Reclaiming novelty:
Hannah Arendt on natality as an anti-methodological methodology for sociology

J. V. W. Clark

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Department of Sociology

University of Essex

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Abstract:

This dissertation seeks to contribute to research in the philosophy of social science. The study focuses upon select epistemological and ontological aspects of Hannah Arendt's work from which methodological implications are drawn pertaining to sociology. Arendt, although critical of the sociology of her time, has become increasingly cited and influential for emerging sociological research and this study seeks to contribute to this by focusing upon the problem of novelty. The aim is to explore the philosophical and methodological implications of novelty for social science by working through three case studies that are theoretically pivotal for social science—action, the 'social', and the self—in terms of novelty as expressed in Arendt's writing.

Arendt is critical of methodology and epistemology, aiming to draw her readers to ontological concerns outlined from her preoccupation with the 'world' and social reality. In this aim, Arendt seeks to distance herself from social sciences that she claims ignore human novelty in favour of reading social regularities, tendencies and similarities. Despite her disdain for method, Arendt suggests a anti-methodological 'method' (outlined in an overlooked footnote) for keeping trained upon and for dealing with novel, anomalous events. In the seed of this method lies a unique opportunity for social science to reassess and extend its methods, addressing this oversight and in so doing bring to light the novel social object as a legitimate subject of social research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction (problematic and review of literature)

> *Objectively, that is, seen from the outside and without taking into account that man [sic] is a beginning and a beginner, the chances that tomorrow will be like yesterday are always overwhelming. Not quite so overwhelming, to be sure, but very nearly so as the chances were that* no *earth would ever rise out of cosmic occurrences, that* no *life would develop out of inorganic processes, and that* no *man [sic] would emerge out of the evolution of animal life.*
> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 170-171.

Introduction

This thesis explores the methodological and disciplinary implications of Hannah Arendt's concept of *natality* for social science. More specifically, it examines the possibility of accounting for social novelty and the emergence of novel social events. It argues that social science does a poor job in acknowledging and accounting for novelty and as of yet has not produced an adequate method, let alone cluster of theoretical concepts, for appraising these phenomena. For example, many emerging social scientific disciplines, in so far as they were at pains to establish themselves as genuinely scientific, often sought to demonstrate repetitions, tendencies and regularities—aiming ultimately for prediction via social laws—thereby rendering anomalies and outliers insignificant. The result was a version of social science not only concerned with objective truths but with a method that at best tacitly endorses harmony and obscures plurality, at worst provides a representation of reality

and model of research that sanctions normativity and tramples nonconformity. As will be discussed shortly, the lack of interest in novelty does not only inhabit "scientific" approaches to analyses of the social, but is to be found, more generally, throughout what has been called "the sociological imagination".

The thesis pursues a range of seminal social scientific texts concerning method and social change as well as drawing upon a tradition of continental thought concerned with event and process to better appraise Arendt's contribution to these debates. Arendt's contribution itself is examined, first, in terms of her theory of novelty and critique of social science. This is followed by three case studies illuminating the condition of natality deployed by Arendt in terms of key sociological themes—the human capacity for action, the rise of 'the social', and the surfacing of the 'self'—the findings of which are assessed in terms of their implications for and contribution to social science. It is argued that Arendt, while outwardly critical of sociology and methodological prescription, in spite of this she produces a methodological framework for detecting and assessing novel events and provides an analysis that is arguably more attuned to social action than a good many professed sociological analyses. The thesis contributes to contemporary methodological debate in the philosophy of social science by developing theoretical concepts and a methodological model adequate to taking novelty itself seriously rather than viewing it merely as individual variations that ultimately adapt to the social whole.

1.1. A Problem with Novelty?

Social novelty, or the emergence of new social phenomena, has an awkward standing for social science and the humanities, conceptually, ethically and empirically. On the one hand, novelty is associated with sought after human values and aspirations including individuality, distinction and genius as well as innovation, creativity and revolution. Cultural authenticity and artistry requires some form of novelty whether it be found in the artist, the artifact, or the process of creation. If novelty is absent, the social and cultural realms become the object of disdain as they are interpreted as inculcating mass singularity and churning out standardized, non-discriminating products and purposes. From conservatives such as Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis to the left-leaning radicals of the Frankfurt School[1], social criticism focuses great moral attention on the ways industrial capitalism diminishes human singularity and distinctiveness.[2]

On the other hand, single case instances, outliers, or anomalies are problematic for scientific enquiry.[3] For Tarde (2013 [1897]: 10), science is defined by its coordination of phenomena "from the side of their repetitions" and is interested in difference only to differentiate between classes that "in

[1] See Matthew Arnold's (2006 [1869]: 37) *Culture and* Anarchy, where he complains of modern mass culture as "mechanical and external". F. R. Leavis' (2006 [1933]: 17) "Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture," thought it "vain to console us with the promise of a 'mass culture' that shall be utterly new." Whereas Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972 [1944]: 134) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* describes mass culture as "a constant sameness [that] governs the relationship to the past as well. What is new about the phase of mass culture compared with the late liberal stage is the exclusion of the new."

[2] Criticizing the culture industry's inability to produce authentically new and challenging cultural objects, Horkheimer and Adorno see a machine that "rotates on the same spot", endlessly churning out the same, predictably marketable objects.

[3] See Thomas Kuhn's (1970 [1962]) *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* and the commentary below.

nature [yield] a certain number of copies, and [are] capable of indefinite reproduction." In fact, Tarde (2013 [1897]: 10-11) goes so far as to say that phenomena "found to belong to a single individual only" is "incapable of transmission to posterity" and "fails to interest the scientist except as a curious monstrosity." The goal of science proper is to capture regular, predictable phenomena that lend themselves to the construction of types, tendencies and social laws. Social novelty, if we accept Tarde's instruction, is a monstrosity that earns no value for posterity and that threatens the status of the patterns and laws science seeks.

While the problem rests with the detection (because rare and elusive) and preservation (lest it become tainted by popularity) of novelty, for the social scientist the problem lies in how to acknowledge and assess irregularities. Hannah Arendt's social theory, the focal material for this thesis, suggests that traditional social scientific analyses, including those of sociology, ride roughshod over the very aspects of social reality that make it specifically human: its plurality and natality. In particular, social scientific research tends to explain new phenomena by fitting or sorting the new into an already explained system, thereby obliterating the very novelty that makes human reality distinctive. The issue here is that those that value novelty, focus their studies upon that which standardizes and those that disdain novelty do the same. The danger is that instances of novelty are ignored by social scientific studies and such analyses are left to the humanities and the arts.

This thesis examines Arendt's contention against a body of social theory that

contends with issues of idiosyncrasy and repetition with the aim of developing a focussed examination of the philosophical and methodological implications of Arendt's writings concerning novelty and natality. In doing this, the thesis aims to contribute to contemporary debates within the philosophy of the social sciences, placing itself within the context of ontological disputes concerning the appearance of social reality, repetition and causation, and social and historical change. Methodologically, the thesis proposes a method for coming to terms with novel events that lies buried and undeveloped within Arendt's writing and that proposes a unique contribution to the field of social methods research.

The following sections explore the background literature to the problem of novelty by examining accounts that directly examine novelty. The question of what it is to be new is articulated here as a key component of modernity itself and therefore as a fundamental feature of the social sciences that originated in the modern period. The literature here is not only examined in terms of methodological and foundational disciplinary arguments, but as it developed concurrent theories on the character of social change. The standing of new or recurring events and causal laws for the explanation of social change is critical to assessing the place of novelty within social scientific discourse.

As will be seen, an important aspect of theories of social change (evolutionary, revolutionary, progressive or regressive) is the metaphorical use of forms of movement or motion to characterise them, and are here related to novelty. Theories of process and event bear some relation to theories of social change but here are assessed in terms of creation/innovation and in terms of fleshing

out what Žižek (2014: 5-6) refers to as “the basic feature of an event: the surprising emergence of something new which undermines every stable scheme.” The literature concerning process proves important for later in the thesis where Arendt’s critique of process is discussed in terms of social novelty. This leads to the final section which provides a broader account of the state of secondary Arendt scholarship is examined in terms of natality, plurality and social novelty.

1.2. Novelty in the Sociological Imagination

Novelty appears in social theory in at least two broad but distinctive modes. On the one hand, there is the novelty of social theorists and social scientists who are expected to employ imagination to gain novel insight into the social world. This mode is often tied to methodological concerns. The literature I focus upon here concerns primarily the “sociological imagination.” On the other hand, there is the novelty encountered in the world, what I will call “social novelty,” that forms the subject matter of some social theories. Social novelty might be thought of as novel social action, as novel products or works, as novel events, as novel institutional developments, as novel modes of expression or change, as novel modes of being for which there is yet no name. I focus here on a selection of traditional sociological theories with the question: how effectively do traditional sociological theories account for social novelty?

For C. Wright Mills (1959), novelty resides in the creativity and innovation of

the sociological imagination itself. *The Sociological Imagination* is a work acclaiming (1959: 4-7) an intellectual pursuit, promoting “a quality of mind” with a humanistic “promise” that “enables us to grasp” the subject matter and potential of sociology. What the sociologist aims to grasp is the connection between biography and history, between private troubles and public issues, that aim to link broad social and historical regularities to individual lives. In other words, novelty can be found in Mills’ text at one of only two sites: the sociologist’s imaginative creativity or the individual biography. Mills understandably prioritises the former because the novelty that earmarks those individuals enduring private troubles is the anomaly that cannot be incorporated into sociological analysis. “Public issues”, Mills argues on the contrary, “have to do with the organization of many such milieu into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieu overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life” (Mills, 1959: 8). Sociology’s task is to demonstrate these shared “overlaps and interpenetrations”, to become “the common denominator of our cultural period”, because it “is a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities” (Mills 1959: 15).

What novelty exists Mills brackets as the psychological, idiosyncratic and non-sociological. The novelty retained is the creative novelty of the sociologist who is able to intellectually develop this imaginative quality of mind. While Mills does

exhibit some solidarity with Arendt as a critic of bureaucratic methodology[4], his solution remains focused upon a sociology whose task is bringing to light overlaps and regularities rather than social novelties. It is these overlaps that illuminate our private lives; meaning emanates from similarity. There is some sense of externalised novelty in Mills work but this is found in the extra-sociological. But chiefly novelty is found in the sociological imagination itself as its imaginative, creative component; novelty is preserved, in a modernist fashion, for the sociologist him or herself in a bid to make sociology the "major common denominator of our cultural life and its signal feature" (Mills 1959: 14).

Anthony Giddens' (1982/1987) interpretation of the sociological imagination similarly highlights the imaginative aspect of sociological inquiry by linking it specifically to a fundamental social scientific goal, 'critique'. Giddens suggests that there are three modes or senses making up the sociological imagination: the historical, the anthropological and the critical. Crucially, the third critical sense is dependent upon the first two: "combining this second sense with the first, the exercise of the sociological imagination makes it possible to break free from the straightjacket of thinking only in terms of the type of society we know in the here and now. …we must be conscious of the *alternative futures* that are potentially open to us. In its third sense, the sociological imagination fuses with the task of sociology in contributing to *the critique of existing forms of society*"

[4] Mills (1959: 20) states "My conception stands opposed to social science as a set of bureaucratic techniques which inhibit social inquiry by 'methodological' pretensions". However in the very same sentence, Mills goes on to say that he is also opposed to social science "which congest such work by obscurantist conceptions, or which trivialize it by concern with minor problems unconnected with publicly relevant issues." Whether these obscurities and trivialities cross into what Arendt might consider novelties is difficult to tell as Mills reference to these is more rhetorical than analytical.

(Giddens 1987 [1982]: 22). Giddens' breakdown is more promising in that it suggests that differences more than similarities across time and place help lead to the critical sensibility and yet difference is no guarantee of novelty (different patterns or structural tendencies are still patterns and tendencies). Novelty emerges most prominently in the sensibility of the sociologist, in the critical sensibility that permits potential alternatives, and provides the basis of sociological critique. In this way, novelty, again, becomes a matter of individual, human activity rather than an ontological category. Furthermore this is a manufactured novelty (reminiscent of the modernist focus upon creative artistry), a novelty that is later shown to be deficient for Arendt as well as indicative of the political troubles of a modern age that comprehended the social and political realm as the product of work, manufacture and making.

Zygmunt Bauman's (1990) *Thinking Sociologically*, helps when evaluating critique and imagination as a site for novelty in the social sciences as he explores the existential condition of the sociologist. Initially, Bauman (1990: 7-8) makes similar points, identifying sociology's distinction as "the habit of viewing human actions as *elements of wider figurations*" but varying this somewhat by suggesting that the "central question of sociology, one could say, is: in what sense does it matter that in whatever they do or may do people are dependent on other people." However, these are specific questions or methods for examining the world that betray, like both Mills and Giddens, that sociology fundamentally understands itself cerebrally: "Sociology, we may conclude, is first and foremost a *way of thinking* about the world" (Bauman 1990: 8). This emancipatory mental posture, identified above as the novel insight sociology

offers, is not a quality of mind available to everyone—most people remain tied to their common sense. Sociologists, however, "remain on both sides of the experience they strive to interpret, inside and outside at the same time" (Bauman 1990: 10), but it is specifically this outside perspective that brings forth the novelty amongst the 'wider figurations' and social processes that similarly demarcate our lives as amenable to generalisation. Bauman (1990: 15) argues,

> Familiarity is the staunchest enemy of inquisitiveness and criticism—and thus also of innovation and the courage to change. In an encounter with that familiar world ruled by habits and reciprocally reasserting beliefs, sociology acts as a meddlesome and often irritating stranger. It disturbs the comfortingly quiet way of life by asking questions no one among the 'locals' remembers being asked, let alone answered. Such questions make evident things into puzzles: they defamiliarize the familiar.

There does then seem to be a place for novelty, for the unfamiliar and the strange, for that which is out of joint, for the uncanny. But this is accounted for in terms of the privileged position of the sociologist him or herself when the scientific perspective becomes imagination, when the student of sociology develops an imagination that puts them out of joint. For Bauman and the tradition of the sociological imagination, the production of novelty is a mental exercise that 'defamiliarises the familiar', that dispels the illusions and ideologies that tie us to a common reality. This methodological conjuring does not grant or acknowledge any genuine novelty in the social world, but requires a method or thought process by which to create novelty.[5]

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[5] There is some indication that novel events can be of genuine interest. C. Wright Mills (1959: 4) notes "Even when they do not panic, men [sic] often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary men [sic] feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted?" However, like Thomas Kuhn's analysis of scientific novelties and anomalies, Mills here sees the significance of novel beginnings but

Two efforts that rethink or update the sociological imagination are found in Steve Fuller's (2006) *The New Sociological Imagination* and Jock Young's *The Criminological Imagination*. Fuller's (2006: vii) "21st Century version of C Wright Mills' 1959 classic" promises a more likely examination of social novelty as it looks to confront "the (now very different) future that awaits us… [and] how much the world has changed since Mills' day". But Fuller's text is perhaps so 'new' that his account leaves sociology behind as both Baehr and Wade acknowledge. Baehr (2007: 500) notes "Fuller says little about sociology as such. Instead of being an update of C. Wright Mills' robust perspective on sociology—how to pursue it—how not to pursue it—*The New Sociological Imagination* is essentially a work of critical philosophy, a Christian socialist call to arms against neo-Darwinism and its denegration of the uniqueness of human beings." Wade (2007: 640-641) concurs, "it warrants its inclusion on the reading list of presessional undergraduates, but not budding sociologists, looking to place sociology in a biological world, but for students of biology, wishing to understand their science's place in society." Less an excursus into social novelty, Fuller's novel approach takes us away from the disciplinary concerns that animate our search for social novelty.

