Hannah Arendt's International Agonism*

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Hannah Arendt's fierce critique of sovereignty, along with her excavation of Greek agonism, has gained much traction among critical theorists of international politics who revisit the basic assumptions of conventional international theories, such as state sovereignty and power as domination. This paper engages with an increasingly popular stream within such critical international studies that appropriates Arendt's agonism to envision a form of a global public acting in concert. I argue that Arendt's thoughts cannot be reduced to a radical vision of agonistic cosmo-politics. Rather, her thinking suggests that political actors appreciate and care for their public worlds while remaining alert to institutional ossification. Her appreciation of the constitutional state confirms that state agency is an important element of her thoughts. By examining the vicissitudes of publicity found in Arendt's thinking and their reflexive effect on inter-polity relations, the article elucidates the grounds of her international agonism and brings home a form of international politics where states pursuing the domestic goal of greatness coexist and cooperate. Thus, the study suggests that critical scholars of radical agonism miss the important implications of an "institutional" Arendt for international politics.

Keywords: Arendt, agonism, publicity, state, international society

I. Introduction

Hannah Arendt's thinking has appealed to scholars of alternative international studies who share a common interest in revisiting the basic assumptions of conventional international theories, such as state sovereignty and power as domination (Axtmann

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2006; Gündoğdu 2015; Hayden 2009; Lang 2002; Owens 2007).[1] Arendt forcefully critiques the idea of sovereignty by revealing its premise that politics necessarily takes the form of rulership. Challenging deep prejudices against free politics that lie in the long tradition of Western political thought, she points out that freedom can appear only under the condition of non-sovereignty. Instead of sovereign politics, she envisions what diverse equals create by acting together: free politics beyond rulership, domination, and violence.

This paper engages with an increasingly popular stream within such critical international studies that appropriates Arendt's agonism to envision a form of a global public acting in concert. Often dubbed "radical agonism," this approach attends to Arendt's accounts of action's features, such as disruptiveness and unboundedness (Herzog 2004; Honig 1993a, 76-125; Mitchell 2010; Shinko 2008; Wenman 2013, 263-297). Its elevation of aesthetic individuation makes this approach distinctive. The core concern of radical agonism is that without the Nietzschean self-transformation that prepares individuals to challenge deep-seated forms of social and political domination, calling for communal action only increases the risk of "sliding into mass behavior" (Honig 1993b, 532). Therefore, the unruliness of action and its resistance to being captured by any communal perspective must be preserved at the individual level of politics.

Bonnie Honig, a leading Arendt scholar, envisions the global application of radical agonism as an "agonistic cosmopolitics" (Honig 2009, 129). Essentially, for a democratic polity to be truly inclusive, it must embrace the unavoidable fact that all institutional settlements generate remainders. Honig (2009, 133) argues that the only effective method for eschewing this problem is committing to "the perpetual generation of new sites of action in concert." Radical agonism, which benefits Honig's interpretation of Arendt, informs several impressive works in the areas of political resistance and intervention. For instance, some critical theorists accentuate the importance of exploring unpredictable forms of engagement derived from the "friction" between

1) For places in Arendt's work where she addresses international topics, see Arendt (1963, 253-279; 1968, 81-94; 1972, 105-123, 229-233; 1973, 123-157, 222-302; 2005, 153-191; 2007, 423-450).

global-local encounters, while demanding "the constant pluralization of subjects and ideas" to challenge the neoliberal framework that sets the terms of the construction and relations of the global and the local (Bargués-Pedreny 2017, 228; Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 294; Robinson and Tormey 2009). In this vein, the Nietzschean self-transformation accompanied by radically agonistic action serves as a crucial element in contesting what Arendt (1998, 38) calls "the rise of the social" in forms such as modern consumerism, capitalism, or neoliberalism.

The clear merit of radical agonism is that it increases sensitivity to the fundamental structural sources of domination by shifting attention to hidden power operations in the everyday contexts of politics. As several critics have noted, however, the politics radical agonism envisions minimizes the crucial role of institutions that render domination inoperative and overlooks the diplomatic function of collective entities on the international scene (Canovan 1996, 11-32; Hyvönen 2016, 201-205; Lang 2005, 223; Villa 1992; Volk 2021). Indeed, Arendt herself has much more appreciation of state and international institutions than radical agonism suggests. Rather than treating Arendt's interest in public law and institutions as a distraction, one must see the broad picture of her free politics, where the demands of agonistic action and institutional stability coexist.

The implications of such an "institutional" Arendt for international politics have not been fully analyzed. Extending Arendt's thoughts to international politics reveals that her thinking cannot be reduced to a radical vision of agonistic cosmo-politics. Grounded in Arendt's call for political actors to appreciate and care for their public worlds while remaining alert to institutional ossification, the essay examines the vicissitudes of publicity in Arendtian polities and their reflexive effect on inter-polity relations. Thus, it elucidates the grounds of Arendt's international agonism and brings home a form of international politics where states pursuing the domestic goal of greatness coexist and cooperate. Emerging from the analysis is a different Arendt from that of radical agonism, where aesthetic individuation receives core attention. This Arendt of international agonism reflects much more the nuance and complexities found in Arendt's international thoughts than other interpretations.

This article starts by articulating the different types of action found in Arendt's thoughts. This part of the analysis helps us address the next task of articulating the basic features of Arendt's political association. After elaborating on the scope of state agency implied in Arendt's thinking, I conclude by exploring the implications of her international agonism in comparison with those of liberal cosmopolitanism, realism, and global agonism.

