of thinking and political action, the claim is made that there is sufficient substantiation in Arendt's own terms to refute her contention that the metaphorical relationship between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa is irreversible. As a conclusion, I posit the notion that thinking and political action, in Arendt's work, are equivalent metaphorical manifestations of phenomenological essences which together constitute a reversible metaphor. The suggested significance of this conclusion to further study of Arendt is that her views on willing and judging should be more closely examined in relation to this expanded conception of the relationship between thinking and political action.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt's justification for her concept of political action was that it gives rise to freedom. She considered freedom as the outcome and the raison d'etre of politics. The central emphasis of her wide-ranging political critique was that since the decline of the pre-philosophic Greek polis, Occidental thought about the proper conduct of politics has moved ever increasingly away from a concept of freedom. Arendt believed the root cause of this trend began with the discovery of philosophy and the subsequent elevation of the status of the vita contemplativa over the vita activa. She perceived the net effect of this development as the acceptance by Western thought of the plausibility of two-world theories, in other words, the simultaneous existence of a visible and invisible sphere of existence. The problem Arendt saw in this acceptance was that, since Plato, the supposed superiority of the metaphysical realm has colored our perception of politics, in that political events have been viewed in light of their consistency with theoretical constructs arising out of the vita contemplativa. The result of viewing politics from this perspective has been the consistent acceptance of rule as the legitimate manifestation of the political realm. Arendt's denigration of this belief rested on her assumption that sovereignty and freedom were antithetical to each other. Hence, her attempt to postulate a concept of political action compatible with the combination of freedom and non-sovereignty.

In order to substantiate her claims for political action, Arendt was faced with the task of proving that assertions of the superiority of the metaphysical realm are without foundation. She approached this problem

from two general perspectives. On the one hand, she cited the loss of certainty in the reality of the physical world, which accompanied the discovery of the Archimedean point, as a proof that the metaphysical realm disappeared at the same time.

With the disappearance of the sensually given world, the transcendent world disappears as well, and with it the possibility of transcending the material world in concept and thought.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, in her work The Life of the Mind, Arendt tried to substantiate the view that our engagement in the mental activities of thinking, willing and judging constitutes a withdrawal from the world, particularly in reference to thinking. Her point was that thinking understood as contemplation is removed from and unconcerned with the world of appearances. As such, thinking is unrelated to politics whose location is in the vita activa, and consequently, the standards of thinking should not be applied to political action. In effect, Arendt's aim was to dismiss the notion that the vita contemplativa was superior to the vita activa in relation to politics. Rather, she postulated that the two realms were equal and directed by different central concerns.

My use of the term vita activa presupposes that the concern underlying all its activities is not the same as and is neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of the vita contemplativa.<sup>2</sup>

The preceding quote forms the frame of reference Arendt used in The Human Condition, in which she enunciated the divisions of the vita activa. In so doing, she tried to evoke a concept of action, distinct from labor and work, which had its causal forces and limits solely within the parameters of the vita activa. This line of argument that political action and its standards are solely located in the vita activa, implicitly and explicitly surfaces throughout Arendt's analysis of the mental activities of the vita contemplativa. I think this is

most poignantly demonstrated in her analysis of the thinking activity in which she asserts that the objects of thought would not exist without a world of appearances, "all thought arises out of experience."<sup>3</sup> Based on this premise Arendt went to suggest that

Since we live in an appearing world, is it not much more plausible that the relevant and the meaningful in this world of ours should be located precisely on the surface?<sup>4</sup>

This is, of course, consistent with her denunciation of the search for meaning in hidden processes, which has resulted from man's belief, since the discovery of Cartesian doubt, that he can only know what he has made himself. Political action, as an activity rooted in the world of appearances, has greater stature in a world in which life's mental and physical functions serve appearance rather than the opposite. It is of note that in this identification of appearance as implicitly superior to the invisible world of thought, Arendt in effect imbued the vita activa with a superiority relative to the vita contemplativa. This is obviously a contradiction of her own assertion that the two realms are equal.

The essence of my thesis rests on this inherent contradiction in Arendt's work. It is my opinion that Arendt, in her attempt to refute the theoretical premises of rule, which she perceived in the development of Western political thought from Plato to the outbreak of totalitarianism, similarly applied a contemplative construct to serve as the parameters of her concept of political action. Despite her attempts to construe political action as an activity located solely in the vita activa, I believe her analysis of thinking is so closely aligned with her concept of political action that the two constitute one and the same thing. In other words, "thinking without a bannister"<sup>5</sup> and political

action (action and speech) are reversible metaphors for each other which constitute the "gap between past and future"<sup>6</sup> or the "nunc stans."<sup>7</sup> My contention is that although Arendt did not successfully demonstrate that political action can function independently of a theoretical construct, the fact that her own theory effectively conceptualizes political action in the same terms as thinking, leaves the validity of her combination of freedom and non-sovereignty intact. In my attempt to elucidate what I believe Arendt did, in comparison to what she said she had done, I take support from her own citation of Kant in reference to discussing Plato,

that it is by no means unusual, upon comparing the thoughts which an author has expressed in regard to his subject ... to find that we<sup>8</sup> understand him better than he has understood himself.

Similarly, I believe my own interpretation of Arendt is consistent with her desire to extol the virtues of political action, while, at the same time, demonstrating that her political thought indicates at least a partial reconciliation of the vita contemplativa with the vita activa, rather than the separation and equalization of the two realms which she envisaged.

It goes almost without saying that my acceptance of the principle that freedom and non-sovereignty co-exist signifies a coeval acceptance that a politics which adheres to the dictates of process automatically incorporates rule as an axiom and is therefore a denial of freedom. I think Arendt's analysis of process as cyclical movement which embodies its own inherently self-destructive tendencies can withstand scrutiny on its own merits. The critical issue concerning Arendt's work must ultimately focus on her combination of freedom and political action. To do so, is to be confronted with the distinction between political and instrumental action, and the impact this necessarily implies relative to

the realities of political organization and its ramifications. As I hope to demonstrate, I think that Arendt's depiction of the thinking activity encompasses a composite of freedom that is tailor-made as a twin of the concept of freedom she envisioned in the political realm. Where I believe she failed in her analysis of freedom is in her limitation of it to the role of the political actor. Typical comments made by her clearly indicate this view: "for to be free and to act are the same"<sup>9</sup> and "the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act."<sup>10</sup> "Men are free - as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom - as long as they act, neither before nor after."<sup>11</sup> Secondly, we can attribute her failure overtly to state the similarities between the thinking activity and political action to the fact that she believed the metaphorical relationship that exists between thinking and the world of appearances is non-reversible. By disproving this latter assumption I believe a reconciliation between thought and political action can be achieved which at once vindicates Arendt's claims even though they are cast in a different light. Because I believe Arendt's concept of political action is valid, yet inadvertently flawed, I also think that my own interpretation of it takes on a hermeneutic significance because it alters its structural content and therefore subsequently redefines the linkages between political action and the elements of the human condition that Arendt analyzed.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life Of The Mind: One/Thinking, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1977, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>Melvin A. Hill (ed.), "On Hannah Arendt" in Hannah Arendt: The Recovery Of The Public World, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1979, p. 336.

<sup>6</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life Of The Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 202.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 202.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup>Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 152-153.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 153.

## CHAPTER 1

### LABOR AND WORK

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an understanding of Hannah Arendt's concepts of labor and work. The exposition of the internal dynamics of these two categories of the vita activa has its principal merit in the delineation of their inspiring principles, such that they can be contrasted later with Arendt's articulation of political action. It is the distinction between the relationship principle has to political action and to the other two categories of the vita activa which lies at the core of Arendt's political theory. By elucidating the principles that govern the activities of labor and work, it is my intention to lay the foundation on which Arendt's extrapolation of their respective characteristics in her critique on the demise of the political realm can be perceived in its consistency. In addition, because Arendt relied heavily on many of the preconceptions that informed the perspective of the pre-philosophic Greek polis, I have provided a brief commentary of its most significant aspects relative to Arendt's own formulations regarding the vita activa. This inclusion is designed to illuminate the affinities Arendt's thought had with the pre-philosophic experience and the instances in which she deviated from it.

A predominant influence on Arendt's concept of political action was her understanding of the organization and inspiring principles of the Greek 'polis.' Fundamental to her location of the political realm in the sphere of the vita activa or active life, was her acceptance of the ancient Greek view that this was its proper place. The interpretation of the vita activa in the Greek polis, which Arendt for the most part

adopted as her theoretical model, pre-dates man's discovery of philosophy and the introduction of the vita contemplativa or life of the mind. The importance of this chronological distinction is that it partially accounts for Arendt's contention that the vita contemplativa and political action are unconnected.

The pre-philosophic Greek understanding of the vita activa ranked labor, work, and action in a hierarchal order. In order of importance, action was pre-eminent, followed by work and labor. Integral to this rank ordering of the vita activa was the pre-philosophic perception of the relationship between men and nature. These early Greeks believed that immortality, meaning "endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in the world"<sup>1</sup>, was the condition of nature and the Olympian gods. Surrounded by the immortality of nature and their gods, mankind's mortality represented to them the hallmark of human existence. In fact, humans were the only mortal beings in pre-philosophic thought. The mortality of man was understood as the distinction between human and animal existence. Whereas animal identity is solely associated with being a member of a species, whose immortality is guaranteed through procreation, humans have both a species identity and an individual identity. Human identity as a species member connotes the same guarantee of immortality coeval with animals, but this guarantee of being forever cannot be extended to humans as individuals and therein resides their distinction as mortal beings. In contrast to the species immortality of human and animal biological life, human mortality is manifest in the individual life stories that span the period from birth to death.

This identifiable distinction of individuals was perceived as a

process which followed a rectilinear path in opposition to the cyclical movement of all other biological life. Consequently, mortality was considered superior to the cyclical movement of biological life and, as such, a uniquely human attribute. The striving for immortality by mortal men was, for the pre-philosophic Greeks, the distinctively human attempt to live up to the standards of the world into which mankind is born.<sup>2</sup>

The quest for immortality represented to the pre-Platonic Greeks the touchstone on which the task and potential greatness of mortal men rested. Through the production of works, deeds, and words, mortal man produced things which belonged, at least to a degree, in a cosmos characterized by immortality. In this ability of mortal man to achieve greatness, whose duration extended beyond individual lifespans, lay the principal distinction between human and animal life. Only through the continual striving to accomplish the immortal deed and fidelity to the principle of excellence did man really distinguish himself as human. Man's 'divine' nature was attained by those who "prefer immortal fame to mortal things"<sup>3</sup> and those who chose to be satisfied by the pleasures freely given by nature bound themselves to live and die like animals. Within this concept of greatness Arendt draws our attention to what she perceived as a central paradox. Whereas all activity in the pre-philosophic polis was judged against the standard of immortality or the everlastingness of things, true human greatness was understood as being located in words and deeds. Hence, the paradox of greatness understood relative to permanence and human greatness resident in the most futile and fleeting of human activities.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Arendt maintains that this paradox did not go unnoticed by early Greek poetry,

and philosophy. Prior to the discovery of philosophy, the initial solution to this dilemma manifested itself in the immortal fame bestowed upon word and deed by poetry.

Immortality, the standard against which human activity was measured in the Greek polis, coincided with the discrimination the early Greeks accorded to the division between the public and private realms. In other words, a self-conscious disjunction between the inspiring principles of activity carried on in the household and in the community. Those activities viewed as conducive to the public realm, works, deeds and words, were considered to be inspired by the principle of immortality. Contrary to this, the private realm had as its inspiring principle necessity. Those activities motivated by needs and wants necessary to ensure survival belonged in the domain of the household, where force and violence were justified as prerequisites to the mastery of necessity. Because necessity is a condition common to all mankind and violence the pre-political means to obtain release from it, the Greeks felt that violence towards others was justified, i.e. ruling over slaves, in order to gain the freedom of the world.<sup>5</sup> Only in overcoming necessity, the principle which ruled all the activities of the household, could the individual liberate himself and participate in communal interests located solely in the public realm.

Antithetical to the structures of necessity, in which the head of the household ruled over the family and its slaves, the pre-eminent activities of the political realm, speech and action, were conducted in an environment devoid of rule. Political freedom in the public realm was an acknowledged renunciation of violence. Participants in the political realm neither ruled nor were ruled. They were equals in the

sense that they were released from the bonds of necessity, subject neither to the demands of life nor to another individual. Speech, as the art of persuasion, was the sine qua non of polis politics. Liberation through violence from the pull of necessity and the establishment of a place of one's own in the world, constituted the pre-conditions that had to be met by the individual to step from the necessity of the private realm to the freedom of the public realm. Only complete liberation from the private allowed for the pursuit of immortality in word and deed, speech and action, focused on common 'inter-ests' in opposition to individual interest.

The crossroads at which the 'humanness' of mankind, manifested in the immortalization of speech and action, coincides with the division of the vita activa or active life between the private and public realms, is the foundation on which Arendt establishes her theoretical analysis of the vita activa and its relationship to the demise of political life. For Arendt, the division between the private and public realms is located at the boundary separating her definitions of labor and work. Alternately stated, the difference is between the labor of our bodies needed to sustain biological life and the work of our hands needed to construct a world common to men, a human artifice. In contradistinction to the Aristotelian and later medieval interpretations of the realm of human affairs or the public, Arendt included work as a legitimate component of the public.<sup>6</sup> This is the most significant deviation she made from the pre-philosophic articulation of the vita activa.<sup>7</sup> Her inclusion of work in the public realm was premised on the fact that homo faber creates the human artifice and, as such, has an intimate connection to the public realm, the 'space of appearances.' It is

noteworthy that this deviation from the pre-philosophic view and its acceptance by Aristotle and others remains consistent with Arendt's insistence that the criterion of immortality be used to distinguish between activities located in the private and public respectively.

In her categorization of labor and work, Arendt maintained that each is directly tied to one of the essential conditions of human existence.

Labor is,

the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. <sup>8</sup> The human condition of labor is life itself.

We see from this that Arendt's concept of labor is essentially a description of man's relationship with the earth and nature. The inspiring principle of labor is the preservation of life, a task dictated by the biological needs of the human body. Similar to all other organic and inorganic entities in the universe, human life is directly tied to the cyclical movement of nature depicted in the continual cycle of growth and decay. Those things necessary to sustain the life process are the least durable of worldly things. Whether consumed by the human life process or subject to decay, the staples of survival have a worldly existence of short duration. Moreover, the staples of survival which are labor's products do not stay long enough in the world substantially to differentiate their worldly character from the cyclical movement of nature. Labor's products do not have the permanence necessary to sustain the endurance of rectilinear movement in opposition to the pull of cyclical movement. Arendt claimed that worldliness, the manifestation of rectilinear movement, is a necessary

condition in order to identify cyclical nature.

Without a world into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness<sup>9</sup> of the human as of all other animal species.

Arendt's contention is that the transient nature of labor's products is incapable of producing the condition of worldliness. The twofold character of nature's cyclical movement, growth and decay, is mirrored in the dual nature of life's maintenance, labor and consumption.

It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent.<sup>10</sup>

The affinity of the cyclical movement of nature and man's biological process condemns labor to constant repetition, a cycle without any real beginning or end, which only ceases with the death of human life.

In the human life process, the expenditure of life's energy in labor's production for consumption is in turn compensated for by the regeneration of new labor power that results from consumption. The human life process is destructive toward nature in that labor seeks to incorporate it for consumption. On the other hand, however, the passage of labor's products through the biological process of consumption returns to nature products which augment its cyclical movement. Likewise, nature embodies aspects of support and destruction in its relationship to mankind. While nature renders sustenance to the species man, it also destroys, wears down the life process of individual men, culminating in death. Hence, whereas the interaction of man and nature sustains the immortal character of nature and species man, it in turn sacrifices the agents of both, nature's products and individual humans, to the repetitive cycle of growth and decay.

While the dynamic of growth and decay dominates the internal mechanics and interaction of both nature and labor, their respective roles vis a vis the human artifice in effect divide this cycle into equal segments. To preserve the existence of a human world against the encroachment of decay necessitates the monotonous repetition of chores. Under these circumstances, labor and nature stand in antagonistic positions to one another. While labor provides the care to nurture and maintain the growth of the human artifice, it stands in opposition to the destructiveness that nature's growth and decay attempts to impose on the human world. This second task of laboring, the protection of the human artifice from the ravages of nature, represents labor's connection to the human world. Nonetheless, it is a much less immediate concern than the urgency of survival, the predominant force motivating labor in its relationship to nature.

It is the pre-eminent urgency of maintaining the life process that Arendt said constituted the inspiring principle of labor. From this initial assumption, she proceeded to draw a portrait of labor as an activity that is private, indigenously gratuitous and worldless. One of her primary justifications for calling labor an activity both private and worldless, was rooted in the striking similarity she drew between the laboring activity and the experience of pain. Not only are labor's products almost immediately consumed and consequently the least tangible of worldly things, but the continuous need for repetition of the labor cycle and the intrinsic endurance needed to do so, characterize labor as painful effort. Arendt cites pain as the most worldless of human experiences.

In any event, pain and the concomitant experience of release from pain are the only sense experiences that are so independent from the world that they do not contain the experience of any worldly object.<sup>11</sup>

Her point being that the experience of pain and release from pain are exclusively events in which the body only senses itself. The conclusion she draws from these experiences is that if pain and release from pain engulfed the whole of human perception, mankind would be unable to have any sensual conception of an outer world at all. Analogously, Arendt postulated a correlation between this supposition and the painful effort inherent to labor, thereby imbuing the laboring activity with the same characteristics of intense privacy and worldlessness.

The attribute which gives labor its own internal gratification is labor's fertility. Reproduction of one's own life and that of the human species does not demand full-time engagement in the laboring activity. This limited need for the activity of labor allows for both the "prescribed cycle of painful exhaustion and pleasurable regeneration"<sup>12</sup> that "follow each other as closely as producing and consuming the means of subsistence, so that happiness is a concomitant of the process itself, just as pleasure is a concomitant of the functioning of a healthy body."<sup>13</sup> In other words, while labor to support life involves a cyclical process of painful effort, exhaustion, and regeneration, the limits of life's demands allow for the production of surplus or abundance, as witnessed in the provisions made for the reproduction of the species. Happiness is founded on the abundance derived from labor's fertility.

In sum, Arendt's depiction of the human activity labor, leaves us with the impression of an element of the human condition that can be

carried on in isolation. Dominated by the necessity of the biological needs of life, labor is engaged in a cyclical and repetitive process. This dreary repetition of a cycle which produces nothing of lasting permanence demands an endurance pervaded by painful effort. The hidden and uncommunicable processes of the biological nature of the human body resemble nothing so much as the intense privacy and worldlessness associated with the experiences of pain and release from pain. Consequently, the actual activity of labor aside, the inward directedness of its functions to satisfy cyclical and repetitive needs gives labor an aura of futility in relation to the demands of producing anything of worldly permanence. Moreover, happiness as a concomitant fulfilment founded on the abundance of labor's fertility serves to close the circle of an internally gratifying activity. For these reasons, Hannah Arendt viewed labor, the domain of animal laborans, as properly belonging in the private realm because the self-oriented motives of the laboring activity are incompatible with an immortal world held in common and the plurality necessary for political action to take place in it.

Such is not the case for Arendt's perception of work.

Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. 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.<sup>14</sup>

Work, in contrast to labor, does not mix with but, rather, makes and works upon nature. The products of work's fabrication constitute the human artifice. By and large, they are primarily, although not exclusively, objects of use whose quality of durability lends stability

and solidity to the human world. This durability is not of an eternal nature in the sense that, it is subject to the life process as is everything else. If the use we make of work's products does not use it up, they will eventually return into nature's cyclical process through decay. Thus, it is not an absolute durability that Arendt attributes to the products of homo faber, but a relative one, based on the durability of work's objects compared to those of labor and the duration of individual lifespans.

Although usage wears out durability, it does not assume the same immediacy of destructiveness that consumption does in relation to the products of labor. Moreover, whereas the products of both labor and work individually return to nature's overall process, unlike the products of labor, the objects of work can be replaced by succeeding generations thereby maintaining the human artifice intact. Durability accords the man-made things of the world a status of objectivity in relation both to the makers and users of them, and, also in distinction to the life process. Because durability allows the objects of the world to outlast the lives of the men who produce and use them, they assume a relatively independent status. Likewise, the capacity of objects to withstand, stand against, the devouring nature of the life process, at least for an appreciable duration, enhances the appearance of objectivity that the human artifice has in contrast to nature. It is this objectivity in comparison to the subjectivity of individual beings which allows for the possibility of a world held in common. In contradistinction to the relentless compulsion inherent in the cyclical movement of nature, the enduring stability of the human artifice offers a touchstone on which the subjectivity of individual beings can be

secured. Only the contrast between a world of durable things and the life process allows for nature to be viewed as something objective. "Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity."<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that an absolute reification has never occurred, Arendt contended that the activity of work consists in reification. Arendt's distinction between the effects use and consumption have on durability entails that there is an appreciable difference not only between these two activities but also between the things of the world to which they are related. In an analogous sense, this is an extension of the distinction she assigned to the difference between the inspiring principles of labor and work. This supposition is most evident in her consideration of man's relationship to nature in the context of man's destruction of nature and his relationship to materials used in the activities of labor and work. Whereas destruction is inherent in the repetitive cycle of labor and consumption, and therefore, symmetrical with the devouring character of nature's cyclical movement, the relationship of destruction to work is indirect rather than direct. The focus of fabrication is on the creation of the object to be made, the destruction of nature which accompanies work is incidental to the goal of fabrication, whereas destruction pervades the entire cycle of labor. Similarly, the materials on which the activities of labor and work are performed, also differ. Labor's interaction with nature is in essence a joint participation in the cyclical movement of the life process, a participation in which labor's products are gathered from the freely given bounty of nature and returned via the biological processes of the body without ever having interrupted or left the

confines of the life-cycle. This is not true Arendt said for the material which is worked upon to fashion homo faber's products. On the contrary, the material used to be worked upon is from its inception removed from the life-cycle. This removal puts an end to the cyclical movement of the life process of that material used for fabrication. In this sense, although work is a destroyer of nature's cycle, at least temporarily, its very wresting of its materials from nature gives these materials a static existence unattainable in life's natural cycle. The significance of this element of violence in both labor and work is that while animal laborans under the dominion of nature is supreme over all other living creatures, homo faber rules supreme over the whole earth. This violence associated with work is the most fundamental aspect in the demonstration of human strength. As such, it is the very opposite of the pain and exhaustion experienced in the activity of labor.

