

INFINITY AND FINALITY:
HANNAH ARENDT ON
POLITICS AND TRUTH

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The crisis of the present world is primarily political.¹ Its gravity lies not in particular shortcomings or imperfections of political practices or modes of political thinking. Modernity is plagued not so much by the existence of a defective politics as it is marked by its virtual non-existence. For what it takes for politics is a fake; and by not recognizing the fake for what it is, it bids fair to render the crisis unresolvable. Through its almost total misconception of itself modern politics beclouds its very reality and thus existentially defies its own remedy.

This, in essence, is Hannah Arendt's diagnosis of our times. Her disdain for modern man's incapacity to perceive the true nature of politics is matched only by amazement over the enormity of his capacity for self-deception. Yet despite her disdain and her amazement she does not altogether falter. If only man could be made to see that he worships idols, that he mistakes a fabricated substitute for authentic reality, genuine politics might still be recoverable.

Authentic reality, or genuine politics, is not, however, something given, waiting to be discovered.² Neither is it made or made up; for a reality or a politics that is the product of making — whether it involves wilful deceit or not — is a fabricated reality or a fabricated politics.³ Reality and politics, if they are to embody or convey intelligible and valid meaning, have to be enacted, not made. The tragedy of our age consists in confusing acting with making. This confusion is so deep-rooted that it has warped modern man's political sensibility. This is the heart of the matter, the prime source of our crisis, the malaise of our times.⁴

Not surprisingly, therefore, the confusion between making and acting is the cardinal theme of Arendt's principal work, *The Human Condition*, and a subject to which she repeatedly returns in subsequent writings. My concern in this article is twofold. In the first place, I wish to explore the major categories and distinctions Arendt invokes in the course of elaborating her position. Beyond this I am anxious to reflect and comment on the position itself as I see

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it. Clearly, the significance of a political thinker's normative position does not hinge wholly, or even decidedly, on the intrinsic meaning of any single claim made, nor, indeed, on the logical consistency of all the claims. Some of the most profoundly imaginative insights in political thought have lost little of their merit by not forming part of a coherent or comprehensive system or body of thought. My second concern, then — which, however, is not altogether separable from the first — is to evaluate Arendt's insights, their expressed or implied meanings and their possible impact, intended or otherwise. In particular I wish to focus on her polarization of political action in its boundless infinity, and truth, in its unchanging finality. Though strangely myopic and disturbingly ambivalent, her political vision strikes me as profoundly exciting; its redemptive thrust is unmistakable; what is less unequivocal is the redemption it envisages.

I shall draw, in varying degrees, on Arendt's published writings, but there is one work which merits special consideration, the highly seminal essay on "Truth and Politics". For the latter essay not only discloses her most pervasive anxieties, it also remarkably typifies the paradoxical tensions in her conceptual approach. And it certainly raises issues of pivotal importance to the central concerns of this article.

I

Manifestations of discontent with political reality have a long tradition. Janus-like, they frequently do two things simultaneously: they give vent to disenchantment over unfulfilled expectations and they sound a clarion call for a society's soul-searching, for its quest toward a better understanding of itself. No less frequently, a highly polarized terminology is used in order to sharpen awareness of, and concern for, the presumed decline of politics, the deterioration or loss of its avowed dignity. Hannah Arendt's work is a fitting contemporary example of this tradition. Its major theme, the lament over the passing of the Greek *polis* and, with it, the loss of the distinctiveness and dignity of political action, finds eloquent expression in *The Human Condition*. There she sees the profound difference between the modern and the ancient Greek understanding of politics in the disappearance of the gulf that the ancients perceived as a deep hiatus separating the political from the non-political domain. In the modern world politics has become subservient to economic and social interests; as a result of this "functionalization" of politics, the distinction between labour, work and action (Arendt's threefold division of human activity), has been blurred, and the uniqueness, greatness and integrity of the political realm almost forgotten. No more is it possible "to perceive any serious gulf between the two realms", they "constantly flow into each other like the waves in the never-ending stream of the life process itself."³

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Acute uneasiness over this ceaseless inter-penetration of the political and the non-political realms is the most pervasive impulse of Arendt's political thought. To her the loss of a clear realization of their separateness is both the source and the symptom of a general blunting of modern man's sensibility for distinctiveness and meaning. Her fear is that modern theories of behaviourism could well be accurate in depicting modern trends, the trends of "sterile passivity" and purely routine behaviour.⁶ For just as the social has swallowed the political, so the ordinary has devoured the extraordinary; the drab and commonplace has ousted the great and unexpected. Behaviour, in short, has come to replace action, depriving, as it did, individuality and spontaneity of the space and scope they need for inserting themselves in the public realm.⁷ What is more, the social itself has, in enveloping the political, lost its own distinctiveness, as it simultaneously destroyed the distinctiveness of the private and the public. If the public has ceased to have a life and integrity of its own, so has the private. Gone is the privacy of family life, of fraternity and friendship, of the "intimacy of the heart."⁸ What we witness, according to Arendt, is a drastic reversal of existential meanings, a virtual metamorphosis of reality itself. What is meant to be hidden is now exposed, and what is meant to reveal and illuminate human greatness is condemned to darkness and obscurity.⁹ Speech, which confers upon the public realm the hallmark of the political — for speech is what makes man a political being — is degraded to "idle talk".¹⁰ Freedom, originally identifiable with politics, and solely with politics, is now almost totally located outside the political realm and indeed opposed to politics.¹¹ Force or violence, originally confined to the private household, now emerges as the defining characteristic, as the sole monopoly, of politics.¹² Incapable of facing the inherent uncertainty of action, and the unpredictability of its consequences, modern man substitutes making (where he knows the outcome or end-product) for acting, and "reckoning with consequences" for reasoning.¹³ Thus reality and human reason come to part company; modern realism is no more rational than modern rationalism real.¹⁴ The flight from infinity, uncertainty, and spontaneity generates another reversal: the denigration of death and daring and the adoration of life and security. Taking care of life's necessities, together with labouring activity, wholly foreign to the *polis*, now usurp the primacy of honourable deeds.¹⁵ This preoccupation with biological requirements, with social needs and economic wants, is, in Arendt's view, at the base of the deformation of politics, perverting a plurality of equals, acting and speaking together, for the sake of intrinsic principles, into the "pull and pressure and the tricks of cliques", motivated by greed, lust for domination, group and class interest, and factionalism of every sort.¹⁶ Thus a politics of diversity turns into a politics of divisiveness, the "judicious exchange of opinion" gives way to inveterate party strife, loyalty to one's fellows and commitment to principle debases itself to implacable partisanship and violent

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militancy.¹⁷ Even the relation between politics and truth, inherently antinomic though it (according to Arendt) necessarily is, deteriorates in the course of this transformation, the nature of their opposition evidently being determined by the character of human relationships in which the clash occurs. Thus, in a world of partial, conflicting interests, where nothing counts but pleasure and profit, truth clashes with the political only on the lowest level of human affairs, whereas Plato's philosophical truth clashed with the political "on the considerably higher level of opinion and agreement."¹⁸

Now, it is of lesser moment to our purpose whether Arendt's portrayal of the modern world, or, for that matter, of the Greek *polis* — her model of genuine politics — is accurate or not; for what we are chiefly interested in are the meanings which her principal concepts are intended to carry and the extent to which these meanings illuminate her vision of political redemption in which politics and truth come to confront each other at a level compatible with human excellence and dignity. Consequently, in subsequent sections, we shall look more closely at Arendt's contradistinction of making and acting, basic to her theory of political action, and to her polarization of politics and truth, which is equally basic to her conception of a politics of freedom and plurality.