II. Varieties of Action

Agonistic appropriations of Arendt's thinking are often grounded in her conception of action. The disruptive, unpredictable, and unbounded features of action attest to its great potential for challenging normalized violence and initiating new directions in extant political situations. Yet, although Arendt appreciates such an agonistic aspect of action, her accounts of it are variegated, as she recognizes both advantages and disadvantages associated with action-driven politics. Indeed, interpretive issues arise when one fails to reflect on Arendt's argument for the needed tension between agonistic action and stable institutions for free politics. This section presents three different accounts of action found in Arendt's works: that of the Homeric world, the Greek polis, and the Roman republic. A critical engagement with her arguments about action reveals two essential elements for the political association oriented toward free politics: agonistic action and stable institutions. For Arendt, I further suggest, the Greek and Roman polities achieved a certain balance between these competing demands, yet each carried the risk of overreaching. This elaboration offers the main ground for the later analysis of how Arendtian political association is constituted and what impact such an internal constitution has on state agency.

Prior to this analysis, a preliminary articulation of Arendt's thoughts on action, especially why she engages with it, is necessary. Arendt discovers a clear advantage of action in creating free politics beyond enforcement, domination, and violence.

According to her famous accounts of the *vita activa* (human activities), differences among labor, work, and action have become blurred (Arendt 1998, 79-247). Even worse, labor is now considered the top source of value and work the second, while action carries the least utility among human activities. Arendt's concern is that the human condition of natality and plurality cannot be fully acknowledged in the activities of labor and work. For instance, when the mentality of work—the defining characteristic of *homo faber* (man as craftsman)—dominates politics, treating human beings as raw material to be shaped by a particular end or value becomes inevitable. The laboring activity that serves to maintain the life processes of human beings differs from work, the unnatural activity that makes things. But, for Arendt, both labor and work create situations inconducive to free politics: while the elements of violation and violence are present in all work products, labor absorbs everything into a cyclical life process where "destruction is the inherent end of all things for consumption" (Arendt 1998, 137).

As is well known, Arendt (1998, 9) considers action to be most compatible with natality and plurality. Arendt (2006a, 145) makes the decisive points that the purpose of politics is to achieve freedom and the way of realizing this is action. Arendt's view of action as a key factor in free politics closely relates to two basic features of action her writings describe: disclosive and associational (Benhabib 1996, 125; d'Entreves 1994, 84; Villa 1996, 54-55). The *disclosive* aspect of action, which some also call "dramaturgical," characterizes the performative dimension of action: through performing "great" words and deeds in public, individuals reveal their uniqueness. Important in this scheme is that actors do not know truths about themselves and project them in public—their public identities are formed only through what they say and do. *Associational* action holds that to be heard and witnessed, one's speeches and actions need an audience of diverse equals who share multiple perspectives on the public concern. By being inserted into a web of human associations, action creates a chain reaction among people and generates new relationships by enacting stories in an intersubjective manner (Arendt 1998, 183). Action-driven politics, then, effectively avoids sources of domination. By the disclosive action, individuals avoid enforcing predetermined

sovereign wills in public. The associational action that renders individuals both "actors" and "sufferers" through storytelling significantly alleviates oppression or violence in the form of tyranny (Arendt 1998, 184, 190; Kateb 2000).

Arendt places a varied emphasis on these aspects of action when illustrating them through historical examples. Early Arendt scholarship focused on bringing up and correcting what is conventionally considered action, such as violence (Kateb 1984; Pitkin 1998; cf. MacGowan 1997). This interpretive orientation had the unintended effect of flattening her variegated accounts of action. It further increased the risk of blinding us to complexities that lie in her recognition of the two demands of disruptive action and institutional stability for free politics. Rather than offering neat accounts of action, Arendt discusses its merits and drawbacks in various contexts. Indeed, apart from Arendt's dismal statements about modern society, where every activity is "socially" coordinated according to the same biological process of life—namely, sheer survival—we can find variation in her statements about action.

Arendt's works suggest three types of action, none of which fully represents the whole dimension of her thinking. One is the action of the pre-polis world, the Homeric age in Greece. Arendt characterizes this period with a primordial form of action by heroic kings who embarked on new enterprises and pursued immortal fame. For Arendt (1998, 26), Homeric action represents "the specifically human way of answering, talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done." However, owing to its excessive concern about the disclosure of uniqueness, this pre-polis action often becomes "highly individualistic," pursuing "self-disclosure at the expense of all other factors" (Arendt 1998, 194). Despite her interest in the pure form of action, as Margaret Canovan (1992, 137) points out, Arendt remains cautious about this situation, for it is "too anarchic to be fully compatible with any settled political structure."

In contrast with agonistic theorists, who would find great inspiration from the kind of agonism driven by Homeric action, Arendt assesses it much more ambivalently. This attitude is also identifiable when she turns to a more communal form of action in the Greek polis. For Arendt (1998, 36), the polis life meant the transition from

warriors' deeds to citizens' words, from the action of "embark[ing] upon some adventure and glorious enterprise" to "simply … devot[ing] one's life to the affairs of the city." At the same time, though, Arendt (1998, 26) makes sure that to the extent that the "anarchic" form of action is "tamed" through the foundation of the polis, the revelatory quality of action is tainted: speech as a form of action is transformed into a means of persuasion, not a spontaneous act. On the surface, Arendt seems to present the Greek polis as a solely desirable polity that sustains a balance between agonistic action and institutional stability. As her account of the demise of Athens attests, however, her actual judgment is that such a balance was too fragile to maintain in the Greek city-state. Indeed, Achilles' heroic acts and deeds "became the prototype of action for Greek antiquity" (Arendt 1998, 194). "[The life of] a polis … consisted of an intense and uninterrupted contest of all against all … ceaselessly showing oneself to be the best of all" (Arendt 2004, 435). "[T]his agonal spirit," as Arendt (2004, 435) observes, "eventually was to bring the Greek city states to ruin because it … poisoned the domestic life of the citizens with envy and mutual hatred." In terms of action, then, Arendt's worrisome accounts of Greek politics imply that the disclosive aspect of action may overwhelm its associational feature in the context of intense agonism.

