Politics as Endurance: Hannah Arendt and the Three Deaths of Being

by

Steven Ray Shadbolt Orr
B.A., University of Victoria, 2010

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis examines Hannah Arendt's *vita activa* in the context of the contemporary political world that is marked by the inclusion of a variety of beings beyond mere human plurality. Understanding that Arendt's work is in opposition to the isolating tendencies of philosophical and bureaucratic thought, I look to the processes of labor and work as methods by which togetherness and worldliness can be recovered. Beginning with Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* and Vanessa Lemm's *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, I draw out a common thread in projects that consider non-human actors as capable of politicking: endurance. Building upon Arendt's work in *The Human Condition* and *On Violence*, I suggest that the *vita diutina*, the enduring life, and the three deaths of being serve as a useful ways of understanding already ongoing political projects that include non-human beings.

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Acknowledgments

It is wholly a mistake to believe that these projects are the result of any one individual's effort. The fact that it is solely attributed to me helps to perpetuate that mistake, but I am entirely aware that this is not just a product of my own effort. The thoughts that found themselves on these pages are a result of many years of instruction, conversation, and togetherness — and I consider myself fortunate to have been a part of that experience.

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Dedication

To friends, both past and present. Despite everything, you endure within me.

Introduction: Politics as Endurance

The ending of an activity, the cessation of an impulse or opinion, and, so to speak, its death, is no evil. Pass now to the various stages of life — childhood, adolescence, the years of one's prime, and old age. There too each change is a death; is there anything to fear in that? And turn now to the life that you lived... there again you will find many losses, alterations, and cessations; so ask yourself again: was there anything to fear in that? So correspondingly, there is nothing to fear in the termination, cessation and change of your entire life.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1997

I hope it is true that a man can die and yet not only live in others but give them life, and not only life but that great consciousness of life that made cathedrals rise from the smoke + rickets of the poor, mantle's fall from illuminated kings, gospel's spread from twisted tortured mouths of living saints that sit in dust, crying, crying, crying, till all eyes see.

Jack Kerouac, *Windblown World*, 2006

I know simply that the sky will last longer than I.

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 1991

That the human being is a rational animal has long been entrenched in the tradition of political philosophy, but much of the discourse is focused on our capacity for rationality with little attention paid to our animality. Political philosopher Hannah Arendt suggests that this focus on reason is not solely a matter of academic theories or the study of knowledge: the events of the modern era have resulted in the near absolute supremacy of the contemplative life over actual existence and "the various modes of active engagement in the things of this world".[1] As a result of this placement, human beings have aimed themselves towards the transcendent realm with its eternal, absolute truths — at the expense of our worldly existence. Having understood that we ourselves are mortal creatures and that our individual lives are meaningless because of the way that they will not endure beyond us — an understanding that Arendt attributes to the decline of the

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.

Roman Empire and the rise of Christian thought — we have turned our gaze away from 'mere' reality and become attentive almost solely to transcendence. This is the rise of the *vita contemplative* as distinguished from the *vita activa* — the active, worldly life. It may be that actions in the world are necessary as a means by which contemplation is achieved, but merely engaging in the active life is both futile and inhuman.

It is against this understanding that Arendt writes *The Human Condition*. She is not suggesting that contemplation and thoughtfulness are invalid, but rather that to focus solely on transcendence neglects worldliness, which is a key aspect of our human experience. The human condition is that we always already live within and experience both these forms of existence. Philosophy, science, and politics in the modern age are all marked by a rejection of concrete existence as anything more than a means by which the absolute truth is attained. Despite this, living and all other activities must be performed in the world — and yet a serious analysis of this worldliness has been "curiously neglected" in the philosophical tradition.[2] The processes of this active life — labor, work, and action — have been given insufficient attention in regard to their worldliness. So as to remedy this and recover worldly activities from the contempt of philosophy, Arendt develops her own reimagining of the *vita activa* that celebrates the uniquely human way of living within the world. Attending to the active life would allow us to recall that we, ourselves, are free and responsible for our actions in the world.

This concern about responsibility is as present now as it was when Arendt was writing — perhaps much more so due to our globalized, interconnected, and digital world. Yet until we act and let our deeds flow into history, it is impossible to trace the effects of our actions — and inactions, which can themselves be a form of action; they

[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 78.

have the capacity to go far beyond us and endure within countless others. Even then, ‘full’ knowledge of the impressions that we leave behind on others is outside of our grasp. Whether our deeds linger long into the future or dissipate immediately, the manner of their endurance being unknown does not absolve us of our responsibility to those that are marked by our actions. How far along the causal chain our responsibility for our actions remains may be a point for debate, but that we be somehow accountable for our actions is not: it is the foundation upon which society, governance, and justice are built. That there are those that wish to overcome these structures does not negate the point that we largely depend upon them. They are fundamental to how we understand ourselves to be human.

Arendt’s *vita activa* — and her later reflections on violence and the Holocaust — dwells within the problem that, despite the necessity that we can be held to account for our actions, responsibility seems to have removed from the worldly individual and left to the transcendent realm of causality. The use and threat of the atomic bomb is one such example; the trial and defence of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann is another. Both share the strange quality of being removed from physical instances of violence themselves while still being absolutely necessary causes of destruction on massive and horrifying scales. That the Cold War policy of mutual assured destruction — and thus the annihilation of all earthly life — could perhaps be viewed as the epitome of rational madness. Likewise with Eichmann, who suggested that “his guilt came from his obedience” and not from his direct involvement in the creation and deployment of

policies of mass murder — that somehow 'doing his duty' was sufficient excuse to absolve him of any responsibility for his crimes.[3]

Though not as stark or immediately apparent, the contemporary world certainly has instances wherein people use similar logic. Western capitalism seems dependent on these kinds of justifications so as to permit sweatshops and economic slavery or resource extraction at the expense of people's homes and health. The convenience of Walmart, the novelty of an iPhone, and the fashionability of Levi's all trump the personal responsibility of making use of them, because even if we ourselves feel some measure of guilt, we consider ourselves as impotent in the face of the systems, structures, and processes of capitalism. Such logic is not limited to violence either: consider that many democracies are known for apathetic and disenchanted attitudes from citizens who see little value in elections, voting, and the political process at large — politicians and their policies seem to be wholly interchangeable with no meaningful difference. To these problems, Arendt offers the *vita activa* as a possible solution, as a reminder that our smallest, worldly actions can be significant when undertaken in the spaces that we share with other people.

These instances wherein there is a rejection of worldliness are indeed troubling, but I would suggest that the supremacy of the *vita contemplativa* is not so vast as to be wholly unopposed — and that there are other understandings of politics that operate for the love of the world. That Arendt begins with the human being is of no surprise, but that she remains focused on this one type of being within the world is, I argue, what prevents her from seeing these philosophies as companions to her own thoughts. All that is worldly can be understood as perpetually struggling against finitude. The attempt to

[3] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 247.

endure despite the fact of our eventual end is the marker of far more than merely human beings. It may be that the modes by which endurance is attempted differ dramatically from animal to object to human, but continuing through time and stretching into the future is itself the experience of worldliness.

These philosophies can be seen in environmental conservationists, ethical vegans, and posthumanist movements — and, although their particular details vary dramatically, what disparate views such as these share is a respect for worldliness. They are philosophies that understand the responsibility inherent to being in the world with others; and they focus on particular conceptions of that worldliness from beyond merely human vantages. Rather than fixating on the particulars that define these groups and movements, I believe that they can be understood as broadly concerned with the most worldly of all problems: how to endure despite finitude. The *vita activa* can be articulated similarly, but only with regards to human beings. These projects move beyond anthropocentric togetherness; the human is not the sole being within which people consider themselves to endure within. As such, I propose a reconsideration of worldliness — not from the vantage of the human nor that of any other particular being, but rather as a matter of processes that are revealed through witnessing.

This life of endurance — *vita diutina* — is not necessarily meant to be prescriptive or suggest how one *should* engage in the world. I propose it merely as a lens through which certain modes of politicking are clarified with regards to their intentions. As such this thesis should not be taken as a holistic analysis of Arendt's work, but rather as a brief account of the ground from which this idea sprung. Just as Arendt does not fixate on the *vita contemplativa* — despite its significance as a contrasting framework —

so too do I not intend to be bound her to conception of life or politics; instead I see her as offering a valuable perspective against which to contrast my own thoughts.

In Chapter One, I briefly sketch the Arendtian *vita activa* and read it through her later writings on violence and power, before indicating why the active life alone is insufficient for understanding endurance. Here I ultimately suggest that Arendt's explanations of labor and work fall into a subordinate position where they occur only to allow for action rather than simply being differing modes of being together. In Chapter Two, I take up the Arendtian processes of labor and work and attempt to rethink them to accommodate a broader understanding of togetherness. Vanessa Lemm, whose work is concerned explicitly with revaluing animal life, will be the lens through which I examine labor; and I will use Richard Sennett's exploration of craft to examine work — Sennett in particular provides a nuance to the process of work that helps inform the *vita diutina*. Both thinkers, although perhaps valuable with regard to their own projects, prove insufficient for understanding the wide range of worldly interactions that can be considered political within the contemporary world. Finally, in Chapter Three, I begin to draw out the enduring life through what I call the *three deaths of being*. This is an understanding of death that is meant to highlight the complexities of worldliness as a series of processes that can be witnessed in togetherness — in such a way that opens the possibility of endurance to a wide range of beings, but without firmly defining those beings.

Chapter One: The Active Life

The Human Condition is a work rooted in a critique of modernity and the history of Western philosophy — although to simply label it as a criticism would be to ignore Hannah Arendt's attempt to understand the thoughtlessness of the modern age. This loss of thought is startling because it appears, for Arendt, to share responsibility in making possible the annihilation of not only human beings but also the entirety of the world that humans inhabit. The mass murders of the twentieth century were undertaken with a terrible efficiency against which resistance seemed to be utterly futile, but this 'seeming' is important for Arendt because it distinguishes destruction from annihilation. It is not the case that the massive bureaucracies of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia — nor, later, those of Maoist China and Hutu Rwanda — were capable of completely removing all traces of a being from the human world: "Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story".[4] It is this opportunity for either the continuation of an old narrative or the construction of a new one that must be juxtaposed against the lack of possibility — that is to say, the futures that could be different than the now — that draws near with world-obliterating weaponry: the difference between the nuclear bomb and all other activities and artifices is that it removes possibility altogether. This would appear to be the "hole of oblivion" that Arendt believes "do[es] not exist": it annihilates not only the future of beings but also their pasts, because after its use there will remain no beings that can serve as witness to the events that came before it.[5] This concept of bearing

[4] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 232-233.
[5] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 232.

witness — and its opposite, which is bound up in the apocalyptic notion of a nuclear earth, of a global Hiroshima or Chernobyl — is integral to understanding Arendt's *vita activa* and the continuation of it that occurs in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Arendt's concerns about annihilation — which can also be explained as the loss of possibility of beings enduring in the world — needs to be kept close at hand when attempting to unravel the knot of activities that make up her fundamental human condition.

The Arendtian human being is solely able to utilize its radical newness to create new futures and this explains her placement of thinking over bodily toil as the highest of human activities. While Arendt's aim to understand the Holocaust may be a noble enough purpose to justify such an arrangement of human activities, it severely restricts the applicability of her work outside of this context. This is not an accident and those who simply apply labor, work, and action to contemporary politics and society ignore the explicit intention of her writing: to reconsider "the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears".[6] In "Situating Hannah Arendt on Action and Politics," Jeffrey Isaac addresses a similar point in his plea for understanding the context of Arendt's work:

> [I do not] believe that we ought to abandon creative interpretations of figures like Plato or Nietzsche or comparisons between such figures. But such interpretations should always be undertaken with historical sensitivity. In the case of Arendt, it is impossible to understand her work, much less to understand its relevance to contemporary concerns, without situating it historically, for her model of action was, above all, an effort to understand how the dreams of modern ideologues had produced monstrous nightmares and how it might be possible to reconstitute human dignity and freedom in a world laid waste by such nightmares.[7]

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[6] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.
[7] Jeffery C. Issac, "Situating Hannah Arendt on Action and Politics," *Political Theory* 21 no. 3, (1993): 539.

Despite the fact that *The Human Condition* is written as a theoretical text, Arendt herself is the character from which the entire position of the text is formed. This is a result of what Henry David Thoreau called "the narrowness of [one's] experience" and, while this position can be applied more generally than just to Arendt's work, it is particularly significant with regards to *The Human Condition* because of her opposition to comprehensive theorizing.[8] This is not to claim that Arendt's work has no bearing on those topics that she was either not concerned with or merely unaware of. Rather it is to suggest that the *vita activa* cannot be applied to new contexts without thinking it through from one's own position. The failure to do so can result in using theories or models that are unfit for the problem at hand and one of the key points of Arendtian thought is that there are no universal solutions.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt suggests that it is possible to comprehend the multitude of outrageous and so-called 'unprecedented' phenomena that make up human existence — not by use of the reductionist methods of science, analogy, or causality, but with an "unpremeditated, attentive facing up to ... reality".[9] The world contains nothing transcendent beyond explanation — but human beings are creative and can produce entirely new situations that cannot be understood with the use of old models. It is not possible to judge the unique by the traditional; the complexities of human affairs demand careful examinations of history, a respect for the multitude of particular influences, and the willingness to eschew long-established understandings in favor of creating new modes of thinking. The present reality is never simply a mirror to past events and, as long as there are human beings involved, each experience will be new.

[8] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 107.
[9] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1985), xiv.

Reducing the present to nothing more than a reflection of the past is dangerous because it lacks the "tangible unexpectedness of the event".[10]

It is in this spirit that I begin with *The Human Condition*, as one preoccupied and perplexed by contemporary society and politics. The contemporary world, perhaps as much as in the past, is marked by conflicting understandings of what it means to be political, who is capable of making these political decisions, and where the appropriate spaces are to gather and be together in this manner. Even as suffrage movements become relegated to history, the divide between those capable of meaningful change and 'mere citizens' expands. From this we see concerns about the efficacy of democracy, the role and rule of the mob, and clashes between equality, historical injustice, and freedom. I do not truly believe this to be a new situation. One can look back to the trial of Socrates and see that it was rooted in these very same concerns. Yet this is an account that is based in my own history, and the lived experiences that have shaped my understanding of the world are radically different than those that those that shaped Arendt.

Despite this difference of perspective I still find the insights of *The Human Condition* to be relevant and I take seriously her respect for plurality. Further I share Arendt's fear of annihilation, although I worry that the contemporary, digital world has established a new form of destruction that occurs because of plurality itself: that in the nigh infinitude of voices, the individual being may disappear into the cacophony of originality that is the collective being. Finally, I believe that the *vita activa* is an understanding of being that offers a valuable mode of exploring the complex and intertwined relationships of both the social and the political – even if I find that her division of activities is insufficient outside of the context of respecting the human being

[10] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 252.

within a bureaucratic and totalizing system. As such, first I will articulate my understanding of Arendt's original intentions of the core concepts of the *vita activa* and the human condition while focusing on their significance within *her* project and then I hope to explain the ways in which her theory requires modification in order to be used outside of that context and within my own.

The *Vita Activa*

Worldliness — as distinct from transcendence — is expressed in a multitude of ways, but Arendt focuses on the fundamental processes of *human* existence in the world: labor, work, and action. Even as "statistical determination and therefore … scientifically correct prediction" serve as administration over worldly affairs, the activities of the *vita activa*, when understood in concert, continue to establish the conditions on which individuality and freedom are predicated.[11] That the modern age is marked by a willful negation of freedom is due to the ever-present experience of futility, but it is only in death itself that this futility is realized. To be concerned with worldly affairs may *seem* futile — a philosophical point that is rooted in the notion that "no work of mortal hands can be immortal … [and thus] any striving for an earthly immortality [is] futile and unnecessary" — but it is a fact that we, largely, ignore: "no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceased to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them".[12] Through her description of the unpredictability that is inherent to human affairs, Arendt offers the *vita activa* both as an explanation for this contradiction and as a mode of living in the world despite, and in fact because of, the dual nature of the human being.

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[11] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 43.
[12] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20.

With labor, work, and action, Arendt establishes a worldly foundation for the human being within "the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man".[13]

Labor

Labor is any process that a being engages in that contributes to the necessities that are required in order to maintain their life and continued existence — "to be enslaved by necessity", which is "inherent in the conditions of human life".[14] This can simply comprise the consumptive experiences of hunting, gathering, and preparing food, but labor can be broadened to include the tasks and conditions that dominate beings. The environment that a being occupies will determine the method by which they receive sustenance: the possibility for farming has specific land requirements, just as the feasibility of hunting for food depends on the availability of pursuable game. Thus the actual processes of labor are not absolute and equal standards for all beings but are variable and dependent methods. Regardless, what all labor shares is the transitory nature of its products:

> After a brief stay in the world, they return into the natural process which yielded them either through absorption into the life process of the human animal or through decay; in their man-made shape, through which they acquired their ephemeral place in the world of man-made things, they disappear more quickly than any other part of the world. Considered in their worldliness, they are the least worldly and at the same time the most natural of all things.[15]

While Arendt goes on, in her later works, to suggest that the Nietzschean eternal return is "a mere thought or, rather, a thought-experiment" it is clearly a guiding principle within her understanding of labor.[16] She describes the reproduction of beings to be "the eternal

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[13] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.
[14] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 83-4.
[15] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 96.
[16] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 149.

recurrence of the life process to which [laboring activity] was tied".[17] It may not be the case that she subscribes to fantastical concerns about what to do if "a demon were to steal ... into [her] loneliest loneliness" and force her to relive, *ad infinitum*, the entirety of her life.[18] Rather Arendt is suggesting that such a demon has already inserted itself into existence — but not as it is written in Ecclesiastes that "there is no new thing under the sun" nor as a simple repetition of every actor and their speeches and actions.[19] What Nietzsche called a demon has long been studied with biology, geology, and all the other earth and life sciences; chemical reactions, biological necessities, and laws of physics are all processes that control the life of all beings.

Yet labor differs from these eternal processes because it requires an active human presence. Maintenance alone is insufficient — labor requires the decision to maintain oneself. Thus the way that the body recovers from injury only becomes labor when we must participate directly in the process. That bodies are capable of passively recovering indicates the eternally recurring aspect of life, but that bodies cannot do so forever shows the necessity of labor activities. We ourselves are not eternal creatures, but we labor against the fact of our finitude. It is always towards the aim of sustaining the self with the implicit intention that something will be done with that life rather than merely living it. The slave that exerts itself for the benefit of a master is still engaged in labor, regardless of whether they are directly occupied with sustenance, because it is through the performance of their duties that they are granted the necessities of life. Nor is slavery the only example of the variable nature of labor, as other such cases could include dietary restrictions (allergies or digestive deficiencies), physical capabilities (body strength or

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[17] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 46.
[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 273.
[19] *New Oxford Annotated Bible,* Ecc. 1:9.

tooth structure), and environmental conditions (changes in weather or degradation from usage).

