The Self in the Realms Ontology: A Critical View of Hannah Arendt's Conception of the Human Condition

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Abstract: The widely accepted approach in scholarly literature on Hannah Arendt's The Human Condition emphasizes its political meaning and implications while neglecting its ontological dimensions. Against this trend, in this article I seek to uncover the implicit ontology that underlies her conception of the human condition. This human ontology appears to be comprised of five realms – the private, the public, intimacy, the social and the self. While Arendt explicitly bases her conception upon the first two, the paper shows that the remaining three, although not defined as realms, are explored by her as such. These appear as autarchic contexts of human activity, which are not supposed to refer to each other. The problematic of this split between the different realms is widely discussed in the paper. Yet, the split of the self from the two pivotal realms – the private and the public – acquires a special interest, for it undermines the entire project of the human condition.

Keywords: Arendt Hannah, Hume David, Intimacy, Ontology, Realm, Self, Social, Split, Private, Public

A. Preface

IN HER FAMOUS book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt searches for a reconsideration "[of] those activities that traditionally, as well as according to current opinion, are within the range of every human being". These "elementary articulations", she determines, constitutes the human condition (Arendt, 1958, p. 5). The present article wishes to extricate the ontology that is imbued in Arendt's conception of the human condition, which is rooted in the above mentioned book and explored in the entire corpus of her writings. The widely accepted approach in scholarly literature puts the emphasis on Arendt's political thinking. This specific focus seems to adopt almost unreservedly Arendt's decision to eliminate metaphysical considerations (Arendt, 1958, pp. 55-56).[1] Against this trend, the interpretation suggested in this article focuses especially on the metaphysical problematic underlying her project, in particular the ontological implications regarding the self.

The ontology that emerges out of Arendt's writings reveals a fundamental split between the comprising realms of the human condition that appear as detached from each other. Accordingly, the human experience appears as torn into different realms, each addressing a certain aspect or need and creating a separate context of its own. At the center of this article stands the delineation of the various realms comprising Arendt's conception of the human condition and the problem of the self which is inherent in it. My main argument is that this very breaking into different realms violates the supposed boundaries between them and thus undermines Arendt's apparent vision of the human condition. Moreover, the ontological category of the self – which hosts different aspects such as personality, individuality, particularity and identity – appears in Arendt's thinking as a void abstraction, which can never meet real human beings, existing in a given time and culture. Simply, if the self is presupposed as existent – as emerges both implicitly and explicitly from her writing – the split between the realms comprising the conception of the human condition is impossible, since it is "there" in all the realms where human beings live and take place. Alternatively, wherever the conception of the split collapses – as will be demonstrated below – this indicates the presence of the self in the different realms that thus prove to be referring to each other by means of the self.

In my opinion, the idea of the self which is employed in Arendt's thinking, is comparable to the one typifying the classical phenomenalism of Hume and some of his followers in postmodernist thinking, according to which the self is divided into a multiplicity of single experiences without having a unifying core that could generate a suitable mechanism cap-

[1] Arendt herself defines political thinking in itself as distinct from metaphysical thinking (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). See also: "I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 212). As for the literature, one might regard as an exception to this determination the discussion of Arendt's affinity and critique regarding Heidegger. Yet, even this viewpoint is often focused on the political dimension regarding the two. For example see (Barash, 1996; Villa, 1996)

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able of establishing identity.[2] To be precise, unlike phenomenalistic thinking, Arendt, at least in some of her writings, presupposes the existence of the self. Nevertheless, she explores the two pivotal realms in her ontology – the private and the public – as if the self does not exist. I wish to demonstrate that the fragmentation of the self into the discerned realms which takes place in Arendt's thinking is incompatible with her own conception of the human condition and therefore makes it self-contradictory.

B. The Five Realms Ontology

1. The Private Realm and the Public Realm

Arendt poses two pivotal realms of the human condition: the private and the public.[3] **The private realm** is identified with the Greek notion of the household (Arendt, 1958, p. 28), characterized as a place where "men live together because they were driven by their wants and needs".[4] Necessity appears as the ruling force over all activities performed in it (Arendt, 1958, p. 30) which are designated for the sake of the protection of the "biological life process of the family" (Arendt, 1958, p. 64), in particular birth and death (Arendt, 1958, p. 62). Yet, Arendt clarifies that "it is by no means true that only the necessary, the futile, and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm…[but] that there are things that need to be hidden" (Arendt, 1958, p. 73); alongside the concern for biological needs, there is also a requirement for "a private owned place to hide in" against the light of publicity (Arendt, 1958, p. 71).[5] Since the darkness is in itself also regarded as a need, one can claim that needs dominate the private realm as a whole.

This understanding of privacy does not associate it with creating a space for individual expression, for achieving personal identity or with the need for it; these are not even mentioned within Arendt's discussion of the private realm. Even the acknowledgment of the need for concealment is not assigned to protect one's singularity or intimacy.[6] On the contrary, Arendt explicitly emphasizes the non-private traits of the household as the place where individuals appear as exemplars of a certain species (Arendt, 1958, p. 30), and presents privacy as prolonging and multiplying one's individuality (Arendt, 1958, p. 57). Indeed, the entire management of the household is exposed as pertaining to immortality as a target that surpasses the personal life expectancy of the individuals comprising the family. As much as life's necessities and needs are being taken care of within the private realm, these are not conceived by Arendt as one's personal concern but as that of human beings as such. Finally, the I as a first person disappears from Arendt's characterization of privacy.

The human need to exceed the boundaries of privacy from time to time concerns especially the individual as a unique person, i.e. exactly the one who is absent in Arendt's discussion of the private realm. Therefore, it is not surprising that within Arendt's discussion of the private realm there is no reference to the public realm or to the causes and needs that regularize one's shift from the one to the other. One can regard the specific shape of the private realm as indicating the possibility of spending one's entire life without crossing the private realm or transcending the concern for natural needs, as if there are no other realms or additional needs to be taken care of .In any event, the private realm appears in Arendt's thinking as blocked before the other realms in which human experience takes place. To be precise, the split from other realms is concurrent and even tantamount to the nonappearance of the person in the private realm, for the person who is deprived of his singularity cannot come near to its confines anyway.