For some, such fragility may be an unavoidable part of politics. However, Arendt wants to go beyond the Greek polis and investigate a communal context that can better balance the demands of disruptive action and stable institutions. Some of *On Revolution* strongly suggests that the Roman idea of augmentation serves to sustain a polity to cultivate free politics. Regarding Arendt's conception of augmentation, grasping her distinctive view of power that closely relates to action is essential. Arendt (2006b, 167) considers action to be the seed of power: power is only "engendered by people's acting together and kept by their mutual promises." Her formulation of power significantly departs from the conventional account that treats it as domination (Breen 2007; Correm 2019; Young 2002). However, Arendt (2006b, 174) also acknowledges that even if it is generated by acting in concert and maintained by promising, power alone is insufficient to give permanence to political

institutions. Thus, some source of authority that can endow the newly born political association with durability must exist. The problem is that when broaching the need for authority to make a newly founded institution long-lasting, people tend to rely on transcendent standards above the body politic. Arendt (2006b, 149) names this tendency "the problem of an absolute," while raising the concern about its depoliticization effect. Alternatively, Arendt (2006b, 193) addresses the Roman sense of authority that depended on "the vitality of the spirit of foundation," which resulted in the Romans treating the founding act itself as an object of respect, commemoration, and worship.

This attitude, according to Arendt (2006b, 194), is acutely manifested in the augmenting activity: "authority in [the Roman] context is nothing more or less than a kind of necessary 'augmentation' by virtue of which all innovations and changes remain tied back to the foundation which, at the same time, they augment and increase." Arendt (2006b, 194) also claims that the same principle of augmentation was operative among the people of the American Revolution, as they thought "the very authority of the American Constitution reside[d] in its inherent capacity to be amended and augmented." Bearing the Roman and American cases in mind, Arendt speculates that, by avoiding complete stagnation and abrupt upheaval, augmentation combines two contradictory themes of politics: change and continuity or disruption and stability. Action conceived of in this scheme, then, does not occur to the point of anarchy, as in Homeric deeds. Nor does the politics of augmentation take intense agonism and the resulting fragility of politics for granted, as in the Greek polis. Rather, Arendt's conception of augmentation points to the way of action occurring with a constitutional referent to foster open-ended debate about what "the best way to 'preserve and augment' the space of public freedom … citizens have either constructed or inherited" (Villa 2008, 352).

So understood, the augmentation model inspired by the Roman idea of authority seems to best foster Arendt's free politics. Much complexity exists in this side of her thinking, however. The Roman sense of augmentation accompanies a quasi-religious deference to the founding itself (Canovan 1999, 138-142; Villa 2008, 101-107). The

augmentation model, as already suggested, departs from the "traditional" approach that would explicitly set a divine absolute above the body politic. Equally true is that Arendt of *On Revolution* (2006b, 205) entertains the idea of augmentation to revive the memory of beginning and construct a myth about the founding act, while believing that "the beginning, because it contains its own principle, is also a god who, as long as he dwells among men, as long as he inspires their deeds, saves everything." The intended effect of the Roman-style augmentation is to create "an atmosphere of reverent awe" that "has shielded both event and document against the onslaught of time and changed circumstances" (Arendt, 2006b, 196). The underlying idea is that the public worlds are "born of the specific actions and agreements of particular men and dependent on continuing support for their survival" (Canovan 1992, 248). Hence, there is nothing natural to guarantee the continuation of a republic without people's support. The living memory of the act of constitution conceived of as a myth does the trick because it conceals the contingency of the republic's origin while facilitating the worship of the founding moment and endeavors to preserve and augment it among the people.

Remembering the constituting act sets a certain limit on constitutional questions when they come into play, thereby providing stability for the newly born republic (Arendt 2006b, 196). Yet, the politics of augmentation may also increase the risk of placing too much restraint on "the possibility of new action" if it is conceived of as demanding a strong piety toward the myth of the founders (Keenan 1994, 309, 315). Indeed, as Dana Villa (2008, 104) cautions, Arendt's real intent can be properly captured only when we view the Roman idea of augmentation alongside her Greek-oriented suggestion of a "public-spirited individualism" evident in *The Human Condition.* Taking insights from *On Revolution* and *The Human Condition* together, one can argue that Arendt hardly wants to establish a particular institution as a blueprint for her free politics. Rather, her writings demonstrate a political dilemma that free politics faces between its two demands—agonistic action and institutional stability (Canovan 1999, 148). Viewed from this perspective, none of the three forms of action was perfect. The Homeric world practiced a pure action where speech drew

attention to the "greatness" of one's deeds, although it was too fragile to sustain a joint enterprise. Meanwhile, both the Greek polis and the Roman republic created a communal context for action. Yet, each institutional model carried potential danger, as the Greek way of intense agonism could ruin the common space for freedom, and the Roman-style cult of the founders could undermine the potentials of agon and action for free politics.

III. Arendtian Political Association

The suggested reading of three types of action in Arendt's works has important implications for investigating a polity conducive to her vision of free politics. Informed — not overwhelmed—by the Homeric spirit, the Arendtian political association creates a public space for action's appearances but remains alert to the danger of political fragility that individuals' intense agonistic competitions can effect and the risk of political conformism that ossified institutions and quasi-religious deference to them may cultivate. This conception of political association, with its acute recognition of the tension between agonistic action and stable institutions, considers the activity of balancing those demands as the essential practice for free politics. This way, it differs from radical agonism, which takes action as the boundary-blurring force par excellence and renders any claims of publicity inadequate for free politics. Arendt's *res publica* embraces the risks of politics, although it never ceases to problematize the degree of public-spiritedness in the real world, where the pendulum of politics swings between the poles of action and institutions. As her conflicting accounts of Greek and Roman politics attest, Arendt intends to bring home the inherent difficulty communities of free politics encounter rather than presenting an imaginary point of complete equilibrium between the competing demands in the most abstract sense. By doing so, she urges actual political actors to bear in mind what they gain and lose from attending to each side of free politics.

