

The End of Action: An Arendtian Critique of Aristotle's Concept of *praxis*¹

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Introduction

Arendt's concept of action, which she distinguishes from other human activities as the eminently political activity, is often regarded as a renewal of Aristotle's concept of *praxis*. Arendt's own remarks easily lead us to think that she is simply "rehabilitating" action from its Aristotelian subordination to contemplation. I will argue that in interpreting contemplation in its pure self-referentiality as the supreme kind of *praxis*, Aristotle is, in fact, realigning the pre-philosophical notion of action itself along the lines of the teleological means-end structure of production (*poiēsis*). Consequently, Arendt's critique of philosophy's traditional "forgetfulness" of action, which she sees as ultimately culminating in the totalitarian substitution of social production for political action, can be understood as a critique of the Aristotelian notion of *praxis* as such, along with its presuppositions. The roots of this critique can be traced back to Heidegger's reading of Aristotle.

1 I would like to thank the editors and Dana R. Villa for their valuable comments on this paper, as well as Julia Honkasalo, Krista Johansson, Mika Ojakangas, and other organizers for the opportunity to present an earlier version of it at the anniversary symposium *Practice, Thought, and Judgment: Hannah Arendt 100 years* (Helsinki, November 2006). Among other studies closely related to the topic of this paper, I would like to mention Jussi Backman, "Für das Wohnen denken: Heidegger, Arendt und die praktische Besinnung." In Alfred Denker, Günter Figal, Franco Volpi & Holger Zaborowski (eds.), *Heidegger-Jahrbuch*, vol. 3: *Heidegger und Aristoteles*. Freiburg: Alber, 2007, 199–220; Peg Birmingham, "The Subject of *Praxis*." *Research in Phenomenology* 29 (1999), 215–225; Jacques Taminiaux, "*Bios politikos* and *bios theoretikos* in the Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt." Trans. Dermot Moran. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 4(1996), 215–232; Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*. Trans. Michael Gendre. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997; Dana R. Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action." *Political Theory* 20 (1992), 274–308; and Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996 (in particular 17–79).

One of the key distinctions underlying the political thought of Hannah Arendt is the ancient Greek distinction between *praxis*, “doing, carrying out, (en)acting,” and *poiēsis*, “making, producing.” The distinction between *action* and productive *work* – both of them further distinguished from *labor* in the sense of mere toil, which has no purpose beyond the immediate satisfaction of life’s requirements – is meticulously elaborated by Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958). This study constitutes, in effect, a genealogy of the *modern* human condition through a study of the shifting hierarchical positions of these three principal human activities in the history of Western thought. Even though Arendt’s approach is here much more general and “theoretical,” *The Human Condition* is still implicitly informed by the quest undertaken by Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951): to understand the terrifying totalitarian experiments of the 20th century, Stalinism and Nazism, with their unprecedented attempts at a total annihilation of political freedom and human spontaneity, not as contingent disasters but as *essentially* modern phenomena with firm roots in Western intellectual history and its ambiguous relationship to the domain of the political. The same quest persisted throughout Arendt’s later works: *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) is a “case study” in the totalitarian frame of mind, and the unfinished *The Life of the Mind* (1978) is an attempt at elaborating *judging* as the essentially political mental activity, traditionally overlooked by philosophy in favor of contemplative *thinking* – and increasingly, in modern times, in favor of *willing*.

In this essay, I will consider the role of Aristotle and his notion of *praxis* in this traditional “forgetfulness” of politics and political action as diagnosed by Arendt. I approach Aristotle from an Arendtian perspective and try to situate him in the context of Arendt’s historical accounts; however, I will also attempt to make a few critical additions to Arendt’s remarks on Aristotle’s practical philosophy. Aristotle did not simply subordinate action to contemplation, but rather defined contemplation (*theōrein*) as the *supreme kind* of action – as the activity that fulfills what Aristotle regards as the fundamental criteria of proper *praxis*, namely, self-referentiality and self-sufficiency. I further suggest that this Aristotelian realignment of *praxis* is rooted in the very tendency that Arendt points out as being fateful for political philosophy: thinking action in teleological terms, which ultimately amounts to thinking action in terms of production, i.e., as a means for attaining an end.

It follows from this that the notion of action that Arendt operates with is not simply a “rehabilitation” of Aristotelian *praxis*, as has sometimes been suggested. Jürgen Habermas, for example, reads *The Human Condition* as a “systematic renewal [*Erneuerung*] of the Aristotelian concept of *praxis*” and sees the weaknesses in Arendt’s conceptuality as deriving “from the fact that Arendt remains bound to the

historical and conceptual constellation of Aristotelian thought.”² Nor can Arendt’s relationship to Aristotle be understood as a simple reversal in an order of preference, as some of Arendt’s own remarks might lead us to think, with Aristotle preferring contemplation and Arendt preferring action. Rather, with Jacques Taminiaux and Dana R. Villa, I will argue that Arendt’s critique of the philosophical tradition entails a fundamental critique of the Aristotelian concept of *praxis* itself.³

The Pre-Philosophical Experience of the Transience of *praxis* and the Political Solution

When, in the ancient Greek context, an activity was addressed as *poiēsis*, it was considered in terms of a separate and predetermined outcome or result that bestows an instrumental meaning on the activity itself. This, of course, applies first and foremost to productive craftsmanship, such as building a house.⁴ A *praxis*, however, is an activity considered in terms of what is enacted or performed *during* the action itself, and of the way in which this is done; its outcome, if any, is extraneous to the action itself.⁵ Since *praxis*, once it ceases, does not leave behind anything of itself *qua praxis*, it is vital that the agent be seen by others while she is acting. For example, the acts of the Greeks at the battle of Thermopylae were glorious *praxeis*, but only because the greatness of the acts themselves survived through the testimony of witnesses; the *result* of the battle was the defeat and slaughter of the Greeks. The acts of the Apostles (*Praxeis apostolōn*) were not great because of their accomplishments – many of them perished as martyrs – but because of the great faith and courage manifested in and through those deeds.