Jock Young's 2011 book *The Criminological Imagination* returns to Mills'

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only as the trigger for these "ordinary men [sic]" to develop that quality of mind Mills calls the sociological imagination (a quality of mind, remember, that fits private experience into the framework of wider public issues).

questions and highlights the abstract empiricism commonly found in much current criminology and sociology. Young's (2011: viii) intentions sound positive: "For Mills a key indice of loss of such imagination was the rise of abstracted empiricism where reality was lost in method and measurement, where the tools of the trade become magically more important than reality itself, where to put it metaphorically, the telescope becomes of greater importance than the sky." This chimes with Arendt's concern that we not get lost in methodology and that we remain trained upon the novel reality itself rather than lose it to the abstraction of statistics or typologies. Another crossover between Young and Arendt is that he is concerned that much abstract empirical sociology and criminology does damage to the integrity and dignity of the subjects they study, "sociology is frequently a subject where the social scientist looks downwards at the poor… There is distance and diminishing. The criminological gaze is more so; its traditional lens focuses on those who are seen to inhabit special universes economically detached, spatially segregated and morally reduced, consisting of individuals who by disposition, lack of socialization or circumstance are less than us" (Young 2011: viii). This is laudable and suggests both an ethical dimension and a singular attentiveness to persons. However, while there is a concern for individuals, there is little to suggest that Young sees or provides the opportunity to acknowledge modes of social novelty beyond that of persons (and what this means is not elaborated).

In fact, Young (2011: 220-221) argues that a "criminology consigned to

the examination of the peripheral and the exceptional… is palpably incorrect… instead it is preferable to view the process of criminalization as a critical and integral part of a core system of social inclusion and exclusion which reaches across the biographies of each citizen, selecting and rejecting and involving all the major institutions of society." Rather than examine the "peripheral and exceptional," rather than demarcate deviance as the novel anomaly that bucks the norm, Young makes a case for its social ubiquity—"the criminal justice system is far from peripheral to the system… it has become encoiled in the day-to-day lives of so many, it is ubiquitous" (Young 2011: 222). Furthermore, unlike Arendt, Young seems to see abstract empiricism as the primary social scientific ill, he does not see theory as potentially an equal area of error—Arendt once remarked during a round table discussion, "What is the subject of our thought? Experience! Nothing else! And if we lose the ground of experience then we get into all kinds of theories. When the political theorist begins to build his [sic] systems he [sic] is also usually dealing with abstraction" (Arendt 1972: 308). If we are to develop a sociological account and method of actual social novelty, then social scientists must be wary of both abstract empiricism and abstract theorizing. I turn now to classical sociological theories of social change with the aim of finding genuine sociological interest in social novelty.

1.3. Criminality, Delinquency and Social Novelty

As discussed previously, criminologists have attempted to broaden or renew the remit of the sociological imagination. Their work is important as sociological approaches to criminology (such as those developed by Young (2011) do, at first sight, seem more interested in the novelty involved in deviating from, rather than adhering to, social norms. Therefore, criminology is more auspicious as its object of study—crime and deviance—are forms of social anomaly, taking us away from the mind of the social scientist and into the social world. Furthermore, we expect deviance to be its genuine object of study, rather than the social norms deviance is pitted against. This basis is all the more promising as criminology's theoretical background includes sociologists such as Durkheim (Smith: 2008) who, although focused on the normative realm and therefore the realm of the expected, sees crime as an expected way for modern societies to develop and change (societies with a strong conscience collective seemingly remain frozen in time). Yet in effect, much criminology tacitly reinforces the importance of the normal, consistent and coherent as deviance is always deviance from or in relation to a set of established norms. Consider Robert Merton's (1932) paper "Social Structure and Anomie". Merton (1932: 680) suggests that deviant behavior is generated by the strain individuals feel when their social structure does not provide the opportunity to realise shared cultural values of success: "it is only when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain *common* symbols of success *for the population at large* while its social structure rigorously restricts or completely eliminates access to approved modes of acquiring these symbols *for a considerable part of the same population*, that antisocial behavior ensues

on a considerable scale." It is the "common symbols of success," the normative expectations, that are the preconditions and bases of anti-social behavior. And while the means of achieving goals may demonstrate novelty, the goals themselves remain the same normative expectations, maintaining cultural coherence rather than distinctive novel change. Deviance in this sense might be interpreted as subservient to normativity, even if it elaborates and tracks the novel means people take to achieve the anticipated norm. What is more, Mertonian analyses read novel deviations against predictable frameworks of understanding that transforms them into expected patterns of behaviour (eg. rebellion, retreatism, innovation).

Another influential example of criminological research, that of Dick Hobbs (1991), examines the entrepreneurial or enterprise culture that begins to emerge in Thatcher's Britain. Focusing on the innovative and enterprising aspect of deviance, Hobbs (1991: 114) claims, "'business' becomes an organizational metaphor for life itself, a way of being that is totally in accord with attempts to solve the problems posed by the daily grind of everyday existence." This is an active, purposive solution to the daily grind: "Strategies based on entrepreneurship provide means of retaining the vigour of youthful experimentation, while laying the foundations of strategically planned enterprises that do not threaten the existence of capitalism but make it somewhat more bearable" (Hobbs 1991: 117) Hobbs' analyses, despite the recognition that enterprising deviance does not threaten capitalism, focuses more effectively upon the novel means undertaken rather than the normative goal.

Hobbs' account takes us some way towards a consideration of novelty, in that it examines the innovative actions of social agents. There still remains some tacit link to normative expectation but the focus is clearly the novel strategies of a "working class game plan" (Hobbs 1991: 117). However this mode of reckoning illuminates novelty only in terms of the motives and intents of rationally minded agents: it relegates novelty to rationally minded intentionality. In other words, Hobbs reckoning with novelty veers from the "sociological imagination" model where novelty is seen as the "quality of mind" of the sociologist, but remains firmly within an understanding that sees novelty as a "quality of mind", this time the entrepreneurial mentality of deviant actors attempting to "solve problems". Consequently, both criminological modes tend to oscillate around novelty from either side of a well-worn structure-agency divide—Merton in terms of normative structure, Hobbs in terms of enterprising agency. Later chapters will demonstrate how Arendt's interpretation of social novelty brings to social science an anti-humanist account that is neither dependent upon structure, nor dependent upon conscious intent, but emerges out of conditioned but unpredictable (and therefore linked to freedom) action. It is this eminently social, yet anti-humanist mode of novelty that is explored further in Chapter 2.

1.4. Novelty, Social Theory and Social Change

When looking back at nineteenth and twentieth century social theory, social novelty—if identified at all—tends to be rooted in theories of social change and

history. Like with the detection of deviance, novelty seems to require some horizon against which it is detected, yielding a binary relationship for which each side retains an echo of the other. The historical development of sociology as a discipline is indebted to a number of central early writers keen to establish sociology's object, its method, its scientific integrity, and its normative aims. In this section, we look to Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Parsons to elaborate the foundations of the discipline.

Novelty may indeed imply change, leading to questions regarding the nature, shape and direction of change. Change, on the contrary, need not imply novelty and this is what we find, for example, in the work of Auguste Comte. Identified as the originator of the term "sociology" (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004: 14), Comte produced a stage theory of evolutionary change that saw each stage moving progressively forward from the last. Randall Collins (1988: 12) sees evolutionism as "the oldest part of sociology" influencing later figures such as Durkheim and Parsons, but also sparking divergent theories in Weber, Simmel and Pareto. Comte's (1988 [1830]) thesis that societies progress by moving from the theological, through the metaphysical, and on finally to the positive stage of development is based upon an evolutionism driven by specified laws of succession. These laws of change do not permit genuine novelty as the evolving path is law-bound and determinate. Furthermore, the ideal state for Comte is one where all things are explained according to a set number of laws: "the ideal of the positive system… would be reached if we could look upon all the different phenomena observable as so many particular cases of a single general fact, such as that of gravitation, for example" (Comte, 1988 [1830]: 3).

The "ideal" scenario where all differences are seen as "cases of a single general fact" leaves no room for novel events or occurrences. From the perspective of novelty, the positive stage yields no progress over the uni-explanatory model of the theological stage that explains all phenomena "by the direct and continuous action of more or less supernatural agents, whose arbitrary intervention explains all the apparent anomalies of the universe" or the metaphysical stage where "the supernatural agents are replaced by abstract forces… capable of giving rise by themselves to all the phenomena observed" (Comte 1988 [1830]: 2).

Émile Durkheim's (1982 [1895]) theory of social change, while only accounting for two stages as opposed to Comte's three, is more nuanced. For instance, Collins (1988: 19) notes that Durkheim "began to separate *what evolves* from *what remains constant* as societies change," arguing that beneath the improvement of modern rational contracts sits the non-rational ground of pre-contractual moral solidarity—"beneath the surface, modern society still shows many traits of traditional societies." In other words, Durkheim's (1982 [1895]: 133-134) theory differs fundamentally from Comte as it lacks a teleological mechanism of change as all phenomena (social and natural) "are not explained when we have demonstrated that they have a purpose." However, despite the greater level of sophistication and depth, this theory yields one of two alternatives that nevertheless fail to account for genuine novelty: on the one hand, there is evolutionary change that acts as a mechanism to yield a predictable developmental direction and, on the other hand, there are static, unchanging facets of society that remain despite change. Both scenarios

combine to yield a scientifically predictable model, based upon causal structure-dependent change.

One might object at this point, however, that Durkheim's model of change is not entirely mechanical and that his account of "emergent properties" that derive from chemical synthesis has not been considered. Durkheim (1982 [1895]: 39-40) is keen to establish sociology as a science and to demonstrate a similar origination of social facts:

> Whenever elements of any kind combine, by virtue of this combination they *give rise to new phenomena*. One is therefore forced to conceive of these phenomena as residing, not in the elements, but in the entity formed by the union of these elements… If, as is granted to us, this synthesis *sui generis*, which constitutes every society, *gives rise to new phenomena*, different from those which occur in consciousnesses in isolation, one is forced to admit that these specific facts reside in the society itself that produces them and not its parts—namely its members [emphasis added].

This begins to look like a potential basis for a theory of social novelty—Durkheim is laying the claim that sociology's object is new phenomena that are the products of chemical syntheses and therefore not reducible to individual combinatory ingredients. Unfortunately, while Durkheim establishes novelty, the argument is largely rhetorical, first as a means for establishing the basis of sociology as a science similar to the natural science and second as way of distancing himself from psychology and the consciousness driven model of Auguste Comte. When Durkheim comes to explore and explain these new social facts, he accomplishes this by searching out extra-psychological causes—extra-psychological causes that nonetheless causally determine social facts. Durkheim (1982 [1903]: 201) states,

> what emerged from all of these investigations was the fact that social phenomena could no longer be deemed the product of fortuitous combinations,

> arbitrary acts of will, or local and chance circumstances. Their generality attests to their essential dependence on general causes which, everywhere that they are present, produce their effects. These effects are always the same, endowed with a degree of necessity equal to that of other natural causes.

In the end, Durkheim's theory shunts aside the novelty he initially identifies in favour of following the causal principles and laws that determine their emergence and help sustain a positivist model for sociology. Alan Swingewood (2000: 65) sums this up, "At the heart of Durkheim's method is the assumption that what happens must happen: there is never any sense that some other course of action might have occurred, no possibility of alternative paths… The emphasis lay rather in the ways human action contributed to maintaining a given society."

Elements of an "evolutionary" aspect can be found in the manner in which Marx and Engels rendered Hegel's idealist historical model of a teleological unfolding of human 'spirit' or *geist.* Spirit, it is argued, develops dialectically according to cyclically progressive stages that transcend each manifestation of spirit but that eventually come to realise the essence of human spirit. Dialectical change does not develop unvaryingly or uniformly, but is characterised by negation—each successive transcendence, then, entails opposition and destruction. Progress unfolds through the negation and repudiation of imperfect stages. This process, however, takes on the appearance of an unceasing striving, a relentless process of negation, that Herbert Marcuse (1941: 66) argues, becomes "absolute unrest."

Engels was also influenced by Saint-Simon's "scientific grasp of social change… especially the concept of historical laws, the necessary historical

conflict between classes… and the central argument that changes within the political system depended, not on moral actions, but on economic institutions" (Swingewood: 29). However, both he, and Marx, ultimately rejected Hegel's idealism, which he, according to Louis Althusser (1996 [1969]: 75), saw as a sign of Germany's "*historical underdevelopment*" that, in turn, promoted a speculative culture "*whereby German intellectuals thought their conditions, their hopes and even their 'activity'*."[6] However, by merely 'turning Hegel on his head', Marx retained the *form* of Hegel's philosophy of historical change, maintained the dialectical process of negation and the teleological thrust of unfolding. Gone now is *Geist*, but in its place stands material production. Arendt (1958: 292-293) viewed "reversals" such as this as nothing novel or fresh, as the reversal did not require "either historical events or changes in the structural elements involved." What is more, the very processual structure of the dialectical change behind historical materialism promotes an historicism that Tama Weisman (2014: 5) identifies as causal and law determined:

> In "turning Hegel on his head" Marx understands dialectic as causality. The laws of dialectic, rather than being "a method of searching for more or less far-reaching correspondences between actual phenomena, and the sharp outline of the dialectical movement" (Jaspers 1995, 350), become necessary and inevitable with laws that define the past, present and future. Jaspers describes this type of dialectic as "mono-causality"…

Indeed Engels (2007 [1892]: 27) defined the new project of historical materialism as "that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the

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[6] Althusser claims, "It was not the attraction of a witty turn of phrase that led Marx to declare that the French have political minds, the English economic minds, while the Germans have *theoretical* minds. The counterpart to Germany's *historical underdevelopment* was an *ideological and theoretical 'overdevelopment'* incomparable with anything offered by other European nations. But the crucial point is that this theoretical development was an *alienated ideological* development, without concrete relation to the real problems and the real objects which were *reflected in it*."

economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another." And yet despite Marx being understood as "mono-causal" by Jaspers or his project of historical materialism defined in terms of an "ultimate cause" and "great moving power of all important historic events" by Engels, it is difficult not also to recall his characterisation of labour as immensely creative, his marvelling at the innovative capabilities of capitalist enterprise (even if he despised the system out of which this grew), and his humanistic call for and belief that there would be radical, revolutionary change. Is not Marx the one classical social theorist who genuinely believed in radical new beginnings?

A further indication of an attempt at conceptualizing novelty can be found in Marx and Engels' (2008 [1848]: 34) account of new changes within capitalism: "new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones." And yet the very sentence that precedes this (in *The Communist Manifesto*) states "the modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms." In other words, the contradictions of material production fundamentally retain the same class antagonisms regardless of new forms—there may be new classes, new modes of oppression and struggle, but at base there is still class, still oppression, still struggle. As for charging historical materialism with being economically determinist and "mono-causal," Shaw (1991: 238) reports Marx's protestation when he "denied propounding 'any historico-philosophical theory of the *marche générale* imposed by the fate upon every people'." Shaw (1991:

238) retorts however, “but this oft-quoted remark does not amount to a rejection of historical determinism. Marx could consistently believe in a necessary productive-force-determined evolution of history without holding that every social group is preordained to follow the same course.”