Numerous works have addressed Arendt's statements about the Greek polis and the Roman republic (Ashcroft 2018; Owens 2007, 33-51, 72-90; Suh 2011; Taminiaux 2000; Tsao 2002). Yet, by attending to both the advantages and disadvantages of these ancient polities, the interpretation proposed here seeks to do justice to Arendt's critical reflections on them and her acute sensitivity to the broad topic of political association. Arendt clearly sees that the Roman style of establishing "lasting institutions" through public-spirited citizens' augmenting activities can reduce the infiltration of individual socio-economic interests into the public space and the overreaching of agonistic action for the disclosure of individual excellence. Lasting institutions also make possible human greatness, the quality that human beings can achieve through a "perpetual" union (Arendt 2006b, 174, 221). For Arendt, human beings actualize the greatness of public culture and civilization only when an organized community sustains itself long enough to be a lasting institution that binds present and future generations. Seen from Arendt's Greek-inspired agonism, however, the Roman augmentation sets the bar of public-spiritedness too high. Such a "conservative" move fails to reflect legitimate voices derived from deep-seated moral or religious differences, as it confuses them with interests driven by the strategic, harmful approach to politics that merely seeks to maximize individual profits.

One can also problematize the augmentation-based political association based on the international dimension it renders. The Roman republic, like the Greek polis, facilitates the vitality of politics. Overall, with its strong emphasis on public deliberation and self-government at the local level of politics, Arendt's republicanism takes the "bottom-up" approach, thus avoiding the problem often levied against the "top-down" model of liberal governance. However, the Roman augmentation model goes further than merely appreciating local norms and respecting extant public laws. It suggests that future changes will remain tied back to the constitution, to which all people across generations will remain faithful. Of course, Arendt's conception of constitutional augmentation should not be confused with hardline traditionalism. Augmentation is not the same as conservation. The activity of augmentation enables political communities to integrate new voices for change into constitutional

amendments, as people actively apply and expand constitutional principles in their public lives and incrementally modify existing arrangements of public judgment. Nevertheless, the Roman augmentation may undeniably project a high degree of solidification of political community, and this demand can render politics too reliant on domestic political needs and the rate of change too slow to meet the demand for international cooperation.

Arendt's accounts of augmentation inspired by the Roman idea of authority do not fully reflect her thoughts on political association for good reason. Various aspects of Greek and Roman politics coexist in her thinking, creating tension and calling for balance. Arendt appropriates Greek law and politics as critical sources to indicate the Roman problem. Pointing out the difference in the Greek and Roman conceptions of law, Arendt (1998, 195) argues that for the Greeks, laws "did not command the same loyalty we know from the Roman type of patriotism." While discussing the crucial role of action in generating power, Arendt (1998, 205) praises Athenians' conviction that their acts and deeds were "enough to generate *dynamis* and [did] not need the transforming reification of *homo faber* to keep it in reality." However, the Roman moments in Arendt's thoughts also critique the Greek problem; Arendt's approval of Greek politics always comes with qualification. Her thinking makes it clear that, because the public space was not guaranteed to last in a place of intense agonism like Athens, the Greeks had to establish the formal law, the founding of which was not part of action. In the end, the Greeks could not see the viable relationship between law and politics that the Romans discovered. For Arendt (1998, 191), although the Greeks recognized action's "tremendous capacity for establishing [new] relationship," they failed to see that this could be used to engage in and revise extant legal criteria.

For some, though, the nature of the critique Arendt's thoughts accommodate is questionable. Aside from the liberal frustration that Arendt's thinking is too dated to reflect the recent developments of "benign" global governance, postcolonial theorists want to examine whether her attitude toward modernity is critical enough to evaluate its effect on power and race. Notably, Jimmy Casas Klausen claims that Arendt's political association is predicated upon the ethnocentric idea of high culture that is

inseparable from the German tradition of *Bildung*. For Klausen (2010, 415; 2011, 671; 2010, 416), Arendt's idea of politics proximate to high culture that treats "culture's highest vocation … [as] the striving for immortality" creates a "structural" effect on her oeuvres, which renders her thinking not radical enough to promote the postcolonial sensitivity needed for recognizing "value-contents … operative in non-European cultural contexts." Klausen (2011, 671) even speculates that owing to Arendt's demand of high culture for politics and the resulting exclusion of primitives who do not meet this standard, her thinking is not free from the charge that it fundamentally shares the same mindset as colonial authorities who refused to reflect indigenous peoples' voices in determining their way of life.

Klausen's critique of Arendt, seemingly inspired by Franz Fanon's (2004) analysis of colonialism, broadly aligns with radical agonism's problematization of some of the "conservative" aspects of her thoughts, such as her appreciation of moderation and stability for free politics. Klausen has added to the known postcolonial critique his problematization of Arendt's emphasis on cultural fabrication. The key principle that lies in Arendt's high culture, Klausen notes, is that culture intrinsically values art beyond its utility. Thus, for Arendt, cultural artworks are (at least relatively) more durable than objects that are consumed for the biological necessities of life. Klausen (2010, 415) thinks this view is problematic because it can invalidate forms of indigenous culture that are embedded in "the contexts of everyday use and complex ritual." Arendt does appeal to "taste" by characterizing its intersubjective aspect as what cultural artworks embody. But, seen from the postcolonial lens, the critique fostered by the intersubjective process of taste is insufficient because it is uncritical of the high-culture standard, according to which one determines authentic and inauthentic forms of culture and measures the degree of humanity.