The **public realm** is indicated by the appearances which are "seen and heard by everybody" (Arendt,

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[2] Part of the problematic of Arendt's idea of the self is typical of postmodernist thinking. For example, the idea that the self is divided into plurality and heterogeneity of individual life-experience and social forms is central to Goffman. Similar to Arendt, he puts an emphasis on the aspect of one's appearing in the face of others and regards appearing as faithful to the self. See (Goffman, 1958).
For a comprehensive discussion of the phenomenal character of experience, see (Shoemaker, 1996, pp.246-268). For the postmodernist self see (Glass, 1995, pp.4-8); (Elliott, 2001, pp. 1-16); Badiou (1991, 26-27). (See in particular the 'Negative Delimitation of the Concept of the Subject'). The full interpretation of Arendt's idea of the self will be exposed in what I shall call 'the sphere of the self' and in Section C.

[3] I accept the prevailing understanding that regards Arendt's use of ancient Greek texts not as reflecting an idealized picture of Greek political life but mainly as instrumental for the sake of her political theory. See (Kohn, 2000, pp.128-129, notes 28, 30); (Benhabib, 1992, p. 91f); (Barash, 1996, p.264). Arendt herself admits this. See for example (Arendt, 1958, p. 197).

[4] Arendt's masculine-addressed language, besides her specific understanding of the private and the public, expectedly provoked sharp criticism. For example, Benhabib discussed the fact that Arendt did not take into consideration the plain fact that the political space of the polis excluded from it large groups of human beings like women, slaves, non-citizens etc., i.e. especially those whose 'labor' made possible the political activity itself (Benhabib, 1992, p. 91).

[5] See also (Arendt, 1958, p. 64). Arendt explains that the Greek and Latin words for the interior of the house have a strong connotation of darkness and blackness. See (Arendt, 1958, p. 71, n. 78).

[6] The separation between the natural needs and personal expression might be explained also by the primal understanding of the private realm as 'sacred' (Arendt, 1958, pp. 62-63). For extension, see (Villa, 1996, pp.147-148)

1958, p. 50 (and by artifacts originating in the fabrication of human hands (Arendt, 1958, p. 52), thanks to which the world appears to us as "objectivity" (Arendt, 1958, p. 137).[7] Arendt argues that "the very fact that something is being heard by all confers upon it an illuminating power that confirms its real existence" (Arendt, 1968, p. 72). Additionally, she associates the public realm with the truthfulness and authenticity of the phenomenon of the surrounding world, as well as that of personal identity (Arendt, 1958, p. 208). Specifically, one's argument for truth rests exclusively upon activity itself or upon "interference with appearances" (Arendt, 1958, p. 274)[8], whereas the active participation in the public realm in itself is considered as proclaiming "an unquestioned belief in the truth of appearance" (Arendt, 1979, p. 101). In other words, a person's actions rely on his confidence that the way he appears to himself is not destroyed but is reflected in the manner in which he appears to others.[9] Indeed, the activity conducted in public is regarded as the force which gathers together the appearances with the man-made world and as a mode of being and organizes people's lives in various ways (Arendt, 1958, p. 199). Thus, the meaning of the public realm is denoted by the term 'vita activa', in her words:

> The *vita activa*, human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something, is always rooted in a world of men and of man-made things which it never leaves or altogether transcends.
> ...All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men. ...action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man... and only action is entirely dependent on constant presence of others (Arendt, 1958, pp. 22-23).

It is clear that the specific idea of truth employed in this context by no means undermines Arendt's deliberate elimination of the 'vita contemplativa' (Arendt, 1958, pp. 5, 16), which concerns philosophical contemplation, from it. Unlike the typical metaphysical concern with the differences between being and appearing, according to Arendt, "In politics", i.e. the most essential activity conducted in the public sphere, "we have no possibility to distinguish between being and appearance. In the realm of human affairs, being and appearances are indeed one and the same" (Arendt, 1973, p. 98).[10] That is to say that while the truth in the 'vita contemplativa' rises above or and even detaches from the world of appearances, the truth of the public realm is merely that of appearances; like these, it is accessible to all members of the public realm.[11] Truth in public means then not only that multiple members comprising the public sphere can see the same one, but also the maintenance of plurality against that one. Both oneness and plurality are indispensable for the existence of the public realm. Yet, the discerned one does not belong to or is not identified with any single person or member of the public sphere, but occupies the "interspace" (Arendt, 1968, p. 21) that surpasses mortal individuals (Arendt, 1958, p. 55).[12] Finally, the publicness of the public realm means "the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives in which the common world presents itself", as well as "the sameness of the object" that is maintained notwithstanding the "variety of perspectives" which are directed to it (Arendt, 1958, pp. 57-58).

The phenomenon of the split that takes place in the public realm is apparent already in the conditioning of the participation in it upon full independence or freedom from natural needs (Arendt, 1958, p. 12).[13] Here, freedom means first and foremost the severance from the environment of the household and from all its accompanying aspects. So, Arendt's presentation of the spheres of the private and the

[7] Although Arendt's idea of politics is part of her discussion of the public realm, the discussion will not refer to her political theory directly but will focus on its ontological foundation. Arendt discusses the idea of appearance in several contexts. See: (Arendt, 1978a, pp. 37, 193, 210-211); (Arendt, 1958, p. 207-212).

[8] This determination is indirectly supported by Arendt's criticism of Heidegger's understanding of the public sphere as obscuring everything. See (Heidegger, 1972, §27, 126 ff). In this regard see (Arendt, 1968, ix), the essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" in (Arendt, 1930-1954, pp. 163-187). For further discussion, see (Barash, 1996, pp. 252-254); (Villa, 1996, pp. 111-143).