But if we put aside questions concerning Marx’s theory of social change (charges of economic determinism, historicism, teleology and messianism), we have to ask whether the promise of Marx’s revolutionary radicalism suggests a genuine theory or method for examining social novelty? Marx and Engels (1848/2008: 63) write, “the communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional relations; no wonder that its development involved the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.” It seems likely that the prospect of revolution indicates for Marx a “radical rupture” with the past and the inculcation of a genuinely new beginning. The difficulty with this is that for a writer that is so strongly committed to rejecting idealism and confirming materialism, Marx’s only account in his writings of a radically new novel event is one from the future, one imagined in the mind of the critic. A communist revolution would fit the bill as a genuine social novelty, fully extant in the world (that is, neither focused upon internal questions of method and imagination nor subjective questions of intent and motive). The problem is that it is not realised; the novelty is yet to occur. Like the theorists of the sociological imagination, Marx’s account of novelty remains then at the level of thought. Marx’s account therefore advances sociology no further in the quest for an account or method for identifying actual, empirical novelties.

As explored above, the ‘sociological imagination’ relegates novelty to that of the sociologist, neglecting social novelty as an object of analysis in its own right. In part this is because the discipline is scientifically organised to ensure that events in the world are read as examples of *a priori* theoretical frameworks, as examples of agreed taxonomic categories. In fact, this is perhaps what mostly bothered Arendt about Weber's (1949 [1904]) method: he abstracts from individual occurrences, instances, and events so that they may fit onto transferrable ideal types. Theory manipulates what is seen, fitting it to mental constructs: a task made easier when sociology is relegated to a ‘quality of mind’. Although the method of ‘ideal types’ is based upon the supposition that acts are unique and individual (and therefore ideal types are used heuristically as a method for making sense of unique acts), the impetus is not to examine the uniqueness and novelty of these acts, but to construct a framework so that they may be more amenable to scientific classification and analysis.

Weber’s (1949 [1904]; 1978 [1922]) theory developed in the context of nineteenth century German interpretivism and was influenced by figures such as Dilthey, Rickert and Windelband who rejected the positivism of writers such as Comte. Swingewood (2000: 81) explains, “it was argued that positivism foundered, first, because human society constituted a realm of unique, not recurrent, law-like processes in which human autonomy and freedom were decisive elements; and, second, because society itself did not exist in any meaningful sense apart from the individuals who comprised it together with their unique actions.” This talk of human autonomy, freedom and unique action suggests a social model that Weber might draw upon to develop

methodological and empirical studies of novelty. Indeed, Weber's account of social action emphasizes unique acts over similar or imitative behavior, ie. every type of interaction does not constitute social action/ For example, Weber views homogenous, collective behaviour—which he often equates with imitation—and reactionary behavior as interactive forms that do not count as social action. Social action is "an actor's behavior [that] is meaningfully oriented to that of others" (Weber 1978 [1922]: 23) Social action is the way actors orient or direct themselves using their unique perspectives to others. Imitation or spontaneous behavior does not count as it does not utilise the subjective motivation and meaning that underpins interpretive sociology. Weber (1978 [1922] :21-22) does note that the subjective meaning of action is "only occasionally… brought clearly into consciousness," but nonetheless what is socially meaningful and what signifies the autonomous, free and uniqueness of sociality resides in motivational intent and meaning (whether fully conscious to actors or not). The task of the sociologist is to make explicit the meaningful intent that does not make it to consciousness, making sense of unique acts by approximating and comparing them against an ideal typical schematic. Weber's (1978 [1922]) social model (that seemingly provides for freedom and uniqueness) consigns social novelty to, on the one hand, the subjective realm while at the same time bypassing novelty itself so that attention might be paid to the scientific significance gained via the method of ideal types. Non-subjective social novelty examined as genuine novelty, rather than as more or less pre-set types, is skirted over in Weber's work. This is all the more bemusing as Weber himself was keenly aware of the demystifying, overly-rational and bureaucratic tendencies of modern society. By focusing on ideal

types and aiming for adequacy at the level of cause as well as meaning, Weber effectively draws attention away from novelty, away from the unique and the unexpected, in favour of a disenchantment of the social world.

Talcott Parsons (1968 [1937]) in *The Structure of Social Action* sets out to produce a 'voluntaristic' account of social action that prioritises human freedom in the face of theories that produced predictable, mechanistic models in response to the problem of order. For Parsons, the movement from Marshall to Weber was the change from an economic rationalism that could not be justified as a total system of action to a voluntaristic approach that explains action in terms of an overall understanding of economic, political, sociological and psychological relationships. The voluntaristic approach views action in terms of a causally ordered means/end schema located in the subjective understanding of the actor and analysed objectively by the scientist (Parsons x: 750). This method is intimately involved in situating actions within the historically determined normative rules and ideals which bind the actors and effect their motivation for action. Consequently, while the term voluntarism suggests some sense of freedom that might be the source of novel action, freedom and novelty are lost in favour of a causally ordered and overtly rational account of social action. Furthermore, Michael Halewood's (2014: 111-122) reading of Parsons finds him wanting, as he lacks a clear conception of what constitutes the social. Parsons' later work further withdraws from voluntarism to a more reified concept of the social system with greater emphasis upon social roles and their expectations leaving little in the way of potential for social novelty.

1.5. Thomas Kuhn on Novelty

Perhaps the most influential study that brought novelty into focus in the late 20th century was Thomas Kuhn's 1962 study, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Kuhn's text marked a turn in the philosophy of science away from timeless methodological problems concerning matters such as induction, probability, and falsification, toward historical and sociological matters relating to scientific change and the social encumbrance of scientific communities. Neither the methodological framework of science nor the context of justification could any longer be taken for granted after Kuhn's intervention. Rather, more typical social scientific questions regarding the historical process of revolutionary development and the communal context of scientific change became starting points and foci for debate.

The broad significance of this turn disturbed the authority and gravitas of scientific activity and its findings: objectivity, factual knowledge and scientific progress gave way to an historical (for some, relativist) model of science that fashioned facts using socially received frameworks. Kuhn refers to these frameworks, criteria and assumptions as "paradigms" that rise against and fall in the face of competing paradigms. Rather than a unilinear and accumulative progression, Kuhn's model mapped scientific development and change in a dislocated and disjunctive manner, expressing revolutionary rather than evolutionary change and dispelling the incremental advance of scientific knowledge. Consequently, paradigms are characteristically incommensurable with other paradigms, and there is little ground for deeming one paradigm more

or less justifiable than another.

Such an historical account depicts scientific activity as conventional and provisionally hegemonic. Kuhn refers to this as “normal science” preoccupied with everyday puzzle-solving—rather than the ground-breaking detection of genuine novelties. To put it another way, scientific knowledge is portrayed here as in some sense predictable knowledge, as a fabricated product of accepted conceptual frameworks and methods. Of import to this study is how Kuhn characterizes scientific knowledge as expected knowledge, that facts and findings are what fit with a paradigm’s received assumptions and framework, and that normal science actively discriminates against novelty:

> Perhaps the most striking feature of normal research problems… is how little they aim to produce major novelties, conceptual or phenomenal. Sometimes… everything but the most esoteric detail of the result is known in advance, and the typical attitude of expectation is only somewhat wider… And the project whose outcome does not fall in that narrower range is usually just a research failure, one which reflects not on nature but on the scientist.” (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 35)

Normal science—rather than exhibiting original research and bringing to light novel findings—either explain novelty away or find a way to incorporate novelty in a way to ensure it is familiar:

> Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e., with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science. It then continues with a more or less extended exploration of the area of anomaly. And it closes only when the paradigm theory has been adjusted so that the anomalous has become the expected (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 52-3)

It is then Kuhn’s contention that unexpected novelties or anomalies are actively ignored or evaded as there is no solution to them within the framework or heuristic models of normal science. Furthermore, the problem of novelty is a

political threat: “normal science… often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments” (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 5). One of the distinctive aspects of Kuhn’s argument is that he does not view anomaly in the terms prior philosophers of science viewed instances of falsification (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 146). The anomaly does not just call into question or refute a prior theory, it beckons forth or demands a new theory or new paradigm to explain its unexpected character, thereby ensuring the unfamiliar safely becomes the familiar, safely becomes the support of the new paradigm and its community.

Importantly, Arendt’s early essays contend with the novelty of totalitarianism, and this points to a certain synergy between Kuhn and Arendt around the characterization of science as evading novelty, and the use of theory as a strategy for ensuring all things strange are somehow transformed into the known and thereby appropriated. However it is my contention—and in this way Kuhn is more valuable for this study—that the differences between Kuhn and Arendt are more striking and betray one of the reasons why Arendt’s research is more pertinent to redressing the lack of an adequate theory of novelty for social science and why Kuhn’s ultimately fails. Kuhn’s preoccupation and focus is twofold: the *structure* of scientific change and the process of revolution itself. In other words, Kuhn’s attention is firmly fixed on the formal as opposed to substantive aspects of novelty. Novelty may be the trigger, but Kuhn shows little interest in the substantive nature of novelty favouring instead the formal process of change and formal structure of science moving from normal science, through puzzle solving, paradigm, anomaly, crisis and revolution. Paradigm is

in effect the focus of the book—“The paradigm as shared example is the central element of what I now take to be the most novel and least understood aspect of this book” (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 187)—and its formal process of change. And it is this formal mode of analysis that triggers many readers to read him as a social constructionist, if not relativist.

Arendt’s take on novelty, as explored in Chapter 2, is instructive here as the implications of her argument suggest that paradigms themselves, their very structure, are not suited to the social world because they utilise methodology and conceptual frameworks as a way to dismiss novelty. Kuhn himself passes no judgment on the structure of scientific revolutions, upon the character of scientific paradigms, and therefore the methodological bases of paradigms go unquestioned and alternatives unexplored. Novelty is something that emerges only against the accepted traditions of science and is not therefore distinctive in its own right, the constraint is always to find a way to normalize novelty even if this means the production of a new paradigm. Novelty is not permitted to be in itself.

To conclude this section, Alexander Bird (2000: 21-5) surmises that the crisis phase brought on by novel anomalies yields instability, that the anomaly produces impotence for the incumbent paradigm as it is unable to guide further research. The response to novelty is not to examine the event itself, to allow it to be in its novelty, but to interpret this as a need for a new paradigm. The significance of Arendt's position is that it suggests a model of inquiry whose very focus is the unexpected and whose ‘method’ may very well spurn the

development of a new paradigm. In other words, the implications of her undeveloped ‘methodology,’ if adopted, could theoretically put an end to paradigmatic revolutionary change. This of course does not suggest an ‘end to history’ or an end to variation in modes of inquiry but this change might suggest an ‘end to historicism’ and would be less framework and rule defined. Critically, an Arendtian ontologically grounded theory would be driven more by the occurrence of concrete novel events than by any paradigm of social science.

And because science is the focus of Kuhn’s work, it is focused upon science in a traditional methodological and epistemological manner (although Kuhn protests that he is still interested or driven by issues to do with truth and the facts). The upshot is a study that prioritises paradigms at the expense of anomaly and novelty. Consequently, the interest is with the formation and formal change of paradigms, rather than the content of paradigms or the content/reality of the novelties themselves. Like Foucault (1972), he is interested in the strategies and modes of change. There may an interest in the emergence or recognition of novelties, but this interest is driven by how it changes the paradigm itself, how the paradigm and scientists acting under its framework responds to the novelty, how the new paradigm emerges. The interest is not primarily the novelty itself, its reality, its content. Its meaning is merely formal, not substantive. Arendt’s position is unlike Kuhn (1970 [1962]), Gramsci (1971), Foucault (1972) and other social scientists who understand social change in terms of a history of ideas where different paradigms, discourses, ideologies compete for dominance amongst themselves and there is no or little emphasis upon substantive ontological realities.

1.6. Moves within Social Theory to Establish Novelty

Michael North's (2013) *Novelty: A History of the New* is one of a few studies that examines novelty itself in broad historical and substantive terms. Although he cites the concentrated preoccupation of modernity with novelty, North (2013: 203) concludes that novelty is a "timeless problem" and a nagging "ancient mystery". North identifies three frameworks for comprehending novelty, novelty created *ex nihilo*, novelty that emerges via incremental and progressive change, and novelty understood in classical revolutionary terms, by which he means a return to tradition. The first North sees as a simplistic account that was easily seen off by early philosophical writers, whereas the other two bear an often uncomfortable relationship evidenced in thinkers such as Kuhn who balance innovation with tradition in mapping scientific change.

North focuses much attention on the 'modern project', and demonstrates how most participants had much more sophisticated accounts of novelty than that assumed by Ezra Pound's (1934) famous "Make it new". Significantly, for a thesis concerned with Arendt, North notes how aesthetic modernism led the way in prioritising language and the symbolic as a model for novelty. Significant because Arendt identifies the need to coin new words as a direct response to the shock of the new. However North, citing the influence of Wittgenstein, links the novelty inherent in language more to the linguistic system itself as it provides the conditions and possibility of "an implicit *and so on*" that we also

see echoing later in Derrida's notion of deferral implied in *différance*. For the sociologist, North identifies a specific *sociality* to novelty, distinct from the individualism inherent in much writing on novelty:

> "What this means, though, is that novelty, which was once linked inextricably to the individual, to originality, and which has often been defined in terms of a tension with the social, actually seems more feasible as a social phenomenon. If Darwin is right, as later thinkers from Maxwell to Kuhn clearly thought he was, then variation is one of the natural consequences of development in any complex system. Thus Lehman can argue that even original genius is an effect of the social, of the innumerable interactions of a complex society, which will tend to produce some few bits of the unprecedented just as surely as they reproduce the given" (North, 2013: 206).

In *The Greeks and the New: Novelty in Ancient Greek Imagination and Experience*, Armand D'Angour (2011: 1) offers an historical perspective on novelty with the aim of showing that the interest in novelty is not merely a modern phenomenon and the aim of correcting the common view that classical Greece was "averse to innovation and shunned the new". Not only was classical Greece intent on the novel and the new, but their engagement with it was highly nuanced and self-reflexive. Like Arendt, D'Angour (2011: 225) characterises traditional societies, including the early phases of classical Greece, as viewing "the sensibility of change as a cyclical and repetitive process." D'Angour (2011: 231) tracks how cyclical, relentless change eventually "yielded intermittently to a more innovationist outlook" and indeed the focus of D'Angour's study is upon a more humanistic reading of novelty focusing upon the way novelty is either perceived, created or portrayed: "Whatever the provenance of the new, the way it is presented and perceived was recognised as equally or more important than any objective considerations." So that, while there was an awareness of novel events and even a recognition that they were living in "interesting times", the primary terms

of reference are subjective, concerning the production, interpretation and representation of human innovation and creativity.