This interpretation, however, fails to reflect Arendt's real intent of conceiving of the public realm as one that is close to a cultural (not socio-economic) association (Canovan 1994, 183-184). Arendt's interest in culture stems from her view that cultural fabrication is one of the activities of "work" that contribute to building a durable human artifice (Markell 2011). To Arendt, the public world in the form of

cultural artwork can serve as a bulwark against natural and quasi-natural destructive forces and a medium through which human beings attain public freedom without domination. This insight is driven not only by Arendt's overall worry about the modern consumerist culture that subjects everything to a cyclical life process but also more acutely by her experiences of the quasi-natural claim of totalitarianism manifested in the Nazi and the Stalinist regimes, which posited that the evolution of the Aryan race or the triumph of the proletariat in the class struggle reflects natural and historical processes. In this regard, Arendt does not have the anthropological task of discovering and preserving "natural" forms of indigenous life. Rather, her interest lies in investigating an "artificial" human community where diverse equals achieve freedom through the reliable appearances of action (Arendt 2006a, 147).

Equally worth noting is that Arendt's appreciation of the cultural aspect of politics always comes with caution. As Ayten Gündoğdu (2011) points out, Arendt's writings show both her interest in and reservation about cultural artworks that reflect the mentality of work. This sensitivity is evident in Arendt's judgment that the human artifice of institutions needs action's consistent inputs, without which institutional ossification is unavoidable. Considering Arendt's recognition of the crucial need for agonistic action for free politics, then, the anti-primitivist charge that the overall structure of her thinking harbors a bias toward embracing cultural production in the name of human progress is hasty. With Gündoğdu's sensible observation, my synthetic approach to Arendt's engagements with the Greek and Roman polities adds further clarity, suggesting that viewing the public world via the lens of high culture may have a dual effect: Calling for a high degree of solidification and public-spiritedness, such a public engagement effectively eschews the problematic situation of individuals' projection of private socioeconomic interests or their excessive agonism in politics and may also silence legitimate voices originating from deep-seated moral or religious differences. Vigilance against these two dangers found in Arendt's take on Greek and Roman politics suggests her sensitivity to the difference between mere interests subject to biological necessity and plural voices rooted in different ways of life.

Yet, it is important to confirm that Arendt embraces the risks of politics.

Highlighting Arendt's concern about the overreaching of the demands of agonistic action and institutional stability and her recognition of the need for their balance may give the impression that her thinking is either merely aporetic or abstract to the point of setting a universally applicable point of perfect equilibrium between those demands of free politics. Arendt, however, is always cautious about confusing theoretical possibilities with practical politics. As Arendt's engagements with the Homeric spirit that lives in the Greek polis and the augmenting activities inspired by the Roman idea of authority evince, her thinking is not aloof from the real world of politics, where the pendulum of politics sways between the two parameters of action's disruption and institutional closure. Put differently, Arendtian political association is not solely indeterminate. Rather, by showing what political actors gain and lose from attending to each side of free politics, Arendt intends to offer key principles that they should consider for the future of their common spaces for freedom.

IV. State Agency

So far, the discussion has made three points: 1) action for Arendt has a constitutional referent; 2) her political association for free politics attends to the two demands of agonistic action and institutional stability; and 3) her thinking embraces the risks of politics and makes the task of free politics incomplete, and thus balancing action and institutions is always necessary. Regarding international relations (IR), this elaboration of Arendt's thoughts provides a distinctive picture of international agonism. A key question that arises from applying Arendt's thinking to international politics is whether and in what form action occurs on the international level. Action, for Arendt, has an initiatory dimension: The actor has the ability to bring up his or her distinctive view and engage with others. Who then is the actor in Arendtian international politics? Can the state "act"? Does the state have agency?

At first glance, the idea that the state is entrusted with a degree of agency is far

from Arendt's thinking. Arendt's problem with sovereign statism is well known. Understandably, scholars of radical agonism frequently cite Arendt's vivid account of "the perversion of the state into an instrument of the nation" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt 1973, 231). Yet, considering what we have discussed regarding her idea of political association, the state, for Arendt, is not an entity totally dismissible but a political structure requiring constant reform. In fact, Arendt (1972, 230-233) herself has a strong interest in formulating a new concept of the state. State agency, or the scope of states' ability to engage with each other, is not irrelevant to Arendt.

State agency is a contested topic in contemporary IR scholarship. Under Kenneth Waltz's shadow, so-called structural realists long assumed that state behaviors merely reflect the regularities formed through objective forces in an international system that lacks any central authority. States simply happen to balance each other, and the condition of international anarchy even mandates that they do so. Emphasizing the structural effect of international politics this way considerably restrained the agency of the state (Wendt 1987). Two alternative approaches have emerged from such a bleak image of the state portrayed by structural realism. One emphasizes the agency of individuals, while the other appeals to the agency of the state as opposed to the international system. The first approach treats the state as a very thin structure; thus Erik Ringmar (1996, 452), providing a prime example of this argument, considers the state to be "at the mercy of the interpretations given to it through [each individual's] stories in which it features." This narrativist conception of the state aligns with the view that state or identity formation does not need the so-called "recognition struggles" between the self and the other (Bartelson 2013, 125-127; Lebow 2008, 482). By valorizing individuals' agency in mutually constructing the narratives of the state through "storytelling," the narrativist approach renders itself close to "global social movements" or the global version of radical agonism addressed earlier (Neumann 2004, 259-267; Ringmar 1996, 454-458).