The central assumption which Arendt made in her separation and differentiation between the faculties of labor and work had one primary source. She viewed all of her multifarious distinctions as mere refinements of the basic dichotomy between the inspiring principles of labor and work. Labor is motivated by the internal principle of necessity and work has its principle in the external model of what is to be fabricated. What guides the fabrication process is a mental model in the 'eye of the mind' or a blueprint already fabricated by work. In either case, this guiding model is both external to the fabricator and occurs prior to the actual work process. That this model survives the finished product gives fabrication its inherent multiplicity. This potential for multiplication is different from the repetition in labor in that it is conscious and produces things which are stable and remain

in the world for an appreciable duration.

The actual work process itself is completely determined by the demands of means and ends, to which there is a definite beginning and end. Work's end product assimilates the fabrication process within itself, bringing the process to an end, while at the same time, the fabrication process is simply a means to attain that end. All that goes on in the fabrication process, its materials and tools, is decided upon by the requirements indigenous to the autonomous model of the finished product. With the appearance of this durable end product in the human artifice, the process comes to an end, and only bears repeating if the craftsman must maintain his subsistence or in response to the demands of the marketplace. It is the dual characteristics of a definite beginning and predictable end which serve to differentiate work from both labor and action. It need not succumb to the repetition of labor and in contradistinction to action it has a predictable end. Homo faber not only exerts control over nature, but over himself and his products. He has the power both to initiate and destroy the things which constitute the human artifice. This freedom of action rests on the fact that the products of fabrication are neither inspired by the necessity of sustaining the life process nor dependent for its initiation on others.

The person of homo faber engaged in fabrication is a solitary figure. Isolation is the sine qua non of the work process because the model of the end product which initiates this process is an individualistic concept. In the preparation of this model the fabricator judges all means to be used in terms of the desired end and, similarly, the actual work process is determined in the same way by the model. Consequently, the inclusion of the many in the work process is

either a disruption of the work process caused by the conflict between many models, or else, the process is so divided into simplified functions, whose focus does not extend beyond the immediate task, that the individuals performing them can no longer be said to be engaged in work. In either case, the removal of the fabricator from his isolation cannot but end in failure to produce the finished product according to the original model.

As much as isolation is contrary to the condition of plurality in action, Arendt's basic reason for excluding the inspiring principle of work, the external model, as a guide to political action hinges on the notion that the standards employed in the means-end dynamic of the work process are destructive of the very world they seek to create. Work's instrumentalization of means to produce an end carries within it the all-pervasive principle of utility. Utility, as a perspective from which to view the man-made world, in effect, robs the products of work of their intrinsic value. Once utility becomes the standard against which the products of homo faber are judged, the end products of work no longer have meaning in themselves but only as the means to new ends. This devaluation of work's finished products to the status of means alters the relationship that process has to work. Rather than ending in the finished product and simply being the means to achieve this end, utility's instrumentalization of work's products introduces process determined by necessity. In this way, the inspiring principle of work when used to judge the suitability of fabrication's products in the world, becomes an unending process as means become ends which become new means. Arendt diagnosed this problem as the failure of homo faber to distinguish between utility and meaningfulness, "in order to" and "for

the sake of."<sup>16</sup> The continuing chain of means and ends implicit in utilitarianism understands the "in order to" as the content of the "for the sake of." In this process the products of fabrication no longer sustain their stability in the world because as soon as they become ends they are viewed by homo faber as means to new ends. This is an inadequate standard against which to assess meaning because,

Meaning, on the contrary, must be permanent and lose nothing of its character, whether it is achieved or, rather, found by man or fails man and is missed by him.<sup>17</sup>

Arendt further substantiated her argument against the perspective of homo faber as the standard of the world in her examination of the term 'value.' While homo faber must remain isolated to produce his work, he only establishes his relationship with others by placing his products in the market. Although unlike the political realm, the exchange market is nonetheless the equivalent of a public realm for homo faber. The crossing over from fabricator to the owner of commodities is synonymous with homo faber's leaving his isolation to appear in the public realm of the exchange market with his products. Inherent in this crossing over is a change of emphasis from use value to exchange value. Prior to its appearance in the public realm an object is manufactured in isolation for private use. Once it enters the public realm this use value is overshadowed by the proportional relationship that exists in weighing the benefits of processing one object in preference to another. This public assessment of the value of objects gives them their exchange value. It is neither a result of the production process nor the function of the product which determines its value. Exchange value is directly determined by the appearance of the object in the public realm.

The point, which Arendt wanted to make about exchange value, was that its universal relativity based on the ever-changing assessments of supply and demand could not produce anything as concrete as an absolute value. This inability translates into a similarly negative relationship to the intrinsic value of work objects as that demonstrated in the standard set by a means-end category. What is paradoxical about the connection between objects and exchange values is that homo faber's appearance with his products into the market inevitably leads to exchange, whose internal relativity is antithetical to the absolute standards required by fabrication's models.

In the cases of both the principle of homo faber as a standard for the world and the relativity of exchange value, Arendt saw a direct threat to what she considered the purest embodiment of the activity of work. For Arendt, art represented the most complete reification attainable by work. Its outstanding permanence gives it the character of being the most worldly of tangible things. Art's durability is almost invulnerable in its relationship to the decay of natural processes because in contrast to mere use objects, art is not created to accommodate use by living beings, a use which would destroy its existence. In essence, it is art's combination of supreme worldliness and uselessness which imbue it with its extraordinary permanence and stability throughout the ages. The purity and clarity manifested in the sheer durability of art works is the connecting link Arendt perceived between the creation of an immortal home by mortal hands. Only in homo faber's ability to create a world whose standards transcend the functionalism of consumption and the utility of objects for use can there be any stable home for mortal men. Art, as the most complete

reification of this human artifice and example of its immortality is doubly susceptible to both functionalist and utilitarian principles as standards for the world. Art is at one and the same time the premiere expression of the human artifice while serving neither the purposes of consumption or use. Consequently, the conclusion Arendt derived from the example of art was that the standards which need to be adapted to preserve the immortality of the human artifice lie in neither work nor labor.

In conclusion, the principal significance that can be derived from Arendt's delineation of the activities of work and labor is that their inspiring principles are inadequate to preserve the human artifice and to guide the activities within it. Nonetheless, they do as categories represent the division Arendt perceived between the public and private realms, the differentiation between interests which are one's own and those which are communal. In contrast to the pre-philosophic Greek belief that only action in its attainment of immortality adequately expressed the uniqueness of human life, Arendt readily included work as a legitimate participant in the public realm because the human artifice also has an immortality of its own.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History" in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op. Cit., p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History", Op. Cit., p. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op. Cit., p. 31.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>It is pertinent to note that there is a distinction in Arendt's thought between the public and political realms. The public realm is the domain in which the activities of work and action co-exist. Only the political realm is solely limited to the parameters which regulate Arendt's concept of political action. This distinction is particularly relevant to those critics who suggest that Arendt does not include strategic or instrumental concerns such as economics in her conception of the public realm. Cf. George Kateb, "Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," Political Theory, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977 and Bhikhu Parekh, Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1981, Chapter 5 and Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," Political Theory, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1981.

<sup>8</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op. Cit., p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 154.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 155.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DEMISE OF THE POLITICAL REALM

#### A. THREE SOURCES OF THE WESTERN TRADITION

Hannah Arendt's overall political critique is fundamentally rooted in the contrast between her concept of political action and her perception of the developments in Western political thought since the decline of the Greek city state. Without digressing into a discussion of whether or not her political theory represented a nostalgic desire to return to the politics of the Greek polis, there is really no dispute that her theory is founded on certain prominent ideas which were present in the conduct of political activity in the pre-philosophic polis. Foremost amongst the ideas she adopted were the separation of the private and public realms as distinct and mutually exclusive spheres of human activity. Concomitantly, her articulation of the activities of the vita activa, namely labor, work and action, was focused directly on the relationship of these activities to the dichotomy between the private and public. It was in the context of believing that this dichotomy has become blurred that Arendt viewed the tradition of Western political thought, since the disappearance of the polis, as marking a gradual demise of the political realm. The upshot of this analysis was that she believed that political action as conceived in the polis represented the embodiment of true political activity.

An overview of Arendt's political critique can be basically divided into two parts. On the one hand, her analysis was an examination of the developments in the tradition of Western political thought, beginning with Platonic philosophy and its subsequent interpretation by Roman and Christian thought up until the modern age. On the other hand, the second part of her analysis focused on what she called the modern age, a

period which began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the revolt by philosophers against the tradition and the end of the tradition with the emergence of totalitarian domination in the twentieth century. As I hope to demonstrate, the premise of Arendt's critique of these two periods is directly tied to the theoretical formulations she constructed in her concepts of work and labor. In both instances, the thread of her thought links the theoretical perspectives of these two periods with the inspiring principle of either animal laborans or homo faber. In general, her discussion of the tradition connects it to the mentality of homo faber and her account of the modern age rests on its similarity to the world view of animal laborans.

Arendt saw the initial beginning of the political realm's demise in the ancient Greek discovery of philosophy. The rise of philosophy signalled to her the first step in what has been a continuing deterioration in the status of politics. In contrast to the pre-philosophic emphasis on the vita activa as the all encompassing domain of human activity, philosophy with its discovery of the vita contemplativa brought with it not only a new understanding of human activity, but, also, a corresponding denigration of the vita activa. In essence, the eventual Greek acceptance of the superiority of contemplation of the eternal in the vita contemplativa had its roots in the contest between the merits of the eternal and the immortal. Immortality as the goal of mortal man's works, deeds and words, embodied for the pre-philosophic Greeks, man's attempt to measure up to the immortal universe which surrounded him. However, with the discovery of contemplation, coupled with the Greek distinction between things which are as they are in themselves and those which are the creations of man,

it became accepted 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.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, this eternity is only visible to man in the quiet of contemplation wherein the consciousness of human movements and activities is removed. This quiet of contemplation constituted a withdrawal and turning away from the distinctions and articulations of the vita activa. Contemplation thereby entailed removal from the world of human affairs and the plurality of men. Because contemplation as an activity needs quiet isolation, the unquiet of the vita activa from the philosophic perspective, is an annoying disturbance characteristic of activities incapable of releasing themselves from the fetters of earthly existence to experience the freedom inherent to the contemplation of the eternal. Consequently, from the philosopher's viewpoint, the vita activa was necessarily inferior and subservient to the needs and wants of contemplation. Arendt contended that this development served to undercut the status which politics had held in the pre-philosophic polis. In contrast to its pre-eminent position amongst the activities of the vita activa in the pre-philosophic view, in the philosopher's vision, politics was relegated to an equal status with labor and work.

The primary significance that Arendt attached to philosophy's elevation of the vita contemplativa over the vita activa was that it shifted the criteria for the conduct of political activity from those of action to those of homo faber. The premise on which she based this argument was the similarity she drew between the means-end focus of homo faber and the Platonic application of the philosopher's relationship to politics epitomized in the cave parable of THE REPUBLIC. In the cave

parable, one of the inhabitants is able to free himself from the fetters which bind the cave residents and limit their vision to only those shadows and images which appear on the wall in front of them. Having freed himself from this confinement, this lone individual is able to turn around and in the light of a fire is able to view the things in the cave as they really are. On leaving the cave, the individual's vision is directed toward the clear sky where, illuminated by the sun, he becomes aware of the ideas which explain "the true and eternal essence of the things in the cave."<sup>2</sup> Finally, the individual must return to the cave and leave behind the vision of eternal essences. The cave parable represents the becoming of the philosopher. Having freed himself from the fetters of human activity in the vita activa, the philosopher is able to contemplate the eternal, but this escape from human affairs is only temporary, as is, the easily disturbed activity of contemplation, and the philosopher returns to viewing the real world. However, upon his return, the philosopher still retains his vision of the eternal and must somehow find an accommodation between it and the vision held by those in the world of human affairs who have no understanding of these eternal ideas.

Plato's solution to this need for accommodation was the claim to rule of the philosopher-king. Arendt identifies the 'utopian rule of reason' associated with the philosopher-king as the closest that Greek thinking came to a concept of authority which could be used as a standard to sanction political activity.<sup>3</sup> The establishment of standards or models that accompanied Plato's application of philosophy to politics had, in Arendt's view, its basis in the conflict which developed between the philosopher and the polis. She posited the notion

that Plato's claim to rule by the philosopher-kings had its motives not so much in a desire to preserve the polis and politics, but rather, in the philosopher's attempt to protect philosophy and the philosopher. The perceived need for this protection was an extension of the conflict between the philosopher and the polis. Coeval with the return of the philosopher from "the bright sky of ideas" to "the dark cave of human existence" is the need for an accommodation between the two. However, the transcendence of and loss of orientation to human affairs in the philosopher's metaphysical journey is an obstruction to the philosopher's attempt to communicate what he has seen. As a result of this predicament, the philosopher's life is placed in real jeopardy and as a consequence he resorts to using the standards and measures of his philosophic vision as a means of domination in order to save his life.

It is in the attempt of the philosopher to use the standards and measures of the philosophic vision to assert his rule that Arendt noted the striking similarity it bore to the relationship the craftsman's model has to the fabrication process. In the same sense in which the craftsmans's model serves as the external standard against which the success or failure of the fabricated product is judged, the philosopher's vision becomes an external and absolute standard against which human behavior is measured. There is a problem, however, which obstructs implementation of the rule of reason. The powers of persuasion are limited in their capacity to influence the activities of men. As a consequence, Plato began a search to resolve this dilemma. Arendt surmised that he must have quickly discovered that the power of self-evident truths, which coerce the mind without the use of violence, are far more effective than persuasion or argument. Because reason

compels only the few, the problems of establishing a legitimate political authority that eschews violence, but has the coercive power of reason, becomes a task for the philosopher in his attempt to guide the multitude of men who are incapable of receiving the truth of reason. Hence, Arendt viewed Plato's use of examples such as the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, the master and the slave, or the physician and the patient as attempts to establish a legitimate coercive principle which would evoke the same authority as that inherent in these pairings.

What Arendt found constant in Plato's examples was the fact that either the coercive power was based on compliance rooted in a confidence inspired by expert knowledge, such as the physician and patient, or the relationship of ruler to ruled was a pre-established condition between two categories of beings, as demonstrated by the shepherd to the sheep or the master to the slave. In either case, the determining factor which maintains the distinction between ruling and being ruled is the stark inequality between the two halves of each of these relationships. This identification of inequality as the common denominator did not, however, satisfy Plato's search for a legitimate coercive principle. He was looking for a principle on which the compelling element in a relationship was pre-established before the issue of any commands. Although his examples reflecting glaring inequalities met this prerequisite, such was not the inevitable result in equal relationships. Finally, he resolved his dilemmas by creating the myth of rewards and punishments in the afterlife, the external measures against which human behavior would be judged.

Arendt attached great importance to Plato's resolution of his

dilemma in terms of those aspects of his thought which she felt became rooted in the Western tradition of political thought. At the heart of her condemnation of Plato is her attack on the central proposition she felt had evolved from his teachings, namely, that there is justification for rulership in the political realm. Arendt believed that Plato's application of philosophy to politics was in itself a repudiation of the inspiring principle of philosophy. Her rationale for this conclusion was that philosophy begins as an exercise to determine the essence of Being and culminates in the contemplation of the "beautiful" as outlined in the cave parable. At no point prior to this discovery does the philosopher countenance any practical applicability as a result of his activity. On the contrary, the philosopher's activity is an effort to discover meaning that will illuminate the darkness of human affairs. The difference that Arendt saw between this internal motivation of philosophy and Plato's application of it to politics was the displacement of the "beautiful", as the highest idea under which all others are subsumed, by the idea of absolute "good".<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of Arendt's political critique, the important recognition to be drawn from this substitution is that it was undertaken by the philosopher to ensure his continued safety, rather than as a direct result of any real or imagined impetus prompted by activities in the political realm.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of rule and its ramifications, were then, for Arendt, neither the motive of philosophy or derivative from any political activity. Plato's deliberate modification of his philosophy to provide a useful political theory, as interpreted by Arendt, had according to her no theoretical justification. Nonetheless, Arendt wanted to point out that regardless of this fact, rule has been accepted by the

tradition of Western political thought as an integral and necessary aspect of political activity. She considered this acceptance symptomatic of a general inclination to apply the inspiring principle of fabrication or making to the conduct of politics. Most clearly, she saw this trend manifested in two particular examples. From the various examples Plato gleaned from human affairs in order to construct a universally valid principle that would coerce political obedience without violence, Arendt believed we have adopted the attitude that politics is an activity best left to the experts. In other words, acceptance, for instance, of the automatic inequality between the master and the slave, or the ruler and the ruled, in which the master knows what to do and issues commands that the slave obeys and executes, has an acute political significance. It is, in effect, a distinction between knowing and doing as "separate and mutually exclusive functions."<sup>6</sup> In fact, Arendt said that in THE REPUBLIC the separation of the two represents the political character of two different classes of men. The obvious parallel being that the relationship of knowing to doing is the same as that in which homo faber conceives the model which guides the fabrication process or the relationship between homo faber and animal laborans. Likewise, the outstanding characteristic of authoritarian governments, being that they invoke the sanction and authority to exercise power based on the law of nature or divine decree, is inherently identical to the concept of making in Plato's application of the philosophic vision to politics.

This tendency of authoritarian governments to refer to an external authority is also indicative of a second concept Arendt felt had been carried over from the teachings of Plato to contemporary thought on

politics. Lodged in the transcendent world views of the philosopher is the inclination to see the 'humanness' of mankind judged in accordance with a standard based on seeing philosophic truth. Man's humanity is judged on this attempt to see. In summary, the rule of the philosopher-king or the direction of human affairs by an external source,

is justified not only by an absolute priority of seeing over doing, of contemplation over speaking and acting, but also by the assumption that what makes men human is the urge to see. Hence, the interest of the philosopher and the interest of man qua man coincide; both demand that human affairs, the results of speech and action, must not acquire a dignity of their own but be subjected to the domination of something outside their realm.

Implicit in this quote is Arendt's hostility to the elevation of the vita contemplativa over the vita activa. As corollaries to this perceptual shift she felt that Western political thought has since Plato been influenced by the concepts of fabrication and transcendent authority. In her analysis of this development, she wished to point out that both of these developments were antithetical to the pre-philosophic concept of the polis. In fact, she cites Aristotle to substantiate her position that even after the discovery of philosophy the antipathy to the idea of rule in polis politics lingered on.<sup>8</sup> Although she admits that Aristotle did attempt to introduce some form of authority into politics, as in the case where the rule of nature determines that the old should rule over the young, she points out that Aristotle himself did not equate this to rule between those active in polis politics. He still maintained the Greek distinction between rule as it relates to the private realm and as it relates to the association of equal rulers in politics, the latter being equal in the sense that they were free from

the necessity of life and ruled over individual households. Lastly, Arendt was determined to show the influence of Plato not on the Greeks but rather on later Roman and Christian thinking. Her conviction was that because polis politics did not recognize any type of authority not arising out of immediate political experience, the attempt of Greek philosophy to impose its dictates on the polis were unsuccessful. On the other hand, Arendt did think that due to certain predispositions of Roman and Christian thought, the negative implications of philosophy on politics derived from Plato's cave parable have had a continuing influence on the tradition of Western political thought.

Central to Arendt's interpretation of Roman politics is the assumption that its fundamental premise was rooted in the sacredness of the act of foundation. What was peculiar to the Roman concept of foundation is that it was directly tied to the city of Rome itself. The foundation of Rome was considered an unrepeatable and unique event. Rome's preservation and remembrance of its founding became the determining factors in Roman politics. Similarly, the pre-eminent Roman divinities were Janus, the god of beginning, and Minerva, the goddess of remembrance. Reverence for the effort needed to found Rome in combination with reverence for the sanctity of home and hearth constituted the political aspect of Roman religion.

In contrast to Greece, where piety depended upon the immediate revealed presence of the gods, here religion literally meant re-ligare: to be tied back obligated, to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity.

The almost identical activities of religion and politics were both integrally connected to the foundation of a particular event and its

remembrance. It was in this context, according to Arendt, that the Romans understood authority in terms of augmenting this founding. This authority was invested in the elders who did not so much direct events as interpret their relationship to the original founding.

Central to the role of the elders was the understanding that a dichotomy existed between authority and power. Their role was perceived as the giving of advice which needed neither the voice of command nor external force to be given credence. Instead, the role of the elders was viewed as analogous to the gods, who did not direct human affairs but simply voiced approval or disapproval of men's actions. Over the course of Roman history the pronouncements of the elders became precedents which were tied to the original founding and were used to judge future events. In this sense, they were used as "authoritative models for actual behavior"<sup>10</sup> or "the moral political standard as such."<sup>11</sup> The cumulative effect of these precedents was the establishment of a tradition that functioned hand in hand with authority.

Tradition, therefore, served to sanctify the past. Its transmission from one generation to the next, augmented the authority generated by those who had witnessed the original founding. As a result, as long as the tradition was allowed to proceed uninterrupted, the force of authority remained sacrosanct. Given the predisposition of the Romans to ground their politics in the original foundation and the precedents of tradition which flowed from it, contravention of this tradition was unthinkable. Arendt was quick to point out that "the notion of a spiritual tradition and of authority in matters of thought and ideas is here derived from the political realm and therefore essentially

derivative..."<sup>12</sup> By these words, Arendt was suggesting that the inherent spirituality and authority connected to the interplay of Roman politics, religion, and tradition laid the groundwork for a similar perspective on the domain of thoughts and ideas. Particularly relevant is her reference to the fact that Roman conceptualizations of philosophy stemmed from the importance that authority and tradition held in the political realm. Moreover, it was the impetus of politics with its demand for authoritative examples, which Arendt said caused the Romans to search for similar models in the realm of thought and ideas, and their even eventual acceptance of Greek models of theory, philosophy, and poetry.