Like D'Angour, Winifred Gallagher (2011) focuses upon the subjective aspects of novelty however unlike the largely historical and sociological account D'Angour provides, Gallagher (2011) in *New: Understanding Our Need for Novelty and Change* focuses upon the biological and psychological predispositions for or against novelty that she refers to respectively as *neophilia* and *neophobia*. Less an examination of novelty as creativity and innovation, Gallagher (2011: 1) views novelty as something out there in the world that human beings must reckon with, today more than ever due to the fast paced change of capitalism and the digital age: "Scientists, artists, and scholars have cast us as analytical thinkers and passionate romantics, pragmatic toolmakers and spiritual souls, aggressive competitors and cooperative altruists… Now our fast-paced world invites us to see ourselves in yet another light—this time as nature's *virtuosos* of change, who are biologically as well as psychologically primed to engage with novelty." A largely behaviourist text, Gallagher's *New* claims that our proclivity towards *neophilia* and *neophobia* occurs on a spectrum that is read against a general evolutionary framework that covers topics such as the human development of large "surprise detector" brains and human specific genes that incline us toward the seeking of novelty. Covering both individual as well as cultural/societal adaptation to novelty, the text has a tendency to reduce neophilia to our ability to adapt to the vast amount of new information and objects that confront us daily in contemporary digital capitalism.

By viewing “e-mail, tweets, searches, music, video, and traditional media” as exemplars of “unprecedented amounts of novelty”, Gallagher (2011: 9) reduces novelty itself to any old ‘new’ thing we have yet to encounter, psychologising human interaction with novelty as the ability to react and adapt to either generic change or the specific onslaught of the “warp-speed information age”. Charles Baudelaire’s (2010 [1972]) *The Painter of Modern Life*, provides both an account of modernity and an account of the sensibility best suited to modernity, a sensibility that resonates with both Arendt and with the “sociological imagination”. Baudelaire (2010 [1972]: 7-9) describes the ‘painter of modern life’ as a child, claiming “the child sees everything as a novelty; the child is always drunk” suggesting that modernity, if it is to be perceived at all, requires a methodological or imaginative change. Like the sociological imagination, Baudelaire (2010 [1972]: 9) argues that the effective attitude towards modernity is “to be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world…”

Richard Boyle (2015: 3) suggests that “there is no such thing as an expert in novelty, there never will be, and the reader should be highly skeptical of anyone claiming to be such. This is because in order to become an expert in anything one must become extremely familiar with that thing, which in turn requires that the thing in question be repetitive - and therefore not novel.” Boyle’s point bears some similarity to the concern of Modernist’s who fear the slide of authentic novelty into the realm of reproduced populism. But Boyle’s focus here is upon the instance of novelty itself and expertise linked to knowing the content of

novelty. I maintain that Arendt is, and it seems to me Arendt believed herself to be, an expert in novelty and this is justified because Boyle is wrong to believe that expertise in novelty concerns the content of particular instances of novelty. Arendt was an expert in novelty because she detected its emergence against a background horizon of normality. Boyle's familiarity with the thing itself approach is an expertise that is knowledge bound rather than the method driven expertise Arendt utilised. But even a methodological approach must have some schematic for recognising novelty and recently there have been significant studies focusing upon novelty itself that provide a useful context against which Arendt's account may be understood.[7]

1.7. Methodology

Arendt seems an unlikely subject of a PhD thesis in sociology. Not only was Arendt an outspoken critic of the major disciplinary modes of sociology that predominated during her lifetime—Weberianism, structural functionalism neo-evolutionism, alike—she also spent much of her professional life seeking to show that sociology's object, the 'social' realm, was deeply suspect. According to Arendt, the arrival of the 'social' in the nineteenth century, and its establishment in the twentieth, had increasingly displaced the 'public' realm of

[7] Further studies such as Donald A. Crosby's (2005) study *Novelty*, Boris Groys' (1992/2014) *On the New*, and Slavoj Žižek's (2014) *Event* provide insight into our understanding of novelty, Crosby's is primarily a philosophical study that pays little attention to social science, Groys' text is largely an aesthetic piece examining the new in art and in aesthetic innovation, and Žižek's is both a philosophical and psychoanalytic report that draws on philosophy, religion and film in its exploration.

authentic political life. 'Social' relations in the modern world were those of the masses, the individuals who saw themselves, and respectively behaved, as part of an aggregate. Moreover, sociology, as a 'science,' has actually contributed to the existence of this social realm by the very theories (of law-like prediction) and methods (such as the Weberian ideal-type) that it has utilised to make sense of human beings under contemporary conditions.

It is Arendt's contention that traditional social scientific analysis rides roughshod over the very aspects of social reality that make it specifically human: its plurality and natality. In particular, sociological research tends to explain new phenomena by fitting or sorting the new into an already explained system, thereby obliterating the very novelty that makes human reality distinctive. And those theories (eg. Whitehead (1978) and Deleuze and Guattari (1991)) that grapple with human creativity tend to interpret novelty within the framework of process and becoming, something Arendt (1998 [1958]) criticizes (as the resulting ethos of *homo faber* displacing the ethos of novelty emanating out of the realm of plural action) as a constitutive feature of modern explanation. Arendt's ontology yields an anti-methodological approach that, despite herself, leads to a set of methodological precepts that will with careful examination help to inform a new sociology for understanding the new. It is my aim to show that Arendt's attention to novelty as the unexpected beginning or initium, grounded in her ontology of the human condition of natality and plurality, yields a unique perspective for reading the social world. The significance of the research lies in the implications it yields for sociological practice.

The question of method is central to this research in terms that are procedural, ontological and political. However method is not a primary object of the research, rather the research findings themselves hold implications that bear upon method. That being said, this research deploys methods that do not always sit agreeably with the methodological implications of the findings. There is then a tension between the approach taken to reach the findings and the findings themselves.

The empirical objects of this research are texts, however the selection and interpretation of texts imply, if not yield, research objects that are themselves underdetermined relying upon background values and assumptions that contribute to the ordering of data and the production of hypotheses. So although texts are ostensibly the object, they imply the social, political and normative contexts in which they were written and the social, political and normative context that embed my considerations. Consequently the hypotheses and findings present here result from a much broader and complex object that leave conclusions open to contestation and that limit the ability to trace them clearly and definitively back to the texts ‘themselves’.

Reflecting upon the interplay between tradition and novelty in Arendt, Agnes Heller (2001: 20) argues “one can assume the position of comprehension and reflection only if one does not undertake the grand project to tell one single story about history and instead decides to tell many different stories of new beginnings and traditions.” Reflectively applying this to my study of Arendt

suggests that if one sets out to provide a singular all-encompassing account of novelty then this aim itself undercuts an accurate understanding of novelty itself. If novelty is a conglomeration of many beginnings and ends that are not causally or necessarily linked via some mode of historicist framework, then the methodological approach to accounting for novelty and the method of writing/recording this account is better expressed using case studies that explore isolated examples of novelty. One might object that these are all tied necessarily to the person, Hannah Arendt, but in an interchange between Umberto Eco and Richard Rorty (Eco 1992: 88), Eco notes, “the private life of the empirical authors is in a certain respect more unfathomable than their texts. Between the mysterious history of a textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, the text qua text still represents a comfortable presence, the point to which we can stick.” Rorty (Eco 1992 : 94) concurs and notes the difficulty of linking an author’s texts with each other: “the boundary between one text and another is not so clear.” And so Rorty (Eco 1992 : 97) suggests that it is a mistake to go searching for internal authorial coherence between texts: “a text just has whatever coherence it happened to acquire during the last roll of the hermeneutic wheel, just as a lump of clay only has whatever coherence it happened to pick up at the last turn of the potter’s wheel… the coherence of the text is not something it has before it is described… its coherence is no more than the fact that somebody has found something interesting to say about a group of marks or noises”. In my task, I hope that my subject of novelty has something interesting to say for the social sciences, but please do not expect this to have something determinately certain or truthful to say about the empirical author, Hannah Arendt.

Determinate certainty is surely not what Arendt thought possible in the social world and yet there are indications that she would also have found the doubt-driven preoccupation with reflexivity both self indulgent and self defeating. Arendt’s concern is always with the externalised world itself and not our internal prevarications. Arendt did see the products of ‘work’ as maintaining some durability and therefore as an object that stood on its own in the world. In this sense, it is worldly objects, such as Arendt’s texts, that I will get on to assess and, not assuming the ability to divine the motives and intents of their construction, will remain mute on questions of intra-textual coherence, authorial coherence, and subjective motivation. This may seem an odd thing to note in a methodology, but the vast majority of Arendt scholarship focuses upon Arendt the author or person and the biographical life she led, either because they see this as exceptional and/or because they use this as a way of contextualising, if not explaining, her substantive work. To mark my desire to stray from this path, I note these objections above.

1.8. Novelty in Arendt and Arendt Studies

Arendt's reflections on novelty vary across differing substantive areas of her writing and offer up a host of different but related terms. 'Natality', the term most frequently associated with Arendt's work concerning novelty, is used to counter the traditional philosophical emphasis upon mortality and links to the idea of new beginnings, to birth and the separate but related term origin. Her interest

in birth grew out of her doctoral research on Augustine which grounds Arendt's identification of novelty with human being and provides the ontological basis for the political capacity of action, for freedom, and for the mental capacity of will. Arendt argues, "the beginning that was created with man [sic] prevented time and the created universe as a whole from turning eternally in cycles about itself in a purposeless way and without it anything new ever happening. Hence, it was for the sake of *novitas*, in a sense, that man [sic] was created." (Arendt, 1996 [1929]: 55)

As such, natality, grounded in human birth, is treated as a factual condition of human existence—in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]: 8) she describes it along with mortality as "the most general condition of human existence"—rather than mere metaphoric framework for understanding. Linking this to action, she claims (1998 [1958]: 247) "the miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men [sic] and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born." This focus continues in her writing through to her final unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind* (Volume 2, 1978c: 108-110), where she reaffirms natality as the basis for political action, for individuality or unique personhood, and where she locates this mentally in the faculty of the will as the freedom to spontaneously begin a series in time (although it would be inaccurate to brand natality as a psychological category).

It could be said that there is a quasi religious element to Arendt's argument that

focuses on the givenness of life which she also frequently refers to as a gift. But this only accounts for the basis or origin of a condition that all too often exists only latently and is threatened by the uniformity and conformity of 'society'. Arendt maintains that 'society' expects particular types of behaviour, imposing rules in the aim of normalizing its population "to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement" (1998 [1958]: 40). What is more, the concept of 'process' inherent in labour, the body and nature came to define the modern understanding of history and human development and became the key defining factor of the modern natural and social sciences, "economics, history, biology, geology" (1998 [1958]: 116). The result is a methodological outlook that seeks connections and regularities in an overall process, without adequate provision to account for the unexpected or unprecedented.

Arendt identifies human being and reality with the capacity to begin things anew, with the capacity for producing novel events that she grounds in the factual reality of our birth, where birth is not considered merely as a repetition and continuation of a species or a sequence but where birth results in the production of unique individuals and events by virtue of the plural manifestation of natality. Without this ontological basis there would be no freedom and therefore no political realm and there would be nothing one could call human will (will and free will are the same for Arendt in the sense that she argues there would be no concept of will if it were not free).

But while natality provides the conditions for political action and novelty, for the

unexpected ruptures that break the chains of life's regularities, it is no guarantee of this. Moreover Arendt's (1998 [1958]) historical analyses judge the modern age as a period where the political realm is perverted by the process character of 'society' at odds with the peculiar novel character of human action. Arendt's claims are therefore ontological, methodological and moral. Ontological in that birth is a fundamental condition of human existence, methodological in the sense that this ontological fact suggests to Arendt that any human science must pay attention to new actions and events, and moral in the sense that she does not see human novelty as automatic but rather as threatened by the social pressures for conformity.

In terms of method, Arendt (1968: 169) argues, “It is in the nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an ‘infinite improbability,’ and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real. … Hence it is not in the least superstitious, it is even a counsel of realism, to look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable.” Action, novel events, break the predictable processes that the natural sciences (and social sciences modelled upon them) seek and this novelty suggests that the human sciences ought to arrange their research accordingly. Looking for predictable laws and causation, even seeking probability in the social world, ignores the unpredictability of human action: "Causality, however, is an altogether alien and falsifying category in the historical sciences. Not only does the actual meaning of every event always transcend any number of past 'causes' which we may assign to it..., but this past itself comes into being only with the event itself. Only when something irrevocable has happened can we

even try to trace its history backward. The event illuminates its own past; it can never be deduced from it" (1994: 319).

The grounding of Arendt's understanding of human reality, freedom, subjectivity and dignity in natality yields a social landscape very different to the predictive goals of empirical science. It furthermore runs counter to the attempt to revise a positivist empiricism via the concept of probability, as it shuns regularity and similarity in favour of the unpredicted and unexpected. At the same time, Arendt is critical of rationalism and logical deduction, favouring instead an idiosyncratic common sense empiricism that remains at the level of surface phenomena without being compelled to place phenomena in the service of prediction. This links to her critique of historicism examined in Chapters 3 and 4.

Bowen-Moore (1989) sets out to differentiate three types of natality—primary, political, and tertiary. Primary natality includes the existential fact of birth as the basis of the conceptual category of beginning, the capacity of human beings for starting or commencing action, and primary natality as enacted in the play and learning of childhood. Political natality transcends the existential birth of primary natality by bring forth a 'second birth' that is focused squarely upon the shared world or community. Bowen-Moore (1989:43) illustrates this move from the potentiality of primary natality to the actuality of political natality by way of totalitarianism as the "utter perversion of natality", by way of the realisation of freedom in the "transition from the chambers of the nursery to the stage of the public world", by way of "the public spirit of *amor mundi*" and by way of "history

as biography" which links the freedom of human action to biography as that which interrupts historical process. Tertiary natality, Bowen-Moore defines in terms of the natality evident in the life of the mind and this she illustrates via Adolf Eichmann and the relationship between evil and thoughtlessness, via Socrates ability to think afresh "what has been frozen in thought", via the faculty of the will's connection to human spontaneity, via the faculty of judgement's role in joining thought with action, and via thought's timeless quality as the basis for resisting history as process. The final section of Bowen-Moore's text explores the political condition of Arendt's writing, particularly the conditions and emergence of totalitarianism as well as nuclearism in elucidating the worldless character of modernity and the dislocation of natality and world. The conclusion is, however, framed as 'the promise of natality' and here Bowen-Moore focuses more positively upon the act of political foundation as the promise of rebirth and the basis for a reinvigoration of public life. While Bowen-Moore's account provides a good basis for coming to terms with Arendt's philosophy of natality (its ontological basis, its metaphorical, if not factual, condition for a renewed politics in times of totalitarian terror, bureaucratic drudgery and worldlessness) it's focus remains an account of human being and human action as natality, rather than elucidating the methodological implications or significance of Arendt's theory. As such, it is one philosophical anthropology amongst others. The strategy of this study is to explore the implications of Arendt's ontology for social science and to ask what a social science might look like if it were to assume the natality of human being that Arendt maintains. In this regard, Bowen-Moore offers some assistance when she explores 'tertiary natality' as the Socratic method that Arendt outlines

metaphorically in terms of Socrates as the 'gadfly', the 'electric ray', and the 'midwife'. However, the account largely portrays method in terms of thought process alone (at best how an interlocutor might disturb or provoke you to embody natality in your thought process. There is no discussion of a method that bridges worldly novelty and thought[8]. At best it encapsulates natality as an aspect or quality of mental life without explicit link or method for detecting and making sense of novel social events.