[9] Arendt attributes this disposition to Socrates. See (Arendt, 1973, pp. 101-103; 1978a, pp. 187-188). Throughout the discussion of the figure of Socrates, as contradistinctive to that of Plato, Arendt traces what she regarded as the decline in the ethos of the *polis* which was apparent already in Plato's time (See: *P &P*) up to modern times, see: "Tradition and the Modern Age" in (Arendt, 1961, pp. 17-40); "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought", in (Arendt, 1930-1954, pp. 428-447).

[10] Arendt discusses the issue of truth in politics also out of her experience of Eichmann's trial. See her essay "truth and Politics", in (Arendt, 1961, pp. 227-264).

[11] Arendt discusses the loss of the public realm in modern times in many places within her writings. In this context she supplies a deeper illumination concerning the truth typical to the realm of appearances. For example: "If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality. ...The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective" (Arendt, 1958, p. 58). See also (Arendt, 1968, pp. 9, 153-206); *OR*, 466; ;Arendt, 1961, pp. 143-171).

[12] Such plurality is exactly what mass societies (Arendt, 1958, p. 321) or those subordinated to totalitarian regimes are lacking. See the essays: "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social Political Significance", in (Arendt, 1961, pp. 197-226). See also (ibid, pp. 198-200).

[13] See also (Arendt, 1958, pp. 30-31).

public as contradicting each other by their content (Arendt, 1958, p. 61) – depicting the private as darkness (Arendt, 1958, p. 71) and the public as harsh light (Arendt, 1958, p. 51) – confirms the split which separates between the two spheres.[14] Furthermore, Arendt explicitly argues that "the subjective element", namely "the individual subject who offers some objective work to the public", "does not concern the public at all" but "the person himself [who] appears with it". The explanation given to the exclusion of the individual aspect from the public realm is that this is beyond one's control. Although Arendt locates the phenomenon of self within the public realm, claiming that the public realm is the context where one can appear and prove oneself (Arendt, 1958, p. 193), and be judged by others (Arendt, 1968, pp. 72-74), she does not provide it with meaning appropriate to the realm of its appearance. Since appearance – the very force that establishes the public realms – is fragmentary, changeable and dynamic by its very nature, the self or anything relating to human identity transpires as irrelevant to the public realm.

The phenomenon of the split, which is visible in Arendt's understanding of the private realm, is indeed deepened within the public sphere. As we have seen, although one's activity in the private sphere is directed to the preservation of the life of the species and not only with personal survival (Arendt, 1958, p. 8), the care for immortality ascribed to this activity still concerns the individual and is dependent on his actual deeds which become visible already during his lifetime. Moreover, the actuality of life itself, within which one is inescapably immersed, can rightly be considered as a realization of immortality. In contrast, the idea of immortality which Arendt introduces with regard to the public realm is rather different. Here immortality it is used as a central means for establishing the priority of the 'bios politikos' or the 'vita activa' over the 'bios theōrētikos' or the 'vita contemplativa' (Arendt, 1958, pp. 12-17), conceived as especially concerning eternity (Arendt, 1958, pp. 16-17).[15] These distinctions strengthen the split typifying the public sphere, since they appear to eliminate the activities which are carried out by individuals and which might be used for communication among them. Accordingly, Arendt exposes the public realm as a place where individuals are detached from their personality, but while standing apart from others are able to see the same world, or as she put it: "The public realm, as a common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak" (Arendt, 1958, p. 52).[16]

On the foundation of Arendt's decision to eliminate individuality and personality from the public realm, there exist the problems regarding her idea of the self. A comprehensive account of the problematic of what I denoted as Arendt's 'realm of the self' will be discussed below. Nevertheless, the problem of the self emerges already at the stage of characterization of the realms comprising her conception of the human condition and while elucidating the relations between them. As the self is absent, no mechanism or explanation for one's shift from the private sphere to the public one is provided, but the latter is only vaguely assumed as the 'elsewhere' in which the conditioning needs for one's participation in the public realm are somehow being taken care of. Indeed, the shift from the private realm to the public one reveals a paradox: entering to the public realm presupposes the fulfillment of the needs that concern the private realm. However, split between the two spheres means that the two do not refer to each other, thus the entry to the public realm cannot be conditioned upon such fulfillment.

One wonders what could cause someone to enter and participate in the public sphere. Principally, the answer to this question is avoided, for according to Arendt "...the act itself... does not reveal the innermost motivation of the agent. His motives remain dark, they do not shine but are hidden not only from others but, most of the time, from himself, from his self-inspection, as well" (Arendt, 1973, p. 98). Thus,

[14] The relation between the lighter side of things and their dark side in Arendt obviously originated in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1972, §7). Yet, whereas for him the lighter side is conceived as bound to the dark one, to be precise as a manifestation of it, for Arendt these sides are detached from each other to the extent that the dark side is not assumed to be able to show itself and thus become lighted. This fundamental difference reflects the status of the self in their thinking: while for him both the light and the dark are expressions of the self (*Dasein*), for her the split between the two is a result of a lack of sequence in the subject.

[15] For the priority of the 'vita activa' over 'vita contmplativa' see: (Heller, 1989, p. 148). Arendt's understanding of 'vita contmplativa' as part of the human particularity will be discussed below within the realm of the self.