The Roman application of authority and tradition to matters of thought and ideas is important in another sense as well. Arendt saw the Roman application of political authority and tradition to philosophy in the same theoretical light in which she perceived the application of Platonic philosophy to politics. She believed that Plato's application of philosophical ideas to politics has influenced Western political theory generally and, the Roman conception of political spirituality based on authority and tradition has dominated the greater part of Western philosophical thought. Arendt was wont to indicate that this curious disjunction between the source and theory of both Western politics and philosophy was a result of the fact that the original political origin and experiences stimulating these theories had been forgotten. What had been forgotten was the conflict between the philosopher and polis in political theory and the direct link between foundation and the Roman trinity of authority, tradition and religion in its philosophical context. In short, she was saying that Western

political and philosophical theory have forgotten their political roots.

The last major development that Arendt saw in the Western tradition of thought was the amalgamation of the Platonic and Roman distortions of political theory within the parameters of Christianity. Following the decline of the Roman Empire, Arendt suggested that the Church took on the mantle of Rome's political and spiritual heritage. She drew an analogy between the reverence of the Romans for the act of foundation and the concomitant attachment through tradition to an anchorage in the past, and the establishment of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The analogy lies in the fact that the life of Christ pinpoints the foundation of the Church and the testimony of the apostles as it has been handed down through following generations represents the tradition of the Church based on the witness of its founding fathers. Based on this interpretation, Arendt concluded that the continuity of the Roman trinity of authority, tradition and religion survived the demise of the empire in the guise of Christianity. As a further substantiation of this analogy, Arendt noted that upon the entry of the church into the political vacuum left by the fall of Rome during the fifth century, it quickly acknowledged the Roman distinction between authority and power. Similar to the precedent set by the Roman elders in the Senate, the Church claimed the role of established authority and left power to the princes of the world. The realignment of the authoritative foundation for politics from a political to a religious event was, according to Arendt's interpretation, the significant difference between the two conceptions of authority, tradition and religion. In effect, although Christianity essentially embodied the same theoretical framework as that

which stemmed from the Roman belief in one specific and unique act of foundation, the shift from political to religious founding event caused a redefined articulation of political activity. Notwithstanding the Church's acceptance of the distinction between authority and power, and the thereby supposed separation of the religious and the secular, Arendt contended that the introduction of a religious event as an authoritative foundation robbed politics of the authority it possessed in its classical sense. Additionally, she saw this deflation in the authority of politics as the beginning of what has become the inability of political structures to sustain their durability, continuity and permanence.

There is a distinct similarity between what Arendt perceived as the damage done to political thought by Platonic philosophy and the integration of the political and spiritual heritage of the Romans by Christianity. In both instances, political directives are derived from non-political sources. This stands in direct contrast to the central role political foundation played in the Roman conception of human affairs. What is particularly interesting about Arendt's analysis of the politicization of the Church is that, not only did she suggest that the Christian religion changed in the process, but also, that Christianity's successful integration of the Roman heritage could not have been accomplished without the existence of Plato's political doctrine.

Arendt cited early Christianity as being characterized by anti-political and anti-institutional inclinations. In other words, a group of believers whose faith rested in the resurrection after death and who correspondingly shunned participation and interest in worldly

affairs. With the entry of the church into the political realm, the belief in resurrection and the Hebrew obedience to God's direct commands became overshadowed by the foundation event of Christ's life story. Arendt postulated that the significance of this foundation was that Christians realized their faith had spawned something which could be recognized as a distinct historical event to which future generations could be bound back. This binding back was augmented, Arendt thought, by Augustine's statement "the seat of the mind is in memory."<sup>13</sup> Hence, her point was that the analogous combination of authority and tradition tied to a past event in Christianity, as in the Roman perspective, represented a theoretical framework amenable to the continuance of the Roman spirit. What stood in the way of the complete assimilation of Rome's political perspective was the twofold intransigence of the Christian belief in revealed commandments and a transcendent authority.

Arendt believed that the Catholic Church was able to resolve this dilemma by using Plato's philosophic truths as standards for human behavior. In distinction to the judgments Plato made about proper measures for political behavior, based on his philosophic intuition, Christian dogmatism regarding revealed truths and a transcendent authority could go one step better. Christianity found itself, with its religious foundation, able to interpret the Platonic susceptibility for belief in universal measures as the awareness preceding the actual revelation of these standards and their source in a transcendent god. It is in this context, that Arendt saw the final amalgamation of the Roman and Platonic political perspectives. A melding of the Roman political concept of authority tied to a past foundation with the standards and measures implicit in Platonic political philosophy.

Arendt believed the capstone that served as the theoretical cement for this religious articulation of human existence rested in the Christian adoption of the Platonic myths about the hereafter.

Once the Church entered the political sphere it encountered the same difficulty Plato had in finding a political principle to control the masses. Christianity, too, was compelled to find a means to control the political behavior of a multitude incapable of perceiving self-evident truth and yet curiously susceptible to the imaginative myths of poets and storytellers. As a consequence, Arendt said that Christianity quickly took heed of the success that the spectre of hell in Platonic myth had in controlling the people in accordance with the tenets of truth, even if they could not recognize truth themselves. This addendum to Christian doctrine gave it an authority unrivalled by any secular authority. In fact, Arendt cited Tertullian and Thomas Aquinas to suggest that Christian acceptance of the doctrine of hell became so complete, that these two men could speculate that one of the rewards of heaven would be watching the torment of those sent to Hell. Arendt equated this extremism of the Christian vision with a dilution of the Roman concept of authority resting solely on foundation and the introduction of violence as an acceptable instrument of politics and the Church. All in all, this new vision of politicized Christianity was far removed from the solely religious speculations about the hereafter characteristic of Christianity's pre-political period.

In sum, there is a consistent theme which is predominant in Arendt's analysis of the Western tradition of political thought. Common to the Platonic and Christian perspectives on politics was the derivation of a source of authority external to the political realm. In both cases,

this authority found its fundamental basis in one or another interpretation of an eternal principle. Plato rooted his political philosophy in the eternal ideas. Christianity focused its concept of eternity on the eternal life of the individual. Part of what Arendt was claiming in the delineation of this characteristic formulation by these two perspectives was the consistent objectification of the vita contemplativa as a sphere superior to the vita activa. Inherent in this ordering of these two realms of existence, Arendt perceived an identical structural relationship to that demonstrated by the world view of homo faber in terms of the connection between the craftsman's model and the fabrication process. Although the Roman concept of authority was derived from the political foundation of Rome, it nonetheless bears a striking similarity to the Platonic and Christian perspectives. Both the Roman adoption of Greek philosophy as its own and the overriding dominance the original founding of Rome had on politics served to limit political action to absolute standards analogous to the activity of homo faber. Hence, the affinity Arendt ascribed between these three perspectives and the activity of homo faber corresponds with one aspect of her critique concerning the demise of the political realm following the loss of the pre-philosophic polis.

#### B. THE TRANSITION TO THE MODERN AGE

In the same way that Arendt sought to root the various interpretations of the Western tradition in particular events, namely, the philosopher's emergence from the cave, the founding of Rome, and the life of Jesus, she was similarly disposed in her analysis of the modern age.

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 twofold 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.<sup>14</sup>

Foremost amongst these examples, Arendt emphasized the ramifications of the invention of the telescope as being of primary significance in the re-orientation of scientific and philosophical thought in the modern age. In the following discussion of this developmental process, my objective will be to demonstrate the transition Arendt saw separating the tradition of Western political thought from that manifest in the modern age. Included in this transition is the end of the tradition as Arendt saw it, and the change in the predominant political outlook from that of homo faber to that of animal laborans.

At the core of Arendt's analysis of what she thought to be the three most significant events determining the course of the modern age is the concept of world alienation. With the discovery of America and the ensuing exploration of the whole earth, mankind has developed a full awareness of its mortal home. Simultaneously, in contrast to earlier times in which distance and the time it took to travel caused a formidable barrier to a complete conception of the earth, the conquest of distance by speed has led men to think of themselves as citizens of the earth as much as simply citizens of a country. Hence, the full discovery of the earth paradoxically shrank its size in man's consciousness. Arendt attributed this development to man's surveying capacity. In order to accurately survey anything, one must shift his focus from the particular to the general. To accomplish this task

requires a mental distancing away from the object under surveillance. Intrinsic to this mental distancing to measure an object is a direct correlation between the intensity of world alienation and the measure of the distance removed. Consequently, all attempts by man to decrease terrestrial distance in terms of time requires automatically an increased alienation from the earth.

Arendt also maintained that another form of alienation arose at the time of the Reformation. Instances in which the separation of Church and State occurred resulted in the expropriation of ecclesiastical and monastic property, which in turn, eventually led to the expropriation of the peasantry. Premising her argument on the ancient Greek distinction of private property as the "privately owned share of a common world"<sup>15</sup> and "the most elementary condition for man's worldliness,"<sup>16</sup> Arendt viewed the expropriation of the peasantry as a denial of their place in the world. This expropriation which allowed for the accumulation of wealth and the eventual transformation of this wealth into capital, initiated a process whose internal standards know no end in the continual expansion which is its by-product. The origin of capitalism, in the expropriation of the surplus productivity of the laboring activity, became a cyclical process, which, more than merely creating new property or a new distribution of wealth, used expropriation and wealth accumulation to regenerate the motor power of the process. Expropriation and wealth accumulation were reintroduced into the process to create more expropriation, increased productivity and more accumulation. The net effect on those disenfranchised from the world through expropriation was the limiting of life's concerns to the immediate urgency of acquiring life's necessities.

In effect, expropriation and wealth accumulation initiate world alienation in a twofold sense. The continual reintroduction of their products into the capitalist process, a feature unique to the modern age, causes a deterioration of the public world. Those objects whose durability and stability serve as the foundation of the human artifice are impediments which need to be removed if the process is to continue its cyclical regeneration and ever-increasing velocity. Analogous to the cyclical movement of labor and consumption, the process of wealth accumulation is stimulated by the life process and in turn stimulates life. In the enclosed cyclical movement of the process of wealth accumulation the rectilinear movement embodied in the human artifice is a handicap that must be sacrificed if the process is to follow its own inherent law. The other half of this alienation is the disenfranchisement of those whose property is expropriated. The loss of property, that which sheltered the individual and in which labor as an activity was conducted, removed the protection hitherto given life and the family. Exposed and unprotected, family life ceased to be the subject of the new life process. Instead, society took on the protective role of the family. The destruction of the public realm by the process of wealth accumulation, coupled with its innate expansionism and the exposure of the private to the light of day, culminated, according to Arendt, in the rise of the social realm. Deprived of the privacy of property, and access to a commonly held world, men become isolated in their alienation, huddled together in a mass, connected only by the ongoing process of sustaining life. Even the beneficiaries of wealth accumulation suffered the same fate, because they were no less tied to the process. The rise of society brought the downfall of both

the private and public realms, and mankind, in turn, became more alienated from the rewards of both labor and work.

If, however, the world alienation stemming from the exploration of the world and the Reformation can be said to have produced certain negative effects, it will soon be clear that the ramifications that Arendt cited as having a direct relationship to the invention of the telescope, produced a way of thinking which reinforced adherence to and the continuation of these processes. What Galileo's invention of the telescope did, was to provide the means to record an event. That event brought to light the fact, that from a terrestrial viewpoint, our senses perceive a geocentric universe, and from an astrophysical standpoint, a heliocentric universe. The proof which the telescope provided was that man could perceive the universe in diametrically opposite ways from his earthbound position. This new found ability to project one's mind to a point in the universe, as Archimedes had wanted to step outside the world and view it from space, almost immediately brought into question the ability of human senses to reveal reality. As a consequence, the discovery of the Archimedean point initiated radically new orientations in scientific and philosophic thought.

It became apparent with the discovery of the Archimedean point, that not only could man project himself mentally to a location outside the world, but that this point was not fixed and could be located anywhere in the universe. In this context, the scientists could direct terrestrial nature from a universal standpoint, using universal laws valid beyond human sense experience. Man became capable of thinking in terms of the universe while remaining earth-bound.

Modern mathematics freed man from the shackles of earth-bound experience and his power of cognition from the shackles of finitude.<sup>17</sup>

The subjection of geometry to algebraic calculation was in essence the conversion of terrestrial sense data and movement to mathematical sign. It was a process that allowed for the postulation of laws which were equally applicable to terrestrial and universal nature. The non-spatial symbolic language of modern mathematics provided an interpretation of concepts and dimensions which were not visible either sensually or to the 'eye of the mind'. In effect, science moved into a conceptual realm of mathematical symbolization which exceeded human capacities to perceive it.

The arrival of the experiment as the new found tool of science changed the scientific approach to nature. Instead of observing terrestrial nature as it is revealed, the utilization of mathematical symbols in the experiment, amounted to placing nature under the conditions of the human mind. While this development made possible such radical novelty as the import of cosmic forces into terrestrial nature, it did nothing to increase mankind's truth revealing abilities. To substantiate this point, Arendt cited the conclusion of Eddington and Heisenberg that aside from the novelty and innovative tools of modern science, its actual truth revealing capabilities are nil. In other words, the subjective component of scientific experiment influences what is perceived and without scientific intrusion, what is perceived would not even exist as a cognitive possibility. Consequently, the modern reductio scientiae ad mathematicam is the process of amalgamating a multitude of scientific facts within patterns developed by the mind. What Arendt meant to point out was that, because modern science operates outside the sensual capacity of mankind and its data base is the product of hypothetical mental abstractions, which are then fitted into overall

mental patterns, modern science is a construction of the human brain rather than a representation of actual Being. Thus, modern science becomes a study of the structure of the mind instead of "Being in its true appearance."<sup>18</sup> Discovery of the Archimedean point enabled mankind to direct terrestrial events from a universal or absolute viewpoint, but, in turn, it nullified man's ability to think universally as had been possible when universal principles referred to revealed nature. In essence, modern science has successfully refuted the truth of eternal ideas in traditional philosophy without providing an alternative or infringing on the realm of faith. Hence, notwithstanding the initial exuberance in the belief that science could render forth truth, Arendt claimed this has not been the end result and science has been no more successful than philosophy in discovering true Being.

Even though modern science does not render truth, it nonetheless shattered mankind's belief in the truth revealing capacity of appearance, and had as a consequence, a profound effect on modern philosophy. In fact, Arendt went so far as to suggest that the rise of Cartesian doubt was as significant as an encapsulation of modern thought as thaumazein, "the wonder at everything that is as it is,"<sup>19</sup> was for ancient Greek philosophy. The invention of the telescope, an actual event, changed mankind's physical world view. The old opposition between sensual and rational truth became irrelevant in that the discovery of the Archimedean point eventually revealed them both to be illusions. Cartesian doubt grew out of this loss of truth and reality, the separation of Being and appearance. The most outstanding characteristic of this doubt was its universality in that no thought or experience could elude it.

Cartesian doubt did not simply doubt that human understanding may not be open to every truth or that human vision may not be able to see everything, but that intelligibility to human understanding does not at all constitute a demonstration of truth, just as visibility did not at all constitute proof of reality.<sup>20</sup>

The division between Being and appearance was not a mundane discovery. It shattered traditional skepticism which assumed a static relationship between Being and appearances in which appearances merely hid Being in such a way that it escaped human notice. Instead, modern science revealed Being to be extremely active in fostering appearances, only these appearances are delusions which do not reveal anything about the true essence of Being.

Manifest in the perplexity of Cartesian doubt, Arendt pointed to two nightmares which she felt characterized the thought of the modern age. On the one hand, reality as it is presented by the world and human life is doubted to the extent that the seeming incapacity of the human senses, common sense, and reason to provide trustworthy interpretations of the world, engenders the belief that reality is a dream. On the other hand, under this new human condition in which man can neither trust his senses nor his reason, the suspicion that an evil spirit or Dieu trompeur wilfully spites and betrays human activity becomes as realistic a conception as one in which God rules the universe. Based on this outcome of Cartesian doubt, Arendt described the most poignant highlight in modern thinking as a loss of the certainty which had previously accompanied human perception. This loss of certainty, she intimated, led to a renewed zeal to make good in life and search for truthfulness. Not only were success, industry and truthfulness the cardinal virtues of the modern age, but of its scientific enterprise as

well. Contrary to Greek "theory" in which contemplation witnessed revealed truth, theory in the modern age came to be judged in terms of success: whether it would work or not. Hence, theory which evolved into successful hypotheses became truth.

In the scientific move from truth to truthfulness and reality to reliability, Arendt suggested there lay the solution to Cartesian doubt. In conjunction with Descartes' conviction that "though our mind is not the measure of things or of truth, it must assuredly be the measure of things that we affirm or deny,"<sup>21</sup> Arendt summarized the path of scientific discovery in the modern age as an articulation of the hypothesis that even if there is no truth or reliable certainty, humans, nevertheless, can be both truthful and reliable. The import of this realization was that salvation became rooted in mankind itself and if there was a solution to doubt it must lie in doubt itself. All that was certain was that if all things are doubtful, then at least doubt has certitude. Descartes concluded that conscious awareness of doubt gave mental processes a certainty of their own which then become subject to inquiry in introspection.

Cartesian introspection is, in essence, the cognitive concern of consciousness with its own processes. Although consciousness cannot verify the world given to the senses or reason, it can verify the reception of sensations and reasoning as they affect the functioning of the mind. In this sense mankind carries the certainty of existence within itself. Arendt noted that this form of awareness is not dissimilar to an awareness of the biological processes of the body. In both instances, however, simple awareness of these processes does not provide any basis on which to infer the actual shape of a thing in

reality. Alternately stated, an understanding of internal processes reveals nothing about their appearing characteristics. As a consequence, Cartesian introspection provided certainty only within the realm of the mind. Arendt suggested that two important developments resulted from the introspective focus of Cartesian thought. By implementing the nightmare of non-reality, Cartesian introspection effectively submerges all appearing entities within mental consciousness. Sense-objects which enter the stream of consciousness are viewed by introspection as adjuncts to the subjective state of our mental processes due to the loss of reality in the sensuous world. The second development is that because mankind can find certainty only in introspection or in the study of its own mental processes, man can only know what he makes himself. The withdrawal into Cartesian introspection is a renunciation of any valid worldly reality.

Predicated on the assumption that man can only know what he has made himself as the root contention of Cartesian reason, Arendt concluded that the purest activity must be mathematical knowledge. The mind's playing with itself in the isolation of Cartesian reason is analogous to the disjunction between the scientific use of mathematical symbols to conceptualize dimensions and concepts that are unperceivable by human senses. Arendt contended that the validity of this comparison was detrimental to the stature of common-sense. In contradistinction to previous understanding of common-sense as the function which integrated the five senses into a common world, common-sense in the Cartesian formulation simply became another internal function with its relationship to the world severed. The withdrawal into consciousness annuls the experience and sharing of a common world. In its place, all

that is left in common between men is their faculty of logical reasoning. As Arendt expressed it, this common element in common-sense logical reasoning rests on the fact that for each individual two and two will always equal four. This is an obvious deduction from Arendt's initial assumption that the highest activity of Cartesian thought is mathematical symbolization. What is pertinent in her use of this rudimentary mathematical equation is that she was trying to point out that within the Cartesian perspective "two and two are four" does not represent the balance between two halves, but the beginning of a cumulative process of addition that leads to infinity. Introspective investigation of conscious processes within an inherently mathematical framework, oriented Cartesian thought to view all conscious sensations as functional elements of processes. Common-sense reason is consequently transformed from a plural analysis of a commonly held world into the mere "reckoning with consequences."<sup>22</sup> Arendt characterized both Cartesian and Hobbesian interpretations of reason as fundamental extrapolations on the concept of 'reckoning with consequences.'

The fundamental dynamics of Arendt's analysis of modern thought, premised on the combined developments stemming from the discovery of the Archimedean point and Cartesian doubt, are most adequately expressed in Kafka's synopsis,

He found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself; it seems that he was permitted to find it only under this condition.<sup>23</sup>

The loss of certainty about reality that emerged as a result of the discovery of the Archimedean point, culminated in the application of the Archimedean point being focused within man himself in Cartesian doubt. In choosing introspection as the path to certainty, man's viewpoint

became locked within the mental prison of his own mathematical formulations. All sensuously given information is translated into mathematical equations in which all appearing relationships become logical relations between man-made symbols. In essence, man's world view becomes a sole product of the work of his hands in which neither God nor an evil spirit can challenge the assumption that "two and two equal four". In his search for Being man only encounters himself in the patterns of his own mind.

The absolute renunciation of the senses as a means of knowing was followed by a technology based on mathematical formulas uncommunicable in common-sense terms. The truth value of modern science expressed in technology is no more than a proof that man can always transform his most abstract concepts into physical objects. Processes indigenous to the faculty of the mind can, in other words, formulate any explanation of natural phenomena desired and utilize it as a principle for making and acting. Nonetheless, against the unlimited possibilities for a man-made world crafted by human imagination, stands the intransigent realization that thought divorced from the senses operates within a purely hypothetical framework. Central to Arendt's criticism of the acceptance of this hypothetical certainty is her rejoinder that once the mind's capacity to comprehend loses its relationship to the sensually given world, the transcendent world also disappears. Once this happens, it becomes an inevitable consequence that human perception can no longer conceive of any thought or concept which transcends the already given.

### C. THE IMITATION OF PROCESS

Arendt's analysis of the development of modern thought is intimately

connected to its effect on the modern perception of the relationship between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Her own ordering of this relationship was to accord equal status to these two realms with the proviso that their individual foci of concern are mutually exclusive.<sup>24</sup> The failure of the modern age, in her eyes, was that similar to the tradition, it failed to grasp the significance of the equality between the two realms. In its most simplified form, the gist of Arendt's theory rests on this notion of equality between these two domains and the fundamental aberration of both the tradition and the modern age was that neither one accorded this dichotomy an inherent balance. From the perspective of the modern age, Arendt believed that this hierarchical ordering of the two realms was simply reversed and retained the concept of one realm as inferior to the other. The consequence is that, in the modern age, the vita activa becomes the more prominent and superior half of this equation.