1.9. Précis and Outline

This chapter found that while cultural Modernism valued novelty in terms of creative novelty, the social scientific tradition took an opposing view seeing virtue in repetition and emptiness in novelty and singularity. As a result, social research that aimed for scientific validity dismissed anomalies and idiosyncrasies in its push towards a rigorous social science. When turning to the sociological imagination, where one might expect more artistry and creativity, the findings showed that novelty was expressed in Mills (1959) via the sociologist's imagination as well as in individual's biographies. However, while the novelty of the social analyst's imaginative quality of mind is valued,

[8] Academic interest in Arendt's concept of natality is not new; there are a great number of studies that include brief interpretations of natality and novelty including Mordechai Gordon's 2001 edited volume *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing Our Common World*, Peg Birmingham's 2006 *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility*, Anne O'Byrne's *Natality and Finitude*, and Steve Buckler's 2012 *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition*. Readings of Arendt that focus explicitly upon natality or novelty include Patricia Bowen-Moore's (1989) *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality* and Stephan Kampowski's (2008) *Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning*, looking at the origins of her thought on natality in her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine. 2010

the novelty of individual biographies tended to be psychologised and viewed non-sociologically, with the sociologist expected to draw meaning from the overlaps between individuals and regularities that made individual private trouble sociologically meaningful as public issues. Theories of social change looked to provide a better basis for reading novelty in the social world, however theories of evolutionism, extra-psychological causes, historical materialism and social laws defined ‘scientific’ models of social change.

Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigmatic change based upon revolutionary, rather than evolutionary, change looked to be focussed upon unexpected novelties or anomalies that challenge normal science. However, Kuhn’s focus is upon the movement from one paradigm to another and upon the reabsorption of novelty into new paradigmatic theories and models, leaving the novelties themselves untouched and unexamined except as to how they become absorbed into a new paradigm and its community. Within social theory a number of texts were examined that took novelty as its topic. The text of North (2013) professed novelty to be a mysterious and enduring problem providing a broad survey that centres upon its import for cultural Modernism and philosophy. D’Angour 92011) and Gallagher (2011) both focus upon novelty as a subjective matter, the first looking at this historically, the second psychologically and biologically. Methodological questions are raised for a thesis based around a single author and what this might mean in terms of the sorts of claims that can be made and the mode of discursive analysis applied.

Chapter 2 moves away from exploring novelty in the wider literature and focuses upon natality and novelty in terms of methodology and epistemology asking whether or not methodology is appropriate to novelty and, if so, what sort of method Arendt might provide. Methodology is further linked to epistemology as the procedure used in the justification and acquisition of knowledge, and questions are asked as to what epistemology would be needed for a social scientific method tuned to novelty. It is argued that natality and novelty are integral to existence, but neither are reducible to the psychological, biological or, indeed, the "social". Nevertheless, an ability to conceptualise novelty, to recognise its role and status in existence and thought is crucial for social science. It is in this way that Arendt helps provide a method for social science, despite her apparent reluctance to provide any such theory.

In Chapter 3, ontology is considered as the foundation for Arendt's position on methodology and epistemology. It is argued that Arendt's ontology, while having multiple aspects, depends upon natality elevating it to the condition from which her methodological and epistemological arguments emanate. Moreover, Arendt's challenge to the traditional metaphysical separation of true being and mere appearance furthers her insistence of the significance and import of novelty for human existence, for social change and for human identity. Central to human existence, natality and novelty cannot be levelled out into biological, psychological or "social" categories. That Arendt is able to provide a method for detecting and interpreting novelty despite her anti-methodological position is promising for the development of new sociological approaches to novelty.

Chapter 4 examines the concept of the “social” in terms of Arendt’s arguments concerning its historical emergence and regarding the discipline of sociology. In line with Arendt’s case for novelty, she takes a concept, the “social”, that for many is an all pervasive background or horizon and reads it in terms of its novelty, as something with a particular historical beginning and therefore something that someday will have an end. Contiguous with the emergence of the concept of process endemic to modern history, the “social” contains within it a necessity or compulsion that Arendt sees as crossing from the private into the public realm that diminishes the prospects for genuinely novel human action.

Chapter 5 explores Arendt’s concept of self both in terms of the self in action—the self as it appears on the surface in the world—and in terms of her method derived from an ontology informed by the condition of natality. The subject of biography is raised as a way of differentiating between those public natal actors who as “persons” illuminate the world and the unworldly introspective biographies of “individuals”. Via Kierkegaard and Augustine, Arendt sets out her distinction between two modes of biography referred to as the “exemplar” and the “exception”, which is then discussed in relation to the distinction Arendt draws between the pariah and the parvenu. The distinction between pariah and parvenu are then mapped to Arendt’s distinction between people as “who’s” and “what’s”, signifying on the one hand the emergence of self via natal political action and immortalized via posthumous fame and, on the other, the self, determined socially by “what” they are in society and inherent to the social

climbing parvenu. These duailities as examined in the self culminate in the examination of responsibility and thought as applied to the case of Eichmann.

Chapter 2: Natality, Understanding, Methodology

Unlike Durkheim (1982 [1895]), Weber (1949 [1904]), and Giddens (1976/1993), Hannah Arendt never wrote a methodological handbook. Yet Arendt held strong methodological and epistemological convictions. And though concerned for the most part with politics, Arendt never considered drafting a political manifesto, as did Marx and Engels (2008 [1848]). Political instruction, she believed, would have been "presumptuous" of her. During a televised interview broadcast in West Germany in 1964, Günter Gaus queried Arendt about whether she personally wanted "to achieve extensive influence" with her work (Arendt, 1994: 3). She replied,

> ARENDT: …When I am working, I am not interested in how my work might affect people.
>
> GAUS: And when you are finished?
>
> ARENDT: Then I am finished. What is important for me is to understand. For me, writing is a matter of seeking this understanding, part of the process of understanding.... Certain things get formulated. If I had a good enough memory to really retain everything that I think, I doubt very much that I would have written anything—I know my own laziness. What is important to me is the thought process itself. As long as I have succeeded in thinking something through, I am personally quite satisfied. If I then succeed in expressing my thought process adequately in writing, that satisfies me also.
>
> You ask about the effects of my work on others. If I may wax ironical, that is a masculine question. Men always want to be terribly influential, but I see that as somewhat external. Do I imagine myself being influential? No. I want to understand. And if others understand—in the same sense that I have understood—that gives me a sense of satisfaction, like feeling at home. (Arendt, 1994: 3)

An element of modesty and even disinterest marks Arendt's reflections, but behind this lie fervent beliefs about the nature of thought, education, and action. What makes Arendt's stance different to, say, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and

Giddens is the lack of a clarion call in her work. Why is this? And why might it be best to start from this lack when attempting to positively chart Arendt's methodological positions? How might this flavour the determination of an Arendtian methodology? Or might it be more appropriate to ask whether Arendt has a 'methodology' at all?

The subject of methodology is an important one for a study concerning natality and novelty. This is due to the fact that a key element of novel actions and events is their unpredictable and unexpected appearance. Novel events, furthermore, are not reducible to other events—they resist categorisation, disciplinary systematisation, and frustrate the scientific pursuit of orderly, consistent data that lend themselves to predictive models. Methodologies are disposed to providing frameworks for reliability, for reliably mapping an expected social landscape and are considered fundamental to the pursuit of social science. This chapter examines the problem of methodology for a social theory attentive to natality and novelty by exploring Arendt's aversion to methodology and epistemology. Favouring instead a non-scientific approach to understanding that takes its cues from novel realities rather than pre-established methodological frameworks, Arendt's account of understanding, novelty and appearance is developed as an alternative to established methodological programmes within social science. Additionally, Arendt's stance is identified as one that is capable of preserving the dignity of human plurality and the plurality of action and events. In the elaboration of the above, it is suggested that while Arendt provides no strict methodology, she provides methods despite herself that are useful to establishing novelty as a credible

object of the human world and therefore a necessary object of sociological consideration and research.

2.1. The Ethos of Methodology

It is my contention that Arendt has no 'methodology' *per se*, that is a set of methods from which one takes instruction, a set of methods that are meant to be formulaic, suggestive or rallying for readers. But this is not to say that she has no methods. Surely anyone who undertakes to interpret and understand the world in as regular and orderly a manner as Arendt, anyone who puts pen to paper in an effort to reconcile oneself with that which confronts them, must have some manner or approach, either explicit or implicit, for the processes involved in this production. Yet, however true this may be, it neglects to note the particular *ethos* that surrounds the production of programmatic methodology, an ethos that lies beyond the question of whether or not one's methods are explicitly or implicitly stated in one's works. Herein lies that which separates methods and presuppositions from 'methodology.' For when we speak of 'methodology' we speak of more than the philosophical justification for methods, we speak of an 'ology,' a politically *organised* doctrine.

The ethos of methodology is characterised by its programmatic, directive stance, by its counsel or didacticism. Methodology has an educative, instructive purpose: it counsels those who adopt its field. Moreover, methodology's further goal is the creation of the *adopters* of this field, the production of a body of people gathered under the rubric of its signifier. Clearly Durkheim, Weber, and

Giddens wrote methodological treatises to direct and define the discipline of sociology as they thought it ought to be. And certainly the spirit of Marx and Engels' (2008 [1848]) *The Communist Manifesto* (although not strictly a methodological treatise) is to make manifest, that is to make apparent, the conditions of history as class struggle as well as—perhaps more importantly—to manifest, this time meaning to bring about or to incite, actors who see the world with communist eyes and act together to overcome society's contradictions. In this way, *The Communist Manifesto* is not that different from Durkheim's (1982 [1895]) *The Rules of Sociological Method* or Weber's (1949 [1904]) *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. One is the clarion call for *concerted* political action; the others the clarion calls for *concerted* academic research. Both have as their goal a collective body capable of action.

Methodological writing that aims programmatically aims to build political organisations. That an organisation be composed of academics that claim to adopt a methodology for purely intellectual reasons makes it no less a political body than an organised group of political actors proclaiming the revolutionary politics of Marx and Engels. "No scientific teamwork is pure science," states Arendt (1998 [1958]: 271), as "teamwork" prevents it from being pure science by enabling it politically. For Arendt, politics is never undertaken individually; politics is always, necessarily a collective pursuit.

> An organization, whether of scientists who have abjured politics or of politicians, is always a political institution; where men [sic] organize they intend to act and to acquire power. ... as Whitehead once remarked… 'Organised thought is the basis of organised action,' not… because thought is the basis of action but rather because modern science as 'the organisation of thought' introduced an element of action into thinking (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 271).

It is not the thought, theory, or method that makes scientists or academics political—thought, she argues, is *not* the basis of action—but rather the fact that thought has become organised, that its organisation via, in this case, methodology has permitted the non-political activity of thinking to take on political dimensions through assembly. Arendt's writing certainly bears a resemblance to that of Michel Foucault (1972), although she falls short of developing the extensive theory of discursive formation and disciplinary power found in Foucault's work.

Why, then, should Arendt, who put immense energy into defending political organisation and highlighting its identity-affirming and world-affirming effects[9] reject any connection between thought and politics? Why should Arendt spurn the political possibility of methodology in a period that she believed undermined political potential (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 254)? Why did Hannah Arendt have neither the interest in defining a body of thought nor the interest in developing a community of thinkers with whom she could act? Why should someone with such outspoken sympathies for politics refrain from sounding a clarion call? The sections that follow respond to these questions by exploring the experiential, ontological differences between the lived realities of thinking and acting and by relating this to Arendt's contention to keep attention directed to the concrete reality of novelty. Methodology confuses the distinction Arendt wants to draw between thought and action and because methodology demands

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[9] See Arendt's (1998 [1958]: 50) *The Human Condition*, where she argues that the political public realm guarantees the reality of the world and ourselves: "The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves".

allegiance to method, it subsumes social reality to the politic of method, consigning novelty to the dustbin of anomaly and abnormality.

2.2. Arendt's Need to Understand

In 1964 Arendt quarrelled with Günter Gaus for introducing her in an interview as a philosopher (Arendt, 1994: 1-3). Though reluctant to be classified at all, Arendt settled upon "political theory" as her profession. The problem that Arendt saw was the "vital tension between philosophy and politics. That is, between man [sic] as a thinking and man [sic] as an acting being" which results in "a kind of enmity against all politics in most philosophers" who want nothing more than to prevent the quiet of contemplation from being disturbed by the activities of the world (Arendt, 1994: 2). One must stop in order to think and in this "stop" one withdraws from the world of labour, work and political action (Arendt, 1978b: 4, 78).

But in 1972 Arendt felt it important to distinguish herself further, this time within political theory, from those who felt the need to unite theory and action. She claimed that understanding was the priority of her work and that she felt the *need* to think and to understand as opposed to the need to act that she detected in most political theorists. Arendt admitted that she occasionally acted in her life but this was because she had to, not because she went looking to act: "I, by nature, am not an actor" (Arendt, 1979: 306). Arendt's interest in and sympathies with politics are those of the *spectator*: to watch, to think, to write

and to deliberate with a community of other spectators. The need to think and to understand she declared unapologetically, never feeling the need to claim that thinking can also be a form of acting. "The unwillingness of people who actually are thinking and are theorists… and who believe instead that only commitment and engagement is worthwhile, is perhaps one of the reasons why this whole discipline [political theory] is not always in such very good shape. People apparently don't believe in what they are doing" (Arendt, 1979: 309).

Arendt neither 'philosophised' nor felt compelled to act, she wanted to understand—in the sense that understanding is one of the necessities of life itself, a necessity of 'reconciliation.' By 'understanding' she means "an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world" (Arendt, 1994: 307-308). Moreover, it is "a complicated process which never produces unequivocal results" and therefore must be "distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge" (Arendt, 1994: 307). A life-long mode of reckoning ending only at death, understanding is a process of reconciliation with the world without pardoning its realities. Understanding, then, is not the act of forgiveness, "which is a single action and culminates in a single act" and therefore can be thought of as producing in some sense a "final result" (Arendt, 1994: 308). To "understand totalitarianism is not to condone anything, but to reconcile ourselves to a world in which such things are possible at all" (Arendt, 1994: 308). I will return to such considerations of responsibility and action in Chapter 4. For the present argument, Arendt's account of the need to understand is partly resulting from the fact that we are born strangers

into a world which precedes us and post-dates our departure, understanding's task is to elicit meaning out of this strangeness, to make in the world for each one of us what Arendt calls a "home" (Arendt, 1994: 308).

Put differently, the 'strangeness' encountered in the world is the result of human plurality, the condition that each person is new and unique in such a way that "nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 8). Consequently, this process is not merely a reconciliation with the world but a reconciliation with ourselves and so a process of self-understanding, of self-reconciliation. Understanding's unending attempt to create meaning through reconciliation, to reconcile ourselves with a strange world and with the strangeness of ourselves, is the process of coming to terms with novelty, with the newness of the world, it's people, and events. It is precisely the 'new' that characterises reality with which we seek to reconcile ourselves; for what is novelty other than the strangely different, the unique, the unexpected? This is the pivotal concept for this thesis, a delineation of novelty, grounded in the ontological condition of natality, that oscillates between the novelty of worldly events and the novelty of human plurality. It is the indeterminable aspect of novelty that makes this aspect of human experience both problematic for social science and vital to the meaning and significance of social reality. "It is in the nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an 'infinite improbability,' and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real. … Hence it is not in the least superstitious, it is even a counsel of realism, to look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 168). If

Arendt spurns methodological writing and thinks the least said of method the better, then how does one “look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable”?