[16] The scrutinized phenomenon of the split is apparent, more or less implicitly, and is denoted by different words, also in the literature about Arendt. On the one hand, one finds those who praise Arendt's capability to maintain the discussed split. Villa, for example, writes about the power of "the idea of self-contained politics" of Arendt's theory of action as a means of escaping the domination of *poiēsis* within the transition of western philosophy and political thought. (Villa, 1996, p. 276, n. 132). On the Aristotelian roots of Arendt, see (ibid, 17-25). See also Arendt's criticism of the use of activity for ends which do not stand for themselves (Arendt, 1961, pp. 215-216); (Arendt, 1958, pp. 153-156, 305). According to Villa, "the criterion of self-containedness" is not only a means for isolating distinctively political modes of action, but is also useful for discerning "what political speech can properly be *about*", namely the political action is talk about politics. (Villa, 1996, pp. 36-38). In Villa's view, Arendt's ideal of self-contained politics is achieved by means of its deliberately exclusive content (ibid, 39). On the other hand, one finds other commentators who point to the difficulties inherent in the split of the public sphere from the private one, especially with regard to political activity itself. See (Pitkin, 1981; Bernstein, 1986). Wellmer and G. Kateb (1983); all discussed in Villa (1996, pp.36-39). In any event, both the praisers and the critics remain in the context of political action.

the question arises regarding the activity itself, i.e., what kind of activity is that which needs the presence of others but at the same time conceals their individuality? The understanding of the activity conducted in the public realm, which is perceived as originating in deliberation, judgment and practical reason, assumes the self as an agent.[17] Moreover, the self is responsible for realizing the very need for a certain activity and for bestowing it with specific meaning and significance. In other words, the self is responsible for the content associated with the activity conducted in the public realm, which provides it with its specific shape. Therefore, it makes no sense to regard the public realm as prior to the activity and contents it refers to, or to approach the public realm independently of the aspect of the self.[18] Needless to say, if the self is there in the public realm, why cannot it be in the private one? These problems and others seem to undermine Arendt's attempt to establish the public realm as independent of the private realm.[19]

The discussion turns now to a different section in Arendt's conception of the human condition. Whereas the private and the public are locally defined, the household for the private and city square for the public, the remaining human aspects – the intimate, the social and the self – are not revealed by Arendt as occupying a particular place. Moreover, the term 'realm' is usually addressed by Arendt to the first two.[20] However, especially with regard to the fact that Arendt sets human existence between the two realms of the private and the public, the appearance of the human aspects of intimacy, the social and the self within her writings evokes fundamental questions such as: what are these by their very nature? Are they present and ex-territorial in terms of Arendt's conception of human condition? Do they serve as conditions for the two acknowledged realms of the private and the public, or as their shadow? Each of the three additional realms is problematic with regard to Arendt's spatial image of the human condition and especially to the splitting dichotomy governing it. Moreover, as will be clarified below, the three cross the private and the public, hence they proclaim the impossibility of their separation from each other, as well as appear to indicate the existence of the self as a subject of all realms without which the very possibility of shifting from one realm to the other is avoided.

2. Intimacy, the Social and the Self – new Realms?!

The realm of intimacy is regarded as the one where subjective emotions, private feelings, etc., can be "greatly intensified and enriched" (Arendt, 1958, p. 50), and thus as a context which is ruled by the particular qualities of human beings. Intimacy is conceived by Arendt as a specific modern phenomenon, which indicates "the disappearance of the gulf" between the private and the public (Arendt, 1958, p. 33), and therefore results from a violation of the desirable order. Indicating the injury to human freedom, without which the public realm cannot exist, intimacy is described as a result of a "rebellious reaction against the society…[and] was directed first of all against the leveling demands of the social…the conformism inherent in every society" (Arendt, 1958, p. 39). It transpires, then, that the realm of intimacy is a sort of reference or even as reaction to the events happening in the public realm. Unlike the private sphere, which serves as a crucial infrastructure out of which one can turn to the public realm, the sphere of intimacy functions as a shelter for those who wish escape from the public sphere. Moreover, the phenomenon of intimacy inserts a new dimension into the conception of the human condition that can neither be located in the private realm nor in the public one. Since these two transpire as unable to exhaust the human condition, also the original order regulated by the rigid dichotomy between them is undermined. The collapse of this dichotomy is merely the possibility of shifting from one realm to the other – a possibility that requires the postulation

[17] Arendt's commentators attributed these aspects of her thinking to the Aristotelian influence upon her. See (Bernstein, 1986, pp. 220-232; Bernstein, 1984, pp. 207-223; Pitkin, 1981; Beiner, 1983). See also (Habermas, 1983, 173-174).

[18] The regarding of the public realm as a framework which is prior to its content reaches its extreme with Villa's interpretation, as he determines that "the 'adequacy' of Arendt's concept of action ought to be judged according to its ability to distinguish the public realm from other spheres" (Villa, 1996, p. 40). Thus he criticizes Knauer's attempt to elicit from Arendt's political theory goals and motives, claiming that he was "*too* successful", (ibid. p. 277, n. 154). Yet, in my opinion, Villa's insistent endeavor to defend the releasing of political action "from domination by the socioeconomic realm" (ibid, p. 41) fails to hold water. Therefore, to use the Aristotelian terms, especially *poiēsis* and not *praxis*, might be more appropriate for describing the content and activity that fill the public realm, since the content cannot be secondary to any framework as long as human matters are at stake

[19] For example, Pitkin raises the question what is the thing that bonds a given number of people and turns them into a public? See: Pitkin (1981, p. 315). In addition, the split of the public sphere from the private one is weakened also in regard to the element of human immortality, which according to Arendt signifies the remarkable significance of creating an earthly space (Arendt, 1958, p. 55). In this context see also (Barash, 1996, pp. 62-63). The fact that immortality appears as establishing both the private and the public spheres itself indicates that the endeavor to establish the two as opposed to each other, namely the vision of the split, is unsustainable. Therefore, despite Arendt's original intention to separate between the private and the public, the problems presented above indicate that the split between the two is unsustainable.

[20] Although one encounters exceptional cases (for example with regard to intimacy, see (Arendt, 1958, p. 45), the prevailing use of the term 'realm' refers to the private and the public.

of a self who experiences the private and the public realms and withdraws to intimacy. Indeed, Arendt herself implicitly admits that as she determines that intimacy is a product of modern times in which the individual is bestowed with centrality. In her words: "the modern discovery of intimacy seems [as] a flight from the whole outer world into the inner subjectivity of the individual" (Arendt, 1958, p. 69). It appears that as much as subjectivity and the self achieve expression and confirmation in human experience they indicate the impossibility of the discussed split. Yet, Arendt's insights regarding intimacy did not result in the reconsideration of the entire conception of the human condition, in particular the ontological status of the self within it.