II

Arendt traces the modern confusion of acting with making to Plato who, she maintains, was the first to provide a rationalization for the retreat from the infinity of genuine politics and from the "exasperation with the threefold frustration" attending it, its unpredictability, irreversibility and the anonymity of the authors of its processes.¹⁹ The Platonic rationalization was the first major attempt to replace the haphazardness and irresponsibility inherent in a situation in which a plurality of agents is enacting something new whose outcome is unforeseeable in its infinite boundlessness. Intended to shore up arguments against the frailty and fickleness of democracy, it actually spelled the doom of politics itself.²⁰ For it transmuted the meaning of political action: in place of acting in the sense of taking an initiative, of starting something new, of causing, together with others, things to happen in the public realm, the Platonic rationalization substituted ruling, the issuing of commands; and in place of plurality and diversity it put forward the monarchic idea of a philosopher-king.²¹ Henceforth the paradigmatic actor in politics came to be viewed as the master-craftsman, the architect, the expert, who knew what was to be done and why.²² To Arendt this change of conception constitutes the transfer of the organizational ethic of the household and private business into the sphere of politics and is the source of its virtual assimilation by the social, as it also signals the extinction of the private household itself as a distinct and

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distinctive entity.²³ Henceforth public business becomes indistinguishable from private business in that means-ends relationships apply equally to both. The notion that he who wills the end must also will the means thus becomes ubiquitous, a commonplace. Implicit in this notion and the means-ends relationship underlying it Arendt sees the Platonic separation of knowing and doing.²⁴ In the light of this separation knowledge comes to be associated with giving orders, issuing commands and rulership generally, while action comes to be associated with taking orders, obeying commands, and being ruled, with executing a plan or blueprint rather than designing it.²⁵ For Arendt the separation between knowing and doing is tantamount to the destruction of action in its innermost meaning; not surprisingly, therefore, she is distressed that it is this mutilated or perverted meaning of action, in terms of knowing without doing or doing without knowing, which "overruled all earlier experiences and articulations in the political realm and became authoritative for the whole tradition of political thought."²⁶ For what the separation typifies is not action but fabrication; it is in fabrication that processes "obviously" fall into a prior cognition or perception of the end-product and a subsequent organizing of its execution. And that affairs in politics generally came to be so intimately linked with violence is wholly attributable to the warped understanding of action in terms of making; for no fabrication could ever come to pass without violence.²⁷

Further elaborations soon make it evident, however, that in her critique of Plato, and to a lesser degree of Aristotle, for handling political matters in the mode of fabrication, she has in mind not *knowing* and doing, but *thinking* and doing. In the very same passage in which she discusses the division between knowing and doing, she suddenly switches from "knowledge" to "thought": action now loses its validity and meaning "the moment *thought* and action part company."²⁸ Presumably Arendt herself became aware that only the latter formulation is compatible with two essential characteristics of action as she conceives it. Since, on her view, no other human performance requires speech to the same extent as action, and since thought is expressed in speech; thought, speech and action are one and the same thing, and hence the notion of action being devoid of thought is simply incomprehensible.²⁹ But the same cannot be said of *knowledge* and action; for while thought being constitutive of action forms one essential characteristic of action, and, one might qualify further, a positive requirement, the necessary *absence* of knowledge from action forms the second essential characteristic of action, albeit a negative requirement. Indeed one would probably not be wrong in regarding knowing and acting as inherently opposed notions in Arendt's scheme of things, at any rate in her conception of acting in the public realm. Law-making, for example, which since Plato and Aristotle has been considered as the highest form of political activity, involving precisely the sort of superior knowledge the Platonic ruler is

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supposed to possess, is judged by Arendt as a type of fabrication, laws being the products of making and not the result of acting, for what the legislator does is to devise a plan or design a blueprint, the execution of which is the very negation of acting, for what is to be done is not unknown and unpredictable, but fixed and certain.³⁰

That Arendt denies rather than affirms the linkage between knowledge and action is even more apparent from another work in which the closest analogue to action is seen in the occurrence of a *miracle*.³¹ Now, clearly, we do not speak of events as miracles when we know why and how they occurred. Arendt *deliberately* chooses the analogue of a miracle *because* she sees in *not* knowing one of the most disclosing qualities of action proper. She says so explicitly enough herself: men do not, and cannot, in acting, as distinct from making, *know* what they are doing, and thus can never be masters of their own destiny.³² Marx is sharply taken to task for having applied Vico's idea that history was made by man to political action; to her this is a telling illustration of an all-too-frequent conceptual switch from history to politics. To derive politics from history, or to apply to politics the vantage point of the historian, is to confuse, once again, acting with making. For to view action from the vantage point of the historian is to look upon it as a completed process; it is a sort of mirror image of Plato's blueprint. Hence Marx's conception of political action, no less than Plato's is dismissed by Arendt as just another attempt to rationalize the escape from the frustrations and the fragility of human action, as another exercise in "construing action in the image of making."³³ Action — in contrast to fabrication which has a definite beginning and a definite, predictable end — though it has a definite beginning, never has a predictable end.³⁴ In a very real sense, therefore, action is infinite — it has no end. "The process of a single deed can quite literally endure throughout time until mankind itself has come to an end."³⁵ From this Arendt deduces, logically enough, that man, never quite knowing what he is doing, may easily be "guilty" of consequences he never quite intended or foresaw, and thus should be looked upon much more as the "victim and sufferer" than the author of his action.³⁶ But, surely, if this is so, if man plunging into action scarcely knows what he is accomplishing, the separation between doing and knowing is in Arendt's portrayal of action as severe as in Plato's, in spite of profound differences in their conceptions of "doing".

If action, however, has no end, or, at any rate, no end knowable to the actor, what is the source, motivation, or point of acting, wherefrom does it derive its validity or meaning? Arendt is bent on showing that here, too, there is a radical difference between acting and any other human activity. While labour is bound up with biological needs and the satisfaction of material wants, which constitute both its motivation and its goal, and fabrication is governed by means-ends relationships and thus clearly delimited processes, action is free