Arendt saw the elevation of the vita activa over the vita contemplativa as a logical extension of the modern perspective. The loss of reality that resulted from the discovery of the Archimedean point and the withdrawal into introspection of Cartesian doubt culminated in the conclusion that man could only know what he had made himself. What Arendt saw in each development was a particular affinity to the activity of fabrication. Scientific recourse to mathematical formulation and the use of the experiment to verify a hypothetical world signified to Arendt an adherence to the principle of homo faber in the scientific search for knowledge. Likewise, the Cartesian recourse to introspection in order to provide certainty essentially rested on the premise that man could only know what he had fabricated himself. Up to

this point in her analysis of the modern age, the inspiring principle of homo faber maintains the same dominant position it held in her analysis of the Western tradition. As such, Arendt claimed that the reversal of the vita activa over the vita contemplativa was a consequence of the disappearance of contemplation and the reversal of doing over thinking.

She based her claim about the disappearance of contemplation on the loss in the modern age of a sense of reality. With the disappearance of the sensuous world and the loss of the transcendent world, the ancient understanding of contemplation as the admiring wonder brought on by revealed truth lost its validity. Cartesian introspection, as the basis for modern philosophy, constituted a withdrawal from both the sensual and transcendent into the self. Its focus became the processes of consciousness which Arendt equated to the fabrication mentality inherent to 'reckoning with consequences' or the modern interpretation of common-sense reasoning. Similarly, scientific inquiry influenced by the realization of the loss of reality, shifted its focus from asking about the "what" and "why" of nature to "how" nature worked. In this sense, Arendt was seeking to demonstrate that scientific inquiry gave up trying to understand nature and merely sought to imitate it. The convergence of scientific and philosophic thought around doing, or the active making of a man-made world, which was unique in providing human certainty, was the focal point on which Arendt perceived the elevation of doing over thought. Loss of reality precipitated by doing had its culmination in the disappearance of contemplation, the limitation of thought to common-sense reasoning, and the rise of doing as the pre-eminent means to attain knowledge. Thought became the handmaiden of doing and acting temporarily took on the mantle of being the superior activity of

mankind.

Homo faber's victory in the realm of the vita activa was short-lived from Arendt's viewpoint. While acknowledging that doing precipitated the development of modern thought, her analysis takes a turn when she suggested that the initial demise of philosophy in the modern age, and its second-fiddle status relative to scientific discovery, reversed its course and took its revenge on doing. What this explanation is meant to allude to is Arendt's description of how she perceived the one-dimensional focus of introspection, as the undermining factor in the status of homo faber and the rise of animal laborans. Once again, the principal event Arendt used to establish her argument was Galileo's invention of the telescope. She wanted to suggest that the novelty of scientific discovery and its unprecedented ability to fabricate new things dominated man's thinking at the beginning of the modern age. Only with the eventual realization of the loss of reality did the stature of scientific fabrication inherent to the experiment begin to give way to an all pervasive focus on process. In short, as long as the novelty of scientific fabrication titillated and held the attention of men's minds, the underlying process of the scientific endeavour went little noticed. This honeymoon period for the mechanistic world view of the scientist only lasted, Arendt suggested, until the significance of the ramifications of Cartesian doubt became fully apparent.

As it has been previously outlined, Cartesian introspection was a direct result of the disappearance of the sensual and transcendent worlds. The initial by-product of Cartesian introspection was the belief that man could only find certainty in that which he had created himself. Consequently, whereas this belief in a man-made world can be

equated with a belief in the end products of the fabrication process, it has the earmark of being an extension of homo faber's world view. However, the second part of this equation is that the loss of reality, combined with scientific resignation from attempts to understand Being, resulted in science concentrating its energies on imitating the processes of nature and in philosophy adopting an introspective focus with respect to the processes of consciousness. In both instances, the focus shifted from the end product to the process. Arendt believed this shift in focus was given momentum by the very fact that the loss of reality could only be greeted with despair or a renewed vigour in searching out truthfulness. In a sense, the modern age in Arendt's interpretation could be said to be representative of both responses. Despair is manifested in the initial introspective turning away from the appearing world. Renewed vigour in discovering truthfulness is exhibited in the ever-increasing emphasis in the modern age on process as the accumulation of knowledge and certainty.

Arendt's identification of the shift in emphasis from attempts to understand Being to attempts to imitate Process is very important in several respects. First and foremost, it represents the premiere distinction she wanted to make between the foci of concern that characterize the Western tradition and the modern age. Throughout her analysis of the tradition she was consistent in maintaining that attempts to understand Being dominated traditional thought and its applicability to politics. What distinguishes the modern age most clearly from the tradition is that it forsook the quest to understand Being and chose to imitate Process. The problem she saw in this emphasis on process has to do with the fact that from her viewpoint it

is intrinsically invisible. It does not manifest itself in the appearing world, but is, instead, only hinted at by the presence of certain phenomena. The inward focus of the self on its own internal processes in Cartesian introspection, has the effect of separating man's reason from the appearing world. Moreover, this focus on process is a reversal of the world view of homo faber. Whereas homo faber sees the fabrication process justified by the end product, the focus on process ignores the appearing world altogether and is dominated by a concern with means. In effect, the inwardness of Cartesian introspection ultimately becomes fixated on the cyclical movement of life's biological process. In this context, the similarity of this eventual development of Cartesian introspection and the inspiring principle of animal laborans is unmistakable. It is at this juncture in Arendt's analysis, that the final transformation of the modern age occurs. The world view of homo faber, which was evident in the traditional perspective and retained its pre-eminence in the mechanistic world view of science in the early modern age, was undermined by the concentrated emphasis on process. The one-dimensional focus of Cartesian introspection ultimately resulted in the victory of the inspiring principle of animal laborans over that of homo faber. As a consequence, the world view of animal laborans, in Arendt's opinion, took over as the political viewpoint of the modern age.

Arendt offered a bifurcated explanation for the victory of animal laborans over homo faber and the subsequent tenacity and influence 'life as the highest principle of human activity' exerted on the thinking of the modern age. On the one hand, there is a direct analogy between her description of the relationship of homo faber to the marketplace and the

eventual status of homo faber in the modern age. In each case, the common denominator in homo faber's loss of status is a result of a turning away from absolute standards. As was mentioned in the last chapter, once homo faber introduced his products into the marketplace, the guiding principle embodied in use value becomes secondary to the all-embracing relativity of exchange value. Once exchange value becomes the principal influence on homo faber, the relativity of the process of supply and demand obscures and essentially denigrates the original importance of the craftsman's model to the work activity. The loss of reality initiated the same type of concentration on process in introspection that exchange value exerts by coercing homo faber to respond to supply and demand. The result is to see the things of the world as mere means to new ends. The transformation of the means-end relationship, from one which represents a definite beginning and end to one which follows a continual cyclical movement, represents what Arendt saw as the perversion of the principle of homo faber by the world view of animal laborans. Hence, once the loss of reality brought the downfall of contemplation, the interconnectedness of the contemplative model and the fabrication process in the activity of homo faber also suffered. Actually, the loss of contemplation left only the fabrication process just as the loss of reality left mankind with the introspective investigation of conscious processes. Homo faber's loss of utility and use value as an absolute standard, was replaced by the production process, such that whatever increases production and "lessens pain and effort is useful."<sup>25</sup> In essence, Arendt saw in this development the elevation of happiness as the standard to judge the elements of process. Correspondingly, she saw the goal of happiness as the standard informing

the political outlook of animal laborans.

The second prong of her argument about homo faber's loss of status and the consolidation of 'life as the highest principle of human activity' involves the continuing influence of Christianity in the modern age. As we have seen, Arendt postulated that early Christianity, before it became politicized, had as one of its principal distinctions the acceptance of life instead of the world as the embodiment of the eternal. In other words, the eternity of life in the hereafter in contrast to the immortality of the cosmos. The Christian perception of earthly existence as the beginning of eternal life, imbued life with the quality of sacredness. It is this sacred concept of life as the highest good which Arendt felt remained intact, in spite of secularization and the general decline in religious faith. The introduction of the modern age was received by a Christian society and, hence, Arendt was implying that the concept of life as the highest good distorted its perception of the real meaning of this new age and its developments. In that early Christianity abjured participation in worldly affairs, its perception tended to level out the distinction between labor, work, and action. By doing so, the net effect was that labor achieved a much more respectable status than had been its due in the estimate of the ancient world. Labor's liberation from the contempt of the past simultaneously signalled greater appreciation for the necessity inherent in sustaining the biological life process. In sum, Arendt maintained that the sacredness of life in the Christian perception, retained its authority such that it appeared as a self-evident truth to the thinkers of modernity. Consequently, the eventual victory of animal laborans' world view was congruent with the prevailing religious view of the times.

I think it is noteworthy in passing that this reference to the influence of Christianity in the modern age is consistent with Arendt's general analysis. Obviously, secularization, with its attendant expropriation of Church property, weakened Church power and influence. In addition, Arendt cites the effects of Cartesian doubt on Christian faith in its particularity, meaning that the loss of reality necessarily put into question the specific tenets of Christianity. However, given the significance of the historical impact of Christianity, it is reasonable to assume that those aspects of it which could not be conceptually challenged would remain intact in the modern age. This is, in fact, what Arendt was suggesting. Although modernity resigned itself to being forever incapable of understanding Being or finding truth in revelation, its recourse to introspection did not, as Arendt indicated, abolish the realm of faith. Therefore, even though the veracity of Christian revelation became doubtful, faith in general still remained a valid aspect of human thinking. Because life as the highest good is premised on faith in eternal life, it is not surprising or inconsistent of Arendt to suggest that its influence survived throughout the modern age. I think her own words best reveal the most significant influences on modernity.

The only thing we can be sure of is that the coincidence of the reversal of doing and contemplating with the earlier reversal of life and world became the point of departure for the whole modern development. Only when the *vita activa* had lost its point of reference in the *vita contemplativa* could it become active life in the full sense of the word; and only because this active life remained bound to life as its only point of reference could life as such, the laboring metabolism of man with nature, become active and unfold its entire fertility.<sup>26</sup>

The predicament of the modern age was that, in Arendt's terms,

Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown back upon himself and not upon this world; far from believing that the world might be potentially immortal.<sup>27</sup>

#### D. THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

From Arendt's perspective, this throwing of man back upon himself has resulted in devastating political ramifications. The preoccupation with process in modernity not only shaped perceptions about nature, but also influenced the way in which mankind viewed its own history. Her critique of the modern age and its differentiation from the Western tradition actually has a dual focus, the foci of which are nature and history. The immediate consequence of man's being thrown back upon himself was that he once again, similar to the pre-philosophic Greeks, became overwhelmed by his own mortality. In contrast, the loss of reality inherent to the modern age did not leave modern man the same option as the ancients had in contrasting their mortality to the immortality of the world and the cosmos.

The essential difference Arendt indicated between the Western tradition and the modern age, in reference to their perceptions of nature and history, rests on the distinction between the implications of the concepts of immortality and process. Returning to the phenomenal conceptualizations of the pre-philosophic Greeks, she again stressed the importance of their concept of immortality as it related to their notion of history. In the same way that nature was considered immortal, the greatness of human words and deeds were judged relative to the immortality of nature and deserved remembrance in poetry and historiography. In this early Greek conception of historical events,

cause and effect were perceived as adjuncts to word and deed rather than as token expressions of a universal cause and effect model. Word and deed were believed to carry their own internal meaning separate from external influence.

What is particularly pertinent in Arendt's use of the early Greek concept of history is that it represents concepts of objectivity, impartiality and time which she felt were unfortunately missing in the modern age. Word and deed as the embodiment of political activity in the polis had significance in their particularity. Due to the cyclical concept of time and nature that the Greeks accepted, the temporal sequence and location of human greatness had no bearing on the actual determination of this greatness. In this context, objectivity, and in particular impartial objectivity, were notable attributes of this perception of existence. With immortality as the standard against which human greatness was judged, the identity of the actor, the place of occurrence and its temporal sequence had no input into the determination of greatness. Arendt cited, as an example of this attitude, Homer's immortalization of the great deeds of both the Trojans and the Achaeans. It should be remembered that integrally connected to this Greek conception of objectivity was the acceptance of the division between the private and public realms. Ancient contempt for the private and its subjectivity only served to highlight the significance of events which occurred in public and which could be experienced in common and talked about. Greek understanding relied on the ability to see a common event from another's standpoint.

Concerning the pre-philosophic concept of understanding Arendt acknowledged that Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy rejected the

interpretation of immortality by the polis. Instead, they saw the act of immortalizing as the cessation of activity, in order to contemplate the eternal. However, more in tune with Arendt's general description of the major influences on the tradition, she equated the Roman conception of foundation and the way in which all future political acts were judged in relation to it, as essentially identical to the early Greek formulation. This perception was unable to maintain its validity in the Christian era, however, because of the Christian inversion of the relative importance of individual life. Christianity stressed the overwhelming importance of individual salvation and, at least in political terms, ignored the objectivity of the world. As noted earlier, Arendt interpreted the Christian emphasis on worldly life as the first step to eternal life and the victory of animal laborans as the two most significant determining influences on the course of the modern age. In fact, in the Christian interpretation, the only significant secular event was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which in itself was considered as an intrusion of eternity into earthly mortality.

In essence, Arendt's convictions about the practice of history in the modern age are not wholly dissimilar to her version of the Christian viewpoint. In both cases, she felt there was a strong inclination to disregard worldly objectivity. However, whereas Christianity ignored the world because of its belief in eternal life, she argued that it was the pre-occupation with process which influenced the response of modernity to the world. Thrust back upon himself as a result of the loss of reality, man in the modern age began to take a renewed interest in history. Arendt suggested that this was a direct consequence of the

striving for certainty which sprang from Cartesian doubt. Analogous to the search for certainty found in the isolated state of introspection, mankind turned to history as the collective record of mortal events in order to determine the meaning of human existence. The loss of belief in individual immortality was accompanied by a forfeiture of its authority in the establishment of political bodies. This political loss stimulated the recourse of modern man to history in that it sought to find sanction for political activity in human mortality.

Arendt stated that in the modern age, coeval with the rise of doing over contemplation, the early political theorists did try to establish a political philosophy which would provide a reasonable teleology of action applicable to politics. In support of this contention, Arendt cited Hobbes' Leviathan and similar themes in Locke and Hume. Nonetheless, she claimed that this short-lived predisposition toward political action was quickly overshadowed by Hegel's transformation of metaphysics into a philosophy of history. In short, she argued that the rise of secularization and the concomitant renewal of man's pre-occupation with his own mortality, prompted Vico, and then Hegel, to search for meaning in history based on the initial assumption that truth would be revealed to the backward glance of the historian.<sup>28</sup> In Hegel's case, this belief was premised on his interpretation of dialectical movement. In his acceptance of the dialectical movement of thought and matter as identical and of their interaction as the self-realization of a World Spirit, we find Hegel's belief that he had found the ontological identity of idea and matter.<sup>29</sup> Arendt construed Hegel's identification of this spirit and the already prevalent pre-occupation of science with process, as the predominant

influences which initiated Hegel's interpretation of history as process. What is pertinent in relation to Arendt's thesis is that Vico's and Hegel's belief, that the study of history as a whole was a useful theoretical tool to find the one overall process which gave meaning to human life, basically represented the springboard for the later theories of politics in the modern age. In effect, the absolute nature of Hegel's World Spirit or the identification of a universal law influenced the basic parameters of those theses offered by Kierkegaard, Marx and Nietzsche.

The central thrust of what Arendt had to say about the rebellion against the tradition by nineteenth century theorists was that, confronted by the loss of reality and the inapplicability of the tradition to events in modernity, these men sought to overcome and resolve their dilemma by re-ordering the traditional framework. She also wanted to indicate that these modern reversals of the traditional hierarchy were overtly influenced by the conception of a continuous progress in Hegel's interpretation of history. This process characterization of history remained constant in the search of Kierkegaard, Marx and Nietzsche for a universal concept of human nature. Kierkegaard sought to jump from doubt to faith but only succeeded in introducing an incessant doubting to faith. Nietzsche inverted the importance of the transcendent and sensuous worlds, and accorded the latter a superior status. Marx accepted the reversal of doing over knowing and inverted the traditional hierarchy of the vita activa. The significance of these leaps and inversions, according to Arendt, is that although they were inspired by modern man's being thrust back upon himself they were still theoretical postulates which remained within the

traditional hierarchy.

In terms of her political critique of the modern age, Marx stands out as the most politically relevant of the three. Marx represented to Arendt the last development in traditional political thought prior to its absolute end in the totalitarian use of terror and ideology for the purpose of domination. Arendt viewed Marx's glorification of labor and its productivity as the last stage in the theoretical demise of the political realm. Whereas Hegel stood outside the traditional hierarchy and its values and precepts, when he conceived the idea of the World Spirit, Arendt pointed out that Marx, in essence, did exactly the opposite. She attributed to Marx an attempt to find philosophy in action, or put differently, a desire to change the world instead of interpreting it. In contradistinction to Hegel, who had remained convinced of the superiority of animal rationale, Marx offered animal laborans as the embodiment of what was most uniquely human. Arendt interpreted the Marxian concept that "labor created man" as incorporating three direct challenges to the tradition: a refutation of the traditional belief that God created man; the elevation of the laboring activity over its traditional estimate; and the reversal of the traditional glorification of animal rationale over animal laborans.<sup>30</sup>

The Marxian glorification of labor was automatically diametrically opposed to the beliefs fostered by the traditional hierarchy. As such, it changed the understanding of what action itself had represented in the vita activa. Arendt described Marx's glorification of labor and his subsequent analysis of classical economy as politically significant because it viewed events in social terms. Marx's identification of class struggle as a universal theme in human existence was, in Arendtian

terms, indicative of the rise of the social realm. Particular events, in this sense, are viewed only as they relate to the ongoing process of the whole of society. Society becomes the phenomenon in terms of which particular events are judged, and the relativity of values in society, just as in the exchange market, promotes conformity which casts the occurrence of any unpredictable event in the light of being a stark aberration. The heavy hand of conformity in itself is a formidable obstacle to the spontaneity and innovation inherent in the concept of political activity as it was understood in the polis. But Arendt wanted to indicate even more poignantly the inevitable decline of political action into instrumental action in another way. For Arendt, Marx's conceptualization of class struggle as the predominant force in the social matrix perverted the traditional concept of action because he accepted the notion that violence and politics operate jointly. She substantiated this point of view by citing Marx's contention that governments held a monopoly on the means of violence and, as the instrument of the ruling class, governmental violence and politics are one and the same. Most clearly, this combination of violence and politics runs counter to the traditional perspective in which speech and persuasion are the greatest activities in the polis and violence was a characteristic of the barbarian. Consequently, Marx's glorification of violence is a repudiation of speech and constitutes a withdrawal from political action into the mute isolation of violence analogous to the making activity of homo faber.

In effect, Arendt perceived the concept of making in the Marxian interpretation of action as being guided by the maxims of society. In turn, she was indicating how this theoretical framework parallels the

defeat of homo faber by animal laborans. Once the means-end relationship of work becomes subject to the cyclical movement or process of labor, the meaning intrinsic to "ends" is lost when they become simply means to new ends. By establishing labor as the standard against which human activity was to be measured, Marx in Arendt's view necessarily corrupted his conception of politics with the overriding demands of process. Once again the differentiation between use and exchange value is readily apparent and the coupling of relativity and meaninglessness stand out as pre-eminent characteristics of the political world view of animal laborans. His is a world in which society as given is the measure of political action and in which society's goal is to function in accordance with the sought after universal process. In a sense, Arendt's analysis of the tradition from Plato to Marx ends on the note that the tradition has come full circle simply to end up acknowledging once again the irrelevance of the world of appearances. Whether or not the standard has been transcendent Being or internal process Arendt criticized the tradition for ignoring the fact that "being and appearing coincide."<sup>31</sup>

#### E. THE ECLIPSE OF MEANING

Without yet detailing Arendt's concept of political action, it is sufficient to know that her theoretical endeavour was motivated by a desire to re-assert the stature and primacy of the political realm within the vita activa. Her entire analysis of the tradition of Western political thought and its decline in the modern age is premised on the assumption that we have forgotten the basics of political activity. In her attempt to "think what we are doing"<sup>32</sup> she was simultaneously

trying to provide a foundation on which to build a new order of things or a novus ordo seclorum. The theoretical basis of her critique is solidly rooted in her conditional acceptance of the pre-philosophic articulation of the vita activa. As such, her criticism of the tradition from Plato to Marx is based on her assertion that the world views of homo faber and animal laborans have in succession dominated the Western perception of politics.

Our tradition of political thought began when Plato discovered that it is somehow inherent in the philosophical experience to turn away from the common world of human affairs; it ended when nothing was left of this experience but the opposition of thinking and acting, which, depriving thought of reality and action of sense, makes both meaningless.<sup>33</sup>

This condition of meaninglessness is anathema to Arendt's concept of politics. Her recounting of the degeneration of the political realm is like a cry in the wilderness warning us of the dangers to come if we do not change our ways. The revolt against the tradition by such nineteenth century theorists as Marx, was for Arendt, simply a concatenation of the trends of thought predominant in the modern age which received their initial impetus from discoveries in the natural sciences. What ended the tradition and brought the modern age to a close was the advent of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. While she refused overtly to blame the nineteenth century theorists for the occurrence of totalitarianism, she nonetheless believed they set the stage on which its negative elements could coalesce and emerge as a startling novelty. Totalitarianism embodied for Arendt the worst perversion of the revolutionary spirit to create a novus ordo seclorum because it rested on the triumph of process over politics. Arendt's concern for the world and particularly the "decline of the West"<sup>34</sup> is a

response to the horror she felt in regards to totalitarianism and the belief that the decline of the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority has weakened the foundations of Western political thought. She viewed the revolutions of the modern age as attempts to restore some credibility to the broken threads of the tradition. Unfortunately, from her perspective, trends which have grown out of the modern age have precluded or severely damaged even such successful political achievements as the American Revolution. The voracious growth of the social realm and its political equivalent, totalitarianism, were for Arendt the two most threatening developments in the contemporary world.