The worldliness of these products is shown in how they draw upon finite resources for their products, but it is always the case that what labor takes "out of nature's hands … [is] giv[en] back to her in the swift course of the natural metabolism of the living body".[20] We are maintained by this relationship to nature — in fact, we are always already "subject to necessity" — but only become free to act for ourselves in the "attempt[] to liberate [ourselves] from necessity". The only way that it would ever be possible to wholly escape labor is through death. It is through laboring that the human being, as distinct from mere natural processes, is initially constituted — although Arendt suggests that it has become a particularly troubling modern development that we now "live in a society of laborers" and have "almost succeeded in levelling all human activities to the common denominator of securing the necessities of life".[21] Put another way, we are no longer laboring for the weekend.[22] Rather labor has become an activity undertaken for the purpose of life itself — or that of the human species — rather than as a necessary but intermediary task that individuals participate in so as to allow them to express their uniquely human qualities. That all activities have become labor relegates the human being to mere animal life, willfully bound to natural processes. It is in the nature of labor activities to be ephemeral, thus her concern that our society is solely interested in labor processes connects to her fears about annihilation: a society of absolute labor becomes "a waste economy, in which things must be almost as quickly devoured and discarded as they have appeared in the world … we would no longer live in the world at

[20] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 100.
[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 126.
[22] With apologies to Canadian rock sensation Loverboy.

all but simply by driven by a process".[23] Mere living rather than *human* life. To simply accept the necessity of labor is to allow ourselves to become natural beings, to subsume our free will into the transcendent and unending processes of nature.

Work

If laborers can be said to maintain and support natural processes, workers are directly in opposition to them. Work is the production of the material world in such a way that halts — and in fact destroys — those natural processes that otherwise exert near total control over the being affected. This cessation of biology or chemistry always contains within it violence to the material world and its eternally returning cycle of life:

> Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process, as in the case of the tree which must be destroyed in order to provide wood, or interrupting one of nature's slower processes, as in the case of iron, stone, or marble torn out of the womb of the earth.[24]

Work is always aimed towards the creation of durable objects that are not easily returned to nature. It is the human attempt at overcoming the eternal cycle of natural processes, but "the use we make of [the human artifice], even though we do not consume it, uses it up".[25] Even if our artifacts were to go unused, eventually the work put into them would be overcome by the natural world. To stave off this fate, work "needs to be reproduced again and again in order to remain within the human world at all".[26] Through the interruption of natural processes, it becomes possible to transform the material world into a more permanent and stable form. In this way, another difference between labor and work becomes apparent: while the possibility of reproducing work allows artifacts to

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[23] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 134.
[24] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 139.
[25] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 136.
[26] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 139.

endure indefinitely, there is no such hope for immortality with labor. As with all worldly things, these products are not themselves infinite; they remain temporary and their end can be relied upon as an eventuality, if no human action is taken to maintain them.

The body itself cannot be reproduced and so, while death can be delayed even to extreme lengths, labor is always futile. Work allows for the possibility of its products to not be so — if others are willing to take up the task of reproduction. Thus work always differs from labor by virtue of its quality of enduring in the world: human beings require the results of labor and through their usage these objects are consumed. Further, work is also dispensable: although its products may ease labor processes and thus indirectly contribute to labor, the products of work are not *necessary* for the continued existence of the human being. Work is always towards other ends, as with instruments that augment or replace bodily capacities or those that bring pleasure or happiness — the microwave oven, the printing press, and television are three such examples, of which there are many more. Of course, it is possible that a single product of work can achieve multiple such ends, but Arendt is suggesting that thinking solely in this manner is a denigration of the world itself:

> The issue at stake is, of course, not instrumentality, the use of means to achieve an end, as such, but rather the generalization of the fabrication experience in which usefulness and utility are established as the ultimate standards for life and the world of men. This generalization is inherent in the activity of *homo faber* because the experience of means and end, as is present in fabrication, does not disappear with the finished product but is extended to its ultimate destination, which is to serve as a use object. The instrumentalization of the whole world and the earth, this limitless devaluation of everything given, this process of growing meaningless where every end is transformed into a means and which can be stopped only by making man himself the lord and master of all things.[27]

[27] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 157.

Worldliness itself is at risk with such thinking. Work may occur in isolation, but is always modeled upon experiences outside of ourself. This may be “an image beheld by the eye of the mind or a blueprint in which the image has already found a tentative materialization through work”, but is never a wholly new creation.[28] In this manner, work is instrumental because it is always a means of achieving the ideal model from which it was imagined. Even the most useful of objects is valued beyond its functionality, “as though an ugly table will fulfill the same function as a handsome one”.[29] To transform the world into a cycle of mere means and ends with the human alone being judge of all value is to transcend worldliness.

The political being that Arendt establishes within *The Human Condition* is fundamentally rooted in the development of radical new worlds which can only be done by cultivating those uniquely human qualities and “what men share with all other forms of animal life [is] not considered to be human”.[30] Apolitical beings — the flora and fauna of the natural world, for example — are concerned, in so far as she believes that they *can* be concerned, solely with reproduction, consumption, and the biological necessities of existence, and although the human being is capable of standing at the apex of the animal kingdom such an existence for the human is a denial of the potential for creativity. While the ability to transform the natural into the artificial requires human input, the production of goods themselves is likewise a negation of this potential. The uniquely human condition of existence is the ability to establish a world that is irrevocably otherwise than it was and this capacity has nothing to do with material goods — such concepts imbue a form of permanence upon the world, but Arendt is clear that all fabrications will

[28] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 140.
[29] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 73.
[30] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 84.

eventually perish. Reproduction of the self is categorized as labor and production of worldly goods through the use of those selves is the domain of work:

> The work of our hands, as distinguished from the labor of our bodies — homo faber who makes and literally 'works upon' as distinguished from the animal laborans which labors and 'mixes with' — fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice.[31]

Animal laborans consumes the natural world in such a way that the few resulting products that might occur from such labors are extremely limited in their duration whereas *homo faber* produces artifacts that can endure far beyond the moment of construction. Unless preserved through work, the results of labor will decay, rot, or otherwise return to the natural cycle of being, while "used or unused, [artifacts of work] will remain in the world for a certain while".[32] This serves to sharply divide the natural from the artificial in such a way that establishes a binary through which to understand worldly objects and interactions, but human beings have the capacity to transcend this division and operate outside of it.

Action

While the human being depends on both labor and work, neither constitutes the political sphere wherein originality is expressed. When the new occurs within a common realm amidst other beings for whom that originality is a possibility such expressions represent a form of endurance that overcomes the natural cycle of material beings. It is the mind that distinguishes humans from animals, and it is likewise the ability to think that grants each individual human the possibility for uniqueness, but it is not possible to realize these potentialities when concerned with the processes of production and

[31] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 136.
[32] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 138.

reproduction. Further Arendt makes explicitly clear that *to be* unique and *to express* that uniqueness are related, but separate:

> Through [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of merely being distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua men.[33]

The expression of such uniqueness cannot possibly occur in isolation because of its revelatory quality and it is not objects, but only other beings that can be revealed to. So while Arendt articulates the expression of distinctiveness as a possibility for each particular human being, it can only be made manifest when we speak and act in concert with each other. This *can* occur whenever people are gathered together, but proximity alone does not necessarily reveal the unexpected within human beings; if the possibility were a probability or a certainty, it could be expected, predicted, and counted upon. It is the predictability of the natural world that stands in opposition to the haphazard acts of possible randomness, and this is how the human being is elevated above all animal and other natural beings. The natural world can be categorized, predicted, and counted upon to act in a certain manner — which is a possibility that exists regardless of whether any human being has the necessary knowledge to engage in such predictions — but the human being always has the capacity to break from predictions and can never entirely be relied upon to act in a certain manner.

It is through instances of the unexpected that individuals disclose their radical newness. That others can act in ways that we had not predicted or imagined allows them to overcome the what-ness of their appearance — understood broadly as the "qualities, gifts, talents, and short-comings, which he may display or hide" — in favor of their

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[33] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 176.

unique who-ness.[34] The 'who' of an individual is the person that is revealed "so clearly and unmistakably to others" by virtue of acting in the presence of others, but it is never the case that we can experience our own revelations.[35] As Arendt says of the problem of understanding human nature, "this would be like jumping over our own shadows".[36] Instead we can only encounter them when they are mirrored back to us through others as revelatory experiences. It is not even possible for us to grasp ourselves through the descriptions of others:

> The moment that 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 world, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.[37]

This failure to adequately describe radical newness highlights the way that we must take on faith that we endure within others at all as we wish to. This is always a risk that dwells in acting together in the space of appearances.

While it is not entirely clear that Arendt intends for this possibility, this does make room for the consideration of non-human beings as harboring the capacity for distinctness, but this in no way conflicts with her elevated status of the thinking human. According to her explanation of action, any beings or even objects can be said to be *distinct*, if only by virtue of their chronological position, but without a method of expressing these unique qualities of difference that distinctness is senseless — there is no purpose or use to distinctness without expression. If it is solely the human being that can speak and act in the world and thus *distinguish* itself, then distinctness is only significant

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[34] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 179.
[35] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 179.
[36] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 10.
[37] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 181.

for the human being. From this understanding of being it becomes clearer why Arendt wrote extensively on totalitarianism and tyranny: they contain within them the constant threats of loneliness and fear which are far more than mere individual sufferings, because they delay the entrance into or altogether destroy the spaces where humans beings can begin again. The danger of totalitarianism differs from that of murder or widespread war because "it threatens to ravage the world as we know it ... before a new beginning rising from this end has had time to assert itself".[38] It is similar to the possibility of the atomic bomb to destroy the biological world in such a way that leaves no possibility for any organic creatures to reproduce themselves. This is not merely destruction, but total annihilation, the elimination of both the possibility for radical newness and the past itself. For it to be annihilation requires the ability to reach, as it were, into the past and remove certain beings — and their deeds — from both history and the world. The atomic bomb is clearly different than those Nazi policies of mass murder that resulted in the Holocaust, because of the manner by which the latter transformed thinking people into thoughtless cogs within a grand bureaucracy.[39] Murder and annihilation altogether remove the possibility of future expression, whereas bureaucracy and totalitarianism make such expressions less likely.

The Public and the Private

Implicit in the opposition to totalitarianism is the assumption that new beginnings are considered worthwhile or useful. This is not to make the claim that the content of such expressions of uniqueness is necessarily 'good', but that it is the possibility to be

[38] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1985), 478.
[39] For Arendt's lengthier discussion on this radical transformation, see her report on the trial of German Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Despite the flaws of that portrait, there is still merit to the broader points that she makes about the nature of bureaucracy to "make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them" (*Eichmann* 289).

otherwise that is, in itself, worthwhile. This possibility requires the presence of others to be shown and to remember these revelatory thoughts and deeds. While this is achievable within the private realms of individuals wherein "men live[] together ... driven by their wants and needs", it is unlikely that such actions will live beyond their moment of conception due to the fixation on the prepolitical condition of necessity.[40] Laborers are faced only towards their labor and workers to their work — in this Arendt recalls the Heideggerian urge: "the *urge* 'to live' is a 'toward' which brings its own drive along with it. It is 'toward at any cost'".[41] In the private realm, which Arendt connects to property and the household, beings cannot bring themselves to remember newness, because "necessity rule[s] over all activities performed in it"; this is not to say that the private household is asocial — in fact, the entire social realm belongs to the private insofar as sociability is a necessity for all creatures.[42] Drawing upon Greek philosophy, Arendt explains that to gather together in societies is not uniquely human:

> On the contrary, it [is] something human life had in common with animal life, and for this reason alone it could not be fundamentally human. The natural, merely social companionship of the human species was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for the human animal as for other forms of animal life.[43]

This is an understanding of the social as a form of labor — or something closely resembling labor — without which humans die just as if they failed to eat or take shelter. Rather than being a turning away from the natural processes, society is in fact a reinscription of biological needs.

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[40] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.
[41] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 189.
[42] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.
[43] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24.

To turn away from the urge to live, to be concerned with more than the necessities of life, and to be with others in their uniqueness requires both the capacity to cease laboring and the willingness to face one's own death, as the breach of sustaining the self is always such a facing. This provides a brief period in which it is possible to engage in politics, before one must either retreat back into labor to self-sustain or give up on sustenance altogether — that is to say, to die. But it is only in this willful break from necessity that it becomes possible for us to be worldly beings at all. One can be freed from labor by the work of others, but it requires either charity or the treatment of other beings as objects as with slavery, and it still does not completely remove biological maintenance. This is not to deny the obvious reality of people laboring together in order to ease the difficulty of such toiling, but it is to say that such group laboring is not necessarily political. To truly labor together is a mode of being that is not human, because it is motivated solely by the processes of life that are shared among all and is indifferent to qualities that distinguish the group's beings. Radical newness is not expressed through labor.

To help make sense of the difference between labor, work, and action, Arendt explains that there is a division between private and public affairs that goes beyond the concepts of isolation and community:

> Although misunderstanding and equating the political and social realms is as old as the translation of Greek terms into Latin and their adoption to Roman-Christian thought, it has become even more confusing in modern usage and modern understandings of society. The distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state.[44]

[44] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 28.

It is in private that labor and work take place in — not because they are necessarily free from the presence of others, but because they are concerned with necessity and maintenance. Labor and work are, by definition, private affairs because they are not aimed towards expressing radical newness. Similarly, the public realm is designated for action because it is here that we avail ourselves of others to serve as witness to our unique qualities. The difficulty with these firm divisions is that they have been blurred within the contemporary context:

> The collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call "society", and its political form of organization is called "nation". We therefore find it difficult to realize that according to ancient thought on these matters, the very term "political economy" would have been a contradiction in terms: whatever was "economic" related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition.[45]

Arendt's insistence that these two realms be distinct has to do with her ideal political structure: the Greek *polis*. Within that context, it makes sense as to why she would work within concepts that are so troubling to parse when read outside of their original circumstances. Further, Arendt understands the loss of worldliness to be directly attributable to this division.

The spread of necessary human affairs beyond the private realm is what Arendt calls "the rise of the social" and "the emergence of society … from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere"[46]. It should be noted here that this would seem to indicate the private realm is not simply a bounded location of individual beings; instead, as contradictory as it may seem, being private is a mode of being

[45] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 29.
[46] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 38.

together. It is a form of togetherness that is apolitical, because, in addition to being fixated on natural and biological processes, societies have normative codes of conduct and rules of order that stifle uniqueness. This makes it altogether unlikely for people to express their radical newness to others, because "the monolithic character of every type of society, its conformism which allows for only one interest and one opinion, is ultimately rooted in the one-ness of man-kind".[47] If the articulation of unique qualities is that towards which we should aim then the necessities of labor must be overcome in order to constitute a political sphere that allows individuals to take up affairs of the mind. It is the capacity to think that grants each individual human being the possible for radical newness, but it is the ability to speak and act that permits that uniqueness to be revealed to others. The political arena is then not a bounded, physical space, but rather it is a mode of being together wherein beings are constantly given the opportunity to become and express their unique selves. From this it would follow that traditional politics – that is, the establishment of laws, governments, and regulations — does not fit into an Arendtian understanding of the political and is rather a reformation of the social. Accordingly the goal of both philosophy and politics should be to ensure that such expressions are constantly at hand while establishing a space that "offers a remedy for the futility of action and speech".[48] This contradicts the notion of politics as a matter of how to rule over others and how to properly be ruled — as, for example, with Machiavelli's *Prince* or Plato's *Republic* — because Arendtian politics is concerned with how to live together in the common, public world when faced with the ever-present possibility of radical newness that does not conform to our expectations.

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[47] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 46.
[48] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 197.

This public realm is all that is constructed through the work and action of beings and brought into the world of appearances — such a space verifies the products of work and action because in it there is "something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves" and only that which is certain is real.[49] This does not exclude that which is private from reality, because as we saw before, privacy is a form of being together and thus does not necessarily correlate with isolation. In fact, when radical newness appears within traditionally private realms they are transformed, briefly, into public spaces — as long as others are capable of witnessing and confirming that action. This understanding of the public seems to indicate that it is a modality rather than an absolute binary of private or not: contrary to Arendt's suggestion that it is possible for anything to "be seen and heard by everybody and [have] the widest possible publicity", it seems highly unlikely that any singular object, speech, or action is capable of reaching *all* beings.[50] Exclusion happens both incidentally and intentionally. The width of our public realm depends on barriers of time and space, as well as those artificially imposed on those considered worthy to participate. It also begins to undermine the notion that the household is not a sort of public realm in and of itself, because the household is rarely a place of complete isolation from all other beings that could possibly confirm an intimate experience nor is it the case that the contemporary household is solely concerned with the necessities of life. This seems to be separate from Arendt's concern about the social 'loss of the world' wherein the public realm is corrupted by the private concerns of necessity and production. Given this it is difficult to understand what precludes the familial from

[49] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50.
[50] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50.

being entirely political — unless it either already has or inevitably will fall victim to the same equalizing and corrupting influence of mass society.

To navigate this difficulty, Arendt calls upon the ancient Greek understanding of the public realm: "'wherever you go, you will be a *polis*'".[51] The private realm can only be apolitical when it is contained entirely within an individual being and is thus incapable of confirmation by others, but this does not indicate that truly personal experiences are excluded from reality. Rather it again highlights the importance of remembrance: so that a being can bring something immaterial into the public realm through speech and storytelling. When beings are together, it is possible to reveal distinct uniqueness to each other; when beings are alone, such revelations are impossible. Loneliness is not marked by the absence of other beings, but rather by "facing the naked necessity to keep himself alive".[52] Mere living is not sufficient for the establishment of a *polis*. Accordingly, the household that is concerned solely with necessities of life and reproduction is private; those beings within a household that does not require absolute facing towards labor are then capable of action.