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from internal (physical or psychological) motivation as it is free from the determination of set ends or common standards of ordinary (private or moral) behaviour.³⁷ In other words, action, unlike labour or work, is in a certain sense motive-less as well as aim-less, and it is also amoral in terms of ordinary codes of morality. Admittedly — and Arendt fully concedes this — action, like any other form of conscious human behaviour, has motives and aims, as it is also constrained by external reality, including its norms of conduct, but its defining characteristic lies beyond and transcends these determining and limiting factors. Arendt calls this “non-determining” characteristic a *principle*, by which she understands a distinctive but highly diffuse or general ethos or sentiment, whose validity, meaning, or worth, lies wholly in itself, and is neither derivable from, nor reducible to, anything else. She mentions such principles as honour, glory, love, or equality, and likens them to Montesquieu’s “virtue”, “distinction” or “excellence”, though she also adds fear, distrust, and hatred, that is, dispositions which, to my mind, are scarcely distinguishable from “motives” in the usually accepted sense. Arendt seems to think otherwise; she takes great pains to set principles sharply apart from motives, and for her the crucial difference lies in their mode of operation. Motives, in the form of dispositions, feelings, states of mind, intentions, aims, or reasons (the “because of” and “in order to” types of motivation), issue from “within the self”, whereas principles are sentiments which “inspire from without”. To actualize such principles is to *act*, and to act *freely*; not because of this or that personal motive or in order to produce this or that result, but for its own sake.³⁸ Action, thus conceived, in other words, carries its value and justification within the performance itself; indeed, action *is* performance, and it is an activity which is, as to its meaning and validity wholly self-sustaining. The political actor resembles, therefore, on Arendt’s view, the performing artist, the virtuoso, rather than the creative artist, the latter being much closer to the *modus operandi* of the fabricator.³⁹ The *raison d’être* of the political is to establish and maintain a space where “freedom as virtuosity” can make its appearance, where it finds a tangible reality in “words which can be heard, in deeds which can be seen, and in events which are talked about, remembered, and turned into stories.”⁴⁰

The defining characteristic or the distinguishing criterion of action as performance is “greatness”. Unlike ordinary human behaviour, action cannot and must not be judged according to standards and rules applicable to every-day affairs, because it is in its nature “to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extra-ordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.”⁴¹ But greatness and glory, like the performance which they characterize, have nothing whatsoever to do with motives, intentions, or consequences; what matters, and what solely matters, is that the act is performed in

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public and is inspired by principles. Feats, thus performed, so shine in their radiance as to be worthy of remembrance.⁴²

A number of puzzling questions come to mind concerning Arendt's sharp distinctions between acting and making, acting and knowing (as distinct from thinking), and motives and principles. One cannot help feeling that she deliberately overdraws the contrasts in order to hammer in her eloquent plea for the unique distinctiveness of political action. And, likewise, one cannot help wondering whether her intense didactic impulse is not somewhat self-defeating. For while the didactic effectiveness of her choice of sharply polarized categories is undeniable, and the suggestiveness of her insights profoundly stimulating, the content of her categories, despite — and at times because of — painstaking elaborations remain irritatingly obscure or unreal or provokingly odd. What is more, she herself seems to realize at times that she is simply overdoing it. Thus she is clearly reluctant to face the full implications of her amoral conception of "greatness". She would like to suggest that somehow things need not get out of hand. Somehow political actions that are truly great *would* avoid brutality, words uttered in the public space *would not* be used to deceive;⁴³ but she stipulates no moral restraints within the conception itself that would lend support to such assumptions. Here, as elsewhere (as I shall argue) Arendt reveals a disturbingly selective moralism which verges on what I would call a form of moral separatism. One may formally distinguish between acting in accordance with, or for the sake of, an external principle, and acting out of personal feelings or in order to promote a particular end; but one can hardly speak of *judging* actions by only taking into account their inspiring principles and not caring where these could or did lead or why or how they came to exercise their inspiring influence.

Moreover, the matter goes deeper than this. *Should* one act as if one had no image of the end in mind, as if the outcome of actions were unknowable, as if personal feelings counted for nothing and *the principle* counted for everything? Or are such questions, puzzling and troublesome though they are, wholly beside the point when greatness is at stake? To be sure, Arendt is fully aware of these frustrating puzzles; time and again she acknowledges the depressingly frustrating predicament of being seen and being heard in public, of acting *politically*, yet every attempt to resolve or reduce the problematical, if not paradoxical, tensions, represents to her a retreat from acting, an escape from greatness. But this inevitably raises the most fundamental question, the question that touches the core of the matter: why should man aim at greatness, why should he embark upon action so pregnant with futility and frustration; why should he shun being a worker or a fabricator if, in so doing, he achieves results that are wholly intangible, uncontrollable, and unfathomable, where he is groping in the dark, not knowing whether he be the author or victim of his deeds? What, in short, would he miss by not acting, by not performing in

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public, by avoiding greatness and glory? Arendt's reply is as starkly simple as it is devastatingly complex: man, by not acting robs himself of himself, he annihilates his distinctive identity as a human being. For to act means to reveal oneself as an individual human entity, as a *person*.⁴⁴ It is *this* reply which compels us to take the redemptive thrust of Arendt's political thought seriously, however circumspect we might feel about her conceptual approach, about her passion for polarities and paradoxes, about her poetic allusions, about her provoking oddity.

Unfortunately, it is not clear how or why — hence the complexity of Arendt's reply — the greatness or glory of an action is to disclose the personal identity of the actor, the "who" as distinct from the "what" a person is. For it is by no means evident that the nature of the performance is necessarily identifiable with the nature of the performer, with the kind of person he is. Admittedly, it is only through famous deeds that one can acquire immortal fame.⁴⁵ But why or how should the principle for the sake of which the deed was performed self-evidently reveal the character of the person who acted upon it? Could not, putting it simply, a timid man perform feats by word or deed that others judge to be bold and courageous? Arendt concedes as much: the hero the story discloses needs no heroic qualities; an action is no less great, "and may even be greater", if the "hero" happens to be a coward.⁴⁶ But if this is so, if men do not do what they do because they are who they are, it is hard to grasp in what revelatory manner their actions disclose their "personal qualities", their distinctive individual identities as persons, as Arendt claims. Her distinction between the "who" and the "what" of a person does not, I fear, make the task any easier. For how does she envisage the dissociation of the "who" — his personal qualities, from the "what" — "the qualities an individual possesses"?⁴⁷ That she has more in mind than the difference between actualized and latent qualities is perfectly obvious, for she distinguishes not only between kinds of individual qualities but also between phases of an action in which these different qualities surface and reveal themselves. Thus only the story of the performance itself discloses *who* a person was, everything else we know of him, "including the work he may have produced and left behind", only discloses *what* he was.⁴⁸ Moreover, the "who" to be revealed is not simply the person *qua* man, but the person *qua* citizen, and hence, notwithstanding Arendt's distinction, the "what" is not really entirely detachable from the "who"; only the free man qualifies as citizen, and not the slave or the labourer who is subject to coercion by others or driven and urged on by the necessities of life.⁴⁹ Evidently, it does matter *what* the who is; and, what is more, on Arendt's own showing, it is the "what" rather than the "who" that the actor himself is capable of having at least some knowledge of. He would, that is, most likely be aware of his status as labourer or slave and he would most pro-

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bably have a fair idea where his own strength and weaknesses lie. But he could only very inadequately know *who* he is, for the disclosure that action is meant to yield is of no direct cognitive benefit to the actor himself. It is only to the others that he discloses himself, not to himself. Man can never know himself as a direct result of plunging into action; he can only know of himself what others think of him.⁵⁰

Perhaps one could interpret Arendt to mean that what matters in politics is not the character qualities of a person but the manner in which he plays a role or wears a mask. The analogy she draws between politics and the theatre might lend support to such an interpretation.⁵¹ Yet this does not dispose of the problem of whether a role is identifiable with the *who* of a person rather than with the *what*. Possibly, this unclearness concerning the relationship between an action and the "who" and "what" of its performer stems again from an essentially ambivalent stance on Arendt's part. She appears as reluctant to derive greatness from internal personality traits, as she is loath to deprive the actor of his distinctive individuality and to view him as a mere cog that is pushed and pulled from the outside.