Coupled with the world alienation magnified by science in the modern age, Arendt cited the self-alienation brought about by the atomization of the social realm. In terms of her theoretical framework, Arendt linked self-alienation with the loss of culture or massification of society and culture, which resulted from the advent of wealth accumulation as the guiding principle of capitalistic societies. Arendt's evaluation of the relationship between mass society and mass culture has as its source the earlier relationship between society and culture in the modern age. She dated the rise of society as concurrent with the stage of wealth accumulation at which point disposable leisure time became a social phenomenon. At first, possession of this leisure time to pursue the benefits of culture belonged to the few or that group Arendt designated as "good"<sup>35</sup> society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Politically, she viewed this 'good' society as an abomination because its pursuits were concentrated on values that bred conformity and detachment from the common world. Nonetheless, the limited size of 'good' society left other social strata free to maintain a refuge

from its conformism and nourish the traits of humanity it lacked. The problem with 'good' society was that it eventually applied its debased values to the pursuit of culture. Contrary to the appreciation of culture for its durability and the immortality of its objects, 'good' society judged culture in terms of the social status cultural objects could bestow on their owners. Cultural objects became commodities rated against their exchange value. Arendt described this attitude of 'good' society in its relationship to culture as "philistinism."<sup>36</sup> She drew a parallel between its debasement of cultural objects and that demonstrated in the world view of animal laborans toward the products of homo faber.

With the emergence of mass society, Arendt indicated what she believed to be a further debasement of cultural objects. Whereas 'good' society had a limited size, mass society has incorporated all strata of the population. The twofold consequence of this development was that the previous avenues of escape from the conformity of society were cut off, while at the same time providing leisure time to all social strata. Her evaluation of the culmination of this development was that the overriding emphases of human thought and action became focused on process in the modern age. Correspondingly, the last stage of this development resulted in "the society of jobholders"<sup>37</sup> which,

demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had actually been submerged in the over-all life process of the species and the only active decision still required of the individual were to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality, the still individually sensed pain and trouble of living, and acquiesce in a dazed, "tranquilized," functional type of behavior.<sup>38</sup>

The anaesthetic condition of the society of jobholders in its

relationship to the world permeates Arendt's critique of mass society and her critique of non-resistance by the Jews in the concentration camps.

Mass society, which envelops all strata of the population, brings with it the prevailing attitude of the society of jobholders, namely, the automatism of functional elements within a process. Within this society, both the individual and the significance of individual cultural objects are only given meaning based on their relationship to society. The negative influence mass society exerts on culture stems from its need for entertainment. A society of jobholders afforded leisure time views the human artifice not from the perspective of homo faber or the actor, but from the viewpoint of animal laborans. Hence, not only does mass society not have an intrinsic interest in the human artifice, it is also destructive of it. Arendt saw this destruction incorporated in the application of the values of entertainment to culture. In other words, while the entertainment industry provides its own products it is not a threat to culture, but is simply the mechanism which feeds the entertainment needs of society's biological process. The threat to culture comes when the demand for entertainment turns to culture to stimulate its productive capacity. The voraciousness of entertainment denudes and guts cultural objects of their intrinsic significance by revising, abridging and preparing them for consumption. This is the premiere difference in the debasement of culture by society and mass society. Whereas society used and abused cultural objects as commodities of exchange, but did not consume them, mass society with its penchant for entertainment dismembers cultural objects for consumption. Once again, the perversion of the means-end relationship in the

fabrication process is implicitly obvious.

Of course, the major theme of Arendt's analysis of mass society and mass culture was really aimed at illuminating one of the principal ills of the world. Mass society's devaluation and destruction of the human artifice had one overriding consequence for Arendt. It made manifest a festering alienation from the human artifice which in effect destroys the world mankind holds in common while at the same time applying increasing pressure for conformity. In this context, Arendt perceived a growing atomization of individuals in mass society which has resulted in the increased spread of loneliness amongst contemporary mankind. The loneliness and consumptiveness of mass society had, according to Arendt, deleterious effects on both the French and American Revolutions. In the case of the French Revolution, resolution of the social question, or the satisfaction of immediate wants and needs born of poverty and misery, overshadowed the creation of a new political order. Similarly, the modern day pervasiveness of consumerism in America had for Arendt the effect of obscuring the political significance of the revolutionary spirit embodied in the American Constitution. Although these two examples represent pertinent expressions of historical outcomes of mass mobilization, they are of secondary importance compared to the perniciousness of totalitarianism, which fed on the initial atomization and loneliness endemic to mass society.

Totalitarianism was for Arendt the embodiment of all the worst influences derived from the natural and historical sciences of the modern age. In its worldly appearance, totalitarianism is the direct antithesis to Arendt's concept of politics. Her concern for the continued existence of the political realm is directly connected to the

fact that in totalitarianism she perceived the first worldly manifestation of a form of government which was completely divorced from any concept of political utility. The novelty of totalitarianism for Arendt resided in its combined use of ideology and terror to dominate completely the lives of those living in a mass society characterized by loneliness and isolation. The world alienation caused by the loss of reality, combined with the loss of a common world in mass society, gave rise, in Arendt's interpretation, to large numbers of people who felt uprooted and superfluous in the world.<sup>39</sup> In essence, totalitarianism utilizes this condition of isolation and loneliness by organizing it politically under the rubric of ideology and maintaining its control through the use of terror. Its success is based on the susceptibility of these alienated masses to respond to the logicity of ideology regardless of the outcome. Influenced by the belief that man can only know what he has made himself, the modern age, found comfort and solace in the logical reasoning of man's mind. The problem with this recourse to logical reasoning was that it soon became apparent that even if certainty could be found in mental constructions, this certainty could apply to any logical process. Consequently, any mental construct could assume the appearance of truthfulness, or put differently, anything is possible. This new-found ability of man to think not only that everything is possible, but actually to be able to demonstrate it in reality, lies at the heart of totalitarian ideology. As a consequence of the fact that,

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.<sup>40</sup>

Totalitarian ideology is able to retain its aura of infallibility by subsuming any inconsistencies under a newer and more comprehensive axiom.<sup>41</sup>

As a device to induce mass belief, totalitarian ideology is effective, Arendt said, because its inherent flexibility allows it to maintain this status of superior truth, which effectively sways the beliefs of masses hungry for any type of certainty and belonging. In effect, anything which serves total domination can be effectively rationalized by totalitarian ideology. To keep the masses pliant and susceptible to these extremes of rationalization, terror is implemented to maintain and reinforce the initial conditions of mass isolation and loneliness. Terror is used to prevent any communication of a commonly shared world. Its ultimate manifestation in the totalitarian concentration camps is epitomized by the complete self-withdrawal of the inmates.<sup>42</sup>

The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e. the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist.<sup>43</sup>

The fear which the concentration camps inspire in the general population keeps it apathetic and disorganized. Arendt extended her argument that totalitarianism seeks to induce a complete sense of superfluousness, by suggesting that the entire totalitarian system and all its members are equally accountable to this central axiom. Rulers and ruled equally serve as functional entities to maintain the process.

As Arendt herself acknowledged, the success of totalitarianism

cannot be accurately predicted because it operates in conjunction with a non-totalitarian world and thus cannot, at least yet, completely manipulate the factuality of the objective world. In fact, she posited the notion that it is because of the existence of a non-totalitarian world that totalitarianism is expansionistic at all. Because totalitarianism depends on predictability and absolute control it is forced to seek world conquest to validate its ideological framework. Nevertheless, her concern about the horrors of totalitarian rule was fundamentally a protest against our modern preoccupation with process. Totalitarianism was to her simply the most extreme political manifestation of the deleterious effect process has as the guiding principle of the political realm. The fact that it has emerged as an objective reality represented to Arendt the shattering of all past political conceptions. In that totalitarianism has attempted to prove that everything is possible and has been more than moderately successful, she saw the possibility that political activity could be extinguished from human experience. Her fear of this possibility was exacerbated by trends in the Western world. The isolation and loneliness she depicted in her characterization of mass society had in her mind strong correlates in Western society. She viewed the social sciences and their quest for predictability as a milder form of the type of behaviorism that totalitarianism attempts rigidly to enforce. Similarly, the bureaucratic rule of nobody which she attributed to the imperialistic expansion of the colonial period, also had its formative elements in the belief that men acted in accordance with the principle of a higher process.<sup>44</sup> A modern day example of this same disposition is most clearly demonstrated in her account of the Eichmann trial and

his seeming inability to think or judge events in any other fashion than that prescribed by a higher authority. What was most repulsive about totalitarianism to Arendt was its absolute disregard for utility. As a form of government, totalitarian domination forsakes all utilitarian principles in order to maintain the movement inherent to process and those under its rule succumb to viewing themselves as functional units that are expendable and superfluous.

Arendt's entire political critique was an attempt to return meaning to human affairs and restore the lost stature of man. From Plato to the theories of the contemporary world she perceived a decline in Western political thought. Her basic theoretical argument was that there has been a gradual demise in the significance of the political realm occasioned by a historical tendency to view its activities from the perspective first, of homo faber, and later, that of animal laborans. With this basic argument in mind she was greatly concerned for the future of politics in the contemporary world. The fantastic growth and innovation of scientific discovery since the modern age did not reassure her that human existence was getting better. She viewed the scientist as simply an observer of the world, less concerned with its actual appearance than with the processes behind it. This pre-occupation with invisible processes was antithetical to Arendt's concern with Being and appearance because it is analogous to the withdrawal of thinking from the world. Moreover, the search after process has had far reaching consequences, the most significant of which, from Arendt's point of view, was the introduction of universal processes into terrestrial nature. In her call for greater political participation, Arendt points out that the scientific enterprise is

unsuitable to determine the priorities of political activity because it is unconcerned with the fate of the world. She cited as a supporting example of this point the splitting of the atom and the unconditional willingness of scientists to proceed with its practical testing even knowing its potential destructiveness. In essence, she was saying that we are tampering with forces that we are unable to control and which could conceivably destroy our earthly home, and yet we proceed politically as if there were no other course of action open to us.

This blind following of process by politics was completely unwarranted in Arendt's view. The new physical world view which resulted from the discovery of the Archimedean point has in her opinion created a situation in which both the natural and historical sciences view earth from a point in space. Subsequently, human activity has followed behind scientific discoveries as if this were a natural course of events.

It is as though Einstein's imagined 'observer poised in free space' - surely the creation of the human mind and its power of abstraction - is being followed by a bodily observer who must behave as though he were a mere child of abstraction and imagination.<sup>45</sup>

Arendt felt this attitude was incompatible not only with her own view but also with the scientific perspective. The discovery by Heisenberg of the uncertainty principle which held that there are discernible limits on the measuring capacity of human instruments, also occasioned the conclusion that science would never be able to discover the essence of nature. Consequently, it would appear to be absurd that human activity be dictated by scientific discovery which in itself cannot offer any intrinsic meaning.

The meaninglessness of the attempt by the natural and historical

sciences to establish generalizations or patterns of the mind which give meaning to particular events, irked Arendt because of her conviction that particulars carry their own meaning within themselves. She wanted to take issue with theories which postulated process models of cause and effect and with the modern predisposition to accept this as objective reality. Instead, she wanted to point out that although in the contemporary world we behave as if this is true, in effect, the earlier superiority of the scientific method over the humanities, has since Heisenberg's discovery, been reduced to a convergence of the two around the realization that there are no absolute verities accessible to human understanding. Therefore, to equate human stature with mankind's ability to imitate process is really to acknowledge human stature as meaningless. Arendt, on the contrary, wanted to re-assert our trust in a common-sense understanding of the world. Because the application of universal laws to the world contradicts our everyday sense experience, they in effect impede our ability realistically to act in harmony with the sensuously given world we hold in common. In short, because absolute meaning is beyond human understanding, meaning manifest in common understanding is our next best bet. This resolution of our modern dilemma is directly tied, in Arendt's theory, to a rediscovery of our political roots, hence her emphasis on the significance of political action.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'Tradition and the Modern Age' in Between Past and Future Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Authority?' in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 112-113.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 113-114.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 115. Cf. Richard Rorty, Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 116-119.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op.Cit., p. 248.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 265.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 266.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 273.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 275.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 279.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p. 283.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 248.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, p. 17.

- <sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 309.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid, p. 320.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid, p. 320.
- <sup>28</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History' in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 77.
- <sup>29</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'Tradition and the Modern Age,' Op.Cit., p. 38.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid, p. 22.
- <sup>31</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of The Mind : One/Thinking, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1977, p. 19.
- <sup>32</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op.Cit., p. 5.
- <sup>33</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'Tradition and the Modern Age,' Op.Cit., p. 25.
- <sup>34</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Authority?,' Op. Cit., p. 140.
- <sup>35</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture' in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 198-199.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 201.
- <sup>37</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op.Cit., p. 322.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid, p. 322.
- <sup>39</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Origins Of Totalitarianism, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1973, p. 475.
- <sup>40</sup>Cf. Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, Viking Press, New York, 1963.
- <sup>41</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History,' Op.Cit., p. 88.
- <sup>42</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Op.Cit., p. 452-457.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid, p. 474.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 215.
- <sup>45</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man' in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 274.

## CHAPTER THREE

### POLITICAL ACTION

The *raison d'etre* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.

In a nutshell this quote expresses Arendt's thesis that freedom and political action coincide. In fact, this combination of freedom and political action is the linchpin on which Arendt based her contention that political action is distinct from the instrumental action of homo faber. As will be more fully explained in the body of this chapter, Arendt's unique conception of freedom as the manifestation of action at the exact moment of its happening, embodies both her perception of action as a distinct category of the vita activa and its separateness from the vita contemplativa. Relative to my own thesis, the ramifications of Arendt's concept of political action as it affects the relationship between the vita activa and vita contemplativa is of prime importance. In general terms, I am more than willing to agree that Arendt identified in her writings certain unique features of political action which distinguish it from labor and work. I am not convinced, however, that the disjunction she evoked between political action and the vita contemplativa, with particular reference to the faculties of thinking and willing, is valid. On the contrary, I believe her analysis of the vita contemplativa is inconsistent with her concept of political action, and that it is this inconsistency which has obscured for many the significance of her contribution to political theory. My basic point is that I think Arendt's notion of political action must necessarily be understood in the context of an interrelationship between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. I hope to show that she actually implied this connection throughout her work and that her

analysis of the relationship between political action and the vita activa is more consistent with this viewpoint than her own analysis of the vita contemplativa implies.

#### A. THE PRIMACY OF APPEARANCE

The most pertinent aspect of political action which separates it from labor and work is its reliance on the human condition of plurality. Plurality is the essential condition of political action, the combination of action and speech, and has the dual characteristics of equality and distinction. Equality is embodied by diversified mankind in the capacity to understand one another such that this understanding has meaning which binds together the tenses of past, present, and future. The characteristic of distinction is the expression of individual identity, in the combined mode of speech and action, in which men present themselves to each other as unique beings rather than as merely physical objects. Political action as the communication between men qua men is a voluntary act, one which is necessary only in the sense that one may wish to participate in the human world. Arendt viewed this participation as the criterion for being human, because to live a life devoid of political action is analogous to living in a world without other humans.<sup>2</sup> Recognition of a human world rests on the tacit assumption that "plurality is the law of the earth"<sup>3</sup> because,

Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not Man but men inhabit this planet.<sup>4</sup>

As political actors, we insert ourselves into the appearing world which is created and exists between human beings. From Arendt's perspective,

this insertion is a kind of second birth. Prompted by our initial birth, our coming into being, political action is an event "in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance."<sup>5</sup> Uncoerced by necessity as in labor, divorced from the prompting of utility as in work, and unconditioned by those who surround us, political action is an acknowledgement of our individual being in which we begin something new stemming from our own initiative. "Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action."<sup>6</sup> On the premise that such action is possible, only then, Arendt suggested, does the principle of freedom come into existence. In acknowledgement of Augustine's political philosophy, Arendt implied her agreement with his saying, "that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody"<sup>7</sup> which "is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before."<sup>8</sup>

From the actor's perspective, participation in the world of human affairs, through action and speech, affords the opportunity to express one's unique individuality. By engaging in political action, beginning something new, the actor takes the opportunity to introduce something unexpected into the world. Political action initiates spontaneous processes into an already existing web of relationships. This is equally true whether action is begun in the realm of human or natural affairs. The basic factor that differentiates between the process character of political action and the process character of necessity is the human ability to act and initiate processes which would not come into existence without human intervention. Once begun, these processes are irreversible and their outcome unpredictable. Unlike the

fabrication process which ceases with the production of the end product, "the strength of the action process is never exhausted in a single deed but, on the contrary, can grow while its consequences multiply."<sup>9</sup> "The process of a single deed can quite literally endure throughout time until mankind itself has come to an end."<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the statistical uniformity which provides a measure of certainty in everyday life, the startling unexpectedness and newness of political action appears as a miracle. Action manifests the human condition of natality and speech about action confers distinctiveness on the individual. Speech has a greater affinity to revelation than action, and action has a greater affinity to beginning than speech. Arendt based this combination of speech and action as political action, on the fact, that inevitably each newcomer must answer the fundamental question of "who are you?" Action without speech begs the question of why it was performed. Without speech, action loses its revelatory character and appears similar to any automatic process that might be carried out by a robot. It is the intimate relationship between speech and action which gives political action its human quality and allows the individual actor to explain what he has done, is doing, and intends to do. Action without speech robs action of its subject.

The political actor's combined use of speech and action to insert himself into the world of human affairs produces something which in Arendt's interpretation is essentially a phenomenon. The disclosure of the actor's "who" encompasses much more than a description of "what" somebody is. Description of a person's talents, gifts, qualities, and shortcomings merely outlines "what" someone is without really providing an understanding of the person. In contrast, the "who" of a person

disclosed in political action more closely resembles the use one makes of one's talents, gifts, qualities and shortcomings as they are expressed in word and deed and perceived by others. The manifestation of a person's "who" is synonymous with a person's character as others perceive it, and although it defies unequivocal verbal expression, it is nonetheless this revelation that gives action and speech human relevance. In the sense that an actor may know the particulars of what he has done without having the experience of witnessing his act as a separate entity, Arendt concluded that it is virtually impossible for the actor to summon forth his "who" as an act of will or to have an understanding of his "who" as perceived by others in his action. Hence, although political action depends on the actor's initiative, the meaning of the act and the identification of "who" the actor is rests with those who witness the event. Consequently, because the actor does not know "who" he reveals in speech and action, he is taking a risk in disclosure. In recognition of this risk, Arendt understandably believed that speech and action are most revelatory in circumstances in which people join together without being for or against each other. This joining for the sake of sheer togetherness discriminates against the participation of the doer of good works and the criminal in the political realm. Because the former is for, and the latter against, all men, both character types are only peripherally connected to the public realm, and therefore politically marginal. In both characters disclosure is prejudicial to the actor because, on the one hand, the doer of good works must maintain anonymity for his acts to retain their goodness, and, on the other hand, the criminal must remain hidden to avoid discovery and punishment.

The disclosure of the actor's "who" is a primary factor in the distinction between political action and the instrumental action of homo faber. When word and deed part company the revelatory capacity of speech vis à vis action loses its transcendence over mere productive activity. Once speech diverges from the context of action it loses its quality of revelation and becomes a means for the ends of action. In this context, action has no more meaning than its end product. Inasmuch as Arendt asserted that political action is the mode in which men appear to each other qua men, any disjunction between speech and action, because it obscures the identity of the political actor, causes a deterioration in the political realm. "Action without a name, a "who" attached to it, is meaningless."<sup>11</sup> The uniquely individual human quality of political action depends on the revelatory coincidence of word with deed.

The phenomenological quality of political action, pertinent to the role of the acting agent, has its basis in the fact that although the disclosure of the actor's "who" is both visible and audible, it nevertheless essentially defies description. In any attempt to describe "who" somebody is, we inevitably end up saying "what" that person is. As a consequence, disclosure of a "who" as the appearance of men as distinctly human eludes strict definition in the context of a definitive human nature. The "who", manifested in the continuous ebb and flow between acting and speaking human beings, excludes in principle any attempt on our part to manipulate human affairs in the same manner that "we handle things whose nature is at our disposal because we can name them."<sup>12</sup> This elusive intangibility of political action is given objective validity when reified in the tangible objects of the human

artifice and the stories told about specific events. In short, storytelling and the human artifice are the objectivization of political action whose dual focus concerns the physical world people hold in common and intersubjective relations. On the one hand, political action is concerned with the objective reality of the human artifice and those aspects of it which are of "inter-est" to those who live in it and seek to preserve it. This common concern for the objective world stems from the desire to establish grounds of common understanding which will relate and bind the people of political communities together. On the other hand, political action involves the direct speaking and acting of men together. Because no tangible product emerges from the intercourse of this subjective in-between, it is a much more intangible expression of political action than that which focuses on the human artifice. Nonetheless, Arendt was adamant that this subjective in-between or "web of human relationships" is just as real as the world of things. She believed that even when political action concerned itself with the material world, the contemporaneous disclosure of the actor's "who" effects a simultaneous influence on the "web of human relationships".

The initiation of political action, encompassed in the disclosure of a "who" in speech and the beginning of something new in action, makes its appearance in the presence of an already existing "web of human relationships." The consequent interaction between the already given and the novelty of political action starts new processes which culminate in the establishment of a unique life story of the newcomer and the influence it effects on the life stories of those with whom he comes into contact. Due to the conflict of wills and intentions inherent to this pre-existing "web of human relationships", political action seldom

achieves its objective. Despite this barrier, this pre-existing web is the medium which gives political action its sense of reality and from which stories are generated in which the political actor is portrayed as the "hero." While these stories can be reified in various forms of tangible things, such as art objects, the stories themselves more adequately reveal their subject, the "hero," than can any product of human hands. Moreover, although the political actor is solely responsible for his insertion into the world of human affairs, he is neither the author nor producer of his own life story. Whereas the political agent is the "hero" of the story, the eventual outcome is, in effect, his biography and, as such, is not fictional in the sense that it is made up but, is real in that it recounts actual events. The actor's life story is based on actual events and most closely resembles the intangibility inherent to the disclosure of the actor's "who." His character only really shows through in the in-between which exists between the events which make up the story. Hence, reification of the political actor's life story is best represented in imitation that embodies the same intangible dynamic tension between events that existed in the original experience. Based on this qualification Arendt considered the theatre to be the political art par excellence because its sole subject is man and his relationship to others. Similarly, as a consequence of the fact that the story of political action begins immediately following its appearance, its meaning is never fully revealed until the performance comes to an end. For this reason Arendt credited the backward glance of the historian and his story as a more significant and truthful account than anything which could be offered by the actors themselves.