2 Jürgen Habermas, “Hannah Arendts Begriff der Macht” [1976]. In Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile*. 3rd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984, 232. Trans. “Hannah Arendt: On the Concept of Power.” In Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*. Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. London: Heinemann, 1983, 174. Translation modified.

3 Taminiaux (“*Bios politikos* and *bios theoretikos* in the Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt,” *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker*) has convincingly shown that Arendt rejects the Platonic-Aristotelian subordination of *bios politikos* to *bios theōrētikos*. According to Taminiaux, even Heidegger ultimately upholds this hierarchy. With Birmingham (“The Subject of *Praxis*”), I consider this reading of Heidegger to be a simplification, yet valid to a certain extent. Villa (“Beyond Good and Evil,” *Arendt and Heidegger*), moreover, has argued that Arendt’s reading of Aristotle is by no means a mere renewal, but rather a critical reappropriation, heavily influenced by Heidegger’s reappropriating readings of Aristotle. I have discussed this issue more extensively in Backman, “Für das Wohnen denken.”

4 See Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1999, 922–923. In Homer (see e.g. *Iliad*. In *Homeri Ilias*. Ed. Thomas W. Allen. Oxford: Clarendon, 1931, I.608, VII.435), *poieō* is particularly used to refer to the activity of building.

5 See Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 934–35; Günther Bien, Theo Kobusch & Heinz Kleger, “Praxis, praktisch.” In Joachim Ritter & Karlfried Gründer (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7. Basel: Schwabe, 1989, 1277–1307. In Homer (see e.g. *Iliad* XIV.282, *Odyssey*. In *Homeri Odyssea*. Ed. P. von der Mühl. Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1962, VIII.259, XIX.323–24), *prēssō* means “to accomplish,” “to enact,” “to take care of,” in the concrete sense of “passing through” an action (in particular, a journey), with an emphasis on the action itself and not its result.

In this sense, as Arendt points out, human action is to be regarded as the self-disclosure of the agent. The quality of a person's acts are what distinguish her individual life-span or life story, *bios*, from the mere fact of being alive, *zōē*, common to all living creatures. Through her deeds, a person's relative individuality – *who* she is for other people – is constituted. This cannot be accomplished through the outcome or result of those deeds, no matter how great they are – you can never tell *who* somebody was from what she *made* (even though this is frequently attempted in, for example, biographies of artists). A *praxis* can survive the mortal agent only in the form of narratives, which, of course, are dependent on other mortals who narrate them.⁶

According to Arendt, the experience of this transience of mortal humans and their affairs and deeds – of the “vanity of vanities” lamented by the Old Testament Ecclesiastes – as opposed to the permanence of the gods and the cosmic order and to the cyclic recurrence of nature, was fundamental for Greek politics. The great deeds of the archaic forefathers in the Trojan War were a cultural ideal acknowledged by all Greeks, but even those *praxeis* had survived only in the form of a *poiēsis*, namely, the poetic work attributed to Homer. In the cultural self-understanding of the classical Greek period, the foundation of the *polis* – a word that did not mean simply “community,” “city,” or “state,” but rather an enclosed and sheltered, i.e., organized and constitutional communal space – was an attempt at resolving this predicament, at overcoming the mortality, finitude, and transience of human undertakings. A constitutional political space was to create a permanent public assembly in which the restricted elite of citizens, free of the necessities and constraints of simple survival and of relationships of domination or obedience belonging to the private sphere, would have maximal opportunities for gaining mutual recognition for their appropriate and excellent deeds and words – and for making this recognition last in the form of immortal fame. This possibility of granting permanence to *praxis* was considered to furnish human action with a new kind of meaningfulness. The *polis* was to make possible a life in which the endless natural cycle of birth, struggle for survival, procreation, and death would no longer be the

6 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958]. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 7–8, 97, 175–192; Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* [1961]. New York: Penguin, 1993, 151–156.

only permanent feature; that is, a life with a lasting and truly human dignity, over and above the mere survival of the animal species.⁷

Aristotle notes at the beginning of the *Politics* that whereas the primitive human community, the household (*oikos*), is a purely economic and private partnership that exists for the sake of survival in the face of necessity, the *polis* is the supreme human conglomeration that exists for the sake of the “good life” (*eu zēn*) – for the sake of the most appropriate way of being a human, i.e., in order to make possible a way of life in which human beings can carry out their specifically human capacities.⁸ Besides freeing its citizens from the need to cope with necessity and to survive, the *polis* also professed to free them from their dependency on *poiēsis*, i.e., on the production of permanent works of poetry or other monuments. In the famous Funeral Oration narrated by Thucydides, the great Athenian statesman Pericles declares that the Athenians, unlike their ancestors who fought in Troy, are no longer dependent on poets:

[...] far from needing a Homer for our panegyrist [...] we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring, and everywhere we have established permanent reminders of our deeds, both worthless and excellent. [...] For conspicuous [*epiphānōn*] men have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph records it, there dwells in everyone an unwritten record – the record of judgment [*gnōmēs*], rather than that of the produced work [*ergou*].⁹

The establishment of a political space of civic freedom and equality, with walls to protect it from enemies, with laws to protect it from the excesses of its own