Be that as it may, one thing is made unequivocally manifest: human greatness can be achieved solely by acting publicly, by taking part in *arche*, by starting new things in the political realm, by being a citizen. In viewing the connection between human excellence and political action so inextricably tight, as Hannah Arendt does, she markedly departs from the tradition that spans from the age of the Greek *polis* to the present day. Indeed, it is her opposition to this intervening tradition which decisively typifies her political thinking. Although she is manifestly far from indifferent to the moral content of political action, the gravity of her intellectual energies centres on the uniqueness and intrinsic meaning of politics *per se*, apparently, even at the risk of moral separatism. What she laments above all is the passing of an era in which politics was valued as the most distinctive human activity and taken seriously on its own terms.

No other single work reveals more strikingly the extent to which Arendt is prepared to uphold the distinctiveness and autonomy of the political realm than her essay on "Truth and Politics". For the saliency of its juxtaposition of truth and politics lies in presenting truth as not only outside politics but as potentially hostile to it. The externality of truth is as much a condition for the autonomy of politics as it is the basis of its own inherent validity. Neither can preserve its integrity if invaded by the other. The dignity of the political realm rests, therefore, on its intrinsic autonomy, on the underivative character of the principles sustaining it.⁵²

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III

Disregarding the question of the ontological meaning of truth, Arendt makes that much clear: truth is not of one piece; it has at least two faces which she distinguishes as "rational" and "factual". Rational truth, whether produced or disclosed by the human mind, comprises mathematical, scientific, and philosophical concerns, concerns pursued "in solitude and remoteness", while factual truth chiefly refers to the "outcome of men living and acting together."⁵³ Although both varieties of truth are external to politics, factual truth shares with politics, as a matter of necessity, a common involvement with man in the plural.⁵⁴ This shared characteristic accounts for one reason why facts are often mistaken for opinions; the other derives from the "annoying contingency" of facts.⁵⁵ Things could always have occurred otherwise than they actually did, so that what in retrospect appears as inexorable necessity is a sort of illusion.⁵⁶ The possibility of mistaken identity clearly harbours the risk of facts being deliberately discredited, manipulated or indeed destroyed, in that events or individuals are utterly wiped out from the historical record.⁵⁷

But the risk of encroachment by the political powers that be upon the domain of factual truth is not the only danger to guard against. It is not only truth that needs saving from the designs of politics, politics itself needs saving from the onslaught of truth. For all forms of truth contain, in Arendt's view, a coercive, if not tyrannical propensity which threatens the very existence of politics.⁵⁸ Factual truth, through its closer proximity to the political realm, is the most likely to clash with political action, and hence needs watching in particular. It is, therefore, factual truth that Arendt claims to be chiefly concerned with in her treatise on "Truth and Politics".⁵⁹

What precisely does she mean, however, by factual truth? This is not altogether clear; for she tends to run together at least three distinct meanings: (i) what actually is, that is, the objectively given in any situation; (ii) what, in point of fact, is said about it, by witnesses and others; and (iii) what, by way of reaction, is thought and felt about it. Thus, if factual truth is coercive in any one of these senses, it is so quite differently from that of any of the others. Judging by the only example she cites as typifying "factual truth", one would infer that it is the first meaning, the objectively given, that she has principally in mind. At the same time she makes it perfectly clear that she considers personal truthfulness as the hallmark of factual truth,⁶⁰ which suggests that she is thinking in terms of the second or third meaning given above.

The example of "factual truth" repeatedly cited throughout the essay on "Truth and Politics" is the invasion of Belgium by Germany during the First World War. Whatever interpretation we may construct upon "brutally elementary data of this kind" cannot alter their existential finality, their bedrock of inescapable factness.⁶¹ It could be objected that simple observation

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statements, such as "Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914", true though they are as descriptions of events, imply no justification or explanation for action; that, stripped of a context of meanings, such truths have no compelling force whatsoever. There is, of course, soundness in the objection, but I doubt if it really hits the mark. Arendt is quite aware that facts need interpretation to disclose intelligible meaning.⁶² Her point is, if I understand her correctly, that, unless there is something we can take to be true in the unequivocal sense in which we accept the factness of the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, we have no way of knowing how anything could be false.

Perhaps a phrase Arendt uses in another essay, "Lying in Politics", may help to clarify this point. In it she takes the American Administration to task for not having been able "to confront reality [in Vietnam] on its own terms because it had always some parallels in mind that 'helped' it to understand those terms."⁶³ Because of this failure to realize that we cannot readily apply criteria or perspectives to a new situation that may have served us well in a previous situation, lying had been resorted to. Yet Arendt's principal worry here, despite the title of the essay, is not so much lying as a total loss of a sense of reality, which is far more disastrous in so far as it renders us utterly helpless. It is a condition which negates all judgment, truth-telling or lying.

A familiar predicament of human action reveals "reality", however, as having both a passive and an active quality: man sees himself, in any situation, constrained by facts which exist independently of his own designs and desires, while at the same time he is conscious of his capacity to choose between alternative courses of action. On the one hand, he is confronted by reality as an inescapable given; on the other, he acts upon it. His world, therefore, is a field of tension between a realm of factual givens, the domain of "finality", and a realm of potential deeds, the domain of "infinity". For Arendt, action in politics revolves around initiating processes designed to "change the world".⁶⁴ Factual truth — in the sense of the objectively given — thus confronts man, bent on changing the world, as inescapable reality, as something he has to come to terms with. Arendt sees this confrontation as a clash between "what is" and what is to be, and derives from this meeting of opposites her coercion theory of truth as well as her theory of lying in politics. Lying enables the political actor to overcome the coerciveness of "what is". He says "what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are."⁶⁵ Lying is one response to the challenge of factual truth, one way of bridging the gap between facts and deeds, between finality and infinity; it is one way of "reconciling" compulsion with freedom. Arendt speaks of our ability to lie as one of "the few obvious, demonstrable data that confirm human freedom."⁶⁶ From this perspective, factual truth presents a potential threat to politics as a free activity, just as rational truth, with its zealous hankering for changeless finality is liable to imperil its boundless infinity.

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This, however, as Arendt realizes and indeed stresses, is only one side of the coin. Granted that factual truth in its existential coerciveness and stubborn resilience inhibits political action — in view of which Arendt calls factual truth non-political or even anti-political,⁶⁷ can we therefore ignore it and turn a blind eye to its existence? In other words, can we dismiss reality as though it were otiose? Arendt's reply is that we cannot; for if we refuse to face reality, or at least that part of reality which directly impinges upon acting in the public realm, we have no benchmark, no point of reference from which to start something new. Not knowing "what is", we can hardly strive for "what is not". We are adrift, having lost the ground on which to stand.⁶⁸ It is precisely for having lost its bearings that the American Administration is taken to task in Arendt's essay on "Lying in Politics".

Arendt's position, then, on the relation of truth to politics is undeniably ambivalent. But while disturbing in some of its implications, it is not contradictory so long as factual truth is identified with the first of the three meanings mentioned earlier. As soon, however, as the other meanings are brought into play, the cognitive content of "factual truth" becomes blurred; the category can no longer sustain the weight put upon it. Arendt's elaboration of her position threatens, as we shall see, its own viability, its very ground on which to stand.