What the storyteller narrates must necessarily be hidden from the actor himself, at least as long as he is in the act or caught in its consequences, because to him the meaningfulness of his act is not in the story that follows. Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and "makes" the story.<sup>13</sup>

Political action not confined by the limitations imposed by the founding principles of political community is essentially boundless in character. The introduction of speech and action as a new beginning into the "web of human relationships" has, without the qualifying criterion of plurality, the tendency to destroy all pre-existing relationships. Accompanied by a consideration for the criterion of plurality, political action retains its boundless character in terms of its influence not having a time limitation. Arendt viewed the creation of new relationships as the opposite side of the coin to the boundless character of political action. In this sense, Arendt agreed with the Greeks that moderation is one of the political virtues par excellence, because it aims to remain within bounds and avoid the greatest of political temptations, that of hubris. Arendt turned to the Greek pre-philosophic conception of the polis in order to illuminate those aspects of political community that allow for the freedom of political action and the preservation of its continuity. The pre-philosophic polis was founded to remedy the condition of frailty inherent to political action and had its roots in the "pre-polis experience and estimate of what makes it worthwhile for men to live together (syzen), namely, the 'sharing of words and deeds'."<sup>14</sup> To fulfil this demand the polis had two essential functions. The first of these was the creation of a space which would multiply the opportunities for everybody to manifest their unique identity in word and deed. Secondly, the polis

was established as a forum for the organized remembrance of political action. This Greek perception of the polis was in essence the acceptance of a conceptual guarantee that the most futile human activities, speech and action, and their most ephemeral products, stories and deeds, could be sustained in a condition of imperishability. Central to Arendt's choice of the pre-philosophic polis as a paradigmatic model of the political realm is the interaction between the "web of human relationships" and the human artifice. In the ancient Greek perception, speech and action constituted the public realm. In order for political action to survive the fleeting moment of its appearance, the tangible human artifice or the physical polis and its laws act as boundaries to protect its remembrance. In contrast to the infinite dissemination that confronts political action left alone with its boundlessness, the polis and its laws form the limiting condition in which political action is remembered in its proper context.

Although Arendt maintained that all persons are capable of political action, this did not prompt her to conclude that everyone engages in it. In fact, she cited several historical examples, "like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world"<sup>15</sup> who she felt had never participated. Moreover, she also insisted that no person can remain continuously in the political realm. In stating this limitation on individual participation in the political realm, Arendt was consistent with her thesis that the activities of labor and work are part of the human condition of each individual and require tending. It is noteworthy that the logical extension of this line of reasoning refutes any so-called justifications for slave

populations to support an elite class devoted to the full-time demands of human affairs. Arendt's emphasis was on the uniqueness of the Greek conception of the space of appearance because she believed that "to be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance."<sup>16</sup>

The factor that makes the public realm possible and integrates the "web of human relationships" with the human artifice is power.

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.<sup>17</sup>

Implicit in this conceptualization of power is the establishment of trusting relationships based on open and constructive intentions. These relationships are not a necessary outcome of human interaction, but depend on conscious agreement to keep the space of appearance for acting and speaking persons in existence. Hence, power is not a constant and measurable force because it ebbs and flows with the flux which animates the interaction of acting and speaking persons. Arendt's interpretation of power was that it is a potentiality which is actualized when persons join together in action and speech, and vanishes when they disperse. The initial acceptance of action and speech as significant human activities is a first principle needed to allow for the actualization of power. Power potential can never be fully materialized and does not have the constancy of measurement which is inherent to force and strength. Power is, therefore, relatively free of the material considerations associated with numbers and means.

What is pertinent to political community in Arendt's discussion of

power is that it is the organized medium in which power is able to generate itself. Political community or the living together of people is the primary material factor in ensuring that the potentiality for power can come to immediate fruition. Arendt saw the foundation of cities as a necessary material factor for power because they keep people together after the appearance of political action and by maintaining this togetherness sustain the retention of the power generated. Power is dependent on plurality and as such is relinquished in isolation. In short, Arendt wanted to maintain that within political community there are no limits on the growth of power and its reliance on plurality allows for its division amongst others without diminishing it. In fact, she noted that the interplay of power located in different centres tends to generate even more power. Arendt noted that if power was not an attribute of plurality, that is, if power could be possessed absolutely by the individual like strength and implemented as force, then the concept of omnipotence would be a distinct human possibility. Power is not immune to destruction. Whereas individual strength is helpless in a confrontation with power, force in which one or the few possess a monopoly of the means of violence can destroy power. Although violence can destroy power, it cannot act as a substitute for it and this Arendt suggested accounts for the often seen political combination of force and powerlessness indicative of tyrannies. Tyrannical rule destroys power and as a result causes political impotency which sooner or later germinates as the seed of its own destruction.

In contradistinction to the commonly accepted definition of power as an enhanced capacity to rule by the one or the few, Arendt's definition emphasized the voluntary association of people under

conditions of political equality, joined together for the purpose of speaking and acting, and the subsequent generation of power in the establishment of a "web of human relationships." These bonds are significant intersubjectively and give meaning to the otherwise unrelated things that constitute the human artifice. Without power, the public realm created by speech and action would not survive their fleeting appearance. The failure of the Western tradition of politics to view power in this light was consistently portrayed as one of its major downfalls by Arendt. In other words, the failure to recognize the greatness of political action in its performance rather than judging it by its success or failure in achieving any particular tangible end. Political action transcends the commonly accepted bounds of everyday life in its quest for the extraordinary. The creation of new relationships inherent to the boundlessness of political action is coeval with a new world view that is unique and sui generis.

It was the association of freedom with sovereignty that Arendt most pointedly wanted to deny in her concept of political action. She believed that the powers of forgiveness and promise attendant on the irreversible and unpredictable characteristics of action respectively, gave support to her assertion that freedom and non-sovereignty are mutually inclusive. Most pertinent to Arendt's depiction of political action and its relationship to political community is the connection she postulated between the maintenance of power and the activities of forgiving and promising. Referring back for a moment to the activities of labor and work, it was Arendt's belief that the redemption of labor, in meaningfully human terms, from its slavish subservience to the

necessity of the life process, is accomplished by homo faber who eases the pain and toil of animal laborans while at the same time erecting the human artifice. Similarly, the redemption of homo faber from the devaluation of all values synonymous with a world whose standards are calculated according to means-end equations, is given reality in the meaningful stories generated by action and speech. In both instances, redemption comes about as a result of the external application of something to the activity to be redeemed. Of importance to the present discussion, Arendt very directly stated that redemption of the irreversibility and unpredictability of action's processes is not affected by a source external to political action.

The case of action and action's predicaments is altogether different. Here, the remedy against the irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself.<sup>18</sup>

The faculty of forgiving redeems the irreversibility of political action committed by an actor caught in the dilemma of being unable to undo the deed for which he is responsible and whose outcome he did not and could not know. The faculty of promising circumvents the unpredictability of action by creating tentative measures of security in the uncertainty of the future.

Arendt premised her argument for the need for forgiveness in political community on the assertion that without it the capacity of the individual to act would be confined to a single deed. Without forgiveness the actor would suffer the consequences of his initial act forever. On the other hand, the faculty of promising gives reality to individual identity in the confirmation observed by others between "the one who promises and the one who fulfils."<sup>19</sup> In the case of both

faculties, the overriding criteria for Arendt was that they must be performed under the condition of plurality because,

forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self.<sup>28</sup>

This direct correlation between plurality and the faculties of promising and forgiving signified to Arendt a distinctly different set of guiding principles for the political realm than the moral standards derived from Plato's political philosophy which arise out of man's rule over himself. Arendt pointed to the fact that promising and forgiving under the condition of plurality derive their moral context from actual events conducted between people, which the individual cannot experience in isolation.

Forgiveness ameliorates the inevitable trespassing which results from action's interjection into a pre-existing web of relations and the severing of past bonds which often accompanies the establishment of new relationships. It is the release mechanism that absolves the actor for trespasses that he has committed by his action unknowingly. Only in conjunction with forgiveness can men remain free to step back from their actions and their consequences in order to start again. Arendt actually asserted that without the faculty of forgiving mankind could not be entrusted with beginning anything new. Of course, this assumption stems from her supposition that without the faculty of forgiving the trespasses caused by action's initiation of process bring about the immediate reaction of revenge. Without the intervention of forgiving this automatic process is destined to continual repetition. Therefore, forgiveness stands as the direct opposite of vengeance and because it breaks into the chain of reactions to an action, Arendt

classified forgiveness as the beginning of a new act. As such, forgiveness embodies the same characteristics of unexpectedness and revelation as action because it is not conditioned as a reaction by the act which provokes it, but rather stands free as a new act that frees both the forgiver and the forgiven from the consequences of the provoking act.

Interestingly, Arendt posited punishment as an alternative to forgiveness because both seek to bring to an end what would be the incessant continuation of a process of consequences if not externally circumvented. Based on this concept of ending something, she concluded that a principal structural element of the realm of human affairs is that men cannot forgive what they cannot punish, and cannot punish that which they cannot forgive. In conjunction with Kant, she labelled events which fall into this category 'radical evil', something she acknowledged we know little about and which occupies a space outside the public realm and the potential of human power because we can neither punish nor forgive it. Notably, Arendt believed the political realm and the power of the space of appearance are no match for the destructiveness of radical evil where it appears.

Another noticeable distinction Arendt made in her discussion of forgiveness concerned its separation as an entity from love. She wanted to challenge the conviction that forgiveness is a direct adjunct of the power of love. She accepted the premise that love most completely allows for the self-revelation of a person's "who" and its recognition by the loving partner. What she could not accept about love in its relation to the political realm is its total unworldliness, the ambivalence regarding what the loved person is in terms of specific qualities,

talents, and shortcomings generated by the myopia of love's passion. For Arendt, love destroyed the in-between that separates and relates persons. As such, love was for her anti-political and the forgiveness that springs from it, which forgives a person no matter what they have done, is therefore wholly unsuitable to a political realm based on judgmental discriminations. In contradistinction to love's power of forgiveness, Arendt proposed that political forgiveness stems from respect. Respect constituted for her a form of public friendship that maintains the separateness of the world of appearance and abjures the intimacy and closeness of love. Arendt's concept of respect as friendship is the public equivalent of private love and is thus the personal feeling that prompts public forgiving for the sake of a person's "who." The actor himself is incapable of providing this type of forgiveness to himself because he lacks the experience of the "who" to whom forgiveness is extended.

The faculty of promising partially dispels the unpredictability of political action enacted under the condition of plurality. Arendt perceived two conditions of unpredictability that the making of promises remedies to an extent. Man's inability to completely predict his behavior, his inability to completely rely on himself is the price paid for freedom. On the other hand, the performance of political action leaves the actor without complete control over the consequences and outcome of his action which is the price paid for plurality and reality. Promising remedies these two deficiencies of the unpredictability of action by creating limited islands of certainty which extend into the future. However, the faculty of promising is not all-inclusive or forever binding. Quite the contrary to the concept of rule, Arendt's

perception of promises in the political realm was one in which political contracts are voluntarily agreed upon and thereby maintain the diversity of plurality and the association of freedom with non-sovereignty. She perceived any contractual system built on mutual promise which aimed to map out an all-encompassing strategy for the future as self-defeating, in the context that it would be rigorously binding and antithetical to freedom.

Arendt viewed the faculty of promise as the force which keeps people together in political community. The force of mutual promise has a limited sovereignty because it represents a collective many voluntarily bound together, who, because they can create a limited degree of reliability and independence in an uncertain future, are able "to dispose of the future as though it were the present."<sup>21</sup> This sovereignty is limited to the extent that it fulfils the agreed aims to which mutual promises are valid and binding. At no point does this interpretation of sovereignty contradict the condition of political plurality. It is merely a sovereignty coincident with the power of mutual promise stemming from a collectivity of non-sovereign participants. Vis à vis the individual, the sovereignty of the collective is a superior force, but the condition of plurality which supports it is ever-present and in this respect the making of promises differs from the making of homo faber carried on in isolation.

In the final analysis, Arendt posited the activities of promising and forgiving as essential features in any political community that wishes to maintain the continuity of power generated in the space of appearances. In effect, the readiness to forgive and be forgiven, and to make promises and keep them, are the control mechanisms that afford

the political realm a measure of stability. They are activities which are not externally motivated but arise directly out of the acting and speaking between people for the sake of living together. This intimate relationship of forgiving and promising to actual events in the space of appearances, imbues them with a morality more closely resembling virtuousness rather than the good-evil continuum commonly associated with religious or individual morality. The relationship of forgiving and promises to political action rests on their capacity to ameliorate the consequences of action's boundlessness, irreversibility and unpredictability. It is the two former faculties which prevent the latter ramifications of action from turning the political realm into chaos. The faculties of forgiving and promise interdict the cyclical movement of process to which political action is no less subject than nature.

The ultimate purpose of Arendt's analysis of the combined interaction between the political actor and political community was to put forth a concept of freedom she saw manifest in politics. Intimately connected with this attempt on her part was her consistent concern that the legitimate and inescapable relevance of a concept of freedom to political theory has in the tradition of Western political thought succumbed to "the obscure wood wherein philosophy has lost its way."<sup>22</sup> The essence of her political critique is that the concept of freedom located in the political realm of human affairs has been forgotten, since the rise of political philosophy, which over the course of the tradition's history has conceived of freedom as being located in the realm of the vita contemplativa and as a specific attribute of the faculty of the will. For all intents and purposes, Arendt's basic

argument was that freedom does not exist in the "two-in-one" of the thinking dialogue between me and myself, but is rather, directly related to the appearance of actual human experiences. She believed that political theory has followed the same tendency as the early philosophers, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, in the elevation of the vita contemplativa over the vita activa. This escape from politics into philosophy was followed by a transference of the concept of freedom from the political realm to the inner domain of introspection. The great drawback she saw in this conception of freedom located in the inner self is that it remains separate from an individual's contact with others, and is therefore, opposite to the thirst for freedom which prompts men to live together in political organization in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

This assumption by Arendt that the experience of freedom is the original motive for political organization presupposes the condition that freedom is initially a tangible reality that is only discernible in the individual's intercourse with others. Her claim was that without this tangible reality of freedom a concept of inner freedom would never arise out of the intercourse with ourselves. Consequently, the concept of inner freedom has its foundation in the scenario in which the individual has witnessed the reality of freedom but is disallowed from participating. Arendt attributed the discovery of this inner freedom to those in late antiquity who had no place of their own in the world. The offshoot of this development according to Arendt was that liberation and freedom, although mutually exclusive activities, are intimately connected in occasioning the appearance of freedom in the world. Liberation is the activity that severs man's subservience to necessity

and allows him to move freely in the world. The equality of persons liberated from necessity is the sine qua non for the existence of political community in Arendt's perspective. However, she most emphatically wanted to disassociate freedom from the phenomenon of the will. In contrast to the freedom of choice between pre-determined ends representative of the liberum arbitrium, Arendt's notion of freedom is the capacity to "call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known."<sup>24</sup> The freedom of political action is not directly related to the motives and goals of the actor, but rather, to the manifestation of an external principle.

The guidance of motive and goal by external principle was not in Arendt's view a denial of the role of intellect and will in political action per se. She acknowledged that the desirability of a future aim is conceived by the intellect and transformed into action by the dictate of the will. Given the various forms political action can take in a changing world, she considered the proper matching of an aim with a principle as the difference between right and wrong judgment. Similarly, the willing of action follows upon judgment and is not a matter of freedom but a concern of strength or weakness. Freedom is the manifestation of an external principle in the performance of speech and action. Principle shapes the motives and goals of political action, but only becomes manifest to the spectator in the actor's performance. In essence, it is the sophistication and degree to which motive and goal, speech and action, adhere to their inspiring principle which creates the spectacle to which the spectators in political community are witness

and upon which they offer a judgment. This spectacle is something to which the political actor is not cognizant because of his absorption with his own motives and goals at the time of his performance. It is crucial to point out that principle does not dictate particular aims or motives but is rather a standard against which they are judged. Moreover, principle retains its strength and validity after the completion of the performed act whereas the merits of the intellect's judgment and the strength of the will's commands that initiate the act dissipate after its execution.

In distinction from its goal, the principle of an action can be repeated time and again, it is inexhaustible, and in distinction from its motive, the validity of a principle is universal, it is not bound to any particular person or to any particular group. However, the manifestation of principles comes about only through action, they are manifest in the world<sup>25</sup> as long as the action lasts, but no longer.

Arendt called some of these principles of political action "honor and glory, love of equality, which Montesquien called virtue, or distinction or excellence...., but also fear or distrust or hatred."<sup>26</sup> It is the actualization of these principles that affords the appearance of freedom. Freedom and the manifestation of principle coincide with the performance of political action. This assertion entailed for Arendt the premise that men are only free when they act, in contradistinction to their possession of the capacity for freedom. "For to be free and to act are the same."<sup>27</sup> Integral to Arendt's conceptualization of political action was the support she drew from Machiavelli's concept of virtù, "the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of fortune."<sup>28</sup> The occurrence of political action resembles the type of

virtuosity we associate with the performing arts in which the performance itself takes on greater significance than any ramifications that result from it. The purpose of the polis or political realm is to secure a space of appearance in which freedom as virtuosity can appear. Courage is the political faculty par excellence needed to maintain and engage oneself in the affairs of the political realm. This is not the reckless courage which risks life and limb, but the courage to leave the private realm and enter the public realm where concern for the world takes precedence over individual lives. This is the mark of courage properly befitting the political actor.

#### B. THE FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THINKING

At the crux of Arendt's distinction between the vita contemplativa and the vita activa is the relationship she posited between thinking and the world of appearances. I choose to emphasize the importance of her concept of thinking for several reasons. In her description of the mental activities of thinking, willing and judging, Arendt concedes that it is thinking which withdraws most completely from the world present to our senses and, as such, represents what would seem the greatest separation between the two realms.<sup>29</sup> Also thinking understood as contemplation has direct bearing on the contemplative glance of the philosopher which Arendt so roundly condemned for the perversion of politics. Moreover, the thinking activity precedes willing and judging because it "must prepare the particulars given to the senses in such a way that the mind is able to handle them in their absence; it must, in brief, de-sense them."<sup>30</sup> Finally I would offer the opinion that Arendt's text on thinking is much more representative of her own views

than her work on willing or judging. The latter two are concerned, respectively, with a commentary on the views of some major Western philosophers and with an interpretation of Kant.

"Every mental act rests on the mind's faculty of having present to itself what is absent from the senses."<sup>31</sup> This capacity for re-presentation is the unique gift of the mind to make present what is absent. Arendt believed it was the gift of imagination which makes this possible and that the mental terminology of imagination "is based on metaphors drawn from vision's experience."<sup>32</sup> Sense-objects experienced in the world of appearances are transformed by imagination into invisible images which are then stored in the memory. When thinking calls forth these invisible images in memory they become thought-objects. Arendt was quick to note that there is no less decisive a difference between thought-objects and the images of memory than there is between these images and the sense-objects they represent. She offered as proof of this distinction the fact that thinking goes beyond imagination, as for example, "when our reason proclaims the infinity of number which no vision in the thought of corporeal things has yet grasped."<sup>33</sup>

Imagination, therefore, which transforms a visible object into an invisible image, fit to be stored in the mind, is the condition sine qua non for providing the mind with suitable thought-objects; but these thought-objects come into being only when the mind actively and deliberately remembers, recollects and selects from the storehouse of memory whatever arouses its interest sufficiently to induce concentration; in these operations the mind learns how to deal with things that are absent and prepares itself to "go further," toward the understanding of things that are always absent, that cannot be remembered because they were never present to sense experience.<sup>34</sup>

The distinction between thought based on the imagination's

transformation of visible images into thought-objects and thinking which goes beyond imagination informs the separation Arendt posited between intellect and reason, truth and meaning. Intellect organizes the cognitive perceptions of sensory experience transmitted by common-sense reasoning into the knowledge which constitutes the thought-objects of imagination.<sup>35</sup> The highest criterion of intellect's cognition is the self-evident truth that accompanies sensory perception in the world of appearances.<sup>36</sup> Reason which thinks beyond imagination, takes the knowledge of intellect for granted because it does not question what something is but rather "what it means for it to be."<sup>37</sup> Inspired by the interest suggested to it by the thought-objects of imagination, which reason must retrieve from the storehouse of memory,<sup>38</sup> reason learns to deal with things that are absent and prepares itself to go beyond imagination "toward the understanding of things that are always absent."<sup>39</sup> Since reason deals with things always invisible and not given to sense perception, its quest for meaning is not verifiable to the same extent as self-evident truth.<sup>40</sup>

Arendt's fundamental point about thinking beyond imagination vis à vis the world of appearances is that it transcends anything given in our sensory experience and consequently cannot be communicated in its essence. Rather, it makes its presence felt in the world of appearances in speech expressed as metaphor. The reliance of thought on language for its appearance in the world, posed a problem, Arendt believed, since the structure of language expresses relationships between sensory-given objects. Therefore, language is an imperfect transmittal agent for thought because it cannot provide a vocabulary for the essence of thought which transcends sensory experience.<sup>41</sup> Whereas metaphor is

exactly suited to express analogies between sense-objects, it is not compatible, to the same extent, in expressing analogous relationships between invisible images not intuitively received from sensory experience and sense-objects. What metaphor does accomplish for thinking is a presentation of analogies in the world of appearance which express aspects of thinking in a frozen state. Hence, the essence of thinking does not appear, only an aspect of its activity expressed as an analogy at a given point in time. Based on these deductions, Arendt concluded that metaphor serves to bridge the abyss between the inwardness and invisibility of mental activities and the world of appearance. The qualification she applied to her acceptance of this relationship was the assertion that the application of the metaphor linking invisible to sensory is irreversible, in contradistinction to the reversibility of metaphor when applied to analogous relationships between sense-objects. Arendt's contention was that there is no sense-given metaphorical analogy, which can manifest the essence of thinking that goes beyond the intuition given to imagination by sense-objects.<sup>42</sup>

Stemming from this conclusion of her analysis of language and metaphor, Arendt proffered several propositions concerning the dynamics of the relationship between thinking and the world of appearances. In the first instance, she suggested that thinking's use of analogies, metaphors and emblems to manifest itself, serve as anchors by which thinking, when actively disengaged from sense-given intuition, maintains contact with the world.