This distinction between public and private is sustained as a hypothetical thought experiment perhaps, but being together always contains the possibility of speaking and acting. Again complicating the private realm is the difference between isolation and the appearance of isolation: when a being believes that they are alone, but are actually being witnessed and surveilled. Is it not possible for them to display radical newness to their watchers, even inadvertently? Although this tension is significant with respect to Arendt's thought, her point is that "there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to

[51] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198.
[52] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 212.

be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all … [and] each human activity points to its proper location in the world".[53] On the latter point, it is obvious what Arendt means: without the togetherness and the presence of others to witness our radical newness, expressing such qualities would be empty gestures. On the former point, Arendt goes on to explain that "a life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes … shallow. While it retains visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense."[54] It is not simply that the private realm needs to be distinct for its own sake: privacy is that through which the public becomes meaningful. Arendt is not suggesting that traditionally private spaces are wholly precluded from the experience of radical newness, but rather that once the realms of necessity are tapped, as it were, as spaces of action they cease to be safe havens in which we can retreat from the exhaustion that is freedom. Becoming private is a form of uniquely human labor in which we recover from the world-shattering experience of action, but always for the purpose of returning to the free, common world of others.

Situating Arendt

Having presented Arendt largely on her own terms, I would like to briefly withdraw from *The Human Condition* and better situate Arendt's writings within the broader context of her overall philosophical project. I acknowledge that the problems of the time in which Arendt is writing may not be the same problems that are facing contemporary people. This helps to explain her conception of the human being — paradoxically as both a plurality of distinct traits that can lead to unimagined possibilities

[53] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 73.
[54] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 71.

and a collection of indisputable facts that would be, in her own words, “kind of insane” to imagine otherwise — and its unmatched status as a thinking and acting subject.[55] Arendt fled Germany prior to World War II and her work is aimed towards that what Neal Stephenson calls “the highest and best purpose to which we could dedicate our lives”: the safeguarding against and prevention of another Holocaust which, as with all revealed things, will “[stay] with mankind as a potentiality long after its actuality has become a thing of the past”.[56] She strives to affirm the value of all humans in such a way that makes it preposterous to be as thoughtless as Adolf Eichmann, the bureaucratic architect of the Jewish genocide who would make the claim that “[he was] not the monster [he was] made out to be”.[57] I would suggest that the primary focus of Arendt’s earlier works is an attempt to make sense of how Germany could have committed so heinous a crime against humanity as the Holocaust. While it may not be the case that the possibility for such crimes can ever be completely eliminated from the scope of human affairs, Arendt means to ensure that no act can ever be claimed transcendent and beyond the realm of human understanding, justice, and judgment. We must, following Arendt, respect the humanity of other human beings as human beings.

Acknowledging the context of Arendt’s work provides an explanation for the choices that she made and helps to clarify the difficulties that her philosophy faces in the wake of technological and sociological changes that she could not have predicted. While her criticisms of bureaucracy are just as apt in contemporary society, there is also the inescapable conclusion that her focus is solely the human subject as she understood it to

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[55] Qtd. in Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt: Life as a Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 69.
[56] Neal Stephenson, *Cryptonomicon* (New York: Avon, 2002) 497; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 273.
[57] Qtd. in Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 248.

be in the post-WWII period. This is most obvious in *The Human Condition* wherein she solidifies her distinctions between *animal laborans, homo faber,* and *vita activa*: it may be the case that human beings have biological needs as is the case with animals and it may also be the case that human beings can engage in establishing permanence through fabrication, but that which is solely *animal laborans* or *homo faber* is incapable of political action. While these categories can be broadened to speak to processes instead of beings (as she does with labor, work, and action respectively), Arendt is clear that natality — that is to say, the speech and action that is creative and brings about a new world — is uniquely the *human* condition.

Arendt's explanation of totalitarianism and her processes of labor, work, and action provide insight into the way that we, in the words of Judith Butler, are "undone by each other" — how we are reconstituted through the experience of radical newness that is public action.[58] Furthermore, one can utilize and hone Arendt's theory to show that even the possibility for boundlessness manifests the power relations necessary to establish totalizing narratives — and why we, as individuals and groups, accept such identity impositions. These are particularly useful aspects of Arendt's thought for contemporary politics, but are all still dependent upon her project of respecting our individual humanity. If one wishes to utilize her thought in such a way that includes those bodies that she has excluded while still remaining faithful to the core of her philosophy, it is the case that one must be willing to grant a more fluid and ambiguous understanding of actors and witnesses which will allow for the possibility of post- and non-human subjects. In attempting to place Arendt's thought within a contemporary setting, one must take seriously her terms and attempt to occupy the position from which she was originally

[58] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2006), 23.

writing and yet do so with knowledge that she either did not or could not have had. The works of Arendt are then, following Julia Kristeva, "less a body of work than an action" that one acts in concert with in an attempt to create something new.[59] This is not to say that Arendt was wrong or that this is a correction of her thought. Instead this is an attempt to speak with the dead and create something new so as to better imagine the contemporary human being. To that aim, I will briefly divert from the *vita activa* to discuss Arendt's reflections on the nature of both violence and power, so as to use those concepts as lenses with which to return to labor, work, and action.

Violence, Power, and Togetherness

Written as much against the backdrop of the American Civil Rights Movement as it is within the context of the Cold War, *On Violence* is Arendt's attempt to contest the legitimacy of violence as a tool of both the state and politics more broadly. She is explicitly writing against the notion that there is any power in the use of violence and this largely depends on her particularly nuanced understandings of both concepts. According to Arendt, the introduction of violence always negates power: "where one rules absolutely, the other is absent".[60] Throughout the text, Arendt makes absolutely clear that this notion is contrary not only to common understandings but also to "our traditions of political thought".[61] These concepts — along with force and authority — have long been treated as synonymous which has "resulted in a kind of blindness to the realities that they correspond to".[62] As such, Arendt suggests, the power upon which politics is founded has

[59] Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 27.
[60] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 56.
[61] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 38.
[62] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 43.

been substituted for violence which has undermined both the authority and the effectiveness of political movements and states.

Arendt states that violence is unpredictable and that neither models nor scenarios can make certain an outcome, as long as people are involved: "there is no certainty in these matters, not even an ultimate certainty of mutual destruction".[63] The unpredictability of human affairs ensures that the threat of violence — or even violence itself — cannot ensure particular results. Violence also has an instrumental quality and is justified by a particular end — typically peace, but often more generally it can be said to aim towards the negation of a potential threat or the accomplishment of short-term goals.[64] That violence can fail to achieve these outcomes is simply a due to the nature of human affairs but this future-aimed quality is important because it separates violence from actions that would have traditionally been considered within its realm, but for Arendt are not: rage and self-defence. Both concepts are rooted in emotional responses and connected to immediacy more so than her explanation of violence — neither of which invalidates their legitimacy, according to Arendt. There are even situations in which "acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences … is the only way to set the scales of justice right again", but when time is no longer a factor and actions can be more carefully contemplated, that which is rage or self-defence is transformed into violence.[65] Further, violence requires implements — both the tools that are the instruments of violence and those that are violated with them — and while violence as annihilation is readily apparent in the sheer scope of its current instruments,

[63] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 4.
[64] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 79.
[65] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 64.

this only serves to indicate the generally destructive quality of violence.[66] Its use is always a breach in the world and removes certain possibilities, certain hypothetical futures.

While this understanding of violence is fairly nuanced, it is when placed in relation to power that the radical nature of *On Violence* becomes clear. Power, according to Arendt, is "the human ability to act in concert".[67] Power itself is the coming together of individuals to form a collective and the binding force that tethers these people together. This can only be understood as existing in the creation of a *we* or an *us*. Further, power is not even a property of that collective; and, while it can be continually renewed, its existence is entirely momentary and fleeting. This collective exists to chart a path into the possible future — possible, because of the boundless unpredictably that accompanies all human affairs: "predictions of the future are never anything but projections of present automatic processes and procedures, that is, of occurrences that are likely to come to pass if men do not act and if nothing unexpected happens".[68] Seen in this way, power is a consensual agreement about future behavior, but it is a contract made with the knowledge that future events may negate the initial agreed upon terms. Power understood in this way is a hopeful promise, but due to our human fallibility it can never be a guarantee about how the future will unfold.

With these understandings of violence and power, I return to the *vita activa* to explain how action, labor, and work fit into this duality. Arendt's reflections on violence, power, and their interactions in the modern world are incredibly useful in articulating the horror of instrumental politics. There is no doubt that, given the historical context in

[66] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 4.
[67] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 44.
[68] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 7.

which she is writing, this understanding of violence is a valuable contribution to the political discourse. Yet her distinction — between violence as acting *against* others and power as acting *with* others — establishes a particularly narrow conception of interaction that fails to address the ethics and politics that are hidden within these abstractions. It may be the case that the decision to prioritize certain violences over others is deemed legitimate or reasonable, but that is the realm of moral philosophy or political theory rather than the study of pure phenomena.

Arendt understood human action to involve "tak[ing] an initiative, to begin ... This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself".[69] The creative capacity within the human being is not omnipotence and, if only by virtue of temporality and materiality, it can never be; yet Arendt is clear that the human being does have a capacity for radical newness. Such a capacity is a uniquely human condition that is expressed through the speech and action that brings about a wholly new world.[70] This "miracle of beginning" would seem to establish a difficulty within Arendt wherein the human being is simultaneously able to replicate the divine *logos* and yet that creativity cannot possibly be wholly spontaneous.[71] All that which is willed beyond mere thought is an imposition onto the world. The ephemeral realm of thinking is contained entirely within the self and, as such, can never be confirmed as real. Each attempt to transform internal possibilities into external actualities is always, necessarily, violent. To enact a change upon the worldly always results in the destruction of the world in which that change had not occurred — although this destruction is equalled by a creative power that, in the same violent

[69] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 177.
[70] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 178.
[71] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xvii.

instance, remakes the world. Violence stripped of its creative capacity is not worldly; violence stripped of its destructive capacity is not of this world. A purely creative moment — that which occurs without destroying the world that already is; something out of nothing *and* into nothing — is solely the purview of the divine.

The Genesis narrative begins with creation wherein "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light".[72] This becomes more significant when it is read with the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".[73] Only the divine Word/*logos* is capable of creating form out of the void, light out of darkness, or something out of nothing; even Jesus, the Word made flesh, is incapable of replicating this action; he must *take* the sin of the world to transform it into salvation. Jesus' miracles were rooted in alterations of the world rather than purely creative instances, while the God of the Old Testament was able to rain *manna* from heaven. This is the Christian *logos* through which "all things came into being", which is only possible prior to the material world.[74] After materiality even the mere insertion of a spontaneous creation would destroy the world that was in existence without it. Even if the human is, following Heidegger, "that creature whose being is essentially determined by its ability to speak", such speaking can only ever be *a* word and not *the* Word which serves to ground all of existence.[75]

It would seem, then, that all material actions necessarily contain within them violence. This is equally true of hostile human interaction as it is with the animal

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[72] Gen. 1:1 *New Oxford Annotated Bible*.
[73] John 1:1 *New Oxford Annotated Bible.*
[74] John 1:3 *New Oxford Annotated Bible*.
[75] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 24.

relationships between predator and prey — and of everything else that occurs in the world as it all creates a new world wherein that change now exists. If it is the case that worldly affairs are inevitably violent and all actions seem to harbor violence within them then this would appear to be a meaningless articulation. Further there is certainly a distinction to be made between the concepts that Arendt calls violence and power — a distinction that is clarified when articulated by James Tully as 'power over' and 'power with'; there is a difference between attempting to force the world — and its inhabitants — into a particular image and attempting to find consensus between all involved so as to change the world together.[76] Yet this is not merely an argument about semantics. The violence that Arendt writes about is not contrary to power nor is it the case that violence abolishes power when they come into contact — power is not merely indistinguishable from violence, power is a form of violence. The reason that her distinction is valuable is because violence is not necessarily always power. Coercion and domination appear to be utterly distinct from persuasion and consent, but the separation of these concepts hides that there are always those left out of consensual decision-making. Whether it is due to difficulties of proximity and language or of time and being, there are always those that do not have the ability, opportunity, or existence so as to be able to engage in Arendtian relations of power. Understood in this way every instance of power is violence that is enacted in concert with others because it will never be possible for *all* those affected to participate in the process.

It is always already the case that decisions about *how* the world should be — even when they are arrived at through power, that is to say there is a consensus within the

[76] James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 135-139; James Tully, "Violent Power-Over and Nonviolent Power-With" (Lecture, Goethe University, June 7, 2011).

group about that possible future — are preceded by an answer to that very question: we wish the world to be the world that *we* choose it to be. Further, it is always the case that we act alone — even acting in concert is a choice that the individual makes and wills itself to follow. It is not possible to force another to will the world in a particular way — coercion and persuasion attempt to influence such willing, but radical newness ensures the possibility for unpredictability; they are in no way guarantees of the future. Domination, complete and true, may cause certain outcomes to occur, but it cannot be said that someone that has been dominated has willed anything. Rather they were the vehicle or tool through which another's will was realized.

The coming together to engage in worldly affairs is always necessarily exclusionary; every instance of power is also always embedded in violence towards those who are not participating in the process. While it can be debated whether those who choose not to engage in the process are being subjected to violence, those that do not even have that opportunity are having a new, changed world thrust upon them. This would seem to be power and violence coexisting within the same moment — albeit in separate directions. This is obviously contrary to the notion that power and violence cannot coexist. For this to be accurate while still adhering to an Arendtian understanding it needs to be clarified through her distinction between private and public realms.

Both violence and power are worldly occurrences, but further Arendt locates them solely in the experience of togetherness. They are modes of being together: actions. The cat that kills the mouse for food is not *willing* violence upon its prey, rather it is guided by the unavoidable necessities of sustaining its life. While the mouse's experience is the same regardless of whether the violence is willed or incidental, the biological needs of

the cat insist that certain actions be undertaken to allow for its continued existence. The mouse's participation is entirely incidental and, while it would not likely have consented, the processes of biological life — as with the processes of chemistry, physics, and all other natural sciences — are contained within an ongoing, perpetual system that can be interrupted, concealed but not altogether ceased.[77] Without the capacity for radical newness the world "would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlasting of the human as of all other animal species".[78] Within this eternally returning system all violence is incidental and without will to guide it. These incidences are of no more significance than the eventual, natural end that comes to each living being without exception. All things are extraneous and without meaning. It is only when separated from necessity — in the sense of the private realm in which labor and work occur — that deeds become violence. It is not possible for natural processes to be violent because they are merely incidental. They are not themselves actions until there is both a will to enact them and another will to press themselves upon.

The difficulty that arises from appealing to natural processes is in defining exactly what is meant by 'nature'. If artificiality is that which interrupts a natural process then the cat, while it is supporting its own biology, is unnaturally ending the biology of the mouse. It is certainly the case that another natural process will replace that which was ended, but this is inevitable for all interruptions or concealments. This, of course, is not a problem for Arendt as both the cat and the mouse are incapable of the togetherness that permits action. Neither power nor violence occurs in this situation — or are even possibilities. Animals are merely engaged in natural processes. Yet if nature is simply that which is

[77] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 232-3.
[78] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 97.

being guided by these processes of necessity, then nearly all beings are perpetually and simultaneously engaged in both natural and artificial processes. This is because of the complication that arises when faced with the fact that 'natural' beings frequently behave in ways that have nothing to do with mere sustenance.

The consumption of the material world so as to sustain a biological being appears to be a straightforward labor process, but it is not clear whether immediacy plays a role in understanding the concept. The act of consumption itself cannot be the sole defining measure — overconsumption is, by definition, no longer a matter of necessity. There is also the notion of advance preparation: the difference between hunting or cooking and the canning of food or the creation of complex storage techniques would seem to be a matter of degree. If labor is understood only as consumption to satisfy the immediate needs of a being, immediacy itself comes into question. Most acts that Arendt would classify as labor would not qualify: the slave could not be considered to labor and the master ruling over the slaves could not be said to be escaping the immediate bodily needs. While it is the case that the human being requires food to continue to exist, the threat of starvation is not omnipresent and its danger more resembles the ebb and flow of the tide than the sword of Damocles.[79] Only that which staves off immediate death is labor — which may be an appropriate definition, but excludes numerous activities and does not resolve what those other activities might be considered. Arendt claims that "the mark of all laboring [is] that it leaves nothing behind", but it is rarely the case that any processes are utterly

[79] This is not to claim that all human beings are free from want and have an adequate standard of living – it is, of course, untrue. Rather I am pointing to immediate and direct threats such as those that could be articulated as 'if this is further delayed then the being will cease to exist'. It is only in this way that I mean to suggest that the deadly threat by starvation is not ubiquitous.

devoid of evidence of their passing.[80] Yet the complete absence of a being does not serve to annihilate the having been present quality of that being; the unavailability of that being is itself what is left behind after consumption. Further the notion that it is possible for there to be nothing left behind requires a deliberate ignorance of the manner of the material world: an apple has a core, bread cannot help but leave crumbs, and animal carcasses cannot be entirely converted into sustenance. Even if this were not the case, the processes of labor leave traces of their occurrence upon the material world, again complicating the possibility of total removal. The salient point might be the difference between intentional products and incidental by-products although it is entirely possibly that an accidental creation might be more beneficial. Also that which labor leaves behind may not be useful in the same way that the product of work, such as a table, is useful, but there is no indication as to why this is *necessarily* the case. Further complicating the matter is that use value depends, to a certain degree, on the successful completion of the task and the quality of the crafted products. If usability is one of the defining attributes of whether an activity qualifies as work then the artifacts that fail to have a use — either due to shoddy crafting, poor materials, or simply misfortune — would seem to somehow negate the process of work after the fact. This negation also repeats itself with the successful products of work when they are worn out through usage, although it would seem strange to claim that the decay of the *Venus de Milo* retroactively redefine the process that went into its creation. Further complicating matters is the fact that the *Venus de Milo* is known for her lack of arms, but this strangeness is not altogether unreasonable if history is understood as susceptible to influence from the ever changing present.

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[80] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 87.

Human procreation is not — for the Arendtian being — a form of labor, because it is not *necessary* for the continuation of those involved. It is necessary for the continuation of the human *species*, but a child is not an extension of its parents. Rather it is an entirely new being that happens to share some qualities with its parents. Yet animal reproduction differs from this because animals "exist only as members of a species whose immortal life is guaranteed through reproduction".[81] Thus propagation is labor for the natural world but it is something else for the human being. If the creation of a new life can be understood as an expression of radical newness then it would seem to be action. However this appears to rely on the paradoxical notion that progeny are both a creation of their parents and beingsf unto themselves. While certainly a possibility, the justification of why this is necessarily the case is tenuous as best:

> The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.[82]

As was already touched on with regard to the notion of work, it is not possible to ever completely 'cut through' the cyclical order of life. It is always the case that biological beings are bound to biological processes and the interruption of a single process should not be mistaken for the negation or overcoming of biology altogether.