IV

To reinforce her argument in support of the distinctiveness of political action Arendt introduces a further juxtaposition. Although she insists that the only real opposite to factual truth is the fabrication of deliberate falsehoods, she finds Plato's distinction (in the Line allegory) between knowledge and opinion useful for contrasting factual truth with "opinion". (Unfortunately, she misleadingly suggests that Plato equates opinion with illusion.⁶⁹ Plato does not oppose opinion to knowledge as something non-existent or necessarily false; opinion can be true or false, for one can have "correct beliefs without knowledge". [*Republic*, 506 c] Curiously enough, Arendt herself subsequently refers to Plato's concept of "right opinion";⁷⁰ could one have "right illusions"?) Whereas truth, as an absolute, or as a self-evident fact, entails an "indisputable" claim to validity, opinion stakes no such claim. Axioms, or facts, are "beyond agreement"; opinions, by contrast, are inherently discussable; if the former preclude debate, the latter invite it, and hence are the very "hallmark of all strictly political thinking."⁷¹ While self-evidence confers upon truth a coercive propensity, the lack of self-evidence to be found in opinion defines its distinctly persuasive character.⁷² It follows that opinion,

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necessarily involving numbers, differs drastically from truth, which is independent of numbers, in the "mode of asserting validity".⁷³

Arendt's presentation here remarkably echoes Aristotle's reasoning in the *Rhetoric*, in particular his distinction between "things about which we deliberate" and things which are beyond the scope of deliberation.⁷⁴ Once again the "finality" of truth is contrasted with the "infinity" of politics, the former being beyond agreement, the latter forever seeking agreement through discussion and deliberation, through persuasion and argument. And once again the blurring of the distinction is sadly deplored. Modern man is said to confuse truth and opinion as easily as he confuses acting with making, and this makes it so much more plausible to present opinion as truth or to dismiss truth as mere opinion.⁷⁵

But having drawn the line separating truth from opinion, Arendt herself succeeds — albeit unwittingly — in blurring it by elevating opinion to a degree of universality which makes it scarcely distinguishable from truth. The confusion which this qualitative leap produces is made complete by her use of the term "impartiality" — the hallmark of truth — to characterize opinion "at its best".⁷⁶ But this is not merely confusing; it seriously imperils the very foundations of Arendt's theory of political action. For what is at issue here is no longer a matter of adhering to a formal distinction, or of blurring it, but a question of political substance of the first order. It will be necessary, therefore, to trace briefly the steps by means of which Arendt, starting from a pluralistic and diversitarian base, shunning unanimity in the best Millian tradition, arrives at consensual unity strangely reminiscent of Rousseau's general will — I say "strangely", because Rousseau's notion of the general will is anathema to Arendt.

Political thought is representative — that is her major premise. The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given point in dispute, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion.⁷⁷ That representative thinking is disinterested, in that it excludes consideration of one's own private interests, constitutes her minor premise.⁷⁸ From these premises it is supposed to follow that, however diverse opinions might be to start with, and however strongly they might conflict over particularities, they are bound to "ascend to some impartial generality", by being publicly discussed from all sides.⁷⁸

Since there is no suggestion that this eventual common understanding or agreement would ensue through the assistance of physical force or the exercise of group pressures, Arendt must assume, as Rousseau did, that conflicts are not real or fundamental or permanent if individuals think as citizens and not as private persons, and if they think exclusively as individual citizens and not as members of sectional groups. Having liberated themselves from their subjective

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idiosyncracies and private conditions, men, evidently *must* attain agreement.⁸⁰ Yet, what warrants this belief? Why should it be taken for granted that there is but one single conception of the common or general good? Is it not conceivable that even in the absence of "private interests" there could be disagreement not only over "particularities" but over general ends? And, if so, who is to judge between different conceptions of the general good? Arendt does not suggest an equivalent of, or substitute for, Rousseau's Legislator, so there is no way of knowing how she proposes to resolve such differences. Presumably, she rules out such a possibility; presumably, she holds that individuals — unlike parties, classes, or interest groups — would differ only over particularities which are invariably resolvable through discussion, through a process of disinterested reasoning. Stalemate, anarchy, or permanent conflict, evidently could not occur.

Moreover, Arendt's position on representative thinking in politics seems oddly ambivalent. On the one hand she approvingly cites Aristotle's warning that men who are unconcerned with "what is good for themselves" cannot very well be trusted with representing the down-to-earth interests of the community.⁸¹ On the other hand, however, she regards disinterestedness, the "liberation from one's private interests", as the defining quality of representative opinion.⁸² Admittedly, a cynic could argue that there is no necessary inconsistency involved here, since politicians know very well "what is good for themselves" by not *appearing* to be motivated by their private interests. But this is not Arendt's argument. On the contrary, she makes it perfectly plain that representative thinking must be sharply distinguished from representative *government* (for opinions, unlike interests, cannot be represented), or from trimming one's sail, or from counting noses, or from joining majorities; and she certainly does not mean identifying with the interests of the group to which one happens to belong.⁸³ Nor is representative thinking contingent on deliberating with others in common assembly. Even when completely alone "can I make myself the representative of everybody else."⁸⁴ Adopting Kant's notion of an enlarged mentality and his concept of universality of *intent* (not to be confused with actual universality), Arendt is combining here aesthetic and moral criteria for judging and acting. Thus, when she is invoking Aristotle in this context, she obviously is not identifying the "down-to-earth interests of the community" with Bentham's aggregate of private interests. The man not to be trusted in politics is not one who is incapable of "representing" private or group interests, but one who is incapable of taking into account diverse — albeit down-to-earth — opinions of those with whom he shares a common interest as a fellow citizen. However, — and here lies the apparent ambivalence — men should also be concerned with "what is good for themselves". How is this requirement to be reconciled with disinterestedness? The only interpretation of this phrase which seems compatible with Arendt's position is a tautological and

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“moralistic” one, namely, one which implies that only those capable of representative thinking also reveal, in so doing, a proper concern for what is truly good for themselves. It is they who are the paradigmatic opinion holders.

Clearly, nothing could be further removed from Plato’s view (or, for that matter, the most current view) of political opinion than this highly universalist and moralist understanding of opinion. When, in the *Republic* (vi, 493) Plato poses the (to him insoluble) problem of combining “representative thinking” (in terms of what an assembly of men think or would approve of) with doing what ought to be done, he brings into sharp relief what Arendt oddly fails to recognize or accept, namely, that “opinion” in politics is what people do think and not what they ought to think. I advisedly say “oddly fails to recognize”, because in the light of the universalist and moralist flavour of her notion of political opinion the juxtaposition of truth and opinion becomes practically forceless. With so much emphasis on universality and impartiality we no longer know a political opinion when we see one.

The central point of the didactic enterprise, therefore, the sharpening of our awareness of the distinctiveness of politics as a realm of plurality and diversity seems utterly lost in this virtually apolitical vision of consensual unity. One finds it hard to resist the suspicion that, for Hannah Arendt, political opinions are indistinguishable from discussion points. Clashes of views are presented not as confrontations between settled positions or commitments but as multiple dialogues in a debate in which impartial reasoning cannot but attain consensus, if not unanimity. Even if it is conceded that political positions are changeable, that convictions are rarely so firmly held that they are wholly impervious to persuasive counter-arguments, this is still far from saying that political opinions are fluid to a degree that would totally negate a sense of abiding antagonism or opposition. Clearly, an image of political redemption that did so, that issued in the negation of dissent, would empty the concept of plurality of all meaning.