2.3. Arendt’s “Necessarily Inadequate” Anti-Methodological Method

In an over-looked endnote in the 1954 essay *Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)* (Arendt, 1994: 325), Arendt comes the closest to providing a step by step method for reckoning with novelty. Attempting to come to terms and gain some understanding of totalitarianism, Arendt is keen to separate her approach from the social scientific explanations of the day that “equate totalitarian domination with tyranny or one-party dictatorship, when they do not explain the whole thing away by reducing it to historical, social or psychological causes” (Arendt, 1994: 313). In response, and to adequately contend with the reality of novelty, Arendt recognised that it was crucial not only to maintain focus upon the novel event but to actively resist the influence of prior explanatory frameworks. Understanding, if it is not to fall back upon a cliché ridden, scripted explanation, must hold fast to the novelty of that which it sees:

> The same need for orientation in a world changed through a new event that prompts popular understanding should also be the guide of true understanding, lest we lose ourselves in the labyrinths of facts and figures erected by the unquenchable curiosity of scholars. True understanding is distinguished from public opinion in both its popular and scientific forms only by its refusal to relinquish the original intuition. *To put it in a schematic and therefore necessarily inadequate way, it is as though, whenever we are confronted with something frighteningly new, our first impulse is to recognize it in a blind and uncontrolled reaction strong enough to coin a new word; our second impulse seems to be to regain control by denying that we saw anything new at all, by pretending that something similar is already known to us; only a third impulse can lead us back to what we saw and knew in the beginning. It is here that the effort of true understanding begins* (Arendt, 1994: 325; emphasis added).

Arendt suggests this schematic framework is “necessarily inadequate,” but nonetheless posits three steps or “impulses” that guide the process. It is significant that she characterises these steps as “impulses” as this is a seemingly better fit with her portrayal of the method in terms of “intuition”, a term that is surely used to separate itself from modern scientific methodological procedure. The first impulse Arendt calls ‘preliminary understanding,’ and is the recognition of something different and new that leads to a process of distinguishing and naming. Although Arendt differentiates understanding and knowledge, she stakes their interconnection, claiming that knowledge is both preceded and succeeded by understanding. As such, preliminary understanding “is at the basis of all knowledge” by providing the ground from which the distinguished and named objects of knowledge can be known (Arendt, 1994: 311). The ‘second impulse’ is the tendency to return to the safety of our traditional tools, to “regain control” by using familiar language and concepts, thereby in effect effacing the novel as merely another example of that which is already known (Arendt, 1994: 325). Secure and in command, this second impulse, referred to as the scientific approach, “deduces methodically the unprecedented from precedents, even though such a description of the new phenomena may be demonstrably at variance with reality” (Arendt, 1994: 313). The scientific approach, Arendt (1994: 313) quotes Nietzsche here, “is inspired by the instinct to reduce the unknown to something which is known,” it refashions the new as the old.

‘True understanding,’ which Arendt refers to as the third impulse, overcomes the desire to rely on the familiar when dealing with the new; it confronts the

situation where novelty brings our categories of thought and standards of judgement to ruin. True understanding transcends knowledge by paying attention to the assumptions and prejudices—as well as the language they are couched in—that precede preliminary understanding and the gain of knowledge. “If… the scholar wants to transcend his [sic] own knowledge—and there is no other way to make knowledge meaningful except by transcending it—he [sic] must become very humble again and listen closely to the popular language, in which words like ‘totalitarianism’ are daily used as political clichés and misused as catchwords, in order to re-establish contact between knowledge and understanding” (Arendt, 1994:311). The movement from the new and unprecedented to articulation in both new language or clichés and theories which feed the strange back into the ordinary must return faithfully to the reality of the novel event itself, continually moving between the first two impulses while guided by the third. It is a cyclical process with no end that ultimately “may do no more than articulate and confirm what preliminary understanding… sensed to begin with” (Arendt, 1994: 322).

Understanding, argues Arendt, is “the other side of action, namely, that form of cognition, distinct from many others, by which acting men [sic]… eventually can come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists” (Arendt, 1994: 322-323). Understanding is the proper capacity of those concerned with politics and human affairs because it attempts to reconcile itself with the new, with political action itself. For political action, according to Arendt, is the capacity to begin something new, and politics therefore the very domain of novelty. Following Augustine, Arendt claims, “man

[sic] not only has the capacity of beginning, but is this beginning himself [sic]" (Arendt, 1994: 321; see also Arendt, 1996 [1929]: 55). Considering humanity's condition as novel beginners, she contends that though the appearance of the new may ruin our categories of thought and standards of judgement, may leave us feeling lost without recourse to familiar tools to examine the unexpected, it may be precisely the inherent novelty of humanity—the ontological condition of natality—that permits an understanding of the improbable. "Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself [sic] to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the customary rules which is morality" (Arendt, 1994: 321). Arendt fondly thought of this process as "thinking without a banister" (Arendt, 1979: 336), clearly grounding the human ability to contend with worldly novelty in the ontological condition of natality (thereby subverting both methodology and epistemology).

In spite of Arendt's dismissal of methodology on personal, political and ontological grounds, she does betray some guidance for detecting novelty—even if this is portrayed as necessarily inadequate, intuitive (if not mildly essentialist with its basis in natal birth), even reactionary (she describes the first impulse as a "blind and uncontrolled reaction"). Positively, it is linked to the coining of new words, to the production of language, that Arendt sees as the mediating but critical link between understanding and the world. To resist modern scientific methodologies is to renounce a method that leads us away from the unpredictable novelty of reality,

> The answer is not likely to convince the scientist, because he [sic] has been forced, under the compulsion of facts and experiments, to renounce sense perception and hence common sense, by which we coordinate the perception of our five senses into the total awareness of reality. He [sic] has also been forced to renounce normal language, which even in its most sophisticated conceptual refinements remains inextricably bound to the world of the senses and to our common sense. (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 266)

So while Arendt's method is tuned to the plurality of the world found in novel events and the plural difference of people, her method does not separate the analyst from the community as sociology has tended to do by dividing the sociological imagination from common sense. On the contrary, Arendt argues for the importance of common sense, seeing it as a sixth sense that enables thinkers to coordinate and make sense of the other 5 senses.

> The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all, and common sense occupies such a high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities because it is the one sense that fits into reality as a whole our five strictly individual senses and the strictly particular data they perceive. It is by virtue of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and are not merely felt as irritations of our nerves or resistance sensations of our bodies. (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 208/209)

It is definitive of Arendt's method that it is within everyone's capabilities and that it remains faithful to the reality of the world as it presents itself to us, faithful to the given capacities (the senses) that fit us into the world, and faithful to language that links the two. This approach might also be interpreted as more sociological in its grounding than traditional sociological methods as it relies upon community, what Arendt, following Kant, refers to as the "community sense": "common sense, *sensus communis*, a community sense; not autonomous, needing each other's company even for thinking" (Arendt, 1982: 27). This may be "thinking without a banister", thinking without a prescriptive methodology for understanding, but the "impulses" Arendt describes contribute to a provisional method that depend upon the plurality of community, the natality of thinkers, while at the same time taking as its starting point reality defined in terms of novelty.

2.4. Thought, Politics, and Education

Arendt maintained throughout her work that understanding and politics, thinking and acting, are ontologically distinct activities (this is explored in greater depth in Chapter 3). Thinking is done in the singular as an individual, whereas politics is done in the plural amongst the company of peers; thought stops and withdraws from the world, political action is always engaged and without the time to stop and think. They are, however, linked via the new, via the novel initiative which marks the nature of the political act for the actor and which sparks and then maintains the process of understanding for the thinker via speech and language. This is natality, the ontological condition that "saves the world" from the regularities, trends and tendencies that traditional sociology pursues. "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men [sic] and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 247). But this link concerning the novel exists indirectly and only because both acting and thinking are activities enacted by the one and the same human being: "I do believe that thinking has some influence on action. But on acting man [sic]. Because it is the same ego that thinks and the same ego that acts" (Arendt, 1979: 304-305).

What thinking and understanding cannot do is counsel one in the art of action. Arendt's (1978b; 1978c) unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind*, opens with an insight of Heidegger's that stands as a talisman for the journey through the book:

> Thinking does not bring knowledge as do the sciences.
> Thinking does not produce usable practical wisdom.
> Thinking does not solve the riddles of the universe.
> Thinking does not endow us directly with the power to act.

The book is as much about what thinking is unable to do as about what it achieves. Even the word 'achieves' seems incorrect here, as Arendt portrays thinking's unending activity as cyclical and as achieving no results (Arendt, 1978b: 123-124).[10] Thought is the perpetually barren. If thought has any 'result' it is meaning, and this meaning is the specifically tentative way individuals reconcile themselves to the strangeness of reality. Key to the ever-tentative proliferation of meaning is its uniquely personal character, a character conditioned by human plurality and ultimately natality. No person can direct or instruct another along the path of understanding, and no person can expect others to accept the stories or narratives they weave.

Understanding, though it is characterised by a method trained upon the new, spurns methodology, for the new is what continually calls into question the presuppositions and prejudices of our inquiry, it brings to ruin our familiar

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[10] Arendt (1978b: 123-124) claims: "'The activity of thinking [energeia that has its end in itself] is life.' Its inherent law, which only a god can tolerate forever, man [sic] merely now and then, during which time he is godlike, is 'unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle'—the only movement, that is, that never reaches an end or results in an end product. This very strange notion that the authentic process of thinking, namely the *noesis noeseos*, turns in circles—the most glorious justification in philosophy of the circular argument—has oddly enough never worried either the philosophers or Aristotle's interpreters—partly, perhaps, because of the frequent mistranslations of *nous* and *theoria* as 'knowledge' which always reaches an end and produces an end result. If thinking were a cognitive enterprise it would have to follow a rectilinear motion, starting from the quest for its object and ending with cognition of it."

categories of thought and traditional tools of understanding. In effect, novelty undermines methodology. The process of true understanding, on the contrary, aims at providing new, but always tentative, “bearings in the world,” new bearings that become old as soon as the new appears again. Arendt (1994: 323) contends that “it is the only inner compass we have”—a compass that continually readjusts its bearings and is ‘inner’ precisely because it relates to each individual’s personal pursuit of understanding. This undermines the aim to formulate a scientific, predictive, methodological framework that is transferable to new situations and events, useable by any social scientist, able to provide the basis for scientific reproducibility. By shunning methodology and starting from the ontological basis of novel events, Arendt is able to gesture toward a ‘method’ that, while “necessarily inadequate” (Arendt, 1994: 325), ensures social research faces the adequacy of novel events themselves. This continually readjusting inner compass is what it is to think without banisters, what it is to face the ‘new’.

Understanding, then, takes its orientation from the empirical novelty itself[11] and yields a personal and solitary process, incompatible with methodologies that seek political organisation. Methodology in its educative, didactic role cuts short understanding by remaining at the ‘second impulse,’ supplying members with set methods with which to carve its disciplinary niche. Taken as political

[11] In a letter to Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of The Fund for the Republic, Inc., Arendt (2018: 92) discusses the link between empirical investigations and the understanding of basic issues, arguing that the “understanding of basic issues should grow out of attempts to understand and cope with concrete issues”. Arendt (2018: 102-103) links this later in the letter to the issue of method: “It is important not to develop a uniform method for all issues; on the contrary, it should be a principle to treat each topic separately, not only in terms of ideas and basic issues, but also in terms of ways to approach it.”

organisation, methodologies threaten to forfeit understanding by framing or predetermining social reality in terms of set methodological lenses, thereby foregoing what Arendt sees as a personal reconciliatory process:

> Many well meaning people want to cut [the process of understanding] short in order to educate others and elevate public opinion. They think that books can be weapons and that one can fight with words. But weapons and fighting belong in the realm of violence, and violence, as distinguished from power is mute; violence begins where speech ends. Words used for the purpose of fighting lose their quality of speech; they become clichés… The result of all such attempts is indoctrination (Arendt, 1994: 308).

As such, the infiltration of politics into thought—via methodology's goals of political organisation and disciplinary protectionism—yields indoctrination. As noted above, Arendt sees the role of language as one that connects understanding to novelty by way of coining new words. Social science has tended to view language as either part of ideology or as a link to ideas and social values, rather than a link to or a signal of the objective reality of novel events. Language is revelatory and illuminating. The problem with methodology as Arendt interprets it here is that it is not linked to any particular, concrete, novel reality, aiming instead to subvert thought by politics.

The reverse is equally unacceptable: the infiltration of thought into politics, of an educational, methodological politics.

> Education can play no part in politics, because in politics we always have to deal with those who are already educated. Whoever wants to educate adults really wants to act as their guardian and prevent them from political activity. Since one cannot educate adults, the word 'education' has an evil sound in politics; there is a pretence of education, when the real purpose is coercion without the use of force (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 173-174).

Because politics in Arendt's estimation is always, necessarily a plural, communal activity, guidance and dictation can only ever emanate from the group and never from an individual or from a doctrine. Commenting on political instruction Arendt (1979: 310) argues, "I wouldn't instruct you, and I would think

that this would be presumptuous of me. I think that you should be instructed when you sit together with yours peers around a table and exchange opinions. And, then, somehow, out of this should come an instruction: not for you personally, but how the group should act." Pedagogical methodology can never substitute itself for the decision-making process that grows out of political debate. When it attempts this it denies the plurality of people and destroys the equality instituted when people sit as peers and equals around a table.

For Arendt (1979: 305) it is clear, "I really believe that you can only act in concert and I really believe that you can think only by yourself. These are two entirely different—if you want to call it—'existential' positions." She stated once that "I always start anything by saying, 'A and B are not the same,'" and certainly thinking and acting, politics and understanding, though they share the common context of the new, are distinct, differentiated human activities (Arendt, 1979: 338). The problem is that today both politics and thinking have become the prerogative of experts and professionals, further delineated by schools and disciplines, and securely guarded by methodologies and doctrines. Politics is largely controlled by a few parties of professional politicians and thought has been claimed by schools within the academy. As for thinking and understanding, Arendt is confident:

> we have forgotten that *every* human being has a need to think, not to think abstractly, not to answer the ultimate questions of God, immortality, and freedom, nothing but to think while he [sic] is living. And he [sic] does it constantly. Everybody who tells a story of what happened to him [sic] half an hour ago on the street has got to put this story into shape. And this putting the story into shape is a form of thought. … [For me,] I cannot live without trying at least to understand whatever happens. And this is somehow the same sense in which you know it from Hegel, namely where I think the central role is reconciliation—reconciliation of man [sic] as a thinking and reasonable being. This is what actually happens in the world. (Arendt, 1979: 303)

In place of methodology Arendt appeals to the "need to understand" which she likens to "thinking without a banister" (Arendt, 1979: 336; Arendt, 2018: v). This need to understand is articulated, first, as a highly individuated and idiosyncratic process that each person must come to terms with for themselves and, second, as the discarding of prior conceptions and axiomatic knowledge in favour of remaining true to the novelty of events, events which precisely because of their novelty demand to be thought afresh rather than fitted to some *idée fixe*. Consequently, Arendt's conception of understanding flouts the methodological aim of providing general guides and schemas for broad categories of reality and flouts methodology's desire to provide formula for any and every person who accepts its code. One can think alongside Arendt, and indeed against her, but one will find neither sets of rules and procedures for direction in research, nor the basis for a school or tradition of thought from which scholars might band together under the title "Arendtian."