7 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19, 56, 173, 188–201, 220, 232; *Between Past and Future*, 41–48, 71–75; *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1: *Thinking* [1971]. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, 131–135. Arendt has, of course, been widely criticized for glorifying the elitist civic freedom and political equality of the ancient slave-owning communities, which were based on non-egalitarian social institutions (see e.g. Hauke Brunkhorst, “Equality and Elitism in Arendt.” In Dana R. Villa [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 178–198). However, this is a simplification. Her discussion of ancient politics is not a nostalgic revival, but rather a Heideggerian “retrieval” (*Wiederholung*) and reappropriation of ancient political ideals in the present post-totalitarian context – a “critique of the present” with the help of antiquity. (Cf. J. Peter Euben, “Arendt’s Hellenism.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, 153–164) Moreover, as Taminioux (“Athens and Rome.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, 165–177) has pointed out, in spite of her use of Pericles’ Athens as a model, Arendt was no uncritical “Graecomaniac”; the most fully “political” ancient community was for her not Athens but the Roman Republic. Roy T. Tsao (“Arendt against Athens: Rereading the Human Condition.” *Political Theory* 30 [2002], 97–123) has argued that *The Human Condition* should, in fact, be read as addressing the political project and ideal of Pericles’ Athens as inherently flawed and doomed to failure, not as a model for present-day politics.

8 Aristotle, *Politics/Politica*. Ed. W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1957, I.1.1252a1–7, 2.1252b12–14, 15–16, 27–30. As Arendt (*The Human Condition*, 37, 183 n. 8) notes, Aristotle’s notion of the *polis* differs from the archaic Greek conception in that Aristotle takes the *polis*, just like the inferior forms of community, to come to be naturally (*physei*), on the basis of the basic human striving for survival, and not through a free act of foundation, even though he adds that the *polis* persists in existence for the sake of the good life.

9 Thucydides, *Historiae*, 2 vols. Ed. Henry S. Jones & John E. Powell. Oxford: Clarendon, 1955–56, II.41.4, 43.3–4. Trans. *The Peloponnesian War*. Trans. Richard Crawley. London: J. M. Dent, 1910. Translation modified. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 197, 205–206; *Between Past and Future*, 72, 217; *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1: *Thinking*, 133.

members, and with slaves and women to deal with the economical necessities of private life, thus allowed the memory of individual human deeds to become relatively permanent. It offered human beings the possibility of measuring up to the cosmic permanence of the world they live in – a hope of immortality for mortals. Yet, as Arendt points out, the words imputed to Pericles are overly optimistic about the possible permanence of *praxis*.¹⁰ Even in the form of organized politics, human relationships and human affairs remain a very intricate, fragile, and easily corruptible business. The Golden Age of Athens in the 5th century B.C. ended with Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War; the Greek political freedom of the classical age ended with the death of Alexander the Great, which nearly coincides with the death of Aristotle. Between these two events, the new cultural form known as philosophy was instituted in Athens by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. With Nietzsche and Heidegger, Arendt sees the birth of Occidental philosophy in its Platonic, metaphysical form as the symptom of a decisive transformation within the Greek world itself.

The Philosophical Transformation of *praxis*: Aristotle and the End of Action

If we are to believe the story that the Presocratic Heraclitus valued playing dice with children above political involvement, philosophy – the study of the most general and fundamental structures of reality – had already in its earliest stages tended to withdraw from public life into the solitude of thinking.¹¹ Yet it seems that the original intention of Socrates, the founder of the Athenian philosophical tradition, was precisely to introduce critical thinking into the public life of the *polis*. He was an eminently *public* figure. We know only too well how Socrates' project was ultimately received by the political community. The public trial and execution of Socrates, the most “worthy, mindful, and just man”¹² of his day, apparently left Plato – who in his youth had prepared for a political career – permanently disillusioned about the possibility of achieving the truly supreme human life within the political sphere. With Plato, philosophical thinking became the quest for an insight into the absolute, necessary, and eternal structures underlying the relative, contingent, and temporal everyday human reality. According to Arendt, Plato's frustrating political experience was his encounter with the incompatibility of this quest for absolute truth with the

10 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205. Cf. Tsao, “Arendt against Athens.”

11 Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*. In *Diogenis Laertii Vitae philosophorum*, 2 vols. Ed. H. S. Long. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964, IX.3.

12 Plato, *Phaedo*. In Plato, *Platonis opera*, Vol. 1: *Tetralogias I–II continens*. Ed. John Burnet. Oxford: Clarendon, 1899, 118a16–17.

political realm of shifting opinions and persuasion.¹³ However, we must also note Arendt's suggestion, in *The Life of the Mind*, that Socrates may have been aware of another way in which thinking could become politically relevant. In Arendt's view, the first one to fully discover this faculty of transforming thinking into judgments and opinions was Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, which, for Arendt, constitutes the true "political philosophy" of Kant.¹⁴

In the *Republic*, Plato toyed with the idea of replacing politics altogether with a government based on the tyranny not of philosophers but of the absolute and ideal truth that philosophy pursues. Whether this was meant in full earnest is hard to tell; in any case, Plato's reported unfortunate experiences with educating the tyrant of Syracuse revealed that such a government was unfeasible for the time being. Plato's late political work, *Laws*, is much less "utopian," but here, as well, politics is articulated in terms of government and legislation, which for the earlier Greek mind were mere preconditions of political life.¹⁵ It is thus to Aristotle that we must turn in order to find a more mature formulation of the philosophical outlook on political life and on the way of life most appropriate for the human being – a formulation that in certain implicit respects became normative for the entire later tradition of political philosophy. This formulation is to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's main work on the ends of human life, to which the *Politics* is a sequel and complement.