Arendt argues that the blurred division of labor and work is a symptom of the loss of the world and the thoughtlessness that characterizes modernity, but these fundamental activities have more in common than she suggests and, despite her insistence that this

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[81] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18-19.
[82] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 19.

distinction is “unusual” and “striking”, this has likely always been the case.[83] The idea that the products of work “[need] to be reproduced again and again in order to remain within the human world” is similar to the way that individual beings must sustain themselves through labor in order to remain in the world.[84] The reproduction of the bodily self may have a different subject than the fabrication of the worker, but both share the quality of making (or remaking) something as real through force and at the expense of another natural being. This is deliberately contrary to Arendt’s claims about the nature of violence:

> The experience of this violence [of work] is ... the very opposite of the painful, exhausting effort experienced in sheer labor.[85]
>
> It is work rather than labor that is destructive, since the work process takes matter out of nature’s hands without giving it back to her in the swift course of the natural metabolism.[86]

The violence done to a tree in the picking of its fruit differs only in degree from chopping it down altogether and both negate a natural process. This is more obvious when one considers the piece of fruit and the whole tree as beings unto themselves: removing fruit from a tree is an act of force that destroys the possibility of both to continue growing as they were. This problematic does not reveal itself to Arendt, because it appears that she views fruit solely as an extension of the tree instead of occupying multiple contradictory positions as equally part of the tree and independent from it. If the tree can simply bloom again then, according to her understanding, the natural cycle has not been interrupted, but either Arendt is appealing to a unending process that binds all living creatures — wherein the tree can simply bloom again and, thus, the grand natural cycle is not interrupted — or

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[83] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 79.
[84] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 139.
[85] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 140.
[86] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 100.

she is adhering to a hierarchy of separate processes — wherein only some interruptions are legitimate and the suspension of the natural cycle of a single piece of fruit is unimportant when weighed against the possibility of the tree to renew itself. This example is not meant to suggest that there is a need to debate the politics of eating apples. Rather I seek to point out that, even for the most basic of tasks, labor and work cannot easily be understood as separate and this commonality is *inherent* to the processes and not symptomatic of a corruption or fall from an ideal.

And yet, as if responding to an expanded conception of violence so as to include labor and work, Arendt herself invalidates this kind of philosophizing: "We are not in the nursery! Real political action comes out as a group act. And you join that group or you don't. And whatever you do on your own you are not really an actor – you are an anarchist".[87] Philosophy and thinking can be done in isolation — as anarchists, perhaps — but politics in the world insists upon the attempt to find a future in which all participants can agree to strive towards. Ever achieving true consensus or full participation is not possible, but this is why politics must be understood as an ongoing process that cannot ever be completed. This agonism is the intersection between Arendt's philosophical project that shows the nature of existence as being rooted in violent actions and her political project which is an attempt to navigate the complexities of living together in the world. It may be the case that labor and work can be understood broadly to be violence, but to what end? Towards her project of recovery human dignity through worldliness, it can be nothing more than a frivolous pursuit. Her politics insists upon the human being as sole actor because it would be meaningless to include animals or objects in the political decision making process — not that Arendt would advocate for a complete

[87] Hannah Arendt, *The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), 310.

disregard for non-humans, but there is too massive a barrier between these relationships for them to ever be meaningfully understood.

Beyond Human Plurality

This distinction between power and violence — and, more importantly, the recognition of what activities fit outside the realm of both — serves to highlight one of the limitations of even the most inclusive forms of human power: it rests on the assumption that all concerned individuals will be considered worthy of participation in the collective and to have the ability to convince others of their situation. There is no attempt to act in concert with those considered unworthy. Rather than trying to understand the position of those that we choose to exclude, we operate solely from our own perspective. In this way, human politics bears more resemblance to the isolated, contemplative life that Arendt opposes than the active togetherness that she advocates for with the *vita activa*. To always be aimed towards an active life with others would be exhausting, likely impossible, and a rejection of our internal being. That we turn inward to our own thoughts, views, and perspectives is entirely normal, but Arendt's suggestion with *The Human Condition* and *On Violence* is that to solely do so is a rejection of our capacity for togetherness and it is only by being together that we are at all capable of being human. I would take that notion one step further and indicate that to solely operate from within a perspective that privileges the human being is a rejection of our capacity for togetherness — one that we perhaps are comfortable with, but a rejection nonetheless.

Arendt suggests that violence and power "belong to the political realm of human affairs" as both are connected to the establishment of radical newness.[88] Violence then, even in its most terrible instances, can carry with it the possibility of creation, of

[88] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 82.

beginning a new world that was not possible prior to it. This does not suggest that such new worlds are necessarily desirable, but simply that they are novel. It is for this reason that we can understand the Holocaust as an event that has shaped the contours of our shared world. We cannot help but live together with the fact of the Holocaust; that it was the product of thoughtless bureaucracy is incapable of changing this. Violence and power are both forms of action — Arendt is clear on this point — but they differ because "the most probable change [with violence] is to a more violent world".[89] This resembles the claim by Martin Luther King Jr. that "the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy".[90] That violence is a form of action ensures its unpredictability, but that it is action also returns us to the troubling notion that it happened at all. Even if the Holocaust was perpetrated by countless thoughtless individuals, bureaucratic mirrors to Adolf Eichmann merely 'following orders', that these countless others chose to likewise follow orders shows just how perverse 'togetherness' can be. There remains the fact that the individuals within the Nazi Party, like Eichmann, "carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder".[91] Thoughtlessness, as with bureaucratic obedience, is a choice. Bureaucracy does not negate the individual will. Adherence to such structures is always a decision to act together for the purpose of establishing a new world.

That collectives can be aimed towards a more violent world would seem to suggest that power does not require absolute togetherness. Togetherness, even in its most wonderful of instances, requires the exclusion of at least some other individuals. The

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[89] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 80
[90] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), XX.
[91] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), XX — last page of epilogue?.

nature of that exclusion is determined in the actual coming together prior to the disclosure of radical newness, before the establishment of a new world. This presupposition about who is permitted entry into political decision-making processes is not necessarily permanent: it may be that a collective resolves to include others in the process, but this does not negate the initial choice to exclude. It may be forgiven, but it remains a fact of history. Although the complex nature of this forgiveness is an important aspect of Arendt's work — and when considered with particular political contexts is vital — equally significant in the contemporary world is navigating the initial exclusions upon which political decisions are founded. The present is marked by a variety of relationships in which the possibility for communication is a barrier to that forgiveness. The lack of a shared language can be an obstacle, but so too can different conceptions of the world.

Consider the example of Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada: one of the key difficulties in even attempting reconciliation projects is that there are a variety of contradictory world views at play in nearly every instance. This is not to suggest that it is futile to try engaging when faced with these situations, but rather to point to their difficulty. The worldliness of particular situations demands attention to the details that distinguish them. These situations are immense in their complexity and this thesis makes no attempt at their resolution. Instead I believe that it would be worthwhile to approach the act of coming together with the aim of reducing the instances where forgiveness is necessary — to seek out an understanding of being together that is open and inclusive rather than predetermined and fixed. The respect for plurality upon which Arendt's work is predicated serves as a strong foundation from which to begin thinking through this problem, but there are limits to simply utilizing the *vita activa* for doing so. I am not

concerned with the recovery of *human* dignity — at least not merely so. There is immense value in projects that are thusly aimed, but anthropocentrism is the norm. Critically engaging outside of this boundary is not. Yet it is increasingly more common for individuals and groups to attend to the dignity of other beings, to a vast multitude of creatures and things that are treated as worthy of respect. I believe it to be worthwhile to turn our gaze elsewhere so as to understand traditionally apolitical beings in new ways. Not only does this help shed light upon our relationship with the non-human world, but I also think that it is helpful in pointing out the unexpected relations of domination that exist between humans. Further, I think that radical newness is not bound to human beings as actors. It may be that humans are the sole beings in the universe capable of understanding the significance of witnessing the unique *as unique*, but it seems against the very experience of worldliness that radical newness is located entirely within the actor. The vast multitude of humans, creatures, and objects can inspire us towards such experiences. This is not an attempt to firmly establish the merits of these various understandings or absolutely define the boundaries of that multitude, but rather to explore how it is the case that we can — and already do — look beyond ourselves and find a freedom, of sorts if not identical to our own, in a variety of actors. This occurs both through the expansion of that which we consider to be human and by developing an open-mindedness to that which is not remotely so. If my project is aimed towards this manner of inclusion upon an Arendtian foundation, merely applying her theory to new situations and different political beings is insufficient: one must reimagine the *vita activa* itself from the vantage point of these new conceptions of being and through broader modes of interaction than those of the traditional understanding of human beings.

Chapter Two: Rethinking Work and Labor

Togetherness Prior to Action

Politics as action for the sake of the world is a tradition that Arendt seeks to recover; it is the expression of ourselves as human beings rather than biological or sociological truths. For her, human speech and action in public spaces is the best possible method of allowing for those expressions, but other thinkers have attempted to re-evaluate politics so as to accommodate more than the conventional politicking human being.[92] For those directly engaging with Arendt, it is rarely a matter of writing *against* her *vita activa*; rather it is an attempt to explore concepts, beings, and processes that do not neatly conform to her active life. Just as she would oppose the rote application of any principle, theory, or philosophy, so too would she disagree with the attempt to apply her uniquely human condition to that which is not human. The vantage of *The Human Condition* is a particular understanding of political human beings and it is a misstep to merely apply the *vita activa* to different understanding or to wholly different beings. Yet the concern for worldliness can be extended beyond mere human plurality as Arendt articulates it. The contemporary world is filled with instances in which people look to the non-human world with respect, dignity, and engagement, but I would suggest that her conception of action provides a poor ground from which to attempt that. Action is conditioned by human plurality and human plurality is actualized through action, but work and labor are processes that human beings share with other beings. To utilize action alone — which I grant the possibility that it is, at least in Arendt's articulation, unique to human beings — as a method of involving or incorporating the non-human is to be

[92] To list all of these thinkers would be far too vast to accommodate, but I would be remiss if I avoided some examples. To that aim: Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Bruno Latour, Iris Marion Young, and Jane Bennett.

trapped by an anthropocentric gaze; it is an attempt to find the humanity in that which is not human. It is in work and labor that a possible entry point can be found within Arendt's *vita activa* through which to explore interactions that are outside of her original concerns. The notion of togetherness can be expanded to other worldly beings that do not neatly fit into the process of action. To that end, this chapter diverges from action so as to rethink work and labor within this context.

To do so, I draw upon two pieces of work: *The Craftsman* by Richard Sennett and *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* by Vanessa Lemm. Richard Sennett has written on many topics, but has a central focus on cities and labor — and the way that culture and society are influenced by the varied nature of those two concepts. He engages with Arendt both thematically and explicitly, particularly in *The Craftsman* in which he draws upon her understanding of work, but he diverges significantly from the *vita activa*. Vanessa Lemm is both a Nietzsche and Foucault scholar, and her recent work has focused on questions of community, exclusion, and togetherness. *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* connects to these concerns through the excluded body of the animal — mere laborers, in the context of the *vita activa*, although Lemm only casually invokes Arendt within this particular work. *The Craftsman* is a direct reimagining of *homo faber* and the worker beginning from Arendt and is thus helpful for my own similar project. Although radically different, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* can be understood as indirectly participating in a similar project with regards to labor — and her philosophical approach provides an interesting contrast with Sennett's material history of craft. In the former Lemm attempts to establish and justify a broader conception of being that accommodates animal life as political actors. She may be rooted in Nietzsche's work, but she is also striving for a comprehensive response to

the convention in political and philosophical discourses to treat the animal as subordinate to human beings. Sennett's *The Craftsman* takes a more focused approach to broadening customary understandings of political action: where Lemm includes more beings as capable of political action, Sennett attempts a more subtle corrective than Lemm in his redefinition of the process of action. Further his craftsperson follows directly from the Arendtian *vita activa*, but is not limited to it and, rather than writing generally, Sennett traces his contribution through history and into the contemporary world so as to ground his understanding of work and action in particular instances. I suggest that both Lemm and Sennett can be used to modify Arendt's work in novel ways, but that such attempts do not engage with the more difficult foundational contradictions inherent to the *vita activa* within the context of contemporary, worldly politics.

Richard Sennett and Craft

Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* delves into the notion of *homo faber* as capable of being intensely worldly and as an expression of uniquely human dignity — albeit in a radically different mode than advocated for in *The Human Condition*. Sennett's conception of a worker is rooted in cooperation, togetherness, and the notion of quality. As with Arendt, Sennett looks to politics as a mode of being engaged in the world that is in opposition to the transcendent gaze of philosophy. He is not writing against the *The Human Condition*, but rather comes at similar concerns from an alternate perspective:

> The emotional rewards craft[] holds for attaining skill are twofold: people are anchored in tangible reality, and they can take pride in their work. But society has stood in the way of these rewards in the past and continues to do so today. At different moments in Western history practical activity has been demeaned, divorced from supposedly higher pursuits. Technical skill has been removed from imagination, tangible reality doubted by religion, pride in one's work treated as a luxury. If the craftsman is special because he or she is an engaged human being,

> still the craftman's aspirations and trials hold up a mirror to these larger issues past and present.[93]

Just as Arendt sought to recover the *vita activa* from the contempt of philosophy, Sennett wishes to broaden the idea of worldly engagement "to rescue *Animal laborans* from the contempt with which Hannah Arendt treated him" — but Sennett is not focused solely on Arendt.[94] His intention is to question the entire philosophical tradition that rejects the "idea of the unity of hand and head".[95] His claim is that we are as human in our bodies as we are in our minds. *The Craftsman* attempts to address the material and social conditions of modernity so as to reframe handiwork or craft as a form of engagement that is equally as significant as action.

According to Arendt, it is the fact "that deeds [and actions] possess such an enormous capacity for endurance [that makes them] superior to every other man-made product" such as the fleeting results of labor or even the durable results of work.[96] That we have abandoned the process of action in favor of biology and construction is not due to any lacking capacity, but rather is a matter of constitution, of our unwillingness to bear "the burden of irreversibility and unpredictability".[97] Sennett agrees with this sentiment insofar as modernity has established a social hierarchy between certain modes of being in the world, but he contests that Arendt wholly escapes ordering the human world:

> In [Arendt's] view, we human beings live in two dimensions: In one we make things; in this condition we are amoral, absorbed in a task. We also harbor another, higher way of life in which we stop producing and start discussing and judging together … For Arendt, the mind engages once labor is done. Another,

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[93] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 21.
[94] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 286.
[95] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 178.
[96] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 233.
[97] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 233.

> more balanced view is that thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making.[98]

It is not the fact of this hierarchy that Sennett finds fault with — he too establishes an ordering between mere production and engaged craft — but rather the hopelessness that marks Arendt's treatment of the workers and laborers. The retreat into productivity is certainly a troubling aspect of the contemporary human being, but Sennett understands the craftsperson — both past and present — as in opposition to the loss of the world. Arendt's sees no hope of worldly action in the process of work because of, according to Sennett, the broad strokes with which Arendt treats all work.

Craft, as Sennett explains it, is not merely the world that is made by hand — both the nurse and the orchestral conductor are as much craftspeople as the carpenter — instead "the craftsman represents the special human condition of being engaged".[99] Engagement in this sense requires a dedication to the task at hand beyond the goods that are produced, but this is not meant to evoke the solitary existence of the artist. In fact, it is precisely when craft becomes isolated that "material engagement proves empty" which leads "people [to] seek refuge in inwardness".[100] Rather than seeking isolation, the craftsperson actually requires collaboration and cooperation so as to develop the qualities necessary for its existence: authority, skill, and motivation. To suggest otherwise wholly ignores the "personal mark of his or her presence on the object" that a worker leaves behind.[101] To illustrate this, he draws upon the historical example of 'maker's stamps' on pottery and clay as a way that craftspeople "began to sign their wares" — for the artisanal worker, such signings were often paired with intricate scenes that added no use value to

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[98] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 7.
[99] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 20.
[100] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 145.
[101] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 130.

the objects but showed them as uniquely produced by a particular individual; for the slave worker, these marks "declare, 'I exist' … which is perhaps the most urgent signal a slave can send".[102] Craft is more than just a process aimed towards creating material goods; it also involves leaving ourselves behind on those goods for others to discover.

The public quality of craft can be further seen in the development of the skills necessary to engage in handiwork. Rarely are such skills acquired through isolated attempts at production because "language struggles with depicting physical action, and nowhere is this struggle more evident than in language that tells us what to do".[103] We learn through shared experiences with others. Furthermore it is others that provide criticism, praise, or validation of our products. Craft without this experience is meaningless, just as deeds and actions are empty unless they take place in the world of others. Making can be thinking; making together can be acting together for the establishment of a new, unexpected and shared world. To be a craftsperson requires acting in concert with others so as to establish both one's authority as a skilled worker and one's veracity when making truth claims about the work of others. Sennett shows that this cooperation and collaboration of workers has taken a variety of forms, from the monasteries of medieval Europe to urban guilds and merchant associations to online open source communities. Rather than places of mere fabrication and the absolute adherence to a model, these workshops are spaces of production wherein people are united through knowledge, skill, and determination. Yet, as Sennett points out, "there can be no skilled work without standards" and so the workshop becomes a site of contradiction as the worker attempts to both develop themselves as a model authority upon which others can

[102] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 134; Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 135.
[103] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 179.

rely while at the same time expressing themselves through products that are unmistakably crafted by *their* particular hand.[104] Put another way, this is the struggle between strict adherence to either formal expertise or improvisational adaptability. The workshop is, in an Arendtian sense, both a public and private site, but while Arendt would take issue with such a blending of spaces, Sennett celebrates it.

This blended space arises in a mutual acceptance of both sides of the conflict between those who react solely based on that which came before, on similar models and traditions; and those that attempt to understand the situation at hand as if it were a wholly unique event that bears no resemblance to the past. Arendt would declare the former to be "idle and even dangerous" because historical models cannot themselves be a mirror to the conditions of the present.[105] And yet each moment is always imprinted with the events that came before; the past can be invaluable as a point of departure. In this way, the craftsperson is always engaged in a dialogue with all those who came before and upon whose work the craftsperson will be building. This engagement differs dramatically from the way that Arendt would articulate speech and action, but Sennett's exploration of craft is meant to expand upon her limited understanding of handiwork. The craftsperson is a medium of sorts that speaks with those dead and gone so as to begin working, but the dead are immutable which forces the craftsperson out into the broader community in search of others with whom to work with and continue their work. This forces political relations as "the workplace [transforms] into a surrogate family" that goes beyond biological connections.[106] The craftsperson cannot help but have their hand guided by a vast array of present beings that ensure that a work is always the product of collective

[104] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 80.
[105] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 252.
[106] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 63.

agency rather than isolated effort. Rather than the Arendtian worker who is fixated on "the categories of means and ends" and the "impulse towards repetition", the craftsperson always begins from a model but is never interested solely in repeating the past and always puts themselves into their products to make them new.[107] Mere repetition is not a characteristic of craft.