V

Since Arendt claims to be concerned with truthfulness rather than truth, *per se*,⁸⁵ it is surprising that this distinction is constantly lost sight of in her essay on “Truth and Politics”. For throughout her discussion it seems that truthfulness as well as truth is made contingent on disinterestedness, impartiality, and non-commitment.⁸⁶ No doubt, partisanship, the allegiance to causes and organizations, will entail a higher premium being put on loyalty to one’s fellows and on steadfastness of purpose than on truth. This, indeed, is one important reason why Arendt values human fellowship (*humanitas*) above truth.⁸⁷ All the same, can we not be perfectly *truthful* when we are explaining

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or defending purposes or principles that we cherish or interests that we consider vital to others or to ourselves? Personal truthfulness by itself, admittedly, is no guarantee for the truth content of a proposition. For the only cognitive test of a truth claim is its challengability on grounds recognized as intrinsic or non-special-pleading. Whatever be the ontological status of truth, it is essential that we hold that there are criteria for discerning truth which are self-sustaining and do not derive from our likes and dislikes, our class or group interests or personal advantage. But it seems to me that Arendt is confusing (in "Truth and Politics") two quite distinct sets of criteria, those of a man's personal attributes, and those which apply to impersonal propositions.

To establish the truthfulness of first-order observation statements of the kind Arendt cites — the German invasion of Belgium — we refer to objective reality for verification (as witnessed and recorded by impartial observers). When, however, we are presented with second-order statements which embrace interpretations, evaluations, and explanations of, or personal responses to, first-order observation statements, we can no longer simply refer to the objective "elementary data" (as Arendt calls them) to form a judgment of their validity as truth claims. In other words, the criteria we apply to "what is said" about what is or was, and to "what is being thought or felt about it" (the second and third possible meanings of "factual truth", mentioned earlier), involve judgmental considerations of a kind that do not arise in examining the correspondence of first-order truth claims to elementary facts. Attitudes, assessments, and specific action responses entail in varying degrees subjective commitments which are either non-existent in first-order truth claims or easily discountable.

There is no need to dwell at length on the rather unproblematic way in which the notion of commitment is used in "Truth and Politics". But even in the very general sense in which Arendt speaks of commitment, equating it with partisanship, or one-sided dedication to a cause or interest, one may wonder whether "non-commitment" is necessarily synonymous with impartiality, as she seems to hold. For, while there are, no doubt, commitments which militate against impartiality, non-commitment could do so likewise, since it may simply mean indifference; and indifference clearly is not the same as impartiality. When we are indifferent we do not care one way or the other about moral, aesthetic, factual, or any other considerations or values. But to be impartial, we have to care for such values as objectivity, fairness, or justice. Should we not, therefore, regard impartiality itself as a form of commitment rather than as a form of non-commitment? Arendt does not explore this question; it is evident, however, that but for one occasion where she speaks of a "commitment to truth",⁸⁸ truth and commitment are, for her, inherently opposed categories.

The polarization of truth and commitment does prove, nonetheless, of heuristic merit when we consider each as constituting the end of a continuum

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which comprises variants of either or combinations of both. Thus we might think on the one extreme of those who at all times feel compelled to proclaim the truth (or what they conceive to be the truth) regardless of consequences, and on the other extreme of those so committed to causes or interests that they feel compelled to suppress the truth or have recourse to downright lying. Indeed, we could speak here of two rival absolutist ethics, the ethic of unconditional veracity, and the ethic of unconditional commitment. In any politics, but particularly in a politics of public controversy, the viability of both absolutist ethics will be highly precarious, not only because they are likely to breed intolerance or impair credibility, or both, but also because political action, unlike moral action, is commonly not evaluated — as Arendt wholly acknowledges and indeed insists — by its motives or intentions, but by its outcomes — notwithstanding Arendt's dismissal of "consequences". The conflict in politics, therefore, is not between non-partisan truth and partisan commitment (although it frequently is one between private conscience and public posture), but between weighing the responsibility for the action itself against strict adherence to truth or set commitments. When Robert Stanfield, previous leader of the Progressive Conservatives, reportedly stated, after the last Canadian Federal election, that "being truthful was more important than being a leader", he poignantly captured the essential difference between moral thinking and political thinking. No doubt, what is right and wrong in political terms can never be strictly known in advance — in view of which Arendt speaks of an action's boundless unpredictability — but this does not alter the fact that we hold men engaged in public affairs responsible for what they say or do in light of the consequences we attribute to their words or deeds.

If speaking the truth in public would invariably prove to be the best policy there would clearly be no problem. Likewise, if lying invariably achieved desirable results in public life there would be no problem either. Yet, clearly, neither alternative is the most likely one in politics; for both the wholly "irresponsible" truth-teller and the wholly committed liar will find their absolutized ethic counter-productive to their political ends. All this is obvious enough, and I am not suggesting for a moment that Arendt would deny it. But I *am* wondering whether, by so pointedly focusing on the polarized extremes, she does not unwittingly obscure what throughout her writings she has persistently been determined to maintain, namely, the inherently absurd, or tragic, nature of the predicament that acting publicly involves. For, clearly, the choice is not simply between truth and politics, or, as Plato and Machiavelli saw it, between clean hands and soiled hands;⁸⁹ nor is it a matter of thinking impartially or of being committed or not. The potentially agonizing problem is rather that of acting responsibly, or merely successfully, in a sphere where outcomes are incalculable, and where moral and political imperatives conflict.

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This problem may indeed be insoluble in principle, yet action demands that it be mounted by the incessant balancing of diverse, conflicting and, at times, irreconcilable ends or purposes. We may be deceived about our ends, but we would scarcely act at all on the principle of endlessness.

VI

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Hannah Arendt's essay on truth and politics is that devoted to the problem of self-deception in politics. Self-deception, she maintains, should be treated as far more serious a problem in politics than lying to others. For, while in lying to others the existence of truth is not in jeopardy, since the liar knows the truth which he is wilfully distorting, in the case of self-deception truth itself is lost.⁹⁰ This is an interesting and unusual way of viewing self-deception, which, generally, is considered as a mitigating factor. I must admit, however, that I do not find Arendt's reasoning in support of her thesis very convincing.

First of all, although self-deception may indeed be recognized as a potentially serious source of political misjudgment, "lying to oneself", the phrase Arendt uses for self-deception, is a rather problematical way of speaking, since it inevitably raises the question of who is relating to whom when I am lying to myself. Admittedly, we often use such figures of speech as "debating with myself", or being "angry with myself", or "pulling myself up". Yet what we thus express are circumlocutions for states of indecision, conflict, unhappiness, resolution, and so on, within ourselves. We feel torn, or uncertain, or under some illusion, but none of these states or feelings involve wilful deceit tantamount to the deliberate fabrication of untruths which we present to ourselves as truths. Lying, no less than veracity, is a moral category; being the victim of an illusion, whatever else it is, is not, and hence being deluded about oneself or about others is not a variant of lying.