Aristotle, it seems, had no illusions about the political capacity of philosophers, being well aware that theoretical thinkers are not particularly well disposed for political action,¹⁶ and he never dreamt of denying the essential role of political life for the human being. The human being is, in her very being, a political creature (*zōon politikon*) – not just a gregarious animal, such as the bee. The human capacity for discourse (*logos*) makes the human community, the *polis*, unique in that it is based on the discursive sharing of meaning and of a meaningful reality.¹⁷ Humans, as we saw, need organized communal and public life not only in order to survive, but also in

13 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 20, 185; *Between Past and Future*, 17, 25, 68, 107–115, 227–264; "Martin Heidegger ist achtzig Jahre alt" [1969]. In Hannah Arendt & Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse*. Ed. Ursula Ludz. 3rd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002, 190–191; trans. "For Martin Heidegger's Eightieth Birthday." Trans. Lisa Harries. In *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*. Ed. Günther Neske & Emil Kettering. New York: Paragon House, 1990, 215–217; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 80–84.

14 See Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)" [1954]. In *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, Totalitarianism*. Ed. Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1994, 313–314; *Between Past and Future*, 82–85, 219–224, 241–249; *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* [1970]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 94–96, 111, 129–130, 166–216. Cf. Roland Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging." In Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 89–156, 164–174.

15 On Plato's political philosophy, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220–230; *Between Past and Future*, 17–19, 104–115, 120, 129–131; *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 21, 59–60.

16 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics/Ethica Nicomachea*. Ed. I. Bywater. Oxford: Clarendon, 1894, VI.5.1140b2–11, 7.1141a28–b8.

17 Aristotle, *Politics* I.2.1253a7–18.

order to fulfill their highest capacities. In many ways, Aristotle's ethics and politics are thus a conceptual articulation of the pre-philosophical Greek outlook on the matter.

Moreover, in his elaboration of the difference between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, Aristotle quite manifestly holds to the traditional primacy of *praxis*. Fully in keeping with the earlier tradition, Aristotle points out that “a course of life [*bios*] is action [*praxis*], not production [*poiēsis*],”¹⁸ meaning that a life-project as such is not an instrumental process aiming at some outcome beyond itself, but ultimately consists in a self-enactment that lasts only as long as life lasts. As we saw, this also implies that what decides the quality of an individual life is the way in which it is lived, not what is achieved in that life. Thus, the fundamental premise of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – that what constitutes excellence (*agathon*) in the sphere of conducting a human life is “prosperity,” *eudaimonia* – is not really a doctrine but a simple explication of the notion of excellent living.¹⁹ *Eudaimonia* does not mean an achieved state of subjective happiness or objective well-being, but is simply a name for the quality of the action constituting the good life. Accordingly, it is often expressed with a verb, *eudaimonein*. Equally self-explanatory is the contention that “living well” (*eu zēn*) is synonymous with “acting well” (*eu prattein*), for this simply means that the good life consists in living, in enacting a good life. However, as Aristotle himself emphasizes, the multitude of men disagree with men of insight (*sophoi*) as to what this most excellent enactment of living consists in. He is actually preparing us for his own answer, which will deviate decisively from the answer of the many – that is, from the traditional Greek view of the good life. This answer is, however, a direct consequence of his definition of *praxis*, to which we must therefore pay close attention.

We find the first inconclusive philosophical discussion of the *praxis–poiēsis* distinction in Plato's *Charmides*.²⁰ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle settles this issue with a seemingly simple definition: “The end [*telos*] of producing [*poiēseōs*] is other than the producing itself, but the end of acting [*praxeōs*], arguably, is not other; for appropriate action [*eupraxia*] is itself an end.”²¹ He claims that this distinction can be found in popular discourses (*exōterikoi logoi*),²² and at first sight this definition seems to agree perfectly with the pre-philosophical understanding of *praxis* referred to above. However, it does say somewhat more. While affirming

18 Aristotle, *Politics* I.4.1254a7.

19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4.1095a14–22. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 192–193; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing* [1974–75]. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, 61, 74–75.

20 Plato, *Charmides*. In Plato, *Platonis opera*, Vol. 3: *Tetralogias V–VII continens*. Ed. John Burnet. Oxford: Clarendon, 1903) 163a10–e11.

21 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.5.1140b6–7. My translation.

22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.4.1140a2–3.

that *praxis* does not take place for the sake of an *external* end, Aristotle adds that *praxis* does have an end – namely, *itself*. In other words, what matters in both *poiēsis* and *praxis* is an end, which, in the case of pure *praxis*, simply coincides with the activity itself and therefore does not survive it. This is all the more evident from the passage of the *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle illustrates *energeia*, perfect activity or actuality, with the help of *poiēsis* and *praxis*:

None of the activities [*praxeōn*] for which there is a limit [*peras*] is an end [*telos*] [in itself], but these are rather activities that are concerned with the end [...], and, as that for the sake of which [*hōn heneka*] the movement takes place is not present [in the movement itself], they are not action [*praxis*], or, in any case, they are not complete action, since they are not an end [in themselves]. But the other kind [of activity – i.e., besides the unfinished activity, which is not true *praxis* – is truly *praxis*], insofar as the end and the activity itself are both present. For example, one has, while seeing [*hora*], <at once already attained seeing,> one has, while still thinking [*phroneī*], <already attained thinking,> one has, while still apprehending [*noeī*], already attained apprehension; whereas, while still learning [something], one has not already learned [it], and while still recovering, one has not already recovered. While living properly, one has at once [*hama*] already attained proper living, and while prospering [*eudaimoneī*], one has already attained prosperity.²³

In her reading of this passage in *The Human Condition*, Arendt insists that, for Aristotle, “[t]his specifically human achievement lies altogether outside the category of means and ends [...] the means to achieve the end would already be the end [...]”²⁴ However, as we see from the passage itself, this is not entirely accurate: an end is indeed attributed even to *praxis*. Arendt does not seem to have been fully aware of the extent of the Aristotelian transformation of the concept of *praxis* itself. When discussing *praxis* in Aristotle, she takes it to mean simply “action” in a general Greek sense, and (in my opinion wrongly) reads Aristotle as *explicitly* subordinating *praxis* to *poiēsis* as well as to *theōria*:

[...] Aristotle [...] places [...] practical insight and political science at the lowest rank of his order, and puts above them the science of fabrication [...] which immediately precedes and lead to *theōria*, the contemplation of truth. [...] the reason for this predilection in philosophy is [...] that contemplation and fabrication (*theōria* and *poiēsis*) have an inner affinity and do not stand in the same unequivocal opposition to each other as contemplation and action.²⁵

23 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. In *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 2 vols. Ed. W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1924, θ.6.1048b18–19, 20–26. My translation. For unknown reasons, this passage is omitted in some Greek manuscripts and is obviously corrupt in others. Moreover, even though its general point is clear, many individual phrases are ambiguous. The passages given in <angle brackets> are emendations suggested by Hermann Bonitz. See W.D. Ross's comment, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, vol. 2, 253–254.

24 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205–206. Cf. *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*, 123–124: “In Aristotle it is quite clear that *praxis* [...] cannot be understood in terms of the means-end category [...]”

25 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 301. Cf. *The Human Condition*, 12–14, 25; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*, 123–124. However, Arendt's formulation in the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 21, comes close to the one I am pursuing here.

To be sure, Aristotle does apply a threefold division of human activities into production (*poiēsis*), action (*praxis*), and contemplation (*theōria*) in his classification of the sciences, to which Arendt is referring, and on several other occasions.²⁶ However, whereas Arendt's reading contains certain profound insights into Aristotle's concepts, her claim that *praxis* is now subordinated to *poiēsis* as well as to *theōria* is not supported by the passages to which she refers, except by the habitual order in which Aristotle lists the three domains of science (practical, productive, and theoretical). Aristotle does not regard action as inferior to production. It would be more correct to say that he regards action as a kind of perfected production in which the end is immanent in and identical with the process of its production.

The examples of *praxis* given by Aristotle – seeing (*horan*), thinking (*phronein*), apprehending (*noein*) – indicate that in spite of certain basic common features, this is *not* the concept of action that Arendt operates with, a concept modeled on what she takes to be the original, pre-philosophical Greek concept. What matters in Arendt's concept of action is not the end, the *telos* at all, but rather the *beginning*, the *archē*, undertaking a new venture whose outcome or end cannot be foreseen. The only standard for such a new venture is *courage*, daring to embark on something new and unpredictable, and the consequent “greatness” of the undertaking.²⁷ As Dana R. Villa puts it: “Arendt's theory of political action should be read as the sustained attempt to think of *praxis* outside the teleological framework.”²⁸ We know how fond Arendt is of quoting Augustine's words, *Initium ut esset creatus est homo*, “man was created so that a beginning be,”²⁹ i.e., in order that entirely new undertakings and ventures could come about in the historical human world.

Aristotle, on the contrary, considers both producing and acting in terms of means and ends; the only standard of action is the coincidence of the means with the end, i.e., the self-referentiality and self-sufficiency of the action. Aristotle's action therefore requires no courage at all – on the contrary, its outcome is even more certain than that of production, in which it is at least possible to fail. The supreme

26 This division is first and foremost used by Aristotle in his classification of science (*epistēmē*) into theoretical, practical, and productive sciences is to be found in *Metaphysics* E.1.1025b18–28 and in K.7.1064a10–19. Theoretical, contemplative, or speculative science (first philosophy or theology, mathematics, and physics) studies the permanent and necessary structures of reality as it is; practical or action-related science (ethics, politics) studies the active human life in its singular situations as well as the enactment of the supreme kind of action, both on the individual and on the communal level; and productive science or art (rhetoric, poetics) studies the means for achieving specific results. Cf. Aristotle, *Topics (Topica et Sophistici elenchi)*. Ed. W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) VI.6.145a15–18; *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2.1139a26–31. We also find *praxis* distinguished from *theōria* in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8.1178b20–21; cf. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*, 124.

27 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7–8, 144, 176–192, 205–206, 222–225, 230–237, 243–247; *Between Past and Future*, 59–63, 151–154, 169–171.

28 Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 47.

29 Augustine, *De civitate Dei*. In J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 41. Paris: Migne, 1845, 13–804, XII.20.4. See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951]. New ed. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973, 479; *The Human Condition*, 177; *Between Past and Future*, 167; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*, 18, 108–110, 158, 217.

and purest *praxis* thus becomes the *least* risky and the most predictable activity of all: the end is attained as soon as the activity is undertaken. There is no chance that anything new could ever come out of it. It is clear that this ultimately divests action of political significance. Like production, action is an individual project that can be undertaken in solitude, as it no longer requires being seen, acknowledged, or supported by others. Aristotle states this explicitly, aware that he is running against the popular understanding of action:

[...] the life of action [*bios praktikos*] is, arguably, the best way of life both communally for the entire *polis* as well as for each individual. But the life of action is not necessarily lived in relation to others, as some believe, nor are action-related considerations [*dianoias*] limited to those that aim at the results that come out of acting; rather, the contemplations [*theōrias*] and considerations that are self-referential [*autoteleis*] and take place for their own sake are much more action-related. For proper action [*eupraxia*] is an end, and thus the end is a kind of action.³⁰

Contemplation as Self-Sufficient and Immortal Action: The temporalities of *praxis*

The question concerning the best way of life, conceived of as the most authentic kind of *praxis*, has thereby implicitly been answered. At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces, as possible candidates for the good life, three alternative ways of life that can be freely chosen for their own sake (excluding, of course, the life of the laboring slave and the life of the working craftsman, which no one freely chooses, as they are both dictated by force or economic necessity): (1) the life of bodily enjoyment (*bios apolaustikos*); (2) the political life of public action (*bios politikos*); and (3) the life of contemplation (*bios theōrētikos*).³¹ The first alternative is dismissed immediately, as Aristotle agrees with his tradition that mere bodily pleasure does not fulfill the capacities specific to the human being. Most of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is devoted to discussing the political life and its respective excellences, as this is the best kind of life for the multitude of free men. However, keeping in mind the principle of self-sufficiency, as well as the theoretical character of the examples of *praxis* that Aristotle gives in the *Metaphysics* (seeing, thinking, apprehending), the conclusion in Book 10 in favor of the life of contemplation is more or less inevitable.