Further distinguishing Sennett's craftsperson is a concern about time and the notion of originality, recalling what Margaret Canovan calls "the most heartening message of *The Human Condition*": the optimistic possibilities inherent to "the fact that new people are continually coming into the world, each of them unique, each capable of new initiatives that may interrupt or divert the chain of events set in motion by previous actions".[108] Arendt labels this as natality — which is the innate human capacity that allows for radical newness to be expressed — and it would seem that it is this concept that Sennett is evoking with his use of 'originality', but Arendt is explicitly clear that it is "in the realm of ideas" that originality is found and it cannot not connected to worldly actions or events.[109] The fact that craftwork is always guided by collective agency prevents such work from being original. The original craftsperson is a contradiction in terms because their work is never "the *sudden* appearance of something where before there was nothing".[110] This is not to suggest that the craftsperson is incapable of change, but rather to point to the conservative and gradual nature of those changes.

This distinction seems contrary to the very examples that Sennett points to in *The Craftsman* — skilled workers who had individual talents and could be considered genius:

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[107] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 143.
[108] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xvii.
[109] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 258.
[110] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 70.

Benvenuto Cellini, a Renaissance goldsmith; Antonio Stradivari and his remarkable violins; and Denis Diderot's *The Encyclopaedia or Dictionary of Arts and Crafts*. The division between the worker as productive and the worker as creative is the key to his salvaging of *homo faber* from Arendt's disdain. It would be easy to assume that Sennett intends to wholly revise Arendt's thoughts on work within *The Human Condition*, but instead *The Craftsman* only salvages a particular kind of worker and establishes a new process to be read into the *vita activa*: an understanding of the worker that engages with the process beyond the mere intention to produce durable objects — *homo faber* with contemplation. While the Arendtian worker "judge[s] in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else", Sennett's craftsperson is motivated by "the desire to do something well, concretely, for its own sake".[111] The relationship that a worker has to production always calls upon the model against which it is fabricating, but the craftsperson aims towards re-creation rather than replication — that is to say, beginning from a prior standard, engaging in a physical, worldly dialogue with that ideal and its maker, and creating something that is contradictorily both a replica of the model and a break from it.

The human being as craftsperson is able to distinguish their unique qualities through worldly products and the inevitable economic interests that arise from those products does not lessen the craftsperson's possibility for distinction. That crafts may resemble the models from which they were inspired does not negate that possibility — a Stradivarius violin may still be a violin, after all, but it is also something else. Further, craft never guarantees a particular outcome — even the most expert of craftspeople can

[111] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 153; Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 144.

find themselves surprised at the results of their work, both in failure and success. This point is particularly important when craft is understood as process of dedication to engagement with the world, rather than merely the production of material goods. It is a thoughtful attention to both the activity and the collective surrounding its creation that distinguishes craft from work, not the material from which a product springs nor the product itself. It is for this reason that pottery and childrearing can equally be said, in Sennett's schema, to be crafts — or not, depending on the attention of the actors involved.

The political implications of craft — particularly when read in relation to the *vita activa* — are complicated: how does the craftsperson fit into the active life given that "Arendt, drawing on a long tradition of political thought stretching back to Machiavelli, believed that statecraft was a self-standing domain of expertise"?[112] An important facet of Sennett's work is that "craftwork turns the craftsman outward".[113] It is by virtue of our relations with others that we are able to learn and develop skills; it is through the experience of critical engagement by others that our products are made significant and recognized as expressions of ourself; and it is the fact that our craftwork will be revealed in public which leads to care and reflection. This becomes a matter of politics and society at large with Sennett's suggestion that

> both the difficulties and the possibilities of making things well apply to making human relationships. Material challenges like working with resistance or managing ambiguity are instructive in understanding the resistances people harbour to one another or the uncertain boundaries between people. I've stressed the positive, open role routine and practicing play in the work of crafting physical things; so too do people need to practice their relations with one another, learn the skills of anticipation and revision in order to improve these relations.[114]

[112] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 290.
[113] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 288.
[114] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 289.

It is not merely a matter of craft as a process by which we create worldly objects, but rather craft as a method of navigating social and political relations. Making relationships is making; likewise politics is the crafting of a state in which we want to live. Rote democracy — the notion of merely voting in occasional elections or donating money to particular campaigns — is all too common in the contemporary world and Sennett suggests that it "demands too little" of its citizens.[115] Yet what it would look like for us to engage politically as craftspeople is left outside of *The Craftsman*.

This is because it is merely the beginning of Sennett's broader questioning on the efficacy of the human being as a worldly being:

> The homo faber project does have an ethical centre, focused on just how much we can become our own masters. In social and personal life we all come up against the limits on desire and will, or the experience of other people's needs which cannot be reconciled with our own. This experience ought to teach modesty, and so promote an ethical life in which we recognize and honour what lies beyond us.[116]

If we understand Sennett to be following from Arendt's concerns with the recovery of the human world then craft becomes an articulation of the vastness of human experiences in that world. Craft blurs the distinction between work and action because "the man-made material object is not a neutral fact".[117] Contrary to Arendt's limited description of working, Sennett suggests that a craftsperson is more than simply aimed towards the end product. Rather craft occurs when we overcome utility and are "engaged in a continual dialogue" with the physical world.[118] In this way, our concrete and bodily experiences are equally capable as the mind in shaping and informing our interactions with each other.

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[115] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 291.
[116] Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), x.
[117] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 293.
[118] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 125.

When we are actively engaged in the process of making — as with craft — we are changed through our involvement with it.

Through craft Sennett hints at a broader political project, quietly suggesting that the active togetherness that is necessary for craft is itself a form of politics — one that is distinct from the Arendtian *polis*, but also distinct from contemporary politicking. Politics exists in our relationships to each other which are shaped by our relationships to the material world, and it is folly to ignore or avoid the sheer commonness of this form of politics. It is as if Sennett serves to remind Arendt of her own appeal to the Greek watchword, "wherever you go will be a *polis*". He advocates for a "connection between work and citizenship [that] may imply socialism, but not necessarily democracy … self-rule supposes the capacity of citizens to work collectively on objective problems, to suspect quick solutions".[119] This is a conception of politics not as a duty of elites nor as a task that is well served by contemporary political institutions and mechanisms, but as a craft that can be engaged in on a daily basis.

Vanessa Lemm and Animality

The sustaining of the self is a process that the human being shares with all other living beings which for Arendt means that, although it is an activity that the human engages in, it is not within the realm of human affairs. The notion of self-sustenance can even be extended beyond life and, following Jane Bennett, into the "vitality intrinsic to materiality"; Bennett's suggestion is that that perhaps all worldly matter has an energy to it that resembles, if not actually is, life.[120] Arendt would even agree that nonhuman — and perhaps nonliving — actors can themselves labor, but she would contest the notion

[119] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 291.
[120] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.

that such similarities elevate animal or material beings to equal standing with human life. Human life *may* be superior to other laborers *as* laborers — she suggests that the human as laboring animal "is indeed only one, at best the highest, of the animal species which populate the earth" — but what ennobles the human being is that it is not solely a laborer or worker; it does not merely sustain itself nor does it simply produce goods.[121] The human being is in possession of and able to disclose its unique, distinct qualities. This follows from Kant's claim that such representation of the self "constitutes the entire dignity of the human being" and "raises him infinitely above all the other beings on earth".[122]

Appeals to the 'solely' human characteristics of consciousness, rationality, and free will resemble Ancient Greek appeals to philosophy: the Socratic claim that "life without enquiry is not worth living for a man" or Plato's utopian city-state wherein "there is no end to political troubles … or even to human troubles in general" without the guiding hand of "philosophers as kings".[123] This is Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, Martin Heidegger's obligation to unconcealment, and Arendt's insistence towards the life of the mind. These intellectuals are all concerned, in different ways, with the processes of thought and activities of thinking — and how important it is to be a thinker. Pointing this out is not to suggest that such concerns are misplaced nor is it to question the conclusions arrived at through such considerations. Rather it is to highlight that politics as the

[121] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 84.
[122] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 264; Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.
[123] Plato, *Great Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Signet Classics, 2008), 526; Plato, *The Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193.

establishment of new, unimagined worlds presupposes that only creative, thinking beings are able to take part in that formative process.

In *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* Vanessa Lemm seeks the "continuity between human and animal life" so as to escape the relations of domination and subordination that currently define their interactions.[124] Arendt sought to establish the possibility for unexpected futures as the basis for a politics of inclusion and, in doing so, rooted the unforeseen in the capacity of thoughtfulness — which can only be expressed by human speech and action — but she fails to articulate why it is necessarily the case that nonhuman actors are incapable of unique, unexpected acts. If Arendt were to concede such a possibility she would be forced to address the problematic relationship of domination that human beings have to the animal world; given the seriousness of the historical context in which she was writing, such an aside, while perhaps a fruitful philosophical inquiry, would have likely been considered frivolous at best. Being positioned beyond the immediacy of the post-war vantage allows for thinking through totalitarian policies outside of fundamental *human* needs. This permits the entrance of otherwise 'superficial' concerns — such as the question of animal rights or the status of the human animal — into politics without a casual dismissal or appeal to immediate concerns. In his review of Lemm's book, Roger Berkowitz makes this point rather clearly. Even as he highlights the value of "rais[ing] questions about the traditional hierarchy of man over animal as the rational animal", he reasserts the moral rightness of that domination in the sentence that follows: "a more important challenge to human

[124] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 86.

distinction originates from the discourse of human rights".[125] Concerns about human life are perpetually valued above non-human interests — only once those are wholly satisfied will it be appropriate turn a biopolitical gaze beyond human considerations.

Lemm's project follows Nietzschean politics as a "stud[y] from the perspective of life, and not, as the Western tradition of political thought largely assumes, as a means to protect human life against the animality of the human being".[126] She establishes a clear difference between culture and civilization as a contrast between remembrance and progress. Civilized human society is marked by a commitment to morality, reasonability, and self-development whereas culture, according to Lemm, is an expression of innocence in which "life emerges and overflows, indifferent to the rationality and morality of its forms and, hence, powerful in its generosity and creativity".[127] This distinction parallels, in a surprising way, Arendt's public and private realms: the rules, order, and rationalism of civil society are the same notions that bind and restrict the possibilities of the private realm; the freedom within cultural relations to act creatively without regard for that which is expected is similar to the Arendtian public *polis*. That it is from our animal natures that we derive what is most valuable about our humanity is precisely Lemm's point — while still acknowledging that there is are qualities that separate human and animal life.

She establishes a distinction between the intellectual, future-oriented human being and the playful, ever-at-hand animal. The human being is always aimed outside of present circumstances and exists in a means-ends relationship with the world around it; the

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[125] Roger Berkowitz, "Liberating the Animal: The False Promise of Nietzsche's Anti-Human Philosophy," *Theory & Event* 13, no. 2 (2010).
[126] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 86.
[127] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 13.

animal, according to Lemm, devotes itself to joys of the moment and is unrestrained in its actions. In Arendtian terms, the animal is the perpetual laborer, but Lemm's conception of the animal differs dramatically. The animal is always concerned with sustaining itself through the present rather than preparation towards the future — and such laboring is not a mindless activity of self-preservation; rather it is a passionate attachment to being engaged in the moment. It is an eagerness for life and its processes that the human being has lost in its commitment to moral and rational thinking, but Lemm does not advocate for a sentimental return to the past:

> In their happiness and forgetfulness, the animals resemble children. The comparison of animals to children suggests that humans are animals that have lost their animality, their forgetfulness, just as they have lost their childlike innocence and happiness. The encounter with the animals reminds the human being of this irrevocable loss. It is suffused with nostalgic longing and a desire to return to a lost childhood, a 'lost paradise'. Nietzsche rejects this fantasy as naïve and romantic … Despite the human's need for history, Nietzsche holds on to the belief that the human being's animal beginning reveals something essential and necessary that belongs to the human being, something which the human being has lost and needs to recover in order to enhance the future of its life form.[128]

To return to an idyllic origin in which we were mere animals would be a rejection of that which makes us human. Rather Lemm is suggesting that we would be better served by understanding ourselves as more than *merely* human. As Nietzsche remarks, within each individual human "belongs another world; for every soul every other soul is a world behind … [but] for those that think as [animals] do all things are already dancing: they come and shake hands and laugh and flee—and come back again".[129] The isolation of the human being — which cannot be helped because it is "tied to a world of memory" — prevents its happiness from ever being more than "an illusion and a simulacrum of the

[128] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 89.
[129] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 190.

animal's happiness".[130] Memory, history, and the perception of truth avert the human being from the experience of the present.

While the force that most obviously stands in opposition to memory is forgetfulness, Lemm does not suggest that the human being altogether reject the grounding that remembrance provides. The human being may be an animal, but it is not merely an animal. The two seemingly contrary forces can be united within the human animal so as to develop a new respect for the vast multitude of processes that humans intersect with — and this will allow for a recognition that the human *species* cannot be understood, or even properly viewed, without acknowledging the domination that marks the relationship of the human being to the totality of animal life (albeit to differing degrees depending on species, situation, and individual qualities). Forgetfulness is a break from the world that is merely a product of that which came prior in favor of an understanding that the world could be otherwise. This is the animal quality that mostly remains dormant in human affairs, but occasionally is brought forth in "the beginning and rebeginning of philosophy" and this philosophy that Lemm espouses is similar to Arendtian action: "forgetfulness affirms the human animal as the center of the unexpected, the unpredictable, and the miraculous, a form of life characterized by the freedom to begin and rebegin".[131] Rather than the possibility for action resulting from our uniquely human qualities, it is only by drawing upon animal forgetfulness that we are granted the capacity for philosophy, action, and radical newness.

Lemm seeks to salvage the animal because she follows Michel Foucault's point that civilization depends entirely upon "dividing and imposing a hierarchy on the

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[130] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 89.
[131] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 94.

continuum of life [which] betrays its affinity with racism" and she explicitly extends this to human-animal relations by "denying validity to the division among species".[132] Lemm's animality is an acknowledgement that, in addition to our distinctly human qualities, we are also animals and, further, that which makes us uniquely human — whether following Plato, Kant, or Arendt — does not definitively mark the human as superior except in the context of that particular trait. Just as Aristotle's Great Chain of Being was a crafted hierarchy, so too is the Arendtian *vita activa* — as are all narratives that attempt to establish an absolute ordering of being. Reason, speech, and thoughtfulness are merely capacities of being human and, according to Lemm, rather than granting the human being access to metaphysical truths actually serves as barriers to the "silent truth of the animal".[133]

In his review of *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, Berkowitz reminds us of Nietzsche's justification for opposing the rational ordering of the world — as established through science, logic, and reason:

> For Nietzsche, as for Rilke, the Aristotelian "animal having logos" and the Kantian "*vernünftige Lebewesen*" have become nothing more than rational, calculating, planning, and ordering animals. Caught in a world of thoughts, concepts, and reflections, man is trapped in a rationality that cuts him from the infinite openness of truth. Rational animals would be spectators who can never escape the world that we ourselves create with our ordering knowledge.[134]

Such an existence would be the complete degradation of humanity through the very processes that define the human being as unique. The "new humanism" that Lemm seeks by "affirming, rather than denying our dependence on animality" is explicitly meant to

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[132] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 155; Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 156.
[133] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 114.
[134] Roger Berkowitz, "Liberating the Animal: The False Promise of Nietzsche's Anti-Human Philosophy," *Theory & Event* 13, no. 2 (2010).

oppose politics of domination and subordination of animal life, but *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* does not point towards worldly examples of such policies.[135] There is no attempt to navigate the complexities that such an understanding would have for politics, morality, or the social. This seems entirely appropriate for a philosophy project such as Lemm's, because she seeks to salvage animality within Nietzsche's writings rather than to establish a material history of the animal itself. Yet without being grounded by particular policies, governments and events Lemm's revaluation of the animal is ultimately boundless. She reduces all life to a single entity so as to "mov[e] beyond species life" and highlight its "artificial character".[136] In doing so, she fails to articulate the contours of her conception of animality and as a result leaves the human animal open to what Berkowitz claims is "a vast, undifferentiated, and yawning freedom of infinite possibility [and] what such a freedom forgets is that humans live in a world".[137]

Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy is a de-emphasis on reason and a compelling account of the human animal, but it lives solely within the works of Nietzsche. There is no practical consideration of animal life; instead Lemm engages with Nietzsche's idyllic and poetic version of the animal that seems incomplete and unworldly. The 'innocence' of all life is a claim that seems wholly untenable. Most of us have lived experiences with the animal world that, at the very least, make problematic Lemm's claim that "those who have recovered the forgetfulness of the animal are those who do not dwell in the past".[138] Animal life — at least some animal life — seems entirely capable of dwelling in the past, entirely contrary to her forgetfulness thesis. As counterexamples, Donna Haraway might

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[135] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 156.
[136] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 156.
[137] Roger Berkowitz, "Liberating the Animal: The False Promise of Nietzsche's Anti-Human Philosophy," *Theory & Event* 13, no. 2 (2010).
[138] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 69.

point to the peculiarities of ‘training’ dogs (and being ourselves likewise trained) or to the complexities of primate relations. I also find myself thinking about whales separated from their kin or the encroachment of human civilization into animal territory. If she has not her own experiences to draw upon, I would challenge Lemm to look to thinkers such as Jane Goodall or Steven Wise — and ask herself whether they consider the animal to lack memory. It requires a particularly narrow conception of memory so as to discount the numerous examples of animal remembrance.