The realm of the social, like that of intimacy, is characterized by Arendt as a rising realm of modern times. Additionally, both are typified by means of reference to the two primary spheres. On the one hand, the social refers to the private realms by signifing a situation in which "housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a 'collective' concern" (Arendt, 1958, p. 33). As a result of that, "the social rather than the political... constitutes the public realm" (Arendt, 1958, p. 43); what was previously considered as a "private care" became a "public concern" (Arendt, 1958, p. 68). Thus, the social turned out to be the function of the private while the private has become "the only common concern left" (Arendt, 1958, p. 69). One's membership in a social class substituted the protection previously guaranteed by the family (Arendt, 1958, p. 256). The social realm serves as a kind of shelter against the presence of others achieved by the exaggerated expansion of the private (Arendt, 1958, pp. 68-69). Yet, Arendt clarifies that private does not turn public or constitute a public realm by means of its expansion; it "means only that the public realm has almost completely receded" (Arendt, 1958, p. 52).

On the other hand, the characterization of the social refers to the public's capacity for action and speech, which embodies within itself the essence of the original public realm, as having "lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these to the spheres of the intimate and the private" (Arendt, 1958, p. 49). Consequently, the primordial difference between the private and the public realms has thoroughly vanished and their different components have been subsumed into the single sphere of the social (Arendt, 1958, p. 69), wherein they "constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself" (Arendt, 1958, p. 33).

Arendt discerns fundamental problem in the rise of the social sphere The most prominent problem is the appearance of the private and the public as sharing common characteristics, i.e. the primordial separation between the private and the public is violated. Arendt explains that as one's life appears in the social realm as almost entirely visible, the possible depth which exists in one's capability to rise into sight from the indispensable dark ground that conceals privacy is vanished (Arendt, 1958, p. 71). Thus "the final stage of the disappearance of the public realm should be accompanied by the threatened liquidation of the private realm as well" (Arendt, 1958, pp. 60-61). Morever, Arendt associates with the appearing of phenomenon of the social the change that takes place in the two pivotal spheres. As for the private realm, instead of being connected with the life process in its most elementary, biological sense, the activity appears to be "imprisoned in the eternal recurrence of the life process"(Arendt, 1958, pp. 46). Being fixed to the private sphere, now activity is liberated from circular monotony and transformed into a "progressing development" and relocated in the social realm (Arendt, 1958, pp. 47). Arendt left no doubt that it is by no means a matter of indifference whether an activity is preformed in private or in public (Arendt, 1958, p. 46):

> It is decisive that society, by all its levels, **excludes the possibility of action**, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. ...The individual [is equated] with his rank within the social framework.... The rise of mass society... only indicates that the various social groups have suffered the same absorption into one society that family units had suffered earlier; with the emergence of mass society, the realm of the social has finally... reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of given community equally and with equal strength (Arendt, 1958, pp. 40-41).

Another implication of this process concerns the impossibility of realizing the ideal of immortality. Being "the form in which the fact of mutual dependence and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public" (Arendt, 1958, p. 46), the social cannot allow rising above mortality or beyond life as a biological process, through which "man remains related to all other living organisms" (Arendt, 1958, p. 2). The channeling of the life process itself into the public realm (Arendt, 1958, p. 45) transpires then as exchanging immortality for mortality. The problem is that especially as mortality is an immanent condition of human experience, it can never totally condition us, for "the hu-

man condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man" (Arendt, 1958, p. 9).[21] The brutal factuality of life appears, then, as requiring the disposition of being subject to conditions beyond one's control, while the most crucial infrastructure for immortality relies upon the human autonomy against its givenness, which is marked by both the creation of new conditions and the acting out of freedom. In contrast, the erosion of immortality occurring within the sphere of the social destroyed the private and the public realms; thus these do not signify a concrete place but a society that became a tangible entity (Arendt, 1958, p. 256).

Indeed the bi-directional movement of functions between the private sphere and the public one brings about a concurrent decline of both (Arendt, 1958, p. 258). Moreover, along with the growth of the social, the realms of the private and public are revealed as unable to defend themselves.[22] The issue is not that the same functions are relocated in a new realm but continue to be operated as before. The unbending importance bestowed by Arendt upon the original division between the private and the public and upon the specific location of their functions is so remarkable, that nothing could have remained the same after the occurrence of both the processes of the violation of boundaries and the mutual wandering of the original contents of the two realms into the new realm of the social. It transpires, then, that the for Arendt the rise of the social has far-reaching implications for the most basic infrastructure upon which her conception of the human condition is built. Against this background it becomes clear that with regard to intimacy and the social, the whole establishment of the split between the private and the public is being shaken. Now the emerging question is: what explains the fact that the original split ceased to be operative with regard to the last two realms? To put it differently: why could that split not be controlled any more in modern times and instead brought about severe damage to the public sphere? It seems that the answer to this fundamental question is clear and it concerns again the problem of the self which appears throughout the whole discussion. In the modern era, individuality possesses special affirmation and validity, hence the closure of the two realms and the dichotomy separating them turn out impossible precisely because of the self. In fact, Arendt discerned, at least implicitly, the undermining power inbuilt in the phenomenon of intimacy and the social upon her conception of the human condition. Yet, instead of reconsidering this conception and especially the choice to remove the self from the two pivotal realms of the private and the public, Arendt projected the undermining threat upon the durability of the world and determined that "the mutual fusion of the realm of the private and the public undermines the durability of the world" (Arendt, 1958, p. 68). The explanation for this syllogism is inherent in Arendt's ontology where "Being and Appearing coincide for men" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 23). To be precise, "we are appearances by virtue of … appearing and disappearing" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 22), namely we are primarily appearing and form it our Being is elicited.[23] Since without appearing there is also no Being, the contraction of the public sphere, the sphere of appearances, for Arendt means but the abolition of the world.