To be sure, living a political life does enable the human being to prosper, since this life is precisely an enactment of the ethical excellences, i.e., of the properly

30 Aristotle, *Politics* VII.3.1325b15–21. My translation. Cf. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 21; Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie* [1928–29]. Ed. Otto Saame & Ina Saame-Speidel. 2nd ed. Gesamtausgabe 27. Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 2001, 167–179.

31 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.5.1095b14–1096a10. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 12–13; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 20.

human capacities of the human being.³² Yet the essential shortcoming of political life is evident: it lacks complete self-sufficiency, autarky (*autarkeia*). The public agent who enacts justice still needs fellow humans, since no one can be just by herself. The only perfectly self-sufficient, self-motivated, and self-referential activity that the human being is capable of is philosophical contemplation (*theōrein*), i.e., the disinterested, pure, and comprehensive beholding of the *archai*, of the eternal, necessary, and unchanging principles and fundamental structures of all meaningful reality. This contemplation enacts the virtue of wisdom or comprehensive understanding (*sophia*). Yet Aristotle recognizes that such a solitary and self-sufficient activity, withdrawn from human affairs and human relationships, is no longer really human but divine. Paradoxically, the activity in which the supreme human *praxis* consists and which thus enacts the human being's humanity in the most complete and authentic manner possible, is actually a *superhuman* activity, for it likens the human being to God and allows her to "immortalize" (*athanatizein*), that is, to dwell with eternal and supratemporal truths, thereby elevating the contemplator herself beyond time and mortality.

This self-sufficiency [*autarkeia*] that we mentioned is most complete in the context of contemplative [*theōretikēn*] activity. For the wise man [*sophos*], the just man [*dikaios*], and all others alike require what is necessary for survival, and when this has been adequately provided for, the just man will additionally require other people towards whom and with whom he may act justly, and the same is true for the moderate man [*sōphrōn*], the manly man [*andreios*], and all others. The wise man, however, is capable of contemplating [*theōrein*] even when he is by himself [*kath' hauton*], and his capacity to do this is proportional to his wisdom. Perhaps he will be more successful if he has associates [*synergoi*], but all the same, he is the most self-sufficient of all [*autarkestatos*]. [...] Yet such a way of life is, arguably, superior to the essentially human [*kat' anthrōpon*] way of life, for one will not live in this way to the extent that one is human, but to the extent that there is something divine [*theion*] present in oneself [...] One need not heed those who insist that, being a human being, one should consider human affairs [*anthrōpina*], or that, being mortal, one should consider mortal things; one should rather immortalize [*athanatizein*] to the extent that this is possible [...].³³

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt gives a non-standard and inaccurate translation of this passage: "Considering human affairs, one must not ... consider man as he is and not consider what is mortal in mortal things, but think about them {only} to the extent that they have the possibility of immortalizing." The conclusion that she draws from this is accordingly misguided: "The famous passage in Aristotle [...] occurs very properly in his political writings. For the *polis* was for the Greeks [...] the space [...] reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals."³⁴ However, Aristotle is here not discussing life in the *polis*, but precisely the solitary life

32 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8.1178a9–22.

33 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.1177a27–b1, b26–28, 31–33. My translation.

34 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 56.

of contemplation. This also makes problematic Arendt's distinction between political life as a striving for immortality and philosophical life as the search for eternity.³⁵ For example, she maintains that since Plato, "concern with the eternal and the life of the philosopher are seen as inherently contradictory and in conflict with the striving for immortality, the way of life of the citizen [...]."³⁶ However, Aristotle is saying, quite on the contrary, that as the supreme human (or superhuman) *praxis*, the contemplation of eternal reality will precisely provide the contemplator with a more self-sufficient immortality than the life of political action, which is concerned with the contingent. In *Between Good and Evil*, Arendt's formulation is more adequate: "[...] to 'immortalize' meant for the philosopher to dwell in the neighborhood of those things which are forever [...]."³⁷ In *The Life of the Mind*, she quotes from Plato's *Timaeus* a remark that is virtually identical to Aristotle's: "to mind [*phronein*] immortal and divine things [...] to the extent that it is feasible for the constitution [*physis*] of humans to involve [*metaschein*] immortality [*athanasias*] [...]."³⁸ Here she also quotes the passage from Aristotle correctly.³⁹ However, these vacillations are perhaps first and foremost a token of Arendt's rather unscholarly attitude toward ancient texts; her most fundamental argument, I think, remains unaffected.

Philosophy does not forfeit the traditional Greek dream of immortality, of the human being measuring up to the gods in her own way. It rather proposes to realize this dream through the quest for eternity. There is a fundamental difference here – a difference that is primarily related to *temporality*. Like the pre-philosophical concept of *praxis*, even the pre-philosophical conception of immortality is *future-oriented*: *praxis* is understood as the undertaking of new ventures for the future, and immortality is understood as the preservation of name and fame throughout generations *to come*. As for Aristotle's *praxis*, it is entirely determined by the *present*. The Aristotelian *praxis* is superior to *poiēsis* in that it is precisely *not* future-oriented, but at every moment already contains its full meaning as present. The life of contemplation entails a suppression of the futural dimension that in ordinary living gives life its purpose, direction, and meaning.