If Lemm was fixated on Nietzsche alone, philosophically rather than hinting towards a practical and political blurring of species divisions beyond human plurality, then her argument might find itself on stronger footing. Yet Lemm is also suggesting that she has arrived at an absolute truth that overcomes the ‘artificial’ hierarchies of political philosophy despite that her understanding of the human being and its relationship to animal life is as much a constructed narrative as those of Plato, Kant, or Arendt. Even if her claim merely regards the superiority of animal life over all other forms of life, the tree or the flower would seem to be at least as capable of her conception of forgetting as an animal (if not more so). The problem is that Lemm is attempting to come up with an absolute metaphysical truth as opposed to a contextual narrative that is rooted in the conditional. Either she must accommodate all life — and even that might prove too limiting — or she must admit that she has simply crafted a different biopolitical narrative. As Berkowitz describes it, Lemm’s project is “the revaluation of the *human* animal as the human *animal*”, but she is unable to altogether escape the fact of the human.[139] To accept that worldliness itself is domination and that self-sustaining is a process that necessarily

[139] Roger Berkowitz, "Liberating the Animal: The False Promise of Nietzsche’s Anti-Human Philosophy," *Theory & Event* 13, no. 2 (2010).

involves domination — at least against some form of life — results in a being that is forced to either accept itself as sovereign over others or submit to the needs of those others and reject its very self. There are coherent philosophical positions that accommodate such understandings: Mohandas Gandhi's conception of *ahimsa* is an obligation based on the sacred nature of a particularly broad conception of life itself and an absolute principle by which one should live by, but is always also contradicted by a need to sustain oneself. The notion of 'justifiable and imperative' violence or domination is rejected in a Gandhian politics, but complete adherence to nonviolence is impossible due to obligations that are eternally in opposition. Lemm makes no moves to place her philosophy within such contradictions nor does she admit the possibility — which is not to suggest that she would be opposed to the notion, but simply to state that her project is unfinished in this regard.

This is a particularly troubling point for Lemm's work, because of the way in which it seems to reject the very worldly experience of animal life itself. The innocence of the animal is an apt enough poetic device, but it seems an impossible point to defend that the naive purity of animality as a universal principle — to say nothing of forgetfulness as she articulates it. Furthermore animals most certainly commit violence, both in the experiences of sustaining themselves in the world and in relation to each other — unless Lemm is indicating that nature is a harmonious utopia in which all beings live without self-consideration and solely for the well being of each other. How innocent is the lion in the eyes of the zebra? This conception of the animal is simply another articulation of Arendt's laborer which is bound up in unending processes of biology and

thus is “dominated by the necessities of life”,[140] This is not to undermine Lemm through her reading of Nietzsche — that is a prospect that is beyond the scope of this thesis. *Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy* may be an apt addition to Nietzschean thought and there are certainly interesting ways to connect Lemm to Arendt, but the intent of her project — to rethink the hierarchy of animal life — is insufficient as a *worldly* project. The conclusions that she draws out do not warrant utilizing her understanding to revise the *vita activa* through animality. There is merit to the notion that the distinction between animal and human (or between nature and artifice) is a self-serving construction, but appealing to universal, absolute truths serves only to return us to a rejection of worldliness and thus is ill-suited to the project of politics that Arendt articulates as distinctly worldly engagement.

‘The Truth is a Trap’

Despite my difficulties with *Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy* and the accuracy of Berkowitz’s critique, I want to suggest that Berkowitz misses the mark on Lemm — and on all theorists concerned with the problem of politics beyond human plurality — in his suggestion that animals are incapable engaging in the world as humans do. It may be wholly correct to suggest that only human beings are capable of worldly engagement, but Arendt — and Berkowitz’s own work — is rooted in a deep anxiety about way that the experiential world is lost in favor of universal truths. They are thinkers that are deeply perturbed by the way that we seem to have given up on practical involvement in life's happenings. We, as theorists, should turn ourselves towards politics beyond human plurality because it is already the case that human beings have, in very worldly and engaged ways, made such a turn. The question of, "Is animal life capable of human

[140] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 84.

politics?" is, although perhaps important, practically meaningless, because there are people who live as if the answer is yes. We, as theorists concerned with worldly engagement, should begin from that vantage and ask the much more difficult question of, "How is it the case that we can understand animal life as being capable of politics?". Although Sennett is not looking to animality, his exploration of craft is significantly closer to this latter question than the former. Given the rise of handiwork and craft as an art rather than merely as work towards capital, how might it be the case that the worker engaged in a form of politics?

In his journals, Søren Kierkegaard claims that “the truth is a trap: you cannot get it without it getting you; you cannot get the truth by capturing it, only by its capturing you”; similarly, Martin Heidegger wrote in *Poetry, Language, Thought* that “we never come to thoughts. They come to us”.[141] The aim towards revelation is itself an artifice, a concealment of sorts. Thinking necessarily involves the establishment of hierarchies, but such ordering of the world is always a product of thought rather than an absolute and binding truth. By seeking to order the world, a representation of the world is crafted — a representation that rests upon the assumption that there is an order of things. It is this assumption upon which all human affairs are predicated, but Arendt herself articulated that “we have lost yardsticks by which to measure”.[142] By this she meant that the universal truths that once grounded existence have become untethered from certainty; the very foundations of the world in which we live are at question and yet we continue to live within it.

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[141] Søren Kierkegaard and ed. Charles E. Moore, *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* (Farmington: Plough Publishing House, 1999), 424; Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 6.
[142] Hannah Arendt, *Understanding Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 321.

In their own ways, both Sennett and Lemm can be seen as attempting to accommodate other possibilities that Arendt had not intended: Sennett explicitly contesting Arendt's broad category of human work and Lemm reimagining human culture as coming out of our connection to animality and labor. Both approaches reject the existing hierarchy and founding structures of political and social life by appealing to beings that seem to exhibit qualities in common with the traditional, politicking human. The strength of Sennett's project is his limited scope and his focus on a process, rather than a particular being. It is not his intent to suggest that all workers are aimed towards worldly engagement, but rather that workers have the capacity to be thusly engaged. It may be a fine distinction, but it a core philosophical point that separates Sennett from Lemm. Sennett's conception of the craftsperson is not meant to be an affirmation of all human beings but rather as an endorsement of the process of craft itself; Lemm's animality and endorsement of forgetfulness makes her an advocate for all animal life as always already creative, innocent, and free. Sennett looks to worldliness as adequate grounding for the governing of worldly actions, while Lemm considers a philosophical schema as appropriate for that same task. This latter is what Nietzsche meant by the shadow of God that "darken[s] our minds".[143] It is a consideration of philosophy as a series of universals able to speak to the particular rather than the exploration of particulars that may incidentally reach beyond their context.

While Lemm offers possible insight as to a new relationship between human and animal life, her model falls into the very trap that Arendt was seeking to avoid with the *vita activa*. Sennett offers a valuable modification to the conception of the active life, but his model proves limited in navigating the complexities of politicking in the

[143] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 169.

contemporary world with nonhuman actors. As a defence of political, human life the *vita activa* is an appropriate understanding, but if it is systematically applied to all situations and circumstances it is found wanting. Contemporary politics is marked by the entrance of numerous non-traditional actors into the political sphere. Thinkers such as Lemm and Sennett can be used to adapt the *vita activa* to include these actors, but the *vita activa* is strongly rooted in action as a *human* process and as the ultimate expression of politics. Without a reconsideration of that core aspect of Arendt's philosophy, the inclusion of non-traditional actors will always have a contradiction at its core. Her politics begins with the presumption of who (or what) is capable of shaping the world — that is, capable of action and politics itself. The events that will be considered expressions of radical newness can be expected and predicted to come from certain actors — and this creates an inconsistency with the very concept of unpredictable, possible futures. Politics has always been marked by a conflict over who is permitted the right to share in decision making and the establishment of new worlds, but this contradiction is particularly troubling from Arendt who advocates for a democratic and open conception of togetherness so as to better establish a form of politics that is suitable to all involved. To merely accept the status quo is to foreclose certain possibilities. While perhaps acceptable to those that are included in the political process, the act of entering into politics itself is always necessarily an exclusion. If one seeks to include the excluded then this initial decision — perhaps occurring *before* politics — needs to be acknowledged, contested, and worked through.

Chapter Three: The Enduring Life

The Three Deaths of Being

The status quo in political thought has long been a perception that political action is solely a capacity of the human being — and, in many cases, only *some* human beings at that. Arendt herself is not free of this, but nor are many philosophers. We, as human beings, tend to search for definite answers, to seek solid ground on which to stand and deliberate, as if it is possible to craft the unexpected into a particular future — and, if the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are any indication, indeed we believe that we can. The world itself is no longer unknowable nor even is the vast, infinite universe, and human beings themselves can be moulded, shaped, and herded into certain actions and behaviors. Although this is a common enough refrain in contemporary politics, I do not wish to suggest that this represents the sum total of the discourse. There are numerous thinkers that position themselves directly in opposition to these very projects — Arendt is one such philosopher, but she does not stand alone: totalizing narratives are contradicted by numerous works and Sennett, Arendt, and Nietzsche are but three examples within a much broader discourse. Yet it is still certainly the case that politics in the world — if not in theory — is marked by a tendency towards certainty. It may not be the case that unpredictability can be wholly eliminated, but it can be made undesirable and, thus, unlikely. Such is always an attempt to treat the shadowy future as a historical event, as merely the product of a series of causes. The establishment of predictive models — the reduction of all existence through rational-scientific means — is one method out of the conflict between novelty and anticipation, but such an approach makes us prisoners of our experiences. To give up the possibility for newness is to reject what Arendt believes

makes human life — or what Lemm believes makes *all* life — worthwhile. We must act, but, having acted, we often find that we have misstepped. This is as true for politics as it is for the creation of societies and even the most noble and righteous political actors are not free from error. What then is the intent with contesting the boundaries of Arendt's *vita activa*? What good will it do?

While Arendt is probably correct in her claim that "we are not in the nursery", it is also not the case that we have recovered worldliness as she hoped that we would.[144] It is likely that Arendt would look to the contemporary world and be concerned with a number of our trajectories: the boundaries between the public and the private have been breached; the social and the political bleed into each other, and there are no longer separate realms for labor, work, and action. We live in a culture where surveillance is ubiquitous, where politicians operate based on focus groups and polling data, and where digital memory seeks to ensure that *all* things will be saved, recorded, and one day catalogued. When all things are remembered the meaningfulness of enduring in the minds of others is lost. To endure becomes commonplace — until finally it is expected. Memory becomes simply another process that we can count upon in our world. It has increasingly become apparent that we have lost the possibility for endurance: we *will* endure. And this endurance can be measured in the number of Twitter followers or Facebook likes or YouTube comments. The bureaucratization of memory occurs daily. The entirety of politics hangs on the *possibility* of memory. Not merely the fact it, but the possibility itself.

What does it mean to live in a world where being remembered is not the experience of rising out of the shade of private realms, but rather is a nearly inescapable fact? For Arendt it might be living, but it would not be a life. Newness loses its radical

[144] Hannah Arendt, *The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), 310.

quality when it is common; witnessing ceases to matter when it is omnipresent. What is at stake with the question of endurance is the common world itself; it is the very possibility of politicking that is at risk. As Roger Berkowitz writes:

> The burden of the past, the logs on our shoulders, are part of who we are and they are a part of the world in which we live. There is no political world … without memory and memorials that transcend a single human lifespan. Without memories that raise us above our finite lives to an immortal public realm, there is no common world.[145]

The nature of endurance then is not merely an aside to 'real' political questions. It is the foundation upon which politics is built. That we have found a method of ensuring memory would seem to strengthen our interactions with each other, permitting the revelation of radical newness, and allowing for the elevation of the human being. Instead an odd tension has arisen between political apathy and overwhelming plurality.

If we are to endure into perpetuity by virtue of merely taking part in the world itself, then why are we so hesitant to participate in the world at all? Representative democracies have done an incredible job of reducing the obligation of citizens to taxes and the franchise — and even the latter is up for debate, as people frequently eschew even that meagre form of political action. This is, of course, not universal; look to the Arab Spring or Idle No More. People do still throw themselves onto the machinery of politics, but the legitimacy of such movements is often hotly contested — as if to suggest that there are certain places and modes of engagements for citizens. Even as people recognize that power exists in togetherness itself, the state and society at large disapprove of such displays and contest their validity. Apathy — which can be understood in contemporary politics as willfully subsuming oneself before the machinations of the

[145] Roger Berkowitz, "Bearing Logs on Our Shoulders: Reconciliation, Non-Reconciliation, and the Building of a Common World," *Theory & Event* 14, no. 1 (2011).

bureaucracy — becomes the only appropriate mode of engaging with the political process. Even the willingness to discuss politics becomes too extreme for consideration. That which we already consider worthy, capable, and intelligible provides the limits of participation within our democracies and democratic systems.

Further I would suggest that a very real fear has arisen in a world where everything is action. Prior to the blending of public and private realms, people could choose when and how to draw themselves out of their isolated life and display themselves to others. Granted they would never be assured that others would take them as intended, but there was always a measure of control. Now it is to be assumed that we are always within a public space, that our present actions may be pulled into the future at some later date and used to define us. To live in that manner requires constant vigilance, an unparalleled wakefulness and attention to the infinite possibilities that could result from our actions. It is not surprising that we have accepting the flattening of our unique qualities that is apathy. The expression of radical newness has always involved a risk, but prior to modern technologies we had a measure of control over those risks.

At the same time, the notion of limitless surveillance makes plurality and the expression of radical newness too overwhelming for the human being. We are not, ourselves, digital beings and thus we cannot parse the seemingly limitless possibilities that exist within digital memory. Even as more is remembered through these technologies, accessing any particular memory becomes difficult; our interactions with the digital must be mediated in some manner, often in ways that are completely incomprehensible to us in our usage. As one such example, although there are many, consider the secrecy around the Google Search algorithms.

Memory is vital for the undertaking of politics and radical newness, and I would suggest that this is a fact that is increasingly being realized in groups and movements that turn towards the inclusion of the non-traditional into politics. This is a counter culture that is rooted, whether consciously or not, in attempting to recover the world again, to give meaning to the notion of enduring by turning away from the entirely predictable and common gaze of other human beings. This is the project that Vanessa Lemm was engaged in, and we can see it more clearly in the works of Jane Bennett, Donna Haraway, and Bruno Latour — but such thinking can be found far beyond scholarly work. There are numerous political groups — and individual projects — that insist on a respect for the nonhuman world. People rallying around the notion that we cannot solely consider ourselves when we make decisions, even if barriers of communication prevent us from meaningfully understanding those unlike ourselves. These are forms of politics and memory that is understood far more broadly than Arendt's conception of either. Without speech and shared language, action and endurance is an impossibility for her. To that claim, some would point to suffering, pain, or pleasure as a grammar that can be shared among all life; others might suggest consciousness is a concept that could be expanded to include beings that are not human; and others still would take the very difficulty of communication as a justification for complete nonviolence and noninterference.

Instead of viewing all of these particular notions as isolated from each other, I understand them all — even in their disagreements over what nonhuman actors should be permitted in the public sphere — as speaking to the most fundamental of facts about worldliness: the futility of being at all, that worldly beings attempt to endure despite the fact that we know that we will not. In *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*, J.

Edward Chamberlin suggests that it is necessary to "develop a greater comfort level with contradictions as a way of life".[146] It is a plea to be both deeply convinced that the world is at it appears to be from one's own vantage and to be open to the possibility that the world is more vast and complex than can be comprehended. Rather than a complete rejection of predictions, this is an understanding of politics that is entrenched in forecasting towards possible futures — as it is all but impossible to live in the world without being informed by the past — but that demands a readiness to relinquish those possibilities when presented with the unexpected. While Chamberlin is not directly in dialogue with Arendt, this recalls her notion of promising as a mode of politicking within this contradiction:

> The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises. The two faculties belong together in so far as one of them, forgiving, serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose "sins" hang like Damocles' sword over every new generation; and the other, binding oneself through promises, serves to set up in the ocean of uncertainty, which the future is by definition, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men.[147]

If an act that attempts to shape the world beyond merely the self is violence then a promise is a commitment to certain actions (or inactions, as the case may be) and, possibly, to forgo one's desired world in favor of that of another's. Although sacrifice, as Nietzsche explains in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, is not necessarily required for promising: an assurance to act towards a future that is already desired by the guarantor still requires that they "have learned to separate necessary from accidental acts; to think causally; to see distant things as though they were near at hand;

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[146] J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004), 233.
[147] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 237.

to distinguish means from ends".[148] More than any other interaction, promises require leaps of imagination so as to conceive of ourselves as other than we are: as beings able to both predict the future and be ourselves predictable. Through either the written or oral word, promises — when made sincerely with the intent to follow through — allow for the establishment of community, but because of their tenuous nature promises themselves do not perpetuate these relations. The potential cost of a promise is a future disruption of the will to act in certain ways, but this potentiality is never realized. Promises do not foreclose possible futures, so when the particular moment of the promise's realization arrives the will is still present: the choice to abide by one's word is always a willing towards a desired world. No commitment can prevent the unexpected from occurring so a promise is, at best, always a hope for a possible future. It is not the promise itself that sustains a community, but rather memory of past adherences — which ensures that we are never merely just promising animals.

This notion of promising is drawn out of *On the Genealogy of Morality* in which Nietzsche describes the promisor as a "fully emancipated man, master of his will … viewing others from the center of his own being [and] either honors or disdains them".[149] Accordingly, this kind of promise is always an exercise in strength and domination — both over other beings and over the future itself. The statement, "I will…" is among the most boastful of claims that can be made: it is to serve as guarantor towards possibility despite the fact of worldly inconsistency. Promising, according to Nietzsche, leads to *ressentiment* and disdain — there is a counter-oath to every covenant: the "I will…"

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[148] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy; and, The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 190.
[149] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy; and, The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 191.

comes with the corresponding punishment, “If you do not…”. Arendt’s conception of promising differs in that “the wounds opened by promising are not only my own to bear … but they are also borne by others”.[150] We are forced into relations with each other through the experience — and it is precisely this togetherness from which the human being comes to its free will: “freedom arises from the power of the ‘We’ rather than from the will power of the isolated individual”.[151] *Ressentiment* is certainly a possibility, but Arendt’s suggestion is that this should not, and indeed cannot, ever be a guarantee. It is never necessarily the case that we *will* fall into disdain. Rather than being certain that the future will be as we wish it to be, the Arendtian promise attempts towards that future, but also lives within the community that arises out of the promise itself — not merely its guarantee. In this way, one can understand Sennett’s depiction of craft — that of a task that we enter into with a hoped outcome, but always also for itself — as a physical, worldly manifestation of the Arendtian promise.

The Arendtian notion that it is only action that holds “the capacity of beginning anew” — and that work and labor merely “provide and preserve the world” — holds true within a particularly bounded conception of being human in the world, but it is never the case that we, as with all beings, wholly endure through the experience of living.[152] The insertion of time and memory into the world guarantees that all beings are ever-changing, if only by virtue of their chronological position. Time ensures that the conditions of now itself cannot possibly be sustained — that which continues to exist does so at the expense of that which was. Yet it is still the case that there is an internal continuity of sorts that

[150] Daniel Brandes, "Nietzsche, Arendt, and the Promise of the Future," *Animus: The Canadian Journal of Philosophy And Humanities* 14 (2010).