The realm of the self in Arendt's thinking is probably the most difficult to discern.[24] Besides the fact that she never provides a systematic account of it but spreads out the discussion of it throughout her work,[25] the existence of the self is implied within her writings. Analytically, it is possible to distinguish between the concepts of the self or the 'I' and the terms of personality and individuality. The terms of the self and the 'I', denote a unified ontological fundament independent of socio-historical reality, yet it might leave traces in this reality itself.[26] In contrast, the second pair of terms might signify real socio-historical appearing. In other words one's personality and individuality are crystallized in the real daily and contingent context of human beings' lives. Nevertheless, Arendt does not keep this distinction but, as will be demonstrated below, constantly shifts from one to the other. The result is that personality and individuality are regarded as an appearance of the I or the self. Yet the Being of the self remains vague. Thus one finds in Arendt's writings an explicit ideology which insists upon the inaccessibility of the self, in particular of a determinate part of it with

[21] See also (Arendt, 1958, p. 11)

[22] See (Arendt, 1958, p. 47).

[23] The foundation of her understanding of the idea of the world assumed the primacy of appearance (Arendt, 1978a, p. 24), therefore to a great extent it can be considered as parallel to the public sphere. In her words: "Just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the location for its own appearance…(Arendt, 1978a, pp. 21-22)".

[24] The term 'self' signifies throughout the discussion various facets of the human individuality. For example: personality, selfhood, thinking, willing, judging etc.

[25] This fact led Jacobitti at first to argue that Arendt lacks a coherent concept of the self, see (Jacobitti, 1988), but later she changed her mind see (Jacobitti, 1996, p. 216, n. 4). See also (Honig, 1988).

[26] For example this understanding of the self is powerful in Husserl's and Kant's idea of the 'transcendental I' despite the differences in their systems.

regard to which nothing can be said.[27] Arendt determines that one's personality "can almost never be achieved as willful purpose" (Arendt, 1958, p. 179) and presents it as a boundary phenomenon which evades any influence, either positive or negative.[28] Logically, the contention of inaccessibility presupposes the existence of the self which is inaccessible despite its appearance. This interpretation, according to which for Arendt there exists a self behind its appearances, is supported by her understanding of the idea of pure I or pure individuality as indicating our being "imprisoned" by the subjectivity of our singular experience "which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times" (Arendt, 1958, p. 58). Moreover, the existence of the self is indicated by more direct characterizations that she ascribes to it, for example the aspects of nature, destiny, will (Arendt, 1979, p. 454)[29] and thinking (Arendt, 1978a, p. 1) presented as "the soundless of the I with itself" (Arendt, 1978a, pp. 74-75) and as responsible for "the uniqueness characterizing human beings as individuals" (Arendt, 1978a, pp. 34-35).[30]

Nonetheless, the above determinations do not amount to an inclusive understanding of the self and they to not penetrate into the understanding of the two pivotal realms. In other words, the determinations regarding the self appear to create an additional closed realm within Arendt's conception of the human condition. The fundamental infrastructure that seems to guarantee the split of the self from the remaining realms is that of the pure I, thanks to which the person does not entirely integrate in any of his particular experiences in the different realms.[31] While, for example, in Husserl's phenomenology, the discovery of the pure I is accompanied by a prominent endeavor to achieve unification within the individual experience, seemingly Arendt does not demonstrate such an attempt that might enable connecting or locating the self either in the private or in the public realm.[32] Therefore, one gets the impression that beside the basic split from the remaining realms, regarding the realm of the self an additional split penetrates, which divides it into accessible and inaccessible parts; while the appearances of the self are accessible, the Being of the self is not.

However, this does not exhaust the complexity of the realm under discussion. Alongside the known trend of the split which dominates her thinking, Arendt expressed some observations that indicate a connection between the self and the public realm – mainly by means of one's appearance in the face of others, and therefore undermines the discussed split. So, she refers to the need for confirmation by others for knowing one's self and describes the "promise to the world, to those to whom I appear" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 36) to act in accordance with what we regard as ourselves not at all as contradicting one's personal identity. Moreover, Arendt stated that "without being bound to the fulfillment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man's lonely heart, caught in contradictions and equivocalities" (Arendt, 1958, p. 237). One's appearing before others is not a force imposed upon one but is exposed as an internal need for having guidance, and therefore should rightly be considered as indispensable for the very constitution of the self.[33] In her words:

[27] It is noteworthy that the aspect of inaccessibility of particularities of the self is not exclusive to postmodern approaches regarding the self, comparable to that of Arendt. This aspect is originated in Husserl, Heidegger and Freud. See also (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 419ff).

[28] See also the determination that the aspect of the human person appears as "depend[ing] so essentially on nature and on forces that cannot be controlled by the will, [and] is the hardest to destroy" (Arendt, 1979, p. 453). The phenomenological view point even adds to the described difficulties one concerning the fact that Arendt refers in particular to totalitarianism and fascism, in which the human self is threatened by forces which are directed to destroy it. For example see: (Arendt, 1979, pp. 438ff, 453, 458ff); the essay "Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940" in (Arendt, 1968, pp. 153-206). See also (Canovan, 1992).

[29] The term 'nature' includes the physical and psychological characteristics with which people were born. See (Arendt, 1968, pp. 111-112; Arendt, 1978a, pp. 37, 162). Destiny means one's given environment – both the physical and the socio-cultural – into which one is born and raised. See (Arendt, 1979, pp. 455f; Arendt, 1958, pp. 23ff, 182-184). Many commentators attributed the weight she placed upon these two aspects to fact of Arendt's Jewishness. See (Jaccobitti, 1996, p. 217, n.10; Kohn, 2000, p. 114). Yet, in my opinion this reductionist interpretation is not necessary. Moreover, Arendt herself dismissed such an orientation as a valuable while considering Karl Jaspers' post-war public involvement. See: (Arendt, 1968, pp. 75-76). Regarding the will, she contended that although there is "nothing is less permanent, and less likely to establish permanence" than it, nevertheless it should rightly be considered as a part for which we are responsible (Arendt, 1973, p. 321, n. 12). See also (ibid. pp. 76, 225). Arendt devoted an entire volume to this issue. See (Arendt, 1978b).