In contrast, the second alternative accentuates the agency of the state. Here, engaging with Alexander Wendt, a leading IR social constructivist on this approach, is

useful for clarifying Arendt's views on state agency. Wendt (2004; 1999, 193-245) argues that the state not only is real but also has a personhood—an independent character not reducible to its constituents. Though critical of structural realism's portrayal of the state as something static and passive, Wendt's (2004, 316) approach presents itself as more sanguine about the consequences of treating the state as a living entity than the narrativist approach. Wendt (2004, 316) makes a practical argument: "if we want to have states then it is better they take the form of persons rather than something more amorphous, because this will help make their effects more politically accountable." Another notable aspect of the Wendtian argument for state agency is the conviction that the Hegelian struggle for recognition "operates on two levels simultaneously, between individuals and between groups" (Wendt 2003, 516). The basic point is that, if individuals are reconciled with the constitutional state, so are states with the world state. For Wendt, as in the case of human persons striving for recognition in Hegel's narrative, the state engages in struggles for recognition that will eventually lead to the establishment of a world state.

Grounded in Arendt's critique of the idea of sovereignty, it is tempting to enlist her international thoughts in the Wendtian attempt to entrust the state with a full degree of agency. Wendt has the laudable intention of challenging structural realism's description of the state as a restrained entity on the international scene and of finding ways to recover the agency of the state to make it more politically accountable. Clearly, Arendt's thinking is incompatible with the argument of Waltz's structural realism that war merely occurs as rational states, following the regularities imposed on them under international anarchy, balance each other. Arendt would oppose the "scientific" approach that merely focuses on establishing empirical criteria for identifying rational and irrational state behaviors.[2] Questioning the dominant IR assumption that international anarchy sets the structural patterns of state behaviors, Arendt could even applaud the Wendtian motto that international "anarchy is what

2) Arendt (1998, 288) argues that the causal model of modern science "puts man back … into the prison of his own mind, into the limitations of patterns he himself created." Arendt (1973, 131) also makes a similar critique of the works of modern historians by pointing out that they merely dismissed "the seemingly absurd disparities between cause and effect" in modern history.

states make of it" (Wendt 1992, 391-425).

The Arendt presented in this essay, however, possesses much complexity that adds nuance to the IR debate on state agency in her thinking. On the question of whether the state can "act," Arendt's answer is not clear-cut. Her Greek agonism, along with the challenges that her accounts of the Roman idea of augmentation imply, raises the concern that by valorizing state agency and personhood, we might end up obscuring the contingency of political action and denuding human agency (Jackson 2004, 285; Franke and Roos 2010, 1060-1063; Scheuerman 2011, 146). Of course, Arendt's appreciation of the constitutional state and its institutional effect in politics is significant. Her thoughts on the public realm hardly match the approach of blurring boundaries through disruptive actions. Thus, if one invokes Hegel, who occupies a crucial space in Wendt's thoughts on state agency, Arendt would agree with Hegel that "what synthesizes the opposed moments of the dialectic [between unity and plurality] is the concrete world of political institutions" (Canovan 1992, 248). As one commentator speculates, "Arendt's concerns are Hegel's concerns: how to preserve the concrete freedom that the constitutional state makes possible, and how to contain the dissolvent forces of both the market and popular impatience with laws and institutions" (Villa 2008, 252).

That said, although Wendt's reliance on the institutional dimension of Hegel's thoughts might be agreeable to Arendt, she would clearly object to his and Hegel's teleological approach to the public world. If Arendt's call for "care for the world" directs our attention to the importance of the constitutional state, her "public-spirited individualism" (Villa 2008, 104) equally resists the strong theme of reconciliation embedded in the Hegelian state, which treats alienated individuals as a problem to overcome eventually rather than as a critical entity that prevents any attempt to connect political communities with rigid claims of naturalness on which some type of *Gemeinschaft* is grounded. The result of this conceptual scheme is that public worlds, for Arendt, remain contingent affairs, in which we find no general principles of reason, nature, or history but specific agreements that particular peoples form and devise. So, according to Arendt, the state should not "act" if this means putting states

on a teleological trajectory and treating individuals as being incorporated into the macro level of states' struggles for recognition that eventually lead to the establishment of a world state (Wendt 2003, 494-503).

Yet Arendt's thinking also suggests that, if we discard the adoption of some baseline criterion of value that can supposedly serve as a comprehensive measure for all political communities, it is not impossible to see the value in establishing the state's agency. Cognizant of the needs to tame intensely agonistic action and to reduce the problems associated with fleeting action and easily dissipated power, Arendt (1998, 191) emphasizes the importance of communal or institutional contexts that contribute to moderation, which she considers "one of the political virtues par excellence." Thus, political action, for Arendt (1998, 57), occurs in a certain "local" context, and the common world she understands is a "locally" common site, one that can serve as "the common meeting ground" of those present in it. The constitutional state meets this expectation, as it provides an institutionally articulated space for freedom and makes the reliable appearance of action possible. Arendt also sees that different states establish their own common standards based on particular institutions and the specific legal and political cultures these create. Thus, the state has a certain independent dimension that is not reducible to its constituents and cannot be easily disposed of according to individuals' subjective caprices (Arendt 2006b, 148). Moreover, as states have their own legal and political cultures, they have certain gaps in Arendtian inter-polity relations.

Accordingly, for Arendt, the question of state agency is inseparable from the goal of free politics: the state should exist for free politics that diverse equals participating in a common space achieve and can claim agency only for this ideal. Arendt's answer to the question of whether the state can "act," then, can be yes, with qualifications. Yes, the state may have an independent dimension—its specific institutions and cultures are not always changing. However, as opposed to the self-contained sovereign model, the state promotes plural voices in it and integrates others outside its boundaries. For Arendt, such a change in the existing arrangement of the state occurs gradually so that the reliable appearance of action is not constantly threatened

and endangered. The "conservative" moment of closing and preserving, though not meant to be permanent, allows the Arendtian state to claim some degree of agency.