Secondly, there may be occasions when I am not fully informed, or actually ill-informed, or plainly mistaken and, realizing this *ex post facto*, I conclude that, in this unintended sense I have been deceiving myself. But, once again, this is not "lying to myself", for we commonly assume that lying is an intentional effort to deceive and not a case of ignorance, superstition, or inflexibility of thinking. Of course, I may pretend to believe what in fact I do not hold to be true, or no longer hold to be true (out of loyalty, a sense of commitment, opportunism, or sheer stubbornness), but then I am not lying to *myself*, I am simply lying. Putting it differently, I can have false beliefs, but I cannot believe falsely. Just as truth is distinguishable from truthfulness, beliefs are distinguishable from believing. For, whereas beliefs are propositions that can be true or false, believing is an activity or a state of mind which can exist or

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not exist, but which cannot be true or false. Although I may feel profoundly contrite realizing that I upheld beliefs which I now find to have been false, I can hardly accuse myself, or be accused by others, of having lied to myself, or having destroyed truth, in the problematic *moral* sense Arendt talks about.

Finally, though I may be induced, by what Arendt calls "organized lying", for example, to believe what is patently untrue, I cannot be said to be deceiving myself. For if I accept as true whatever I am told, I am neither lying, nor lying to myself, but believing. Such a possibility is indeed not to be ruled out and, with it, the danger of truth being "lost". And perhaps this is what Arendt has in mind. Only I fail to see that this danger emerges from lying to myself rather than from being lied to by others.

In her *Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt denies (quite properly) that concern for consistency, which she regards as the hallmark of ideology, is the same as concern for truth.⁹¹ But it does not follow from this that adherents of an ideology are not truthful about their convictions. Nor does it follow that those who have no ideological convictions are necessarily more truthful or more determined seekers after truth. Indeed, Arendt herself suggests that the very opposite could well be the case, at any rate under a totalitarian regime of terror, where "the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction . . . and the distinction between true and false . . . no longer exists."⁹² Similarly, is the ideologically convinced not likely to be more truthful in genuinely believing what he professes to believe than one who merely pays lip-service to an ideology, out of fear, or for personal advantage, or for both reasons? To be sure, he may well be judged to be deceiving himself, either because all ideological thinking is by definition held to be illusory or false, or because his particular ideology is considered illusory or false; but in neither case is the ideologically convinced lying to others or lying to himself.

No doubt Arendt's close linkage of ideology with terror and totalitarianism leads her to maintain that adherents of a political ideology quite openly proclaim it to be a political weapon and, apparently, for this reason, "consider the whole question of truth and truthfulness irrelevant."⁹³ It is perfectly true, of course, that exponents of an ideology may not themselves believe what they are propagating or that they may be indifferent to its truth content. It is equally true that citizens living in countries where ideology is sanctioned by terror often adopt a cynical attitude toward an ideology which, though backed by force, carries no conviction. But this does not alter the fact that even totalitarian power holders can scarcely afford to be unconcerned over the degree to which the official ideology is conducive to their political ends. Even if it is granted that they rely on terror rather than persuasion, they presumably wish their persuasive efforts to *ring* true.

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By the same token, does it necessarily follow, as Arendt implies, that the prevalence of official lying, sanctioned by terror, leads to an impaired understanding of truth in the factual sense? If people find it imprudent or hazardous to tell the truth publicly, are they thereby rendered incapable of knowing or discerning the true facts in a given situation? Here again, it seems to me, a distinction is clearly called for, namely, the distinction between *knowing* the truth and *telling* the truth. Widely shared knowledge of factual truth is perfectly consistent with officially disseminated lies and officially backed terror, for truths do not necessarily cease to be known by not being aired in public. Terror frequently destroys trust among men, but factual truth may well be less vulnerable than mutual trust, and those meant to be deceived may defy being deceived.

An anecdote, circulating in one of the Eastern European countries, illustrates this point rather well. A man, so the story goes, compares at some leisure two cars parked next to one another, one being a Rolls Royce, the other a Moskvitch. A bystander approaches him. "Which of the two cars do you consider the best?" Before replying the man looks at the bystander, looks again at the cars, and finally says: "I think the Moskvitch". "Man, don't you know your cars?" the bystander says in astonishment. "Oh, I know my cars all right," comes the reply, "but I don't know you." Sagging trust evidently affects truth-telling, but not necessarily truth-knowing; and while mutual deception frequently follows in the wake of terror, it does not necessarily generate self-deception.

VII

According to Arendt, the diverse juxtapositions in "Truth and Politics" are designed merely to shore up her plea for delimiting the political sphere.⁹⁴ This seems a rather formidable understatement, for the impression that the essay provokes goes some distance beyond this modest claim. Without wishing to dispute that the impression provoked in the reader is unintended by Arendt, I cannot help feeling that it is but another version of what I earlier referred to as "moral separatism". For the image it projects is that of a Manichean-like world, of lying in politics and of truth-telling outside politics. Evidently, reporters, professors, judges, or churchmen, who are allegedly outside the political realm, have a concern for truth which is conspicuously absent among politicians, statesmen, or administrators, presumably because the latter depend on opinions and numbers, while the former, being self-authenticating, do not. Surely, however, there are other forms of dependence than dependence on popular support. What is more, personal independence is not in itself a sufficient warrant for impartiality or honesty. In any event, the appearance of moral separatism which this sharp disjunction so easily conveys, bears rather

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disturbing similarities to the "friend-foe, we-they" syndrome found in ideologies which few despised more intensely than Hannah Arendt herself.

The separation and opposition between the political domain and the non-political domain also suggests that the boundary between the two domains which, in principle, is indeed to be insisted upon, is unalterably fixed and thus once and for all definable.⁹⁵ Even if these domains were identifiable with "the public" and "the private" — as Arendt at times, though, I believe, mistakenly, urges — the notorious difficulty of comprehending the private in terms of self-regarding actions would render the distinction highly problematical. But the problem is compounded still further by Arendt's extension of the private or non-political to what she calls "life's necessities", for we are then confronted with the no less notorious difficulty of determining what constitutes a life's necessity, and who rightfully is to judge. More seriously still, if all "life's necessities" were removed from the public domain, what indeed would remain? Arendt has no illusions about the answer: "there would be no political realm at all if we were not bound to take care of life's necessities."⁹⁶

Yet it is precisely this preoccupation with taking care of life's necessities which, for Arendt, corrupts the political realm and causes its deformation. To it she attributes the dominance in modern politics of parties, interest groups, bureaucracies, ideologies, class-conflict, and factionalism of every sort, which, in turn, create a climate of strife and greed, of partisanship and the lust for domination, in which truth and politics clash on the lowest level of human existence. Arendt repudiates the idea of a politics that is little more than a tool of wealth, trade, labour, or welfare. Recurring to the ideals of the ancient world, she adopts without reserve Aristotle's maxim that the *polis* exists for the sake of honourable deeds, not for the sake of joint livelihood.

Tempting though it is to speculate how far Arendt's diverse proposals for some kind of direct and fragmented democracy, or her ideas on selective participation and voting rights, or the banishing of social, economic, and educational concerns from the political sphere, would succeed in effecting a redemption of modern politics, it is clearly beyond the scope of this article even to attempt to do so. Suffice it to say, therefore, that her vision of politics is at once more restrictive and more comprehensive than its modern conception. More restrictive, in that it excludes practically all the concerns that loom so large in the "policy sciences" of our day; more comprehensive, in that it massively reinforces the vigour, exhilaration and nobility of acting in the pursuit of public deeds.