The simple fact that our mind is able to find such analogies, that the world of appearances reminds us of things non-apparent, may be seen as a kind of "proof" that mind and body, thinking and experience,

the invisible and visible, belong together, are  
 "made" for each other, as it were.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, aside from this acknowledgement that thinking and sense experience are "made" for each other, Arendt maintained that the irreversibility inherent in the metaphorical relationship between thinking and the world of appearances "indicates in its own manner the absolute primacy of the world of appearances and thus provides additional evidence of the extraordinary quality of thinking, of its being always out of order"<sup>44</sup> (my emphasis). Carrying this last assumption one step further, she suggested that because thinking is essentially metaphorical, in other words, never so free that it does not remain tied to the world of appearances, the concept of a two world theory is invalid. "There are not two worlds because metaphor unites them."<sup>45</sup>

I believe that the logic Arendt used to connect and support these conclusions about thinking's relationship to the world of appearances breaks down in light of her own description of the thinking activity. The essential problem resides in the fact that thought which goes beyond the intuition of sense-objects eludes metaphorical manifestation as Arendt stated it, and, therefore, represents a sphere not tied to the world of appearance, assuming that irreversibility does condition the use of metaphor in this context. To suggest that analogies, metaphors and emblems still permeate the thinking process to the extent that they establish our bearings when thought reaches beyond intuition, would seem to be a direct contradiction of her own concept of "thinking without a bannister." Equally pertinent is the fact that if the irreversibility of metaphor can be disproven, Arendt's attribution of absolute primacy to the world of appearances dissolves, and with it her invalidation of the

two world theory. The failure of metaphor to manifest the essence of thinking is a concomitant failure to provide an absolute unification which would support her belief in the dominance of the world of appearances.

I am convinced that a reversible metaphor exists between thinking and Arendt's concept of political action and that a key to understanding it rests in the manifestation of the "who" in speech and action. Critical to Arendt's postulation of the irreversible metaphor was her belief that there did not exist any sense-given analogies that can capture the essence of thinking. Her support for this argument was that the limitations of the structural elements of language prevent the formation of a comprehensive metaphor for thinking. What I think escaped Arendt's attention was the fact that she similarly decried the limitations of language in any attempt to describe "who" somebody is.

The manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression. The moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a "character" in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.<sup>46</sup>

It would seem that the similarity of these two examples in their relationship to the deficiencies of language is unmistakable from Arendt's perspective. Moreover, the "curious intangibility" of the "who" manifested in political action bears an uncanny resemblance to the thinking ego located in time in the "in-between of past and future, the present",<sup>47</sup> that "mysterious and slippery now, a mere gap in time."<sup>48</sup> Without doubt, Arendt clearly demonstrated that there are phenomena in

both the vita contemplativa and the vita activa which defy the illuminating capacity of language alone.

In effect, I intend to derive support for my contention that political action represents the reversible metaphor for thinking based on the striking inadequacy of language to embody phenomenal essences in both the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Not only do I consider this a poignantly obvious issue relative to Arendt's work, I also think the egregious disparity in the sophistication of her analysis demands closer scrutiny. I believe it is possible to enunciate a coherent and valid defense of the reversible metaphor by drawing attention to the interchangeability of the structural relationships that exist between the elemental characteristics Arendt attributed to thinking and political action.

The relationship of thinking to the world of appearances was for Arendt basically one of withdrawal. "The only outward manifestation of the mind is absentmindedness, an obvious disregard of the surrounding world, something entirely negative which in no way hints at what is actually happening within us."<sup>49</sup> Thinking is reflexive, it acts back upon itself. "Mental activities themselves all testify by their reflexive nature to a duality inherent in consciousness; the mental agent cannot be active except by acting, implicitly or explicitly, back upon himself."<sup>50</sup> The activity of thinking has a self-destructive tendency, it "is like Penelope's web; it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before."<sup>51</sup> Finally, thinking is only aware of itself as long as it lasts, meaning that "thinking itself can never be solidly established as one and even the highest property of the human species - man can be defined as the "speaking animal" in the

Aristotelian sense of logon echon, in possession of speech, but not as the thinking animal, the animal rationale."<sup>52</sup> These, then, are the outstanding characteristics of thinking that Arendt identified.<sup>53</sup>

The withdrawal of thinking from the common-sense world of appearances is a significant concept in relation to Arendt's attempt to separate the freedom of political action from any form of mental pre-determination. Her emphasis on the withdrawal of mental activities was an attempt to substantiate her claim that the central concerns of the vita contemplativa and the vita activa are different. My contention is that she was less than successful in this endeavour. For instance, even though a person engaged in thinking may focus attention on that which is invisible, it is obviously not a physical departure from the world. The stillness which accompanies the absentmindedness of thought is undeniably an activity of a living body. It is a kind of action without political connotation but which nonetheless is simultaneous with thought. If one can take issue with Arendt's assumption that the "only outward manifestation of the mind" (my emphasis) is absentmindedness, based on her statement that "mental activities, invisible themselves and occupied with the invisible, become manifest only through speech,"<sup>54</sup> what is obviously clear is that thinking can become manifest in action and speech. Granted, stillness categorized as action does not in and of itself illuminate anything about thinking, other than to suggest that it has been ongoing when later corroborated by speech. This corroboration by speech in conjunction with the activity of stillness is a form of political action. Between the extremes of the couplings speech and stillness, muteness and violence, lies a continuum on which the multifarious interactions between speech and action combine. All

combinations of speech and action on this continuum which exclude violence are forms of political action in Arendt's definition. Thus, thinking manifested in speech and action has in Arendt's terms a direct relationship to political action.

Fundamental to Arendt's belief in the withdrawal of thinking was her acceptance of the Socratic model of thought, which depicts thinking as a dialogue carried on between me and myself in solitude. In short, the two-in-one of the thinking ego. She stated that "the only criterion of Socratic thinking is agreement, to be consistent with oneself",<sup>55</sup> and yet she concluded that "this ego - the I am I - experiences difference in identity precisely when it is not related to the things that appear but only related to itself."<sup>56</sup> This duality of thinking can only "become One again when the outside world intrudes upon the thinker and cuts short the thinking process."<sup>57</sup> My problem with this conceptualization of thinking by Arendt is that I do not believe the dialogue between me and myself either necessitates or is inspired by not being "related to the things that appear." If she was speaking of a model of thought separate from appearance, she must have been referring to that thinking that goes beyond the intuition of imagination. Notwithstanding the criticism I have already offered regarding this concept, I cannot conceive of how this sphere of thought can at any time remove itself from the conditioning effect of living in a world dominated by plurality. Arendt agreed that the duality of thinking "points to the infinite plurality which is the law of the earth"<sup>58</sup> and "heals the solitariness of thought."<sup>59</sup> The question is, how does a mind "only related to itself" manage to do this? Arendt tried to establish the premise that duality evokes difference and this gives the mind the capacity to deal with plurality. But how can a dialogue between a me

and myself that are the same, recognize difference unless they represent an inner self and a worldly self?

If as Arendt claimed, neither me nor myself actually represents the self, but rather, combined they manifest the self, the familiarity of her logic compared to her description of the manifestation of the "who" is quite obvious. What seem less obvious is that there is an actual unification of the thinking ego when called back into the world of appearances. Without denying that the recognition of otherness and difference in the appearing world can seem to overshadow the thinking ego, it seems to me no less apparent that this recognition itself does not illuminate the underlying perspectives of the mind. I cannot help but think that the thinking ego is the combination of me as my inner self and me as my worldly self. This equation does not upset the fundamental relationships of the thinking ego in its focus on either the invisibles of the mental world or the appearing world. My inner self is the manifestation of my ego in isolation. On the other hand, my worldly self is conditioned by my place in the world, those who surround me and the processes that are extant. My thinking ego or synonymously my thinking "who" is the manifestation that arises out of these two selves. Surely it is not superfluous to suggest that the infinite variations that can occur in the balance between me and myself bear a direct correlation to the inner and outward manifestations of my self. In other words, just because my worldly self may at times be more directly engaged by the sensory world does not necessarily imply that my inner self does not remain a conscious foil to this engagement. Alternatively, when my inner self ponders the unknowable in contemplation, it need not imply that my worldly self is not a conscious

foil that shapes my perspective. Similarly, how else can one engage in introspection or common-sense if these two foci of the self do not continuously interact with each other?

My opinion on this matter is shaped by the fact that I think Arendt's treatment of the thinking ego as an autonomous entity, "only related to itself," contradicts the caveat she posted when she criticized the theoretical constructs of Plato and Heidegger in relation to Socrates. "To take a mere thing out of its context with other things and to look on it only in its "relation" to itself (kath'hauto), that is, in its identity, reveals no difference, no otherness; along with its relation to something it is not, it loses its reality and acquires a curious kind of eeriness."<sup>60</sup> The Socratic thinking dialogue between me and myself, understood as relating only to itself, cannot reveal difference to other things and consequently it loses its reality. On the contrary, I suggest that my support for the thinking ego as a joint manifestation of the inner and worldly selves has more validity. It does not attribute superiority to either the vita activa or the vita contemplativa. It allows for a fluidity in the interactions between the mental realm and the world of appearances. It does not separate knowing from doing and willing from freedom but, instead, limits them politically, in that they must conform to process of the thinking activity. These political limits are not rules, ideologies or specific procedures, but instead the limits of mental freedom that correspond to the principle of non-contradiction inherent in Kant's Categorical Imperative, "act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."<sup>61</sup> In support of my argument, I contend that a thinking ego "only related to itself" contravenes this imperative and is representative of an inner freedom

completely separate from a worldly self, that does not accept contingency as a condition of the world. I firmly believe that Arendt subscribed to both Kant's Categorical Imperative and the limits of thought enunciated in his "scandal of reason," "the fact that our mind is not capable of certain and verifiable knowledge regarding matters and questions that it nevertheless cannot help thinking about,"<sup>62</sup> such as "God, freedom, and immortality."<sup>63</sup> I am less convinced that her analysis of the vita contemplativa is consistent with them. On the other hand, I suggest that my conception of the thinking ego as the joint manifestation of the inner and worldly selves is fully consistent with Kant's two tenets.

The remaining two characteristics of thinking, its self-destructive tendency and its awareness of itself as sheer activity while it lasts, are equally applicable to Arendt's concept of political action. Thinking's self-destructiveness is a direct derivative of the verifiable certainty unattainable because of the "scandal of reason" and therefore analogous to the tale of Penelope's web. I think there are direct correlates of this functional process in political action. Secondly, the awareness thinking has of itself as sheer activity is closely connected to the freedom of political action Arendt described. I choose to limit discussion of these two characteristics at this point, because I consider them less contentious aspects of Arendt's analysis of thinking and feel they have been adequately scrutinized in my own interpretation of her concept of political action.

### C. POLITICAL ACTION REVISITED

Aside from all else, the foremost idea one must keep in mind to

understand Arendt's concept of political action is that it is a triadic relationship between the political actor, political community, and the manifestation of freedom. This is not always an easy task in that Arendt herself somewhat obfuscated the significance of the whole in her tendency to discuss separately its individual aspects. Moreover, the apparent discrepancies or disjunctions which appear to exist between her conceptualization of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa further complicate matters. The upshot of these difficulties is that Arendt's concept of political action takes on an ethereal quality which is hard to pinpoint. As I have suggested, her analysis of the vita contemplativa offers little to substantiate what she was wont to call a unique concept of political action. This deficiency is further exacerbated by the fact that freedom as a derivative of political action, viewed from the perspective of the vita activa, leaves a nagging impression that it is more or less coeval with the freedom of instrumental action. There is a certain merit to this argument in that Arendt connected the experience of freedom directly to the actor and the duration of time he is engaged in political action. "Men are free - as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom - as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same."<sup>64</sup> On the face of it, this quote appears to place Arendt's concept of political freedom in a light in which it does resemble the domination of the Will and, therefore, is little different from Rousseau's General Will or the product of instrumental action. I cite this example because Arendt's distinction between political and instrumental action is, as I hope to show, a hotly contested issue amongst many of her critics. Similarly, it demonstrates how easily

Arendt can be misinterpreted if aspects of her work are analyzed in isolation instead of in their relationship to each other. In the following discussion I propose to analyze these relationships relative to their compatibility with the four characteristics of thinking dealt with previously.

There are, in my opinion, two essential respects in which Arendt's concept of political action withdraws from the world of appearances. Political action is a "new beginning" and as such is a form of withdrawal from what has gone on before. Action manifested without the illumination of thought, expressed in the language of metaphor, offers no more meaning than the stillness of absentmindedness. Even the combination of speech and action, because of its novelty, must initially appear to spectators as "out of order."<sup>65</sup> The manifestation of the actor's "who" remains "out of order" until his initiative is subsumed by political community, in other words, political action understood as acting "in concert."<sup>66</sup> There is, of course, the withdrawal of the spectator that Arendt cites, but it is not the deliberate withdrawal of the actor when there is a political community in existence. The spectator's withdrawal is the passivity of non-participation in order to judge. Only when this judgement becomes manifest in acting "in concert" does it achieve a withdrawal synonymous with that of the political actor. What is interesting about the actor's withdrawal is that it occurs within the space of appearance, at the height of the actor's engagement in political action, which does not cease until the actor's "who" is called into political community, similar to when an actor thinks and "he is called by his name back into the world of appearances."<sup>67</sup>

The second instance of the withdrawal of the actor is the forced withdrawal of the pariah, "the courage to take a position outside of society, because the pariah does not voluntarily renounce; he can only assume acquired heroic poses after renunciation has been forced on him."<sup>68</sup> No political actor can ever completely relinquish this pariah status, it is a condition of the space of appearances. There are always aspects of the actor's "who" which cannot find their place in the world. "As soon as the pariah enters the arena of politics, and translates his status into political terms, he becomes perforce a rebel."<sup>69</sup> This rebel status must always remain to a degree "since power and freedom in the sphere of human plurality are in fact synonyms, this means that political freedom is always limited freedom".<sup>70</sup> I believe the engagement of the self-conscious pariah in political action is yet another legitimate contradiction of Arendt's attempt to separate the thinking ego from politics. Under the condition of "limited freedom," the political actor is never completely separated from the identity given in the dialogue between me and myself. Hence, the pariah's thinking ego is part of his political manifestation in the space of appearances. The significance of this relationship is that it is more compatible with a thinking ego perceived as the combination of inner and worldly selves. It is also noteworthy that the speech and action of the pariah has a deliberate or willful intent, the strength of which increases in direct relation to the degree of exclusion from political participation. Whatever the extent of the pariah's isolation or forced withdrawal from political participation, in not being swallowed by the necessity of process he "is recompensed for his" "wretched situations" by a "view of the whole." That is his sole dignified hope: "that

everything is related; and in truth, everything is good enough. This is the salvage from the great bankruptcy of life."<sup>71</sup> The complete exclusion of the pariah from the political realm is directly analogous to the relationship between the stillness of absentmindedness and the "view of the whole" given thinking. This is the relationship of the actor to the world of appearances when political community is at its lowest ebb. The actor in this context resembles nothing so much as the role the activity of thinking occupies in Arendt's schema of its relationship to the world of appearances. It is a distorted view, however, because the role of the actor does not comprise the "whole" of political action. The withdrawal of political action relative to political community and the role of the actor as self-conscious pariah are, I believe, completely apt metaphors for the inner self of the thinking ego as I presented it. What remains is to identify the worldly metaphor which represents the worldly self and this I believe is located in political community.

The performance of a political act by an individual in the space of appearance bears an inordinate resemblance to a thought-thing of the inner self seen in the light of the worldly self. To the spectator, the manifestation of the actor's "who" is both an event that appears as a factual truth and as the illumination of an inspiring principle. At one and the same time, the perception of the spectator includes the distinction Kant made between intellect and reason.<sup>72</sup> The relationship of intellect to cognition, and cognition to factual truths that are verifiable is directly related to the political act as an event which has appeared. Its appearance can be acknowledged. The search for knowledge by the intellect is satisfied in the occurrence of the

political event. Also, in these terms, the political act appears as a predetermined product of the intellect. In other words, the political act appears as an instrumental action and has a specific truth value as it appears to each individual spectator. On the other hand, reason in the search for meaning, in contradistinction to truth, relies on the capacity to recognize difference and otherness. In political community, the manifestation of reason and the search for meaning are rooted in the communication of opinions between a plurality of spectators. The spectator in political community occupies, in effect, two perspectives; the common-sense reasoning that organizes sensory perception as an individual and as a participant in the common-sense understanding of the community. This dual perspective serves the functions of both intellect and reason, truth and meaning. It is not unlike the worldly self that has a common-sense understanding of its place in the world and of those persons that surround it. It would appear that the twin perspectives of spectators, is a compatible appearing metaphor for the worldly self of the thinking ego. This does not in itself, however, constitute the "whole" of political action either.

I am in disagreement with Arendt over the assertion that men are free "as long as they act, neither before nor after." The freedom of the actor during political action, or the manifestation of the "who" in speech and action, is no more than the freedom of the Will without political community. Without the actor's tacit acceptance of the legitimacy of plurality as the first maxim of political action, the political act is in essence the imposition of rule, the manifestation of the inner self in its singularity. The disclosure of the actor's "who" in a single political event is undistinguishable from the frozen

metaphors that philosophical terms represent for thinking.<sup>73</sup> Only in interaction with political community is the actor's "who" given meaning. It is like the analysis of the frozen analogies of thought, "whose true meaning discloses itself when we dissolve the term into the original context."<sup>74</sup> Tacit consent to the principle of plurality by the political actor is synonymous with thinking's perception of thought-things in its awareness of the "scandal of reason." Thinking's recognition that it cannot be in possession of absolutes constitutes the same dynamic that regulates the actor's consciousness in his relinquishment of control over the performed act to the judgment of the spectators. The manifestation of freedom that accompanies the actor's performance is localized in this conscious "letting go." It is the point at which political action separates from the dictate of the will and the model of the intellect. The appearance of the actor's performance is the direct result of will and intellect in the service of reason, in the sense that "reason is the a priori condition of the intellect and of cognition."<sup>75</sup> Will as the absolute source of volition implements the model of intellect that fits into the world of appearances and can be cognitively acknowledged by common-sense reasoning. The actor's "letting go" of the event is predetermined by the consciousness that attends the external principle of political freedom. It is both the actor's self-affirmation of a particular aspect of his identity and a voluntary affirmation of the principle of plurality that keeps the political realm in existence.

Arendt's assertion that freedom occurs "neither before nor after" the performance of a political act is, I think, contradicted by her simultaneous claim that "power and freedom in the sphere of human

plurality are in fact synonyms." Political action guided by an external principle is in its manifestation no more than a frozen analogy or metaphor of that principle. The "who" of the principle only becomes evident in the dissemination of the performance in political community. In other words, the freedom embodied in the performance is only a frozen particular of the freedom that the principle has in political community. The sheer awareness of activity that accompanies thinking is equally apparent in the awareness of freedom in political performance and its maintenance in the activity of political community. The actor's performance is the experience of political freedom to the extent that it embodies the freedom of plurality in political community. The degree of vibrancy in "acting in concert" determines the relative strength of freedom in performance to that in political community. What is most pertinent is that the actor experiences freedom both in political performance and as a participant in political community. If power is freedom, then political community is equally the experience of the sheer activity of freedom that political performance is. The former is an individual freedom and the latter is a communal freedom. Most crucial to an understanding of Arendt's concept of political action as freedom, is the fact, that neither the freedom of the actor nor of the community in and of itself constitutes political action or freedom as a "whole".

The political actor and political community both require the presence of the other in order to have meaning. So far in this analysis, the emphasis has been on the manifestation of a single political act as it interacts with political community. It has been determined that the manifestation of the actor's "who" in a single

political act is in fact a frozen analogy relative to political community. This particular "who" of a particular performance relative to political community is analogous to the relationship between the singularity of the inner self and the plurality of the worldly self. In both instances, the theoretical structure is a duality in which a singular entity is viewed in the light of a plural entity. Similarly, political action is the combination of political actor and political community, individual freedom and communal freedom, inner "who" and worldly "who." I have to disagree with Arendt that individual political acts transcend the thinking ego in their particularity. On the contrary, I believe the "who" of a single political act is the manifestation of the inner freedom of the thinking ego in a particular instance. It is neither absolute nor stationary, but this inner freedom precedes the act, the very necessity that it be consistent with the principle of plurality logically entails the freedom of the thinking ego manifest in the dialogue between my inner and worldly selves. The "who" that this frozen metaphor becomes in political community is distinct from the actor's "who" in performance, and the true essence of political action and political freedom is manifest where they amalgamate.

In Arendt's conceptualization of the political realm there is an inherent duality, which exists between the political actor and political community. Only in the dialogue between the two does the coincidence of political action and political freedom occur. They are in essence "an accessory of doing and acting."<sup>76</sup> They are the manifestation of a frozen "who" seen in the light of plurality. Similar to the thinking ego, political action and freedom have a self-destructive tendency, they undo every morning what they have done the night before. In the

same way that,

the need to think can never be stilled by allegedly definite insights of "wise men"; it can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I want and am able to think them anew,"<sup>77</sup>

freedom, too, depends on the continuous activity between acting and speaking persons. Freedom as the manifestation of political action rides the wave of contingency; it is a universal principle that finds expression in the in-between of frozen particulars. Like thinking, freedom's need cannot be stilled by the allegedly superior insights of paternalistic sovereignty; it can only be assuaged by persons acting and speaking together, and the freedom we had yesterday will only satisfy freedom's need today to the extent that we want and are able to act and speak anew.