Behind Arendt’s claim for “banisterless” thought is a political argument concerning the relationship between thought, action, and education. On the one hand, methodology tends toward politics when it organises thought for a body of followers. Such a tendency leaves education and academic research open to political fiat. On the other hand, politics is defeated when dictated by method, when thought attempts to determine political process. The infiltration of thought as educated instruction into politics yields not so much enlightened action as “coercion without the use of force” (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 173-174). The trouble with the two scenarios actually concerns both the differentiation and relationship of mental activities and worldly activities and what comes of

the two when their distinctions are muddled. Put simply, Arendt's disdain for both politically organised thought and educated political process boils down to a fairly strict division between thought and action. Methodology and education become problematic when they cause either thought or action to cross this divide. Methodological writing is ineffective for registering and examining novelty because it's aims take it away from the reality Arendt claims requires our attention, from the concrete particulars where novelty resides. While Arendt rejects methodology per se, her method for attaining true understanding, despite its qualifications and limits, does provide some basis (an ontological basis conditioned by natality) for the understanding process. It is essential to read this ground ontologically as Arendt not only spurned methodology but equally dismissed epistemological approaches to understanding, the focus of the following section.

2.5. Epistemology, Knowledge, and Understanding

Methodological programmes effectively flatten the reality of the object to which they are oriented and flatten the reality of the subjects or researchers to whom they are oriented as methods. For Arendt, it is not the equal similarity of object and equal similarity of subject that frames her approach, but rather the dissimilarity of reality and uniqueness of individuals. To the extent that one can point to some similarity in Arendt's work, it is that all are equally capable of and equally expected to partake in understanding—even if, or rather *because*, the 'products' of understanding are themselves dissimilar. This is novelty as reality

and therefore challenge; the fact that both the subjects who undertake research and the objects of research are ontologically rooted in natality. While this is a challenge for traditional scientific methodologies, Arendt claims that it is because natality is common to both the plurality of people and the unexpected novel events that this then acts as a justification or shared ground for understanding.

As a personal endeavour, understanding is an interpretive process that cultivates the telling of stories, stories that help each person “reconcile themselves to reality.” The temptation here is to see the production of stories as leading to some finality, as providing closure to the issue or event at hand. But storytelling is not definitive, it is highly tentative and the stories told always need retelling and therefore rethinking and re-examination. The "need" to understand is never satisfied; it is an unending cyclical process that does not produce final or unequivocal results (Arendt, 1994: 308). Understanding's value or, one should say, importance (Arendt is highly critical of the concept of “value” so pervasive in modern life) is not found in any end product but in the activity itself and for this reason Arendt separates it from the pursuit of knowledge and the gathering of facts. Understanding's task is the production of meaning, and meaning as personal reconciliation begins at birth and ends only at death. Because understanding deals with the fluid matter of meaning as opposed to the solid collection of knowledge, it is unsuited to the methodological requirement of stable guidelines from which the products of knowledge come. Understanding's individual as well as perpetually tentative quest for meaning in effect calls into question Arendt's position concerning epistemology as well

as methodology. For here too, like methodology, it is possible to make the case that there is no epistemology, or at least that Arendt has little interest in producing an epistemology. Arendt's anti-methodological stance is inextricably tied to an anti-epistemological one.

Epistemology as "the theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge" (Blaikie, 1993: 6), gained, according to Arendt (1998: 273-280), an unprecedented urgency in the modern age due to rising doubt in the human ability to detect the world as it truly is, to provide certain knowledge of reality.[12] While a "science of the method of knowledge" would be contrary to Arendt's desire to overcome scientific methods in favour of understanding, a "theory of the grounds of knowledge" sounds more likely to fit if it were not for the fact that the task of understanding does not produce knowledge. Understanding, as has been stated, produces meaning, and its concern with knowledge is only such that it may "transcend" it, not that it may produce it or even uncover the "grounds" of it. Consequently, one cannot examine Arendt's process of understanding in terms of epistemological categories or as if it has embedded within it an epistemology.

[12] According to Arendt, questions concerning the reliability, validity and justification of knowledge become increasingly urgent in the modern age due to Galileo's proof of a heliocentric universe. Arendt (1998: 259) sees this as separate from and distinct to earlier historical questioning of a geocentric universe because prior to the modern age this questioning was merely speculative and did not rest upon the solidity of a novel event such as the discovery and use of the telescope. Arendt (1998: 279) argues, "Descartes' conviction that 'though our mind is not the measure of things or of truth, it must assuredly be the measure of things that we affirm or deny' echoes what scientists in general and without explicit articulation had discovered: that even if there is no truth, man [sic] can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty, man [sic] can be reliable." Reliability and truthfulness were now firmly entrenched in methodological questions that sought to satisfy the modern age's urgent need to respond to the epistemological need to ground knowledge in an age of rising doubt. Further elaboration of this argument is found below in the section 'Phenomenology, Appearance and the Rise of Modern Doubt'.

One way of beginning to think about the implications of Arendt's approach for the social sciences is to see it as an obscure part of—or at least influenced by—the long debate described commonly as the "explanation vs. understanding debate" (see, for example, Georg Henrik von Wright's 1971 study *Explanation and Understanding*) where, following a distinction attributed to J. G. Droysen and later developed by Wilhelm Dilthey[13], understanding is seen as the remit of the *geisteswissenshaften* or arts and humanities and explanation is understood to be the task of the natural sciences (Von Wright, 1971: 5; Droysen, 1897 [1858]). Arendt herself would have steered clear of being pinned to either side of this camp—even though it is apparent that her interest lies in understanding and the humanities. In other words, the question is what does understanding mean for her as opposed to other figures embroiled in this debate and how does her approach to understanding point to methods that yield a unique contribution to traditional sociological issues such as action and the self?

Arendt's interest in the capacity of understanding is both in the manner it is employed and in the subject matter to which it is directed. More specifically, there is a difference between Arendt's early discussions of "understanding" and her post-Eichmann writing on "thinking" which bring out with greater clarity her

[13] According to Von Wright (1971: 5-6), "Droysen appears to have been the first to introduce a methodological dichotomy which has had great influence. He coined for it the names *explanation and understanding*, in German *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. The aim of the natural sciences, he said, is to explain; the aim of history is to understand phenomena which fall within its domain. These methodological ideas were then worked out to systematic fullness by Wilhelm Dilthey. For the entire domain of the understanding method he used the name *Geisteswissenschaften*. There is no good equivalent in English, but it should be mentioned that the word was originally coined for the purpose of translating into German the English term 'moral science.'"

emphasis upon the Kantian distinction between "reason" and "intellect." The distinction between the faculties of reason and intellect dissolve down into reason's need to "think" and therefore produce "meaning" as opposed to the intellect's need for "knowledge" via "cognition" which thereby produces "truth". Thinking produces meaning whereas cognition produces truth. According to Arendt, the intellectual mistake of the modern age was the misinterpretation of Kant on this point by mapping or explaining questions of reason in terms of questions of the intellect. In other words, many of the problems currently experienced in the humanities and social sciences come down to evaluating their questions (which Arendt sees largely as questions of reason) in terms of the intellect's criterion of truth.

What might this mean for the social sciences? Arendt doesn't discount the intellect but rather sees it as satisfying a different pursuit with different objects of study. In short, the intellect largely could be seen as satisfying strictly scientific questions, questions of fact, and issues of logic: areas of study she says that rely on the criterion of truth. Insofar as sociology satisfies the "science" side of its designation as a "social science" then perhaps Arendt hasn't much to say at all (although the object of scientific sociology is also often shared by more, say, hermeneutic/theoretical analysis. Trying to draw a defining line between scientific sociology and hermeneutic/theoretical sociology is perhaps more difficult to draw then one might think). So if we take for granted that there is a difference within sociology along the lines of more scientific analyses and more hermeneutic ones then one might postulate that Arendt's criticism's or stance on methodological issues has its greatest import

for those sociological studies that are largely hermeneutic/theoretical and whose goal, in Arendt's eyes, is the elucidation of meaning.

I set out in this section with the goal of drawing together the methodological and epistemological claims of Hannah Arendt. I knew that Arendt had not written a methodological text and that the arguments or allusions to these issues were dotted throughout her work in a fragmented and unsystematic way. As for method, Arendt advocates a form of critical thinking that spurns prescribed methods and established modes of thought in aid of remaining trained upon the novel event that initially provoked the need to understand. This view is strongly predicated upon a view of the world whereby human significance, history and societal change materialise via human natality as novel events. A human world evinced via public political life is the life of setting into motion new and unpredictable processes that require a process of understanding aimed at meaning rather than a knowledge acquisition process aimed at truth. Scientific research might conjecture that it looks at the natural world, which is not characterized by novel or unique actions but, instead, by regularities and repetitions. As such, science is interested in the gathering of facts and knowledge and its criterion is truth. However, while the human sciences collect facts or establish knowledge this is far from the whole of human reality. For Arendt, significant and meaningful reality is made manifest and delineated by those singular moments when something new appears. In this distinction Arendt follows Kant on the difference between the mental faculties of reason and intellect that coincide with the aims of thinking and knowing. As has been seen, understanding is the mental process of reason

whereas knowing or cognition is the goal of the intellect. The question is how this relates to an “anti-methodological method”, and how this can inform sociological approaches to the world. The next section will offer a different slant on Arendt’s position and possible offerings through a reading of her specific “understanding” or version of phenomenology.

2.6. Phenomenology, Appearance and the Rise of Modern Doubt

> The word ‘phenomenology’ derives from *phainomenon* (*phainomai*, to appear) and *logos* (reason) and among phenomenologists much significance is attached to this etymology. Whatever ‘appears’ appears in concrete experiences; there is no ‘unexperienced’ appearing. Accordingly the aim of phenomenology is described as the study of experiences with a view to bringing out their ‘essences’, their underlying ‘reason’. This is a very wide definition which tells us nothing about how this study is, or ought to be pursued, but it is a sufficient indication as to where the sphere of phenomenological investigation lies. It lies in the domain of *experiences*. [Pivčević, 1970: 11]

In the biography, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1982: 405) states, “Hannah Arendt practiced a kind of phenomenology, though she seldom used the term and usually felt that the less said about method the better. ‘I am a sort of phenomenologist,’ she once said to a student, ‘but, ach, not in Hegel’s way--or Husserl’s.’” Young-Bruehl points in particular to Arendt’s lifelong interest in etymology as an indicator of some variant of phenomenological approach:

> words were a good place to begin, not because conceptual language reveals the phenomenon in any straightforward way, but because, as Heidegger maintained, words carry the record of past perceptions, true or untrue, revelatory or distorting... She assumed that if different words exist for phenomena, the phenomena are distinct. But she also assumed that if the words for distinct phenomena have come to be used synonymously there is a reason for the confusion, that is, that some overriding concept has subsumed the different words. (Young-Bruehl, 1982: 405)

This approach has largely left her on the outside of much social scientific debate as social scientists rarely draw distinctions (particularly distinctions with reference made to etymology), as she does, between labour and work (Arendt, 1998 [1958]) or between power, strength, force, authority and violence (Arendt, 1970), leaving unshared, confused grounds for discussion.

Partly due to her idiosyncratic style and general skepticism of prescriptive methodological writing, Arendt is not usually cited amongst the notable names of phenomenology (of which Brentano (1995), Husserl (1931), Heidegger (1962 [1927]), Sartre (1984), Levinas (1991), and Merleau-Ponty (2014 [1945]) seem most noted) and gets no mention, for example, in Spiegelberg's (1994) acclaimed *The Phenomenological Movement*. However due to growing interest in Arendt's writings across a range of disciplines, her name begins appearing in publications on phenomenology from the late 1990s. Embree's (1997) *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* includes an entry on what John Francis Burke calls her "existential phenomenology" and Moran's (2000) publication *Introduction to Phenomenology* devotes a full chapter to her phenomenology of the public sphere:

> Although Hannah Arendt only occasionally characterised herself as a phenomenologist and indeed is not usually included in textbook treatments of phenomenology, her work can be fruitfully understood as a species of phenomenology, a phenomenology of what in German is referred to as '*die Offentlichkeit*' ('publicity', 'publicness'), that is the 'public space' (*der offentliche Raum*), the public realm, *res publica*, the 'space of appearances'. (Moran, 2000: 287).

Yet Arendt's relative absence from discussions of phenomenology can also be viewed as somewhat surprising when one considers her early academic education. Arendt studied with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers and spent a short time studying with Edmund Husserl himself. Although she rejects

Husserl's (as well as Hegel's) phenomenological approach (Young-Bruehl, 1982: 405), she was appreciably influenced by Jaspers (her doctoral supervisor and lifelong friend) and was influenced by Heidegger's phenomenological position as he outlined it in opposition to the work of Husserl (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]). For the development of this thesis, reflecting on Arendt's relation to phenomenology is imperative to demonstrating how her use of natality as an ontological starting point leads to, or rather justifies, her philosophical arguments regarding "appearance". This is important because Arendt's position on "appearance" provides the philosophical foundation for her anti-methodological method leading to highly distinctive readings of traditional sociological categories such as action, the social and the self (these are elaborated more fully in, respectively, Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

Arendt's use of the term appearance (see Chapter 3 where this is examined in terms of natality's ontology) is to both describe and justify her method for remaining fixed upon novelty. It is also the focus of her criticism of the modern age's rejection of truth and reality understood as revealed appearance. In its place, the modern age advances a model of truth and knowledge as existing below the surface, out of immediate view. This yields a modern predisposition to view what "appears" as illusory or ideological, a predisposition at the very heart of social science and the sociological imagination. It is the justification and basis for separating sociological critique from common sense. The rejection of appearance is significant, for without it methodology loses its *raison d'être*. The question of methodology only becomes necessary or vital for an outlook that views the given world as deceptive and false, that views knowledge

as obscured or hidden. Furthermore, this perspective leads to epistemology itself becoming the focus for philosophy and the philosophy of science, displacing ontology: if what is given to our senses is a tissue of lies, then there sprouts a real urgency to find a way to justify and account for knowledge, an urgency to find a way to separate truth from falsity. Methodology and epistemology are important, become critically necessary, only when social science begins from this position of doubt, from a standpoint that sees the appearing world as one that tricks and deceives.

The modern tendency to flee the instability of the world for the security of the self is driven by two different traditions: on the one hand, a philosophical tradition that turns away from the world for the quiet solitude of the mind where the philosopher is able to contemplate essential truths (the ideal truths of the pure forms) and, on the other hand, the development of modern science that requires an active disturbance of appearance, enabling the scientist to dig beneath the seeming world because truth and reality are hidden from sight. Modern science believes that “only interference with appearance, doing away with appearances, can hold out a hope for true knowledge” (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 274) or, as Bourdieu (1998 [1996]: 17) puts it, "The function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden".