[30] See in this context also Arendt's criticism of psychology and psychoanalysis for "discover[ing] no more than the ever-changing moods, the ups and downs of our psychic life, and its results and discoveries are **neither particularly appealing** nor very meaningful in themselves" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 35) [emphasis mine].

[31] The affinity of Arendt to the postmodern approach is recognizable by the emphasis on the subjectivity and particularity of the self. Anthony Elliott, for example, shows that those who "deny the agency of human subject and argue in favor of the person's determination by social structure on the one hand, and those celebrate the authenticity and creativity of the self on the other… the fabrication of the self… understood to involve something more subjective, particularly in the way in which desire, emotion and feeling influence the conscious and unconscious experience…" (Elliott, 2001, p. 9)

[32] For the complexity of the problem of the pure I within Husserl's Phenomenology, see (Husserl, 1978a, pp. 65-88). For further discussion, see (Marbach, 1974, pp. 97-140).

[33] The idea that one's appearing and acting in front of others carries within itself "a promise" is central to the postmodern view of the self. See in particular (Goffman, 1958, p. 2).

> ...the old Socratic "*Be* as you wish to appear"...means **appear** *always* **as you wish to appear to others even if it happens that you are alone and appear to no one but yourself.** When I am making such a decision, I am not merely reacting to whatever qualities may be given to me. I am making an act of deliberate choice among the various potentialities of conducts with which the world has presented me. Out of such acts arises finally what we call character or personality... an unchangeable substratum of gift and defects peculiar to our soul and body structure (Arendt, 1978a, p. 37).

This citation is a typical example to the disruption of the two sets of terms regarding the self – the socio-historical and the ontological. At this point Arendt makes two contradictory contentions: on the one hand, the terms "character", "personality" and even "soul" refer to the social-historical context and indicate the products of the processes taking place in it.[34] Yet, in the same paragraph Arendt herself refers to these as "an unchangeable substratum". This determination brings back to the fore, against Arendts' own project, the denied metaphysical self which is supposed to be responsible not only to the Being of the self beyond its appearances, but especially to the unification of the human experience. Needless to say, this also eradicates the discussed split.

Indeed, Arendt herself points to the relation existing between the self and the public realms as she determines that especially with reference to the public realm it becomes possible to assert "the reality of one's self, of one's own identity [and] the reality of the surrounding world ... beyond any doubt" (Arendt, 1958, p. 208). Moreover, the existence of the self appears to be prior to that of the public realm, since it demands a deliberate elimination of the particular manifestations of the self. These, she establishes, should be "transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized... into a shape to fit them for public appearance" (Arendt, 1958, p. 50).[35] However, Arendt does not consolidate from her own distinctions regarding the prerequisites for the establishing of the public realm the conclusion that there is a self beyond its appearance in the different contexts of the human experience, let alone that it undermines the discussed split.

The turning of the self toward the public realm and the need to assume its existence in the other realms clearly weakens the separateness of self from the other realms, and thus raises the question whether it is justified to regard it as a realm or whether it would be more correct to envisage the self as a meta-realm that hovers above the other realms while remaining separate from them. Both possibilities are problematic for Arendt. On the one hand, regarding the self as a determinate realm demands a specific location or place. Yet, while this is possible for the realms of the private and the public, it makes no sense for that of the self. Moreover, from where else do the objects of thinking, willing and judging originate if not from the other realms, from which the self is supposed to be separated in order to be considered as its own realm? Additionally, this possibility, which presents the self as capable of acting only without having an object to which one can point, regresses philosophy to the Cartesian stage, for Kant had already determined that an object necessitates a subject. On the other hand, regarding the self as hovering above the other realms is no less problematic, since this status cannot but determined except in reference to the other realms, thus unavoidably indicating exactly their interrelationship with each other. By rejecting the Cartesian world view, the self appears then as a relation, such that opens it before other realms and creates the possibility in principle of their sequence. One way or another, the establishing split of Arendt's idea of the human condition is undermined in favor of a more open ontology.

To a certain extent, by turning in *The life of the mind* to the elucidation of the idea of the self, Arendt was quite close to achieving a comprehensive solution to the severe problems which had penetrated into *The human condition*.[36] Especially since in her later work the realm of the self stands at the focus

[34] This understanding of the self is epitomized by Goffman by the following way:"[The Self] does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witness. A correctly staged and preformed scene leads the audience to impute a self to the performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of the scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a preformed character is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental character is to be born, to mature and to die, it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited", Erving Goffman, *the Goffman Reader*, C. Lemert and A Branaman (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 23-24 (cited from Elliott, 31-32).

[35] Arendt clarifies that "[although] it is true that all mental activities withdraw from the world of appearances... this withdrawal **is not** toward an interior of... the self" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 32) but to the manifestation of thinking in the world of appearances (Arendt, 1978a, p. 98, Emphasis mine). Concerning the act of withdrawal, see also (Arendt, 1978a, pp. 22, 56, 92-97). The location of the self within the public sphere and its bounding up with politics in the widest sense, characteristic to contemporary social theory, assumes the fragilities of personal experience and the dismanteling of the personal identity in general. See (Elliott, 2001, pp. 15-16). For the link between identity and politics, see (Lemert, 1997, p.128, cited in Elliott, 2001, p. 16).

[36] See Arendt's explanation of her turning to deal with thinking, in (Arendt, 1978a, pp. 5-9). Bernstein contends that "Arendt's concern with thinking always exerts a powerful influence" on her work. See (Bernstein, 2000, p. 277). Yet in my opinion the difference in focus between the two books is undeniable, and the shift from the implicit level to the explicit one does provide a new opportunity to deal with problems generated by the discussed split.

of the discussion, the possibility, characteristic to approaches that assume the fragmentation of the self, of regarding it as a deception because of the above-depicted problems, is dismissed. However, the alternative option of considering the very appearance of the self as possibly indicating a sequence in its various experiences, including those attributed to the remaining realms, is rejected as well. Instead, Arendt acknowledges the existence of the self but imprisons it in a realm inappropriate to its character and to her ontology, which is composed of agent-less realms.