#### D. THE REVERSIBLE METAPHOR

Try as she would, Arendt's quest to enhance the stature of politics and freedom, at the expense of separating the vita contemplativa from the vita activa, stands out as the principal contradiction of her work. This flaw is theoretically tolerable because of the obvious parallel implications in her analysis of the two realms that illuminate their connecting link, the reversible metaphor of thinking and political action. Her reliance on the concept that "being and appearance coincide" to give support to the status of politics in a world of appearances, is strikingly unaligned with the major emphasis of her political critique. The loss of reality that accompanied Cartesian doubt remains with us in the same way that the "scandal of reason" has

shattered the certainty of thought. Whether or not politics is conducted in the mode of rule or Arendt's political action, neither is sufficient to guarantee the stability of reality. What does emerge in the isomorphic structure of thought and political action is the equalization of the vita activa and vita contemplativa along with the search for meaning. It is reminiscent of the man Socrates "who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath."<sup>78</sup> Freedom and thought are united in a joint dependency on meaning; it is the linchpin that links the two. Meaning is the raison d'etre of politics and thought in Arendt's work.

I think the reversible metaphor of thought and political action is given its most conclusive substantiation in Arendt's analysis of the "gap between past and future." The "gap" or "nunc stans" is a time concept.

In other words, the time continuum, everlasting change, is broken up into the tenses past, present, future, whereby past and future are antagonistic to each other as the no-longer and the not-yet only because of the presence of man, who himself has an "origin", his birth, and an end, his death, and therefore stand at any given moment between them; this in-between is called the present.<sup>79</sup>

Arendt chose this metaphor for time, the antagonism between past and future, from Kafka's parable "HE." In so doing, she altered it slightly. Instead of man standing between past and future wishing to jump out of the fray, Arendt wanted to locate man's thinking ego as a diagonal that emerges from the head on clash of past and future.

The diagonal force, on the contrary, has a definite origin, its starting-point being the clash of the two other forces, but it would be infinite with respect to its ending since it has resulted from the concerted action of two forces whose origin is infinity.<sup>80</sup>

She believed this diagonal force was the "perfect metaphor for the

activity of thought."<sup>81</sup>

The temporal dimension of the nunc stans experienced in the activity of thinking gathers the absent tenses, the not-yet<sup>82</sup> and the no-more, together into its own presence.

It is because the thinking ego is ageless and nowhere that past and future can become manifest to it as such, emptied, as it were, of their concrete<sup>83</sup> content and liberated from all spatial categories.

Arendt believed that only thinking had the capacity to step outside the "continuity of everyday life in a world of appearances"<sup>84</sup> such that the "past and future manifest themselves as pure entities, so that "he" can become aware of a no-longer that pushes him forward and a not-yet that drives him back."<sup>85</sup> I contend that in Arendt's concept of political action as the manifestation of freedom, the very same structural dynamics exist that support her hypothesis of the "gap between past and future." She excluded this contention in her assertion that everyday life "is always spatially determined and conditioned."<sup>86</sup> I think this statement is effectively refuted in Arendt's own account of political action as the beginning of new processes and the circumvention and interruption of those already existing. Additionally, the characteristic of withdrawal that political action shares with thinking is, in effect, a synonomous purveyance of the tenses of past and future. Surely the faculty of beginning is contemporaneous with the present, and it is also the case that Arendt equated the "faculty of beginning" with "freedom."<sup>87</sup> It has also been seen that power and freedom are symbiotic. They have no specific home except where men act and speak together, and in this context, freedom occupies the same "nowhere" as thinking. Freedom is not "spatially determined and conditioned," and yet Arendt posited political freedom as a phenomenon of the world of

appearances, the world of everyday life. The thinking ego as the diagonal force that emerges from the clash of past and future is analogous to the freedom of political action in the sense that,

from the standpoint of nature, the rectilinear movement of man's life-span between birth and death looks like a peculiar deviation from the common natural rule of cyclical movement, thus action, seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of the world, looks like a miracle.<sup>88</sup>

Arendt's assertion that the "gap between past and future" is solely a mental phenomenon<sup>89</sup> is loaded with contradictions. The 'nunc stans' is so obviously an enhanced mental freedom that it appears to fly in the face of her assumption "that thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearing."<sup>90</sup> Only if the "gap" exists in the world of appearances can it, in accordance with this criterion inform thought. I maintain this "gap" does exist in Arendt's concept of political action and that she verified this when she spoke of understanding the intellectual history of our century as the biography of a single person. She stated,

aiming at no more than a metaphorical approximation to what actually happened in the minds of men, this person's mind would stand revealed as having been forced to turn full circle not once but twice, first when he escaped from thought into action, and then again when action, or rather having acted, forced him back into thought. Whereby it would be of some relevance to notice that the appeal to thought arose in the odd in-between period which sometimes inserts itself into historical time (my emphasis) when not only the later historians but the actors and witnesses, the living themselves, become aware of an interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet. In history, these intervals have shown more than once that they may contain the moment of truth.<sup>91</sup>

Very clearly in this passage she links the "no-more" and "not-yet" of

the "nunc stans" to the historical time of the world of our everyday lives. It is obviously an intimation that political action walks in the "gap." At the same time, it contradicts the location of the "nunc stans" as the sole possession of the vita contemplativa. The existence of this central contradiction does leave an unexplained tension in her political thought. Given the importance she attached to existing in the "gap," had she consistently located it either in thought or political action, she would have had a substantial argument for asserting the supremacy of one or the other. This she did not do. It was neither her stated intent nor what I believe to be the overall implication of her work. While I believe that Arendt did not fully comprehend the magnitude of her concept of political action, given her alternating perspective concerning the location of the "gap between past and future," the veracity of her arguments, that it exists both in the vita contemplativa and the vita activa, are to my mind quite compelling. Without fully comprehending the fact, her articulation of political action does indeed provide the reversible metaphor for thought, the traverse which freedom crosses back and forth in a world where being coincides with appearance and non-appearance. A world in which the freedom of political action and "thinking without a bannister" are metaphorical equivalents.

CHAPTER THREE

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom?' in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1977, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op. Cit., p. 176.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 196.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 199.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 199.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 236.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 237.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 237.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom?', Op. Cit., p. 145.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 146.

- <sup>24</sup>Ibid, p. 151.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 152.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid, p. 152.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid, p. 153.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid, p. 153.
- <sup>29</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of The Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 75,  
92.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid, p. 76-77.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid, p. 75-76.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid, p. 76.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid, p. 77.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid, p. 77.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid, p. 57.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 57.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid, p. 57.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid, p. 77.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid, p. 77.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid, p. 57, 77.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid, p. 102-103.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid, p. 105-110.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid, p. 109.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 109.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid, p. 110.
- <sup>46</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op. Cit., p. 181.
- <sup>47</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit.,  
p. 208.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid, p. 208.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid, p. 72.

- <sup>50</sup>Ibid, p. 74.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid, p. 88.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid, p. 88.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid, p. 88.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid, p. 98.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 186.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid, p. 187.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid, p. 185.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid, p. 187.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid, p. 187.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid, p. 184.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid, p. 188.
- <sup>62</sup>Ibid, p. 14.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid, p. 14.
- <sup>64</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom?', Op. Cit., p. 153.
- <sup>65</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 78, 85.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid, p. 91.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid, p. 185.
- <sup>68</sup>Hannah Arendt, Rahel Varnhagen, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1974, p. 208.
- <sup>69</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Jew as Pariah, Ron H. Feldman (ed.), Grove Press, New York, 1978, p. 77.
- <sup>70</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: Two/Willing, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1977, p. 201.
- <sup>71</sup>Hannah Arendt, Rahel Varnhagen, Op. Cit., p. 215.
- <sup>72</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 57.
- <sup>73</sup>Ibid, p. 104.
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid, p. 104.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>76</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom', Op. Cit., p. 165.

<sup>77</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 88.

<sup>78</sup>Benjamin Jowett, The Works of Plato, (Irwin Edman, ed.), Random House, New York, 1928, p. 60.

<sup>79</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 203.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid, p. 211.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid, p. 206.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid, p. 206.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid, p. 206.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>87</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom?', Op. Cit., p. 167.

<sup>88</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Op. Cit., p. 246.

<sup>89</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking, Op. Cit., p. 205-206.

<sup>90</sup>Hannah Arendt, 'Preface' in Between Past and Future, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 14.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid, p. 9.

## CONCLUSION

I have sought to accomplish two fundamental tasks in this thesis. Those sections primarily expository in nature have been included to give the reader a clear perception of Arendt's articulation of the vita activa and the consistency which prevails in her application of this theoretical model to her historical critique. My analytical argument has been based on the premise that there is tension, obviously unnoticed by Arendt, between her analysis of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. I have posited the notion that there exists within her work a plausible theoretical structure that suggests that the activities of thinking and political action constitute a reversible metaphor. As a consequence, I believe the theoretical significance of this reversible metaphor is that it demonstrates a partial reconciliation of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa.

In reviewing those sections of the thesis that deal with the relationship between her articulation of the vita activa and her historical critique, there are several points worthy of remembrance. Arendt's division of the vita activa into the separate activities of labor, work, and action was premised on her conviction that each embodies the inspiring principle of a particular aspect of the human condition. Attached to labor, work, and action are the criteria imposed by the human conditions of life itself, worldliness, and plurality respectively. Based on her belief that plurality is the essential condition of the political realm, she sought to explain why activities conducted in adherence to the inspiring principles of labor and work are detrimental to political action. The upshot of this analytical exercise was the conclusion that the proper constitution of the political realm

resides in the coincidence of freedom and non-sovereignty. Since labor and work are both intimately connected to rule, labor subject to the rule of necessity and the model of the fabricator in work ruling over labor, they are unsuitable as inspiring principles for the political process. Labor is tied to the cyclical movement of biological necessity and work's products are tied to the cyclical movement of the means-end relationship that has its expression in the devaluation of values once these products enter the exchange market. The unique quality of political action, is that, although directly related to the initiation of process, its location within the plurality of political community allows for the interdiction of the cyclical movement of process. Coeval with Arendt's association of freedom to political action is their ability to appear as rectilinear movement in relation to the cyclical movement which dominates the activities of labor and work in the world of appearances. Arendt's invocation of various political events and perspectives were intended as a demonstration of the ways in which Western political thought has distorted this equation of freedom to political action and the concomitant distortions of the proper relationship between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa.

My analysis of Arendt is principally concerned with her attempt to rehabilitate the status of politics by equalizing the importance of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Working on the assumption that her articulation of the vita activa is theoretically sound relative to her concern with politics, I posited the idea that her attempt to separate the concerns of the two realms does not accord with her analysis of the activities of thinking and political action. In my attempt to demonstrate the tension in her work, I took issue with her

contention that the withdrawal of thinking equates to a complete withdrawal from the world. By using her own arguments, it was shown that "thinking beyond imagination" is never so complete as to lose its bearings in relation to the de-sensed objects of imagination. In other words, reason never completely transcends the thought-objects of intellect. Having identified this limited withdrawal of the thinking activity, an examination of the relationship of political actors to political community demonstrated that political action itself embodies a characteristic of withdrawal which has an affinity to that of thinking. This comparison was, in effect, the focal point of my correlation between the two activities.

To partially substantiate my claim that the withdrawal of both thinking and political action are equal, I pointed out that Arendt's identification of the inability of language to capture the complete essence of thinking is comparable to the same failure of language in its inability to describe the "who" of the political actor. This weakness of language vis à vis activities in the vita activa and the vita contemplativa brought into question the veracity of Arendt's claim that it is an irreversible metaphor that unites the two realms. Further similarities in the functions of the structural characteristics of thinking and political action were found in their; reflexivity and duality; self-destructiveness; and self-awareness in sheer activity. The problem with Arendt's analysis of these characteristics of thought was pinpointed as resting with her interpretation of the Socratic thinking ego. Documentation was given which suggested that her perception of the Socratic thinking ego was, in essence, a contradiction of her own acceptance of the dictum to refrain from evaluating a thing

only as it relates to itself. By demonstrating that the Socratic thinking ego, as understood by Arendt, could not fulfil the functional characteristics she attributed to thinking, I felt justified in substituting a conception of the thinking ego composed of an inner and worldly self. The functional characteristics of this new conception of the thinking ego were shown to have applicability to thought and political action. A similar interchangeability between thinking and action was found in Arendt's assertions that the "gap between past and future" can become manifest in the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Based on the accumulation of these arguments drawn from Arendt's work, I concluded that thinking and political action are coeval manifestations of phenomenological essences that constitute a reversible metaphor.

The fact that Arendt's own political thought points toward the plausibility of this reversible metaphor tentatively signifies that it can be a useful interpretive tool in further study of her work. Certainly the realignment of the relationship between thinking and political action suggests a focal point for future evaluations of her concepts of willing and judging. In relation to the goals of my own thesis, I think the partial reconciliation that the reversible metaphor imparts to the vita activa and the vita contemplativa, enhances and gives greater credence to Hannah Arendt's concept of political action.

## APPENDIX

### ARENDR AND HER CRITICS

There is a fundamental division in the critical literature on Arendt's thought that has its genesis in her distinctions between intellect and reason, truth and meaning. Generally speaking, these scholars fall into one of two categories : those who criticize her work from the perspective of intellect and truth; and those who view her analysis of the political realm as a unique utilization of the critical capacity she attributed to reason and meaning. It is essential to a proper understanding of Arendt that one be able to differentiate between these distinctions before critiquing and evaluating her thought because they are consistently manifest in all aspects of her work.

Refusing to acknowledge the validity of Arendt's concept of political action and its hermeneutic significance to her theoretical model is a common thread in the arguments of her detractors. The principal methods used directly to attack political action are the denigration of her articulation of the vita activa<sup>1</sup> and the implied or overtly stated attempts to dismantle her combination of speech and action.<sup>2</sup> There is an implicit refusal in these criticisms to accept the transcendence of the principle of non-sovereignty associated with the plurality of political action over the sovereignty that inspires the motives and goals of instrumental activities. It is the same attitude that informs the refusal to accept the distinctions between intellect and reason, truth and meaning. The controversial nature of this fundamental dichotomy, when understood as the antagonism between the inspiring principles of two theoretical perspectives, is unresolvable because they are the absolute antithesis of each other.<sup>3</sup> This

fundamental antagonism is also manifest in indirect attacks on political action, embodied in analyses which insist on critiquing individual aspects of Arendt's thought in their singularity rather than as elements of an integrated whole. It was not Arendt's intent to provide exhaustive explanations of the nature of the topics she chose to highlight the aesthetic dimension of her historical critique. On the contrary, these discussions were intended to illuminate various aspects of her concept of political action in its relationship to the world of appearances. Those authors who choose to ignore this qualification are wilfully neglecting a consistently repeated theme in her writings.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, those who have attempted overtly to dismiss this theme have failed to replace it with a substitute that reflects the same consistency.<sup>5</sup>

As a counterfoil to analyses which attempt to minimize the significance of political action, there are competent interpretations and evaluations of the diverse aspects of Arendt's work which maintain an affinity to the theory that informs them.<sup>6</sup> If there is a principal weakness in the literature that tends to support Arendt, it lies in the over-concentration of effort on her analysis of the relationship of political action to the vita activa and the failure to give due consideration to the synthesis political action effects between the vita contemplativa and the vita activa. Only a few political theorists have acquainted themselves with Arendt's concepts of political action and the life of the mind to the degree that they have begun to recognize the tensions in her theory.<sup>7</sup> Tensions which become evident when one employs her own conceptual framework but of which she was obviously unaware. Credit must be given to those who have thought through the

concept of "thinking without a bannister" because it is the mental keyhole through which we must pass to distance ourselves from her thought in order to properly evaluate it. The tentative undertaking of this task by some authors has led to a small body of literature that poses legitimate challenges to the consistency of Arendt's articulation of the relationship between the vita contemplativa and the vita activa. "Thinking without a ground"<sup>8</sup> and the "winds of thought"<sup>9</sup> are phrases that have been adopted to signify the critical understanding that accompanies Arendt's theoretical perspective. It has been recognized that in Arendt's analysis of the thinking activity she acknowledged a mental freedom that bears an uncanny resemblance to the freedom of the political realm.<sup>10</sup> This finding has brought into question her separation of the concerns of the vita activa and vita contemplativa in relation to politics. Similarly, the understanding of her view of thinking has rightly led to a challenge of her contention that mental activities function autonomously. These are important insights which lend credence to speculation about the relationship of political action to our mental faculties. It is in this context that I have presented my concept of the reversible metaphor as a tentative resolution of the tension that exists in Arendt's thought.

I believe that Arendt erred when she criticized Martin Buber and Karl Jaspers for believing that in thinking<sup>11</sup>

the intimacy of the dialogue, the 'inner action' in which I 'appeal' to myself or to the 'other self'... can be extended and become paradigmatic for the political sphere.<sup>12</sup>

My presentation of the reversible metaphor assumes that the relationship between thought and politics expressed in this quote is fundamentally correct. The interaction between the inner and worldly selves, in my

reformulation of Arendt's concept of the thinking ego, is analogous to "the 'inner action' in which I 'appeal' to myself or to the 'other self'." As I have shown in my thesis, the reversible metaphor, composed of thinking and political action, creates a symmetry between the vita contemplativa and the vita activa in relation to politics. There is an implication in this understanding of the reversible metaphor that the relationship of mental activities to each other must parallel the relations between action, work, and labor if Arendt's theory is to remain consistent with itself. It is certainly an area of inquiry that demands scrutiny.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>There are several approaches that are commonly used to discredit Arendt's articulation of the vita activa. Foremost amongst these approaches are: a) those which cite her misinterpretations of Marx and the deficiencies in her own model relative to him; b) those which attempt to prove that Arendt's understanding of action coupled to speech is devoid of any consideration of instrumental activities commonly associated with politics and is therefore insignificant; and c) those who suggest that Arendt's political perspective, based on her articulation of the vita activa, is elitist. References for category a) can be found in Mildred Bakan, "Hannah Arendt's Concepts of Labor and Work" and Bikhu Parekh, "Hannah Arendt's Critique of Marx" in Melvin A. Hill (ed.), Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1979. See also Martin Jay, "Hannah Arendt: Opposing Views," Partisan Review, Vol. 45, 1978. For viewpoints expressed in section b) see George Kateb, "Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," Political Theory, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977 and Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil, Rowman and Allanheld, New Jersey, 1983, Chapter 1. See also Bikhu Parekh, Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1981, Chapter 5. Sources for section c) are Margaret Canovan, "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought," Political Theory, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1980, and Shiraz Dossa, "Human Status and Politics: Hannah Arendt on the Holocaust," Canadian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 13, June, 1980.

<sup>2</sup>A serious attempt is made to suggest that the supposed exclusion of instrumental activities from political action limits it to the manifestation of speech. See George Kateb, "Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt", Op. Cit., and Hannah Arendt : Politics, Conscience, Evil, Op. Cit., Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup>To get an understanding of the view of truth that Arendt's detractors hold, see F. Mechner Barnard, "Infinity and Finality: Hannah Arendt on Politics and Truth," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall, 1977 and John S. Nelson, "Politics and Truth: Arendt's Problematic", American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 22, No. 2, May, 1978.

<sup>4</sup>Good examples of this type of analysis can be found in: Barry Clarke, "Beyond 'The Banality of Evil'", British Journal Of Political Science, Vol. 10, October, 1980; Shiraz Dossa, "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: The Public, the Private and Evil," The Review of Politics, Vol.46, No. 2, April, 1984; and Stephen J. Whitfield, Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980, Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup>Two noteworthy examples of attempts to dismantle the unifying themes of Arendt's thought without offering consistent alternatives can be found in Bikhu Parekh, Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy, Op.Cit., Chapter 8 and Stephen J. Whitfield, Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism, Op. Cit., Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup>The following are a cross section of analyses of Arendt which take into consideration numerous aspects of her thought perceived in the context of their relationship to the concept of political action: David Biale, "Arendt in Jerusalem", Response, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer, 1980; Margaret Canovan, The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1974; Bernard Crick, "On Rereading the Origins of Totalitarianism", Social Research, Vol. 44, 1977; Kenneth Frampton, "The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects : A Reading of the Human Condition" in Melvin A. Hill (ed.), Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World, Op.Cit.; Hans Jonas, "Acting, Knowing, Thinking: Gleanings from Hannah Arendt's Philosophical Work", Social Research, Vol. 44, 1977; James T. Knauer, "Motive and Goal in Hannah Arendt's Concept of Political Action," American Political Science Review, Vol. 74, September, 1980; Martin Levin, "On Animal Laborans and Homo Politicus in Hannah Arendt," Political Theory, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1979.

<sup>7</sup>Particular insight into the difficulties that arise from Arendt's analysis of our mental faculties vis a vis her concept of political action is given in J. Glenn Gray, "The Abyss of Freedom - and Hannah Arendt" in Melvin A. Hill (ed.), Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World, Op. Cit. Gray's discussion is specifically directed toward the interaction of thinking and willing in contradistinction to Arendt's contention that they are autonomous faculties. Jean Yarbrough and Peter Stern, "Vita Activa and Vita Contemplativa : Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought in The Life of the Mind," Review of Politics, Vol. 43, July, 1981. Yarbrough and Stern raise some legitimate queries about the autonomy of the mental faculties and also draw the conclusion that Arendt's analysis of the thinking activity suggests a correspondence between political freedom and mental freedom.

<sup>8</sup>Stan Spyros Draenos, "Thinking Without a Ground: Hannah Arendt and the Contemporary Situation of Understanding" in Melvin A. Hill (ed.), Hannah Arendt : The Recovery of the Public World, Op. Cit.

<sup>9</sup>J. Glenn Gray, "The Winds of Thought", Social Research, Vol. 44, 1977.

<sup>10</sup>Melvin A. Hill, "The Fictions of Mankind" in Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World, Op. Cit. Hill implicitly acknowledges this same linkage in his account of the interaction between stories given by thinking and the reconciliation made thereby to reality.

<sup>11</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: Two/Willing, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1971, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 200.

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