While Arendt identifies doubt as a defining aspect of the modern age, she traces the conceptualisation of this back as far as classical Greece to the experience and impetus of philosophy, citing Plato’s (1941: 227-235) parable

of the cave as exemplary of this view[14]. However Arendt sees doubt as more momentous and significant for the modern age due to the novel event that arises out of Galileo's discoveries following the invention of the telescope. For Arendt, ideas are not decisive or crucial in the way that events are for bringing about social change and it is particularly the arrival of unexpected, novel events that herald critical changes and demarcate history.

> … neither the speculations of philosophers nor the imaginings of astronomers has ever constituted an event. Prior to the telescopic discoveries of Galileo, Giordano Bruno's philosophy attracted little attention even among learned men [sic], and without the factual confirmation they bestowed upon the Copernican revolution, not only the theologians but all "sensible men [sic] . . . would have pronounced it a wild appeal . . . of an uncontrolled imagination." In the realm of ideas there are only originality and depth, both personal qualities, but no absolute, objective novelty; ideas come and go, they have a permanence, even an immortality of their own, depending upon their inherent power of illumination, which is and endures independently of time and history. Ideas, moreover, as distinguished from events, are never unprecedented, and empirically unconfirmed speculations about the earth's movement around the sun were no more unprecedented than contemporary theories about atoms would be if they had no basis in experiments and no consequences in the factual world. (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 259).

Social change, rarely affected by changes in ideas, is driven, rather, by concrete historical events, i.e. novel events that appear, that are unprecedented and that Arendt suggests embody an objectivity that ideas cannot live up to. So while a heliocentric universe was considered at the level of theory and ideas prior to the modern age, it took a novel event, the discovery of the telescope, to prove this theory, thereby bringing about a modern age concerned now to justify and account for knowledge in the context of a heliocentric universe. For Alexander Koyré (1957: 43), whom Arendt cites, "the loss, by man [sic], of his [sic] unique and privileged position in the theo-cosmic drama of creation… [resulted in] …nihilism and despair". A despair that

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[14] Note also here that this rejection of the cave for the underworld of Hades is not only a turn away from the common world but also a turning away from human beings in their plurality for an isolated, singular existence. For the philosopher, truth, contemplation and wonder can only be experienced in the isolated quiet of the human mind turned away from the public world and away from other human beings. See Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 20-21.

refocussed philosophy upon methodological and epistemological matters in the hope that, if humankind could not rely upon their given senses and the world as it reveals itself, then it might at least find faith in procedure or method.

In the case of both modern philosophy and modern science, Arendt sees the repudiation of the world as it is given to us, as it appears before us, and a turn toward solipsism and security in the self. Arendt cites Heisenberg in support of this: "Instead of objective qualities,… we find instruments, and instead of nature or the universe—in the words of Heisenberg—man [sic] encounters only himself [sic]" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 261). Arendt's use of appearance refers to the philosophical tradition's opposition of "appearance and reality" (also referred to as the opposition between "Being and appearance"), that is retained by modern science and amplified in terms of the rise of modern doubt: "If Being and Appearance part company forever, and this—Marx once remarked—is indeed the basic assumption of all modern science, then there is nothing left to be taken upon faith; everything must be doubted" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 275). The problem Arendt identifies is that the rise of modern doubt leading away from the world into the confines and security of the self,[15] also leads modern enquiry away from emergent novelty in the world that is dependent upon the intermixing and interaction of a plurality of human beings. This is due to the

[15] For helpful discussions of Arendt's rejection of solipsism, its link to philosophical method and Arendt's rejection of this as, for example, found in the early philosophy of Martin Heidegger, see Margaret Betz Hull's (2002) *The Hidden Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (throughout but particularly Chapter 2) and also Seyla Benhabib's (1996: 107) association of Arendt's critique of solipsism with her distaste for Heidegger's methodological solipsism in *Being and Time*. Hull (2002) is particularly keen to note that Arendt cites solipsism as one of the key and enduring problems of Western philosophy: "In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt argued that, 'Solipsism, open or veiled, with or without qualifications, has been the most persistent, and , perhaps, the most pernicious fallacy of philosophy even before it attained in Descartes the high rank of theoretical and existential consistency' (1971a: 46)"

fundamental relationship Arendt sees between plurality and natality, whereby the two are necessary conditions for human being—“natality and plurality are what make it possible for us to become ‘man *qua* man’ [sic]” (Leonard, 1997: 330).[16] The consequent is a diagnosis of the modern age very different to that of Marx: Arendt claims that Marx misreads modern alienation as self-alienation, when the modern age is better understood in terms of world-alienation and earth-alienation (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 254 and 264).

The modern withdrawal into the self coincides with Arendt’s critical stance on methodology: methodology focusses upon the analyst and the analyst’s research processes and theoretical frameworks at the expense of the reality of what appears in the world. As argued, the epitome of reality, according to Arendt, appears as novel events ontologically rooted in human natality. The modern retreat into the self is exemplified by the rationalist philosophy of Descartes (1996 [1641]) who sought an epistemological project to justify knowledge and gain certainty by recourse into the mind.

> Introspection, as a matter of fact, not the reflection of man's [sic] mind on the state of his [sic] soul or body but the sheer cognitive concern of consciousness with its own content (and this is the essence of the Cartesian *cogitatio*, where *cogito* always means *cogito me cogitare*) must yield certainty, because here nothing is involved except what the mind has produced itself; nobody is interfering but the producer of the product, man [sic] is confronted with nothing and nobody but himself [sic]. (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 280)

The preoccupation of modern science and philosophy with methodological and epistemological questions results from the loss of certainty in appearance and the human capability to read appearance. Arendt’s disdain for methodology coincides with her criticism of modern philosophy and modern science for their

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[16] See also Karin Fry (2014: 30-31) who notes “Action is grounded in natality, but it also relates to the human condition of plurality… New political actions are grounded in the fact that each person can begin. Someone’s effect on the world cannot be predicted or controlled, but what can be assured is that it will be different due to human plurality.”

retreat into the self, for their abandon of appearance and worldly, objective novelty. This is evident in Arendt's writing in the way that she attacks modes of analyses that focus upon the interiority of the self and that abjure the world of appearance and is one way to differentiate her within phenomenology. This is in part because selfhood and interiority are integral to phenomenology by way of their use of intentionality. Husserl (1931) advocates an analysis of the intention of actions, the relation of what was initiated to the supposed object of action, without—or at least before—recourse to the world, to the actions themselves. By prioritising the study of action in this way, Husserl advanced what he thought to be a *first philosophy* (Moran, 2000: 16) or *prima philosophia* (Adorno, 1982): he maintained that he was getting at the fundaments of human existence and thereby providing a more rigorous, scientific method. Arendt's disregard of intentionality is not only something that separates her from Husserlian phenomenology but also separates her from the way social action is framed within sociology, something discussed further in Chapter 3. Consequently, Arendt distinguishes her method to understanding, from that developed in the main during the debate over the *Geisteswissenschaften*, by not only rejecting the "psychological twist" of the empathic method but for also rejecting the "intentionalistic or… semantic dimension of understanding" (Von Wright, 1971: 6).

Bringing Arendt within the fold of sociology is not straight forward as many of her claims make sense only once her distinctions and terms have been understood clearly as some run against those already established in sociology (for example, Arendt's efforts to read labour and work as entirely distinct

activities rather than synonymous terms). This method of revisiting terms and etymology fits Arendt's approach to the 'preliminary understanding' by revisiting the point when novelty is recognised and where a new word is coined. In very general terms, Arendt's approach is one of stopping and approaching topics as they bluntly 'appear' to her, sparking a process of understanding. This she outlines at the beginning of some of her studies: "What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. 'What we are doing' is indeed the central theme of this book." (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 5) and "What are we 'doing' when we do nothing but think? Where are we when we, normally always surrounded by our fellow-men [sic], are together with no one but ourselves?" (Arendt, 1978b: 8). Even her analysis of the "life of the mind" Arendt begins with outward appearance—with the judging spectator—rather than with what appears to the thinker or actor from the interiority of the mind. Arendt's approach in this regard is anti-theoretical, beginning not from pre-constructed theories about action or selfhood or society, but from their external emergence and reception by spectators. This "method" is indebted to following Arendt's ontological account of novelty as appearance and so does not begin with the problem of procedure, but begins with the reality of novelty, generating her methods from prior ontological conditions.

Arendt's reading of novelty as objective, worldly events is registered in terms of their surface appearance and develops out of her critique of Western metaphysics, develops out of her rejection of the dualistic cleaving of Being and appearance, of reality and appearance. This critique, based upon the bedrock of Arendt's ontological prioritisation of novelty, generates a method

that refrains from analyses and subject matter that do not appear at the surface leading to an externalised social and political theory. This theory repudiates social analyses that flee the appearing world for the sanctuary of the self to concentrate upon methodological and epistemological concerns.

2.7. Arendt: A Study from the Outside

The function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden.
Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, 17.

The "object" of this study is Hannah Arendt's published work. That is to say, the concern is neither primarily with the social conditions and political events that captivated Arendt nor with the psychological or personal biography she endured. This study holds close to the text and word written by Arendt and is not a study of Hannah Arendt or the 20th century in which she lived. The subject—made manifest in the work—is Arendt's "public self," neither her private self nor her social self nor her psychological self. This is not to say that the social and political events of Arendt's time do not factor in the thesis, or that her friends and colleagues play no part in the analyses. Rather it is to maintain that any account of these events and personal relationships is made via Arendt's work itself—via the work's engagement with Arendt's time and her friends—and not made with recourse to extra or external historical, social and political analyses.

What is more, there are compelling arguments of Arendt's (examined in Chapter 5) that, if heeded, lead one to question the now generic reading of an

author's texts against the biography of her life.[17] In the case of Arendt, a strict textual examination has some phenomenological justification and holds true to her interest in etymology and her linking of words, language and storytelling with biography. Arendt took language very seriously, treating words and language as a link between thought and reality. Consequently, paying attention to language may be the only way to faithfully stay tuned to Arendt's thought and may guard against the prevailing tendency to overly 'biographise' Arendt the person and overly historicise the social and political climate in which she wrote.

In some sense this is a biographical work but not according to the conventional understanding of biography. For if the focus can be seen at all as Hannah Arendt, then it is surely limited to Hannah Arendt the *writer* cobbled piecemeal from her texts. The thesis does not overstep this and so brackets the specific events and happenings of her life, the social and political contexts in which she lived, as they existed independently from their manifestation in Arendt's texts. This is by no means a popular way of addressing Arendt whose life story is a crucial aspect of many interpretations. Consequently, the thesis departs from those who feel it lacking or even impossible to do an academic analysis of her

[17] For more on this issue, see Umberto Eco's interchange with Richard Rorty in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Eco et al., 1992). Eco (1992: 88) notes, "the private life of the empirical authors is in a certain respect more unfathomable than their texts. Between the mysterious history of a textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, the text qua text still represents a comfortable presence, the point to which we can stick." Rorty (Eco et al., 1992 : 94) concurs and notes the difficulty of linking an author's texts with each other: "the boundary between one text and another is not so clear." Rorty suggests that it is a mistake to go searching for internal authorial coherence between texts: "a text just has whatever coherence it happened to acquire during the last roll of the hermeneutic wheel, just as a lump of clay only has whatever coherence it happened to pick up at the last turn of the potter's wheel… the coherence of the text is not something it has before it is described… its coherence is no more than the fact that somebody has found something interesting to say about a group of marks or noises" (Eco 1992 : 97).

work without addressing and accounting for aspects of her personal life (aspects such as the political context of Arendt, a German Jew, living through the holocaust, or the personal context of Arendt's romantic affair with Martin Heidegger who later embraced Nazism, or the context of the furore that erupted upon the publication of her findings at the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, or the American social context in her writings on American social and political life as well as her positive assessment of the American Revolution—to name but some of the more notable areas of attention in current secondary literature). These aspects of Arendt's life are considered to be important for understanding her personal biography and influential many argue to a proper academic assessment of her work. I set out, however, to assess her thought via the texts alone and chose not to hash together a personal biography that runs alongside the analysis of her texts. It is not that personal biography is irrelevant but that some all too eagerly explain aspects of her thought by way of an appeal to personal circumstance. In effect, the thesis offers a divergent approach for thinking about Arendt's work that both aims to provide an account within the frame of Arendt's thought and may also produce answers for some of the prevailing questions concerning Arendt's person and *what* sort of a "who" that might be.

It is not merely that one can adequately analyse Arendt's thought without addressing her personal life and social and political context independently of her texts, but rather that the inclusion of such material may detract from an analysis of Arendt's work by running counter to her own thinking. It has already been noted that Arendt believed questions concerning an author's "methods,

criteria and values" are not only hidden from the author but also from the reader—a claim which echoes Arendt's criticism of the modern preoccupation with introspective subjectivity and her characterisation of the "darkness" of the inner life:

> …the "darkness of the human heart," that is, the basic unreliability of men [sic] who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act. Man's [sic] ability to rely upon himself [sic] or to have complete faith in himself [sic] (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all. (Arendt, 1998 [1958: 244)

Like her claim that action is meaningful in terms of its objective effect in the world rather than by virtue of the actor's intent, the self, too, only becomes meaningful outside of one's head in the public space of the world. I never know who my self is, for the self is always a product of the social world and never the result of an inquiry within. The self cannot be found by searching within the soul, or mind, but is the consequence of interactions in the world and thereby a concept of self that arises secondarily and always dependently upon the reactions and interventions of others to and upon our selves. This concept of self presents itself as less idealistic and more material, less subjective and more objective, less solipsistic and more world oriented and is the subject of Chapter 5.

2.8. Précis

As has been seen, Arendt's thought would seem most applicable to that side of sociology normally associated with the interpretive understanding of social

action, with the action element of the agency/structure divide. Like this tradition of sociological inquiry, Arendt's thought aims to *understand* the world rather than *explain* it[18] and is influenced (like the interpretive tradition of sociology) by what Georg Henrik von Wright (1971) referred to as the German debate between explanation and understanding. The grounds of this debate reside in the distinction of specifically human objects of analyses from those objects deemed natural, reside in the elucidation of a unique form of analyses for the human world in opposition to the natural world. The natural world is amenable to explanation by the natural sciences, the human world to understanding by the *geisteswissenschaften*. But, as noted above, there are significant differences between the emphasis Arendt puts on understanding and the emphasis put on understanding by sociologists such as Simmel and Weber (Von Wright, 1971: 6-7).

German sociology grew out of this debate particularly in opposition to the then dominant discipline of psychology. Arendt's thought, too, is heir to this attempt to delineate the human from the natural, the artifice from the life as it is given, and is clearly seen in her emphasis upon understanding. Yet Arendt differs from this tradition by virtue of the fact that her conception of understanding is disconnected from intentionality and immanent subjectivity. This is one of the fundamental points of dispute between Arendt's analysis of action and of the self and the interpretive side of sociological analysis: interpretive sociology concerns itself with the meaning of social action, a meaning that is primarily

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[18] It ought to be noted that Max Weber sought to both understand and explain social action. However it is clear that explanation for Weber is founded upon an initial or prior understanding of social acts.