Contemplation is supreme because it has no future, and no past, for that matter – it is a pure timeless dwelling in the full presence of those eternal truths that always already have been and always will be present. The grounds for this supremacy of the present in the good life are neither political nor ethical, but rather speculative and metaphysical. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, what *is* in the full sense

35 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 14–21.

36 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 20.

37 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 46–47.

38 Plato, *Timaeus*. In Plato, *Platonis opera*, Vol. 4: *Tetralogiam VIII continens*. Ed. John Burnet. Oxford: Clarendon, 1902, 90c1–3. My translation. Cf. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 129.

39 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 136.

of the word is completely actual, *energeia* or *entelecheia*, meaning precisely that its future is *not* open, that it does not have *any* unrealized potentialities. Aristotle does not hesitate to determine the ideal enactment of human life on the basis of this ideal being of things. This was pointed out by Martin Heidegger in his reading of Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, within the framework of a 1924–25 lecture course on Plato’s *Sophist* – incidentally, the first of Heidegger’s Marburg courses attended by the young Arendt.⁴⁰

[...] all possibilities of being with regard to the *praxis* of prephilosophical man are dependent, in their very sense, on being with others. Therefore they cannot be man’s proper possibilities of being [...] our concern is precisely the proper *accessibility* [*Vorhandensein*] and presence [*Anwesenheit*] of life. We are asking about the radically and ontologically grasped properness [*Eigentlichkeit*] of being [*Seins*], which is itself the ontological basis for the factual concrete existence of man. [...] The philosopher, who is concerned purely and exclusively with understanding and disclosing beings, can be who he is only if and precisely if he is [...] alone with himself. [...] Pure seeing is a matter of the single individual [...]. Herein resides the peculiar tendency of the accommodation of human being-there [*Dasein*], in respect of its being-temporal, to the eternity of the world. [...] Now it is clear why pure contemplation settles something for the existence of man and why it is the highest in the Greek sense. [...] *For the Greeks the contemplation of human existence was oriented purely toward the meaning of being itself, i.e., toward the extent to which it is possible for human being-there to be everlasting.* The Greeks gathered this meaning of being, being as absolute presence, from the being of the world.⁴¹

The ethical primacy of solitary contemplation over political participation is based, Heidegger maintains, on the metaphysical primacy of permanent presence over temporal situatedness. I would like to propose that it is this underlying primacy of presence that Arendt refers to in *The Human Condition* as the “deeper reasons” that she decides not to discuss any further:

[...] the very discovery of contemplation (*theōria*) as a human faculty [...] has ruled metaphysical and political thought throughout our tradition. It seems unnecessary to my present purpose to discuss the reasons for this tradition. Obviously they are deeper than the historical occasion which gave rise to the conflict between the *polis* and the philosopher [...]. They must lie in an altogether different aspect of the human condition [...].⁴²

The question of the temporal character of human activities – laboring, producing, acting, thinking, willing, and judging – and of their different manners of facing the future is present throughout Arendt’s work, ever since her dissertation

40 See Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* [1924–25]. Ed. Ingeborg Schüssler. Gesamtausgabe 19. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992, 132–179; trans. *Plato’s Sophist*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz & André Schuwer. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997, 91–123.

41 Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes*, 176–178; *Plato’s Sophist*, 121–122. Translation modified.

42 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 16.

on Augustine. I argue that this question of human temporality is the Heideggerian heritage at the heart of Arendt's thinking – and, perhaps, the point in which Arendt is ultimately more “Heideggerian” than Heidegger himself in thinking the openness and newness of the future in even less traditional terms.⁴³

We thus see that Arendt's claim that Aristotle subjugated action to quiet and inactive philosophical contemplation is not entirely accurate. Rather, Aristotle very subtly realigns the concept of action in such a way that it becomes justified to point out contemplation as the supreme, i.e., the most self-sufficient kind of action – just as, for Aristotle, rest is the supreme form of movement.⁴⁴ We see that Aristotle's threefold distinction between production, action, and contemplation is ultimately not very rigid: the more fundamental distinction is between 1) future-oriented, open, and incomplete production and 2) self-immanent auto-production in which the end is always already present. To the latter group, strictly speaking, only contemplation belongs – all other activities are ultimately means aiming at an external end that has not yet been attained. As Villa puts it, “the Aristotelian definition of praxis is instrumentalist, insofar as the *meaning* of action is inseparable from a process of teleological actualization”⁴⁵ and “Aristotle's understanding of action is in fact derived from the fabrication experience.”⁴⁶ Therefore, politics cannot be the scene of the supreme human actions, but only a necessary preparation that provides the adequate framework for the practice of contemplative philosophy. Nor can political philosophy be more than a handmaiden or “doctor” of the supreme, theoretical study of absolute truth:

Yet all the same, it [practical insight, *phronēsis*] is not the mistress of [theoretical] wisdom [*sophias*], just as medicine is not the mistress of health: for the former does not make use of the latter, but attends to its coming to be; the former issues orders for the sake of the latter, not to the latter. Further, [were one to maintain the opposite], one might

43 See e.g. Arendt, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin: Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation* [1929]. Berlin: Philo, 2005; trans. *Love and Saint Augustine*. Trans. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott & Judith Chelius Stark. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996; *The Human Condition*, 12–21, 96–101, 119–121, 131–139, 167–174, 179–247, 289–294, 313–325; *Between Past and Future*, 3–90, 143–71, 227–264; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 129–151, 197–216; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*, 11–19, 23–34, 39–51, 104–110. I follow Taminaux's (*The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker*, 199–217) outstanding discussion of the Heideggerian theme of temporality in Arendt. See also Bethânia Assy, “Prolegomenon for an Ethics of Visibility in Hannah Arendt.” *Kriterion* 110 (2004), 294–320; Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Remembrance.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10 (2002), 171–182; Peg Birmingham, “Heidegger and Arendt: The Birth of Political Action and Speech.” In François Raffoul & David Pettigrew (eds.), *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002; Andreas Grossmann, “Im Anfang liegt alles beschlossen: Hannah Arendts politisches Denken im Schatten eines Heideggerschen Problems.” *Man and World* 30 (1997), 35–47; Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 113–270.