Bringing forward Arendt's complex view of state agency is not to say that the Arendtian state is in limbo between the demands of openness and closedness or agonistic action and institutional stability. Arendt's statements about the Greek polis and the Roman republic suggest that, although both polities manage some balance between those demands, each always carries the danger that one side of the demands will overreach. The expectation IR scholars can develop from this insight is that the gap between such two competing needs for free politics would become narrow among states that incorporate Greek and Roman moments in Arendt's thoughts. At the same time, this side of Arendt's thoughts also urges IR theorists to resist any hubristic claim that these demands are fully reconcilable by acknowledging the limitations of theoretical possibility and embracing the risks of politics. This way, Arendt's thinking allows for the vicissitudes of publicity and renders balancing agonistic action and institutional stability a core activity for free politics.

V. Agonistic International Society

What kind of world of international politics does this understanding of the "acting" state generate? To modify Arendt's famous term, what would the international space "in-between" look like? Invoking Chris Brown's (1995) articulation of international order helps us address this issue. According to Brown, one conception of order is an international system with which structural realism's portrayal of the world aptly fits. Here, "whatever rules and regularities exist in the world are the product solely of an interplay of forces and devoid of any kind of normative content" (Brown 1995, 185). The polar opposite of an international system in Brown's distinction is the order of a world community. Brown (1995, 185) considers this form of international order to be

wholly compatible with a cosmopolitan belief in the oneness of humanity, generating a set of common rights and duties "pull[ing] people together in ways that are qualitatively different from the impersonal forces which create a system."

From the proposed reading of Arendt's thinking herein, the *res publica* Arendt envisions is far from the static entity that structural realism describes, as the latter position eschews the important question of responsibility by reducing state behaviors to mere reactions to the systemic effects of international anarchy. However, the Arendtian state does not fit with cosmopolitanism either, whether it argues for an increasingly integrated world among states or among transnational individuals. Bringing any teleological worldview into politics, Arendt believes, violates its inherently contingent nature and obviates the need for continuous discussions and deliberations—the main quality of the authentic politics she envisages. Accordingly, neither an international system nor a world community captures the international space "in-between" that Arendtian states would create.

Brown makes the distinction between international system and world society with the intent to accentuate the efficacy of international society as a middle-ground approach. Unlike system, society recognizes the agency of each state and "envisages a world of states that is partly normatively governed" (Brown 1995, 186). Society also differs from community in that the norms of international society are much less comprehensive than those envisioned in a world community. Brown's arguments that elaborated on the ideas of early English School theorists (e.g., Wight 1991) have laid the groundwork for later works analyzing the degree of solidification empirically present in or normatively required for international society; the possible transition among the three categories of international system, society, and community; and the methodological issues in formulating a middle-ground IR ethic (Brown 2001; Buzan 2004, 159-160; Gallagher 2016; Nardin 1983; Weinert 2011, 35-39; Wheeler 1999).

As demonstrated throughout the paper, Arendt has a strong interest in a middle-way politics that balances the demands of openness and closedness for the political association, or those needs of agonistic action and institutional stability for free politics. At a broad level, a certain agreement exists between her thinking and IR

approaches that foster a middle-ground international discourse. Arendt is hardly against international law and agreements, though she has less faith in their ultimate efficacy than some of their proponents today. Still, Arendt's priority lies less in how to maintain international order than in how to have people experience an authentic sense of politics and communal power as diverse equals in a common space. The question of international coexistence comes in for Arendt, but only when people pursue such an ideal in many different localities and through plural opinions.

Conjoining Arendt's thinking with liberal cosmopolitanism is not impossible. Her deep concerns about the miserable human rights situation of stateless people in the interwar period and the disastrous effects of tribal nationalism on whole regions of Europe seem to point in this direction. Moreover, Arendt (1973, ix; also 1963, 268-269) clearly expresses her interest in a "new political principle" of humanity beyond the politics of sovereign states. However, Arendt (1973, 294) is sure that for the implementation of human rights, "some kind of organized community" is necessary. Even when Arendt (1968, 93) concedes the emergence of "the new fragile unity brought about by technical mastery over the earth," she qualifies this acknowledgement by adding that such an idea can be realized only when it garners "mutual agreements" among actual powers. One can make a solidarist case for international society from Arendt's works. Memories of totalitarianism remind political actors of the dangers of "naturalizing" state boundaries and of treating others as permanent enemies, thereby generating a positive attitude toward viewing norms of humanity as a standard for international cooperation (Verovšek 2014). In bringing up these cosmopolitan traces in Arendt's thoughts, however, we must be clear about her emphasis on the primacy of the political in fulfilling her vision of free politics (Lee 2021, 405-406).

Arendt's thinking adds a special kind of agonism to international society approaches. States that accommodate agonistic citizens, develop distinctive political cultures, and pursue human excellence comprise her international agonism. The Arendtian states in the international in-between space are not driven by sheer survival, as described in structural realism, or regulatory reasons or intimate sentiments, as endorsed by a variety of cosmopolitan positions. As collective forms,

states of this kind are concerned about the conditions that facilitate action, freedom, excellence, and politics. Given this important internal demand, states conceived of in Arendt's scheme cannot constantly reestablish their boundaries. Additionally, there are moments when those states, aspiring to the greatness of public culture and civilization, seek to become lasting institutions through citizens' augmenting activities. This "conservative" move, as already suggested, engenders concerns about the extent to which states need "the specific inheritance of specific people" or the degree to which they depend on "the presence of a shared civic ethos—a 'horizon-sustaining' set of *moeurs* or myths" (Canovan 1999, 147; Villa 2008, 332). However, states informed by Arendt's free politics are never free from the responsibility to reflect the demand of agnostic action. As they actively incorporate disruptive voices and new opinions for change into the extant arrangements of public judgment, gradual changes occur. At times, the desire for agonistic action can be intensely strong in Arendtian states that harbor the Homeric spirit of agon, and this situation requires institutional stability.