[151] Vanessa Lemm, “Memory and Promise in Arendt and Nietzsche,” *Revista de Ciencia Politica* 26 no. 2 (2006), 163.

[152] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

exists with regard to individual beings. Following Heidegger, "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not be itself".[153] This understanding cannot be formally examined, but instead can only be alluded to as a lacking:

> Perhaps when Dasein addresses itself in the way which is nearest to itself, it always says it is I, and finally says this most loudly when it is "not" this being. What if the fact that Dasein is so constituted that it is in each case mine were the reason for the fact that Dasein is, initially and for the most part not itself? … The "I" must be understood only in the sense of a noncommittal formal indication of something which perhaps reveals itself in the actual phenomenal context of being as that being's "opposite". Then "not I" by no means signifies something like a being which is essentially lacking "I-Hood", but means a definite mode of being of the "I" itself.[154]

The nuance of Heidegger's point here is that a question such as that asked by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* — "To be or not to be?" — is indicative of a being that exists behind and before the self that asks the very question, but this being only gains its *is*-ness through the negation of the being that it is not. Prior to negation, the possibility of that which a being *is not* is a property of that being. The self cannot endure into perpetuity. All beings face towards death — to live is always a turning away from such an end, but is ultimately futile. The attempt to overcome finitude is itself a death. It requires a rejection of the immediate self in favor of an understanding of the self that may possibly exist into the future. Even the most stubborn of beings cannot help but be changed through the passage of time. Yet despite this it is possible to achieve a measure of success and endure. This is because we are always faced towards three deaths: the cessation of being itself; the removal of all corporeal markings upon the world; and the psychic death, to be forgotten and have no further impressions left upon the minds of others.

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[153] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 11.
[154] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 113.

It may be that the *telos* of all beings is death, but that only highlights the absurdity of life itself. Just as our search for meaning in the world is met by the impossibility of certainty, so too do we come to this contradiction between optimism and impotence in our attempts at endurance. The choice to continue to live in the world despite the fact of our impermanence is what Albert Camus calls "the only truly philosophical problem" — and yet because we are not isolated beings, even the decision not to endure may ensure the very opposite.[155] Likewise those that attempt a measure of permanence may themselves be forgotten. Rather than succumbing to the futility of this, Camus suggests "by the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death — and I refuse suicide".[156] By continuing to live despite our inability to find meaning and by continuing to live despite our inability to truly endure, we find a meaning and an endurance, of sorts.

There is no mode of being that permits even the possibility of total isolation. We are as we have been made, by family and friends, by enemies and lovers, by those that came into our lives, if only briefly, and laid their mark upon us. Those marks upon our selfhood cannot ever be completely erased, because even their erasure is another mark of sorts. To be isolated is to be alone with oneself and, while we can be with ourself, those markings ensure that we have a history, that we are never truly alone. Arendt asserts that action "creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history", but she fails to follow that claim back through work and labor so as to understand how both processes are irrevocably altered by the insertion of memory into the world.[157] Labor and work can only be preservation of that which *is* within an understanding of being that is, to quote

[155] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 3.
[156] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 64.
[157] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

John Donne, “an island entire of itself”, but this perception of being as wholly isolated falters because “every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main”.[158]

The notion of work and labor as simple preservation falters. It is not that we briefly put ourselves into the world so as to make things. We attach ourselves to the products of our labour, becoming a part of something else as much as it becomes a part of us. In this way, we give ourselves up to the material that we work upon and we lose a part of ourselves when we leave psychic impressions upon others. We impress the world with our being and others do likewise with us. This is not the tethering of one to another; there is no permanent web of connections that pulls us to-and-fro, bound to puppet each other’s lives. We are moulded and remoulded in our interactions — and such constitutions of our being continue to occur with every interaction and influence that we encounter.

If we remove the mistaken assumption that preservation is possible, if we reject the notion that it is possible for anything to merely *be*, then we are left with an understanding that it is always already the case that we, by virtue of being in the world, express ourselves in such a way that we endure beyond the moment. According to Arendt, this is not itself action, because this form of endurance is nothing more than species life and cannot be said to show distinct qualities that separate us from the herd. Bureaucracy and thoughtlessness trouble Arendt because they are indicative of species life in that they prevent the human from being in the world of others in such a way that allows individuals to express their unique qualities. These concerns mirror Nietzsche’s herd instinct and the encountering of “morality [which] trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to

[158] John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 108.

ascribe value to himself only as a function".[159] Bureaucracy, according to Arendt, replaces togetherness with administration — and thoughtlessness replaces unique action with rote behaviour — until eventually the "rule by nobody" is victorious.[160] Not only do all individual human beings become cogs in the grandeur of the human species, but humanity itself becomes nothing more than a function of the majesty of existence — or of mathematics, phenomena, or norms.

This is the final result of causal thinking. We, human beings, transcend the worldliness of our experiences, because they are no longer ours alone. Experiences are merely the results of a long chain of causes and effects we had no choice but to exist within. This elimination of will (and indeed reality itself) is all done for the purpose of securing the future against the whims of possibility. It is the ultimate form of promising wherein one agrees to eschew the self in favor of an absolute truth: cause and effect. In such a world, death becomes impossible — not because we are made immortal through causality, but because such a life is a failure to live. There can be no display of our own radical newness if all our actions have been predetermined by events set in motion long ago: even the slave is better suited to revealing itself than the causal being for the slave can choose to revolt against its master — although perhaps at the cost of its life — but the causal being is forever and completely at the mercy of its causes. This complete rejection of the will is an apocalyptic trajectory and the contemporary world has numerous examples of our accepting impotence when faced with the inevitable. Even if one only considers human life to have value, look to the ease with which most people consent to the structures of capitalism that, at best, enslave others: there is tacit agreement to the

[159] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 174.
[160] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 45.

treatment of some people as nothing more than means towards attaining particular objects — or as mere objects themselves.

The danger of bureaucratic thinking is that it neglects the significance of worldly experiences in favor of universal truths; it prevents togetherness and, in doing so, makes less likely the possibility of displaying our radical newness. Destruction and violence, though perhaps terrible, leave their mark upon the world and as such have the possibility of being remembered; bureaucracy and annihilation are much more stark because they eliminate memory altogether — both in content and capacity. In this manner, Arendt understands both the atomic bomb and the bureaucratic institution to be world-obliterating technologies, removing the humanity of their users as well as that of those whom they are aimed. This capacity may seem obvious with nuclear weaponry, but Arendt's own example of Adolf Eichmann helps to problematize this connection of thoughtlessness to annihilation:

> When confronted with situations for which such routine procedures did not exists, he was helpless, and his cliché-ridden language produced on the stand, as it had evidently done in his official life, a kind of macabre comedy. Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. If we were responsive to this claim all the time, we would be exhausted; Eichmann differed from the rest of us only in that he clearly knew of no such claim at all.[161]

This thoughtlessness, entirely contrary to worldly action, is what ensured that Eichmann "never realized what he was doing".[162] Yet Eichmann endures. He endured into his trial

[161] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 4.
[162] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 287.

and continues to be impressed upon our minds long after his last words.[163] How can it be the case that he failed in action — failed to express himself in his distinct uniqueness — and yet he endures? In fact, it well may be that his thoughtlessness and the aim towards which it was directed are exactly what permitted his endurance in the District Court of Jerusalem, in Arendt, and in us today.

Action requires the recognition of others. All that a being can do is begin the process as it only becomes action at all when that beginning endures in the world. The attempt itself is meaningful only in so far as it can be witnessed, but even the failure to act can have the possibility of revealing unexpected qualities. The expression of unique individual qualities is significant because it is an attempt to gain some measure of control over the unpredictability of witnessing; likewise with the establishment of a public realm wherein such a witnessing is more likely. Just as the body politick is not an actual body, the *polis* that Arendt imagines is not a physical space that can be circumscribed. A *polis* is created whenever people gather together and reveal themselves *as* themselves: "it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the world, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me".[164] It is a space that embraces the contradiction of being together — the recognition that we are both equal to each other and still somehow wholly unique.

It is never the case that such spaces are able to guarantee endurance. Witnessing — both in possibility and nature — is unpredictable, but it is the process by which endurance becomes possible. To enter into a *polis* is to promise to remember, to ensure that a being is not without their place in history. It is not an agreement that can be negated

[163] "After a short while, gentlemen, *we shall all meet again*. Such is the fate of all men. Long live Germany, love in Argentina, long live Austria. *I shall not forget them*." (qtd. in Arendt 2006, 252).
[164] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198.

because being together always contains within it memory. Only through isolation — total isolation from the world — can we be made impotent and unchanging, and it is only in the three deaths that this isolation can be found. Politics is in opposition to isolation, in opposition to the three deaths of being. I reject both the focus on human activities and the hierarchy of processes inherent to Arendt's *vita activa*. It is not the human condition with which I am concerned; rather it is the condition of being in the world. This is a conception of politics that is not merely the mechanisms by which we govern ourselves; rather, politics of this sort should be understood as the tools and sites that allow and encourage us to reveal ourselves to each other. This is not to suggest that the *vita activa* is an absurd method for explaining human interactions with each other, but rather that I believe a strict adherence to the principles of the active life serve to limit the possibility of endurance. Arendt recognized that if we were to maintain attentive focus towards all of existence "we would soon be exhausted" and one of Eichmann's many flaws was that such attention was altogether outside of his grasp.[165] Yet the *vita activa* does not reveal the full totality of reality. As with all theories, it is a lens through which the world becomes obscured. One such detail that is obfuscated is that, despite the futility of finite existence in the face of infinitude, beings — and not simply individual human beings — endure. Just as there is the threefold death of being, I maintain that there are three fundamental processes by which beings oppose those deaths: work, action, and labor. While this concepts have been retained from Arendt, they have been reimagined from Arendt's schema so as to be understood from our contemporary vantage. Likewise they have been reordered. This has been done for two reasons: the first is to remove the notion that they necessarily build upon and allow for each other, instead these processes are

[165] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 4.

meant to be fluid and can both allow for and contradict each other — it is possible to be engaged in all three simultaneously or for the undertaking of one to negate another; the second is that labor is conceptually more difficult and can be understood in much broader terms than work and action.

Work

Work is any process by which a being attempts to mark the physical world with its presence. This certainly includes Arendt's notion of "the work of our hands", the re-creation of goods, and the fabrication of the world, but it extends beyond the understanding of skilled production.[166] When work moves beyond merely the attempt and actually produces something in the world — whether by intention or accident — the result is a physical memory of presence: a material object that can be witnessed in a bodily manner. That which is traditionally understood as the production of goods is an aspect of work, but it is also the introduction of change into the physical world and as such includes all manner of modifications, alterations, and transformations. When work is witnessed it is the marking of the physical world with the self.

Work does not occur in a vacuum and the fabrication of goods is not without history. To produce something new requires the destruction of the old — or *an* old. Use objects are produced from something else, which means that their fabrication involves at least two instances of work: the collection of material components and the transformation of these components into use objects. Sennett showed that work and action could be paired to craft worldly objects that were new expressions, but his craft requires expert hands for unique handiwork. The suggestion is that work alone does not leave an impression upon the world — it is only when coupled with expertise that a work endures

[166] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 85.

to become craft. This requirement is, of course, in addition to being in the world with others: the role of memory in craft again places the witness in the position of determination. The necessity of expertise comes into question. Work consists of all attempts at physically enduring, but endurance itself is at the whim of witnessing. It is also never the case that we ourselves endure through work, merely a facsimile of us. Even that it fails to adequately grasp what occurs through work. To quote Judith Butler, "my narrative falters, as it must".[167] The insertion of ourself into our works is never actually an insertion nor does it result in a duplication of our being, but as inadequate as these metaphors are, they serve as the best possible explanation.

The alteration of the physical world — in both the collection of material goods for production and aimless, destructive violence — is likewise an attempt at endurance. The craftsperson is able to make changes to the world in a detailed and particular way so that it can be said that their crafts are a continuation of their being, again as a facsimile, but it is not solely traditional products that can be witnessed in this way. All changes are capable of marking in such a way that allows for witnessing and thus endurance. There is no conceptual difference between the sculptor that carves away stone — destroying the slab from which they started upon — and the woodcutter that takes an axe to tree — doing violence to both the life process and form they first observed. Both workers are uniquely changing the physical world; they are not just distinct from each other *as workers*, but also as a result of their individual capacities and qualities. The possibility for endurance that comes from the witness is not materially changed by the fact that the sculptor is defined as an artist and the woodcutter is not. Both products can endure as unique expressions if they are witnessed as such. This can be the case even without

[167] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2006), 23.

expertise: amateur work can also establish the possibility of endurance. Expertise may make such endurance more likely, but it would seem to depend wholly on the nature and disposition of the witness: novelty can be shown in both inferiority and superiority. It may be the case that endurance is particularly suited to extreme differences, but even that is not assured; all difference allows for is the possibility of endurance.

Action

Speech and language are clearly models for Arendtian action. Action is a worldly event that must be immediately witnessed to endure, that leaves no physical trace after its appearance, and can be uttered again by those that were witness to the original. Yet these assumptions are challenged in the contemporary world by our culture of surveillance and in the context of ubiquitous digital memory. Beyond the notable examples of constant government observation such as PRISM or Golden Shield — which raise wholly reasonable concerns about the effect of being in a world where privacy is abolished and all events have the possibility of entering the public realm — there are numerous technologies that call into question the 'being present' quality of action. Facebook and Google make it easy to reach into the past and bring events into the now. While well outside the scope of this thesis, it should be noted that this is a highly contested aspect of contemporary society. *Verpixelungsrecht*, or the right to be pixelated, is a live concern in Germany with regards to Google Street View and other digital image services.[168] Similarly, the Court of Justice of the European Union has recently decided that citizens can demand to be forgotten by search engines and, as such, "removed from that list of

[168] For more on this, see Jeff Jarvis' *Public Parts* particularly the 'Public Choices' chapter.

results, unless there are particular reasons … justifying a preponderant interest of the public in having access to the information".[169]

These examples help show that there is no longer necessarily an immediacy to witnessing: both public and private events and conversations are kept or recorded for future witnessing. Even in the privacy of one's home it is no longer expected that what is said or done is wholly private or fleeting. Witnesses not privy to the original act may view it long after its inception — perhaps even long after its actor has died. What is past is not past. Particularly as the advances of technology allow for more complete record keeping, the present can certainly contain reasonable facsimiles of historical events. Witnessing certainly requires a being to ensure that action endures, but the insistence on immediate proximity is historical relic. The suggestion that 'pure speech' leaves no physical markings is to ignore that we are now capable of amplifying our voices so as to leave an echo across the stars; likewise it is a poor understanding of the world to suggest that there are 'pure actions' that do not leave physical traces. It may be that witnessing such markings is only possible through the use of tools, but there are very few worldly acts that are wholly fleeting. This is not to suggest that all things endure in the memory, but rather that the possibility of endurance exists in nearly all actions:

> No experience has been too unimportant, and the smallest event unfolds like a fate, and fate itself is like a wonderful, wide fabric in which every thread is guided by an infinitely tender hand and laid alongside another thread and is held and supported by a hundred others.[170]

Action is the attempt to psychically endure and this beginning is then placed in the hands of the witness. Fleeting action has merely failed to endure within the minds of other

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[169] Court of Justice of the European Union (2014), *Judgement in Case C-131/12 Google Spain SL, Google Inc. v Agencia Española de Protección de Datos, Mario Costeja González.*
[170] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (New York: Norton, 2004), 22.

beings. Action is made up of those processes by which a being marks the psychic world with its presence. When action is witnessed it is the marking of the psychic world with the self, but this marking can only become apparent through further work and action on the part of the witness. It corresponds directly with the minds of others and memory as it is traditionally conceived, but is not necessarily limited to the realm of human consciousness or even consciousness itself. It includes the bodily memory of work processes, but only due to the fact that our psychic lives are mediated through the physical world. The difference between physical and psychic markings is the possibility for observation. Physical markings can themselves be witnessed, but psychic markings must first be made manifest in the physical world.

While I have distinguished work from action, I do not mean to suggest that the two are at all unrelated. Even attempting to independently define the two concepts is difficult because of how interrelated the concepts are. The markings of work do not merely endure in the physical world, but also as psychic impressions upon the minds of both those affected and those that are witness to the markings. Whether and for how long these processes endure is a matter of witnessing. The experience of work can also carry with it the experience of action, although it is entirely possible to imagine examples of the former without the latter: to end the life of a being can be physical work that altogether ends the possibility for psychic action. Once physically dead, a being is no longer capable of remembering the experience of death — which suggests the possibility of a form of work that does not necessarily contain with it action, that is to say memory. One can expand this thinking with examples of physical actors that are not also psychic actors — beyond the precondition of consciousness. Memory itself is the psychic life —

and the possibility for remembrance goes far beyond Dasein for whom being itself is a concern.[171] Even if one is unwilling to expand such a concept of inner life to the inanimate world, it cannot be denied that life and living creatures are capable of memory, of a psychic life that can be marked upon. As Donna Haraway reminds us, "dogs, in all their historical complexity, matter here" — as do all beings that we can be said to share the world with.[172]

Labor

Labor is any process by which a being attempts to endure to and as itself; it is the production and reproduction of the private self that cannot possibly be witnessed by others. It differs from work and action in that it is primarily concerned with internal continuity and is also rooted in the relationship of the self to the self and thus can only be witnessed indirectly, but labor is worldly because of the impossibility of total isolation. This can be seen in the biological processes of sustenance, but also extends beyond mere life and includes that which a being believes is necessary to persist as itself. Labor is concerned with the immediate continuance and care of the self. This process includes all manner of bodily reproduction as well as mental self-sustenance. Permanence is impossible, but enduring in the world of others can be difficult — although not altogether impossible — to achieve without enduring beyond both the spatial here and the temporal now.

Bodily needs are met through labor processes as when a being engages in the necessities of life, but it is the attempt towards meeting those requirements — and thus hopefully achieving (temporary) biological endurance — that is labor. Sustenance is

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[171] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 12.
[172] Donna Haraway, "Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience," *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 298.

rarely met at the utmost of need in opposition to death and even so beings are always laboring towards the future so that a later version of their self will endure. Labor is undertaken in the now for the sake of that being in the coming now; it is an attempt at pushing, as it were, the present into an indefinite but near future. This is a marking of the self with the intention of enduring as the self, but it does not guarantee success as other beings in the world are capable of interfering with such plans — and the very fact of the rest of the world prevents this endurance from being total. Even if labor allowed for a complete preservation of a being, by existing in a world that has changed that being is no longer maintained.