44 This is Heidegger's formulation; see Heidegger, “Vom Wesen und Begriff der *physis*: Aristoteles, Physik B, 1” [1939]. In Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*. 3rd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996, 283–284; trans. “On the Essence and Concept of *physis* in Aristotle's *Physics* B, 1” [1939]. Trans. Thomas Sheehan. In Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 183–230, 216–217.

45 Villa, “Beyond Good and Evil,” 279.

46 Villa, “Beyond Good and Evil,” 47.

just as well say that political science rules the gods, since it issues orders concerning all things in the *polis*.⁴⁷

Philosophy's Forgetfulness of Action and the Origins of Totalitarianism

In Arendtian and Heideggerian terms, a persistent feature of Occidental metaphysics is at work within Aristotle's realignment of the concept of action, namely, the subordination of the contingency and factuality of the past and of the uncontrollability and unpredictability of the future to the necessity and certainty of the permanent present – in other words, the subordination of the temporality of action to the temporality of thinking.⁴⁸ The self-sufficient activity of thinking is the supreme kind of action because it is the most *secure* and most *predictable* activity. Heidegger himself was, according to Arendt, ultimately unable to overcome this presupposition, as can be traced from his very traditional philosophical contempt for politics and public life.⁴⁹ Politics is precisely the realm of freedom, contingency, and opinion in which human beings are essentially poised against human otherness and the unknown future. It is the scene on which humans are able to start something truly new, unconstrained by any transcendental or empirical necessity or by predictable results, and are also able to share this new project with others.

Aristotle's articulation of *praxis* supports Arendt's claim that philosophy has, since ancient times, effectively aspired to dismiss the truly political by thinking politics in terms of production, as a means for attaining a higher, supra-political end.⁵⁰ Since the culmination of this tradition in the thought of Marx, political philosophy has increasingly been replaced by *ideology*, i.e., the attempt to materialize this philosophical articulation of politics in history – in the famous words of Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach, to make philosophy change the world

47 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13.1145a6–11. My translation.

48 Cf. in particular Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 202–213.

49 See Arendt, "Martin Heidegger ist achtzig Jahre alt," 179–192; "For Martin Heidegger's Eightieth Birthday," 207–217; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*, 172–194. Arendt's early critique of Heidegger in the essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" [1946] (*Essays in Understanding*, 176–82) remains quite superficial and largely misguided. However, in the lecture "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought" [1954] (In *Essays in Understanding*, 432–33, 443, 446 n5), Arendt considers the possibility that Heidegger's later thinking could indeed provide the framework for a radical philosophical account of human plurality. Cf. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 253–274.

50 Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Essays in Understanding*, 430–433; *The Human Condition*, 17–18, 220–230; *Between Past and Future*, 77–80, 106–120.

instead of merely interpreting it.⁵¹ For Arendt, the culmination of political ideology was the ideological totalitarianism of the 20th century.⁵² Unlike classical tyranny, totalitarianism is no longer content with simply dismissing the plurality of opinions and the unpredictability involved in political action, but, in fact, seeks to *destroy* this plurality, spontaneity, and potential newness, to *make* politics into the smooth, secure, and efficient administrative process of implementing a social ideal, such as the classless society or the racially purified people's community, engineered by reliable and completely unspontaneous functionaries such as Adolf Eichmann. The peculiar new feature of the totalitarian movement is that what is important is not the end but the process of producing it – the stringently logical subordination of the political realm to the laws of the movement of history as “class struggle” or “survival of the fittest.”

The Arendtian critique of Aristotle's practical philosophy must ultimately be situated within this extremely broad historical framework. Taking this framework into account, we are perhaps more inclined to assent to her warning in *The Human Condition*:

The substitution of making for acting and the concomitant degradation of politics into a means to obtain an allegedly “higher” end [...] is as old as the tradition of political philosophy. [...] How persistent and successful the transformation of action into a mode of making has been is easily attested by the whole terminology of political theory and political thought, which indeed makes it almost impossible to discuss these matters without using the category of means and ends and thinking in terms of instrumentality. [...] We are perhaps the first generation which has become fully aware of the murderous consequences inherent in a line of thought that forces one to admit that all means, provided that they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end. [...] As long as we believe that we deal with ends and means in the political realm, we shall not be able to prevent anybody's using all means to pursue recognized ends.⁵³

51 Arendt, “What is Existential Philosophy?” in *Essays in Understanding*, 171, 175; *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 143, 249, 463–464, 472; “Religion and Politics” [1953], in *Essays in Understanding*, 374–377; *The Human Condition*, 12, 17; *Between Past and Future*, 17–40, 77–82; *Men in Dark Times* [1968]. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1995, 92; *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 36; *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1: *Thinking*, 176.

52 Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps” [1950], in *Essays in Understanding*, 232–247; *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 460–479; “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” in *Essays in Understanding*, 307–327; “On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding” [1954], in *Essays in Understanding*, 328–360; *Between Past and Future*, 87–88.

53 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 229.

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