Such dynamism manifested in this integrative interpretation of the Greek and Roman features of Arendt's thoughts renders a varied range of publicity conceivable in Arendtian states. The expectation is that, as the pendulum of free politics swings back and forth between the demands of openness and closedness and as political agents seek to balance them, the state's internal criteria of public judgment change, and this amendment affects the current stipulations regarding the state's external relations with other states. Contra what global agonism suggests, the political association conceived in this way is not amorphous. Rather, states in the Arendtian form of political association secure a certain independent dimension once they are founded, and under the broad range of free politics, states develop distinctive cultures (if not in a permanent form), thereby finding an affinity or drive to compete. This image of international agonism adds the "political" dimension to international society, where the general concerns about society that "always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest" cannot be completely ruled out (Arendt 1998, 39). In

addition, because each state integrates agonistically diverse viewpoints (arising within and outside its boundaries) into the existing arrangements of public judgment, the international in-between space envisaged via Arendt's free politics hardly severs the connection between the international society of states and an emerging global association of agonistic individuals.

The dynamic aspect of Arendt's agonistic international society is evident in her discussion of international federation, though a full-scale analysis of her federalism is beyond the scope of this essay (Arendt 1968, 93; 1972, 231-233; 2007, 423-450; Lee 2020). It is worth noting, however, that Arendt's federalism shows her acute awareness of the challenges and complexities that arise from simultaneously pursuing the two demands of agonistic action and institutional stability or those of intra-state equality against authoritarianism and inter-state equality against imperialism in the international context. For the reliable appearance of action, as we have confirmed, institutionally articulated spaces are necessary. The problem is that stability-generating institutions may develop into instruments serving an arbitrary will or end, opening the path for the rise of authoritarianism. Yet, any extreme attempt to flatten the extant legal/political criteria of judgment among states not only imperils their specific institutional arrangements but also harbors the possibility of imperialism. Arendt's federalism constructed via a complex system of coordination at multiple layers of council-based politics (Arendt 2006b, 270; Lee 2020, 7-11; Morikawa 2016) reduces the gap between the two claims of equality essential for maintaining desirable state agency. But her free politics also suggests that at the most fundamental level, such a gap is not fully reconcilable. Oscillating between these demands, Arendt's federalism leaves some specific issues less clear, bringing the task of clarification to actual citizens who deliberate about the future of their public spaces for freedom.

VI. Conclusion

Agonism has been a shorthand used to describe Arendt's political thoughts. No doubt Arendt's accounts of agonistic action and of "the rise of the social" provide insights for radical agonism's take on her thinking. The world this approach envisions deeply appreciates action's features of natality, creativity, and plurality. Such a vision is often embodied in so-called "global social movements," a pursuit of global solidarity for bringing social justice into people's everyday lives beyond national boundaries and apparatuses. Arendt, however, is also interested in directing the energies and potentials of agon to sustain the bases of free politics as practiced by diverse equals in institutionally articulated spaces. The kind of agonism that reflects Arendt's appreciation of public law and institutions differs from the radical vision of agonistic cosmo-politics. It not only attends to individual agency but also centers state agency as a core topic of free politics.

The grounds of Arendt's international agonism articulated herein need further examination for practical application. Is the agonistic international society empirically possible? Arendt's thinking is not based on empirical modeling in a strict positivistic sense. A fruitful engagement, one can propose, is to reveal what has been missing in the extant IR theories from the parameters Arendt's free politics offers. Yet, any sensible political theories cannot completely separate themselves from the issue of what is currently possible. Exploring the line between theory and practice will be a valuable task when understanding Arendt's critical thoughts on the modern world. Enriching Arendt's international agonism empirically is worth pursuing, albeit with care not to lose the fundamentally critical nature of her inquiries.

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| 국문초록 |

한나 아렌트 논쟁 이론의 국제정치적 함의

이신규*

본고는 근래의 국제정치이론에서 보여지는 한나 아렌트 해석에 관한 문제점을 지적고자 한다. 급진적 논쟁주의를 대안정치로 여기는 학자들은 아렌트의 분투적 행위개념에 주목하며 그것이 세계정치의 영역으로 확장가능하다고 주장한다. 그러나 아렌트 사상을 사해동포적 세계정치와 연결하기에는 여러 난제가 있다. 아렌트는 정치 행위자들이 공적 세계를 변화의 대상뿐만 아니라 보존해야 할 것이라고 본다. 또한 아렌트는 제헌 국가에 대한 깊은 관심이 있으며 이는 그녀의 정치사상에서 국가가 중요한 역할을 하고 있음을 함의한다. 이 논문은 아렌트 사상에서 드러나는 공공성의 개념이 국제정치에 어떠한 함의점이 있는지를 분석하여 아렌트적 국제 논쟁주의의 토대를 명료화한다. 이에 따라 아렌트식 국가들이 국내 발달을 꾀하되 타 국가들과 공존, 협약하는 사회를 구성함을 논의한다. 최종적으로는 아렌트 사상 내의 “제도적” 측면을 부각하여 급진적 논쟁주의가 갖는 아렌트 원용의 한계를 드러낸다.

주제어: 아렌트, 논쟁이론, 공공성, 국가, 국제사회

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