Even had Arendt not relinquished the image of the split that is powerful in her understanding of the human condition, an appropriate idea of the self could have been helpful at least for achieving awareness of the problematic of the split. Indeed, this is the classical role of the idea of pure I which, at least for Kant and Husserl, indicated the attempt to achieve some unification within the self without necessarily undertaking the challenge of providing an account of its particularity within an given historical-sociological context. However, the opportunity marked by the self is wasted, i.e. instead of being the factor that designs the other realms, it appears in Arendt's thinking as subordinated to the functions that she addresses. At the end, the self does not generate any ontological resistance to the realms in which it appears; its Being becomes hollow and while moving from one realm to the other it erodes to nothingness.

It appears then that the profound meaning of the split between the realms comprising Arendt's ontology is prominent especially regarding the realm of self. On the one hand, the self appears as a Being which cannot maintain within itself any kind of sequence from its experience, but its previous experiences are discarded as one shifts from one realm to the other. Therefore, not only in each realm but also in every single experience the self appears as somebody else.[37] Instead of being the one who designs the shape of these realms, the self appears in Arendt's thinking as subordinated to the functions addressed in them. On the other hand, the self appears to refer to the realm of the public, and therefore the separateness of the latter cannot be maintained anymore. However, if the self is open to the public realm, why cannot it be the same regarding the other realms, especially the private? Nonetheless, Arendt avoids the possibility of representing any kind of presence of one realm in the other, and thus leaves all these fundamental problems unsolved. Obviously, the extreme fragmentation of the I, which is prominent with regard to the realm of the self, projects upon the remaining realms, or better: transpires as the generating force which inserts the split into the realms in the first place. Especially as the self indicates the open windows of the remaining realms, these cannot really be considered as realms any more. In the end, the problems that emerge from the idea of the self seem to disprove the whole conception of the human condition.

C. The Burden of the Self

The autarchy and autonomy which is attributed to the different realms splits them from each other. It seems that Arendt is interested in autarchy and autonomy for the sake of providing one's experience in them with totality. Yet, this very possibility is being held back by the inexorable scattering of that experience itself. This interpretation is supported by the absence of any discussion of the presence or presentation of one realm in the other. In addition, no real account is given to the thing which necessitates the shift from one realm to the other. The silence of the realms to each other is supposed to witness their inherent autonomy as well as their priority over the self who appear in them. However, it is not at all clear what is the meaning of each sphere if the self is not considered as carrying great weight in them, for without it these spheres portray merely an abstract vision of the human reality.

It appears that Arendt's thinking carries within itself the core problems of the phenomenalism of Hume and some of his followers in postmodernist thinking.[38] For Hume, the I is "a bundle or collective of different perceptions" which presents momentary units not referring to each other. Although the reality of the I is not denied, he contends "no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different".[39] This phenomenalistic structure is found also in the ontology of Arendt's realms, in particular in the private and the public realms which appear as closed units standing for themselves without creating any sequence. Lacking any core identity which accompanies a person in all realms and influences his experience of them, each realm appears as an independent field of experience. Consequently, the self collapses into the different realms in which he participates and loses his fundamental and ontological priority over them. Although Hume's phenomenalism refers to the perceptual experience and that of Arendt to the social, they share the same ontological structure in which the existence of core identity is denied.[40]

[37] The understanding that one's behavior changes according to the different contexts where a person participates recalls Goffman's idea of "region behaviour", see (Goffman, 1958, pp. 66-86).

[38] For the implementation of phenomenalistic structure in postmodernist thinking, see for example: (Sagi, 2000).

[39] (Hume, 1969, Treatise, 301, emphasis in the original).

[40] For the psychological problematic if the core-less identity, see (Glass, 1995, p. 7). The metaphysical-epistemological problematic is discussed by: (Shoemaker, 1963, pp. 1-40). See also (Waldron, 1995, pp. 93-119).

In fact, the phenomenalism characterizing Arendt's ontology is more problematic than that of Hume: For Hume, at least in the appendix to the *Treatise*, the I appears as a reflection upon the phenomenal experience itself and thus expresses an increasing awareness of its self-contradiction, i.e: the impossibility of articulating the phenomenal disposition without admitting the existence of the one who observes his own experience and locates himself within it. In contrast, in Arendt's thinking the capability of referring to other experiences by means of reflection is not recognized as part of one's experience in the world. Moreover, she does not recognize the stance of the spectator I and therefore also disregards its ontological implications upon her idea of self. As we have seen, the self is shaped as a specific realm without having any awareness of the need for an instance of spectator to observe all the realms at once, even for the sake of reporting about them and keeping their split from each other.[41] As a result of lacking means for consolidating a relation between the different human experiences, and thus achieving sequence, at least a momentary one, Arendt's idea of the self appears as torn into different functions that themselves are scattered into different realms which do not refer to each other.

The probable awareness of the problematic of her double-realms ontology in *The Human Condition*, which is apparent in the change of focus in *The Life of the Mind*, is then not epitomized, and the imprisoning of the self in a separate realm cannot solve the problem of Arendt's phenomenalism and ontology as a whole. Within the need to confirm the presence of the self in each of the contexts where it participates, lies the crucial foundation for sequence in the human experience. The point is not to find a criterion for the appearance of the self or to achieve identity between the experiences of the person that will annul their variety.[42] Instead, the discussed sequence is an indispensable indication of the human presence in the world or even of the fact that man is not simply a physical being but one who reflects about other beings and about himself as capable of experiencing. The application of this observation to Arendt's project of the human condition is rather clear, i.e.: if there is a self, it cannot be limited to specific realm. Therefore, Arendt's entire conception of the human condition is self-contradictory or even meaningless.

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[41] The problem of the spectator I is discussed in (Passmore, 1968, pp.182-83).

[42] See Shoemaker's suggestion to adopt the idea of criterion in Wittgenstein's later writings. (Shoemaker, 1963, p. 3 n. 1).

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