Both this vision and Arendt's disaffection not merely with "totalitarianism" but with the very institutions commonly regarded as the mainstay of freedom and democracy, at any rate in the West, enjoin us to re-open questions held to be settled and to reflect upon possible alternatives. The prospect of men acting

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together as a plurality, combining equality and distinction, begetting memorable deeds, free from domination of any kind, in a climate of spontaneity, understanding, and forgiveness, is an appealing one; that it enshrines a drastic redefinition of the political, as it is commonly understood, scarcely needs saying. Notwithstanding the loftiness of the vision, there is, however, (as the previous sections sought to indicate) cause also for circumspection concerning both its conceptual underpinnings and its normative implications. Among the latter, three worries in particular bear reiterating. Neither the more specific treatment of opinion in "Truth and Politics" nor the more general glimpses elsewhere (notably in *On Revolution*)⁹⁷ of the envisioned polity inspire sanguine confidence in "plurality" as a modality through which dissent is assured secure political expression. Diversity without divisiveness, disagreement without confrontation, may be desirable modes of "acting together", but to insist on the absence of divisiveness and confrontation as a prerequisite for political redemption raises serious doubts about its *political* content. Secondly, while infinity may indeed be inescapably constitutive of human action, should it absolve political actors of the responsibility to those whose lives (or interests) are palpably affected by the consequences of their words and deeds? Does not a redemptive doctrine which thus invokes the postulate of infinity ominously smack of attempting to rationalize political irresponsibility? Finally, although the loftiness of a vision in which men, by inserting themselves into the public realm, acquire and sustain their true personal identity, is surely beyond dispute, it is less certain that a politics that soars to heights from which the needs, tribulations, and follies of ordinary men are no longer within sight, could offer gratification to any but the few while denying comfort to the many. Who or what will take care of their lives' necessities? Men fear finality, but they despair over infinity. Hannah Arendt knew this well.

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Notes

1. Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking, 1968), p. 140.
2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958, Doubleday Anchor edition), p. 250.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-6.
4. Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture" in *Between Past and Future*, p. 217; see also *The Human Condition*, p. 295.
5. *The Human Condition*, p. 31.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 36; see also p. 61.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 186 and p. 4.
11. Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom" in *Between Past and Future*, pp. 148-50.
12. *The Human Condition*, p. 29.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-92; see also Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1962), p. 58.
16. *The Human Condition*, p. 182; see also "What is Freedom?", *op. cit.*, pp. 151-52, and Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics", p. 263.

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17. "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 223, and "Truth and Politics", p. 263.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *The Human Condition*, p. 197.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-203 and p. 157.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 198; see also "What is Authority?", *op. cit.*, pp. 112-14.
23. *The Human Condition*, p. 200.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
26. *Ibid.*, and p. 202.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 202-204.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74; it may be recalled here that Rousseau also thought of the Legislator as a non-political "authority"; he had, of course, expressly Lycurgus in mind who left the political realm before making laws for the Spartans.
31. "What is Freedom?", *op. cit.*, p. 169; see also *The Human Condition*, pp. 222 and 290.
32. *The Human Condition*, pp. 209 and 215-19.
33. Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History" in *Between Past and Future*, p. 79.
34. *The Human Condition*, pp. 125-26.

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 125, and "What is Freedom?", *op. cit.*, pp. 151-2; see also *On Revolution*, p. 137.
38. "What is Freedom?", *op. cit.*, pp. 152-53.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55.
41. *The Human Condition*, p. 184.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
44. "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 223.
45. "The Concept of History", *op. cit.*, p. 71.
46. *The Human Condition*, p. 166.
47. "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 223.
48. *The Human Condition*, p. 166 and "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 223.
49. "What is Freedom?", *op. cit.*, p. 154; see also *On Revolution*, pp. 38-39.
50. *The Human Condition*, pp. 159, 171, and 209; see also "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 223.
51. *The Human Condition*, p. 167.
52. cf. Arendt's reference to Machiavelli's view that contact between religion and politics corrupts both. ("What is Authority?", *op. cit.*, p. 138.) For an elaboration of the notion of un-derivative purpose, see my "Growth, Purpose, and Political Development", *Proceedings*, International Political Science Association, Edinburgh, 1976.

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53. Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics", in *Between Past and Future*, p. 231, and "What is Authority?", *op. cit.*, p. 115.
54. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 238.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 241; see also "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 225.
59. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 231.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
63. Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics", in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), p. 40.
64. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 250.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

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71. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
74. Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. J.H. Freese (New York: Loeb Classical Library, n.d.), pp. 25, 39.
75. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 243.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
79. *Ibid.*, see also "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, pp. 219-222.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
81. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 245.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 241; see also *On Revolution*, p. 229.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 242; In "The Crisis of Culture", however, Arendt denies that representative thinking can function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others. (*op. cit.*, p. 220)
85. *The Human Condition*, pp. 253-54.
86. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, pp. 242, 250, 262.
87. "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, p. 224.
88. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 239.

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89. Plato, *Republic*, vi, 496, trans. F.M. Cornford (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 204; Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Penguin Books, n.d.), p. 101.
90. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, pp. 253-54. For an interesting discussion of the problematic nature of self-deception as a psychological, as distinct from a moral phenomenon, see Frank Cioffi, "Was Freud a Liar?", *The Listener* (London: February 7, 1974), pp. 172-74.
91. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 477.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 474.
93. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, pp. 235-36.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
95. Once again there is a suspicious suggestion of homogeneity rather than "plurality" as a feature characterizing the political domain, for does not the sharp separation between the political and non-political imply that the political domain itself is a homogeneous entity? Arendt may rightly question the nature of plurality in modern pluralistic politics, but she can scarcely deny its existence in one form or another. In the case of Watergate as also in the case of the Pentagon Papers, for example, the initiative of "truth-telling" did by no means originate *outside* politics. Indeed, the deliberate "leaks" from the political sector to the press, illustrate rather tellingly the plurality within the political domain, including its administrative agencies, such as dissident members of the F.B.I. and the Department of Justice in the United States who systematically divulged information to the newspapers, presumably in an attempt to resist White House domination. (On this point see the perceptive article by Edward Jay Epstein, "Journalism and Truth", *Commentary*, 57, No. 4 (1974), 36-40.) For a comparable situation in a Communist country, see my "Between Opposition and Political Opposition", *Can. J. of Pol. Sci.*, 5, No. 4 (1972), 533-51 and *Socialism with a Human Face: Slogan and Substance* (Saskatoon, 1973), pp. 4-14. In Czechoslovakia during the late sixties the disclosure of truth also originated from inside the political realm.
96. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 263.
97. *On Revolution*, pp. 269-72; see also "On Violence", in *Crises of the Republic*, p. 181, and "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution", *ibid.*, pp. 232-33. For a brilliant discussion of the moral implications of Arendt's political thought, see George Kateb, "Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt", *Political Theory*, vol. 5, No. 2 (1977), 141-82. Professor Kateb's article unfortunately reached me too late for making more detailed reference to it in the text.