I understand labor to primarily be an internal process that can be coupled with work or action and that those processes can be witnessed by others — as with nourishment and any worldly task that affirms an individual being to itself — but labor itself can only be inferred. Often the inference may be strong, but it is never certain because it is impossible to directly explore the internal will and being of others. There is no external measure to labor that can be identified by others *as labor*. This can be better understood through so-called 'inaction' — processes that might be recognized as a choice not to labor, to not continue as one is — but, in addition to being attempts at work or action, also seem serve to perpetuate a particular understanding of the self. By forgoing self-sustenance in such a way that it is witnessed by others a being makes possible the endurance of their distinct qualities. The failure to act in such a way so as to perpetuate one's self — as with a hunger strike — cannot be conceived of as inaction, but rather as fundamentally rooted in action as psychic marking. Yet it may also be the case that such actions that appear to be the forgoing of labor are merely the eschewing of one

understanding of self-sustenance in the service of another such understanding: a hunger strike might actually both perpetuate and neglect differing interpretations of the individual being in question. In this way, labor helps to showcase that the processes of endurance overlap, contradict, and compliment each other ways that are complex and messy; tidiness is not in their nature. The boundaries between them are convenient acts of generalization that allow for comparison and exploration, but attempting to solidly define the worldly experiences of them is a method of willing our *selves* out of existence; rather than existing within the contradictions and complications of our attempts at endure, we seek to impose order upon chaos. We would rather be simple than ourselves.

Memory and the Loss of Freedom

These conceptions of work, action, and labor rest upon the collapse of an Arendtian distinction between memory and glory:

> Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm. Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others.[173]

Arendt insists upon using the terminology of ‘glory’, but the division here is between the universal experience of memory — mere disclosure — and the anthropocentric experience of glory — disclosure of the unique agent. This is the interplay between mere and radical newness. Glory is memory that becomes a possibility for the witnesses to themselves takes up, but the difference between these concepts is found through interpretation on the part of the witness — an interpretation that does not require a willful choice on the part of the witness. One does not have to be ready to receive the actions of others; glory can be entirely incidental. Nor does glory *necessarily* result in others acting

[173] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 180.

on that which they witnessed. It is mere possibility. Thus it would seem that glory is merely memory that endures within others, but we already know that nothing endures into perpetuity. Once such markings are introduced into the world, other beings — and their unexpected natures — will take a measure of control over them. Only in total isolation is it possible for there to be ephemeral marks that are unseen, unheard, and unfelt. Thus it is only in total isolation that there exists newness that does not endure beyond its moment of conception. Contrary to Arendt's claim that "men have always been capable of destroying whatever was the product of human hands and have become capable today even of the potential destruction of what man did not make", total worldly obliteration is unlikely.[174] It may be the case that there are instruments — as with the atomic bomb — that can wholly transform worldly products so that it is difficult to recognize the relationship between two incidents of corporeality, but complications do not negate worldly continuity.

Nietzsche suggests that "it is quite possible to live with almost no memories", but the choice to live is always towards the aim of being remembered.[175] Politics exists in direct opposition to the isolation that would allow fleeting existences; life itself opposes the three deaths of being and is always an attempt to gain control over the nature of that opposition. The *vita activa* is aimed at explaining politics that seek more than mere continuity, but is a poor framework for understanding the rapidly expanding *polis* of the contemporary world. There are various narratives in which human beings are not considered to be the sole actors capable of marking others and themselves being marked: animal rights movements, environmental causes, and digital culture all contain accounts

[174] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 232.
[175] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 10.

that reject anthropocentrism. Further moving beyond individual human beings as actors allows for the possibility of societies, groups, and states to be seen as occupied with the continuance of the form of the collective itself — both in addition and contrary to the individual beings that compose the group. To explain these understandings of politics as invalid or the corruption of some utopian ideal is to forget that concerns about who is permitted entry into the *polis* has always been a marker of political affairs: slavery, imperialism, and colonialism are significant 'historical' examples; and questions of personhood, civil rights movements, and the franchise of youth are all more recent concerns. Even if one were to falsely suggest that democracy itself has been universally accepted as legitimate there is still vigorous debate about the permissibility of various actors and actions.

The so-called ideal *polis* is always predicated on the exclusion of undesirable beings — or simply inconvenient beings — and even without intentional exclusion truly universal freedom is impossible: participation is hampered by barriers of time, space, and language. Nor do I suggest that this is *the* method for explaining the *polis*. The *vita activa* seems a fitting system when politics is conceived of as the expression of individual unique qualities, which is only possible for human actors. A logical extension of this schema is that a wide range of non-human actors are found to be politically incomprehensible. While it is possible to consider these actors within the *vita activa* such can only be done in relation to the effects that they have on human affairs – as a means towards human ends rather than an end in and of themselves. If non-human actors are one day found to be (or merely reimagined as) capable of speech, action, and distinguishing themselves, it may be that the category of what qualifies as 'human' is broadened to these

other actors. Towards this aim, the natural sciences study consciousness in animals and the formal sciences design artificial intelligences so as to achieve the singularity. The former is an attempt at finding human consciousness in animal life and the latter is an attempt to imbue it within technological, digital beings. Such projects, while not directly connected to Arendtian thought, inhabit the same anthropocentric bias as the *vita activa*. If consciousness — or reason, empathy, or self-awareness — is considered the only measure of being worthy of comprehension in the 'civilized' world then all non-conscious expressions become unintelligible, but perhaps, following Zach Weiner, "'consciousness' is just a sort of grab bag of things that are special about us, which we're therefore giving primacy".[176] By predetermining the actors from which the boundless and unpredictable future can be made manifest, one actually bounds and limits the future. I do not find fault with the fact that such thinking attempts to predict the future – these predictions can be a type of promise to attend to certain possible futures — rather it is that I am concerned about their lack of fluidity and the possibility of being totalizing perspectives with which to view the world.

Rather than engaging with the debate of what qualifies as 'human' and establish my own limited definition of which beings are permitted into the *polis*, I suggest that such understandings be open-ended so as to include animals, environments, or even groups of beings depending on the situation itself. One of the perpetual questions of politics regards who to let into the *polis* wherein decisions are made. Who is fit to govern? Who is fit to participate? To have their voice heard? While these concerns are at the heart of revolutionary movements such as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution or the

[176] Zach Weiner, "Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal," *SMBC*, January 25, 2013, http://www.smbc-comics.com/index.php?id=2867.

more recent Arab Spring, we can see other articulations of this question right here in Canada. What was Theresa Spence's hunger strike if not an attempt to be heard? Being open to the possibility of unexpected voices allows for exactly that: the unexpected to reveal itself.

Freedom is impossible without a world that is rooted in unpredictability and the reduction of the world to mere causes is an attempt to ground the volatile future. It is not that scientific means are a threat to freedom, but rather that methods and modes serve to obscure the natural world. Theories are made to predict worldly outcomes, but theories *are not* the world. They 'prove' nothing and do not guarantee the outcomes that are postulated. That such principles are treated as universal truths is, according to Arendt, the most dangerous development in human history. The final chapter of *The Human Condition* shows that human beings have transcended their worldliness — both literally through Galileo's exploration of space and metaphorically through the discovery of the Archimedean point and the development of Cartesian doubt — and how this has undermined the capacity for freedom. She ultimately offers the *vita activa* and a return to thoughtfulness as a possible method for salvaging freedom from universality. If the world is conceived of as nothing more than a series of universal truths then:

> [e]very assemblage of things is transformed into a mere multitude, and every multitude, no matter how disordered, incoherent, and confused, will fall into certain patterns and configurations possessing the same validity and no more significance than the mathematical curve.[177]

Thought — and even the human being itself — is no longer required and it is precisely this mentality towards human life that Arendt sees as resulting in both the Holocaust and the creation of the atomic bomb.

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[177] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 267.

A world that is rooted in unpredictability requires vigilance and attentiveness; although difficult, such wakefulness is the very condition that allows for freedom amidst the obscuring fog of universality. Arendt suggests that this freedom requires bravery to motivate the "willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own", but I propose this merely describes markings towards the attempts at endurance and that these disclosures are a fact of worldliness.[178] Bravery, I would suggest, can instead be found in those that encourage others to endure upon and within themselves in such a way that their own identity is at risk. When other beings mark us — whether physically or psychically — we are changed as a result of those markings. We are no longer as we once were and the ways in which we change are outside of our control. This is the cost of freedom. There is no guarantee that we will approve of these changes and the contours of memory and forgetting are ill understood: the will to forget does not guarantee the eradication of psychic markings; the will to remember does not ensure endurance. Even if forgetting is possible, continuity is ensured. We will always be beings that have experienced the incidents of our history:

> In its factical being Dasein always is how and "what" it already was. Whether explicitly or not, it is its past. It is its own past not only in such a way that its past, as it were, pushes itself along "behind" it, and that is possesses what is past as a property that is still objectively present and at times has an effect on it.[179]

The act of forgetting cannot erase an incident from history. Even if it is the case that incidents are removed from the world in such a way that they cannot be recalled, the original experiences that occurred "behind" us are a part of us — if only in that by virtue of experiencing them we were kept from other experiences. We are our past — and this ensures that what is past is present.

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[178] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 186.
[179] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 19

The *Vita Diutina*

The contemporary political being is implicated in a variety of overlapping and contradictory identities that all fail to adequately represent the character of the individual being because of the unnavigable distance between the distinct individual and the ideal that is imposed upon them, yet these approximations are not entirely false either. Identity claims represent a desire to remain intact, to stay whole and formed, but have left us without the possibility for a plurality of *selves*. It is necessarily the case that an identity categorization will not fully speak to the subject of focus: this can most obviously be understood with personality traits such as kind or relaxed that are, at best, approximations of a particular moment, but insufficiently general to possibly describe the whole sum of a being. When we insist upon rigid identity boundaries we demonstrate that we would rather be dominated than self-determining. A variety of contemporary theorists and philosophers have explored the notion of boundlessness — Arthur Kroker uses the term 'body drift' to describe the way that we transition "through many different specular performances of the body"; Patricia Hill Collins uses intersectionality to describe the theory that "oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice"; and Wendy Brown explores the paradoxical nature of identity wherein "the first imaginings of freedom are always constrained by and potentially even require the very structure of oppression that freedom emerges to oppose" — and each advocates for understanding the ambiguous boundaries of identity so as to better explain the unique and distinct nature of individual beings.[180]

[180] Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2012), 1; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 18; Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 7.

This conception of the enduring life is situated in an understanding of politics as the cultivation of witnesses so as to struggle against the abyss of time. It is predicated on the suggestion that we come together in the world for the purpose of enduring within others, although we frequently disagree on the best method to go about achieving that endurance. But this politicking is usually done with certain assumptions about those witnesses: namely that those we have chosen will make it more likely for us to control the manner of our endurance. In doing this, we close off and ignore other beings that may also permit us to endure — or permit us to endure in other ways. Endurance is a fact of being in the world — it *is* being in the world — but the *vita diutina*, the enduring life, is a commitment to the processes of endurance as tools in the absurd struggle against finitude. The recognition that endurance is multifaceted makes possible the opening of the idea of the *polis* to new, non-traditional actors, but it does not necessarily bring these actors into all understandings of the *polis*. Just as we drift through a variety of bodies, we can also drift through a variety of understandings of being.

To understand this drifting what is needed is a comprehensive theory of witnessing, but the subjective nature of the experience of witnessing makes this difficult. As with anything, the gaze of witnesses can be assumed and predicted, but never ensured — and even that which endures does not necessarily do so in the manner that it was intended. I am not suggesting that the *vita diutina* at all overcomes these difficulties or that such an outcome is even possible. Rather all that it does is remind us that, despite all of our claims towards absolute truth, our politics is always a narrative construction. By this I do not merely mean the laws and legal codes that define our national constitutions. The narratives of politics always include how we come to live and be together in a shared

space, what is permitted to share this space with us, and the direction and subjects from which we allow radical newness to impress itself upon us. The fact that politics is a narrative construction does not absolve particular instances of politics from criticism nor, mirroring Judith Butler's writings about conscience and identity, is its fictional nature indicative of a world without politics.[181] As Amos Elon suggests in the introduction to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, "if you say to yourself, 'Who am I to judge?' you are already lost".[182] We are bound to each other by virtue of our living together in the world and it is shared whether we actively share it or not. It is not possible to interact with non-human actors in a way that resembles contemporary politics. Communication barriers will always exist to varying degrees. Nor do I believe that we can reject worldliness and act in a manner of complete nonviolence. The *vita activa* is a lens meant to highlight the importance of thoughtfulness in worldly affairs, but thoughtfulness is simply one mode of being — and it is incapable of attending to all interactions.

The planet is not universally understood as being comprised of material goods ripe for cultivation by human hands. The notion that our species and we as individuals have mastery over the natural world is increasingly contested by the unpredictable effects of climate change. Even without considering geological changes caused by humanity, the environment challenges human affairs regularly: we are still powerless to prevent earthquakes and solar flares, among numerous other environmental processes. Although not universally true, the legitimacy of our current relationship to the spaces in which we

[181] "The claim that conscience is a fiction is not to be confused with the claim that conscience is arbitrary or dispensable; on the contrary, it is a necessary fiction, one without which the grammatical and phenomenological subject cannot exist." (Butler 1997, 68).
[182] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), xvi.

live is in question. The significance of place and its capacity to reveal newness is hardly a radical suggestion:

> No man stands beside the Fraser River without sensing the precarious hold of his species upon the earth. This fact is disclosed, perhaps, by all of nature's larger spectacles, but here it is thrust upon you with a special clarity. In this grisly trench, bored out of solid rock through unimaginable time by the scour of brown water, the long history of lifeless matter, the pitifully brief record of life, the mere moments of man's existence are suddenly legible. And here, in this prodigal waste of energy, nature's war on all living creatures is naked, brutal and ceaseless.[183]

> The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine … What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station. In order that we may even remotely consider the monstrousness that reigns here, let us ponder for a moment the contrast that speaks out of the two titles, "The Rhine" as dammed up into the *power* works, and "The Rhine" as uttered out of the art work, in Holderlin's hymn by that name. But it will be replied, the Rhine is still a river in the landscape, is it not? Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry.[184]

The former is the beginning of a narrative from Bruce Hutchison and the latter comes from Heidegger's concerns about the essence of technology, but both convey the notion of places as 'speaking' beyond themselves. As with all possibility for endurance, it is not always the case that a place will endure in the beings that experience it, but environments can impress upon us in both physical and psychic ways.

Animal life is another set of beings that complicate Arendtian thoughtfulness. Although similar to the environment itself, the status of animals differs from that of worldly objects due to the relationships and interactions that some people have with animal life. When Donna Haraway speaks of companion species and reconfiguring kinship, she is engaging with traditional narratives of possession and ownership over beings and contrasting them with a "complex ethical discourse … [of] situated co-

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[183] Bruce Hutchison, *The Fraser* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada, 2010), 5.
[184] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper, 1997), 16.

constitution, with inherited pasts of many kinds".[185] Expanding upon the ways that animals — both as species and individual beings — have marked humans — again, both as a species and individual beings — look to the way that the modes of historical development has always depended on the beings with which places are shared: horses in the American frontier; beavers during the era of the fur trade in Canada; and seals in the Arctic regions. Complicating these linkages is the fact that relationships to animals were often mediated through relationships to other peoples: consider, for example, that the North American narrative of fur trade cannot be understood solely as beavers enduring within human beings, but also as human beings in relation to each other. Beavers shaped various Indigenous peoples who in turn impressed European settlers with these markings.

Finally, contemporary technologies allow for the possibility of digital beings — and not merely in the sense of conscious entities that mirror human being. Facebook pages and digital avatars are more than simple extensions of the self, particularly when they are mediated by codes and algorithms that have a measure of control over the resulting beings. In what ways are our digital representations *us*? The rules and limitations that govern virtual spaces are unlike those of the physical world. It is not possible to turn off gravity or transfigure the corporeal into and out of various forms — certainly not with the same ease that it can be achieved through virtual reality. These beings are not isolated forms that exist independently. They are co-constituted in the relations of programmer to player and such complexities cannot be reduced to 'thought'. Immediacy collapses in the digital age. We can extend ourselves far into the future such that even after death our radical newness can be witnessed. There is something eerie

[185] Donna Haraway, "Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience," *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 316

about dead authors and musicians releasing new works after their deaths, sometimes long after. Although this is certainly more stark because of modern technological developments, this is not solely a product of the digital world. Consider the nuances of the relationship between Arendt and Heidegger that was revealed in their posthumously published letters. There is a way in which the manner of their endurance today is certainly changed through such revelations.

These imaginings of the environment, animal life, and digital beings are not abnormal conceptions of relations except in the sense that the everyday itself is peculiar. The contemporary world is filled with beings and relationships that are unintelligible to the *vita activa*, but it is also filled with beings and relationships that are clarified through the *vita activa*. Arendt suggests the active life as a replacement for the contemplative life; I intend no such claims with the *vita diutina*. Her plea for thoughtfulness is a passionate argument for individual humans lives in a world that increasingly seems unconcerned with individuality on the basis that the human species will continue to endure. But that is a single narrative of togetherness in the world and when we reimagine work, action, and labor as processes that serve to oppose differing conceptions of death, the way that we drift through conceptions of being becomes apparent.

There are times that we seek and allow non-human beings to endure within us and there are times that we choose to ignore the impressions of other humans — and the manner of these endurances can themselves vary radically. The *vita diutina* does not have answers to why this is the case nor does it determine whether the animal rights movement is legitimate or whether the environment is an actor unto itself. It only serves as an explanation for how such understandings may be possible. The enduring life is not one of

attention to any particular direction — as with the active life to thought — rather it is wakefulness itself and attending to the possibility that we can endure in a multitude of directions and on a multitude of beings, and that the cost of endurance is always the possibility that radical newness from others will endure upon us. Wholly adhering to it is impossible, because we are finite, limited beings — just as permanence is impossible. In his conclusion to *The Myth of Sisyphus* and in response to the absurdity of the futile suffering that is life, Camus suggests that, "one must imagine Sisyphus happy".[186] Indeed that may be the case, but consider the significance of that statement in the context of endurance: that we imagine Sisyphus at all. He endures. Despite everything, Sisyphus endures.

[186] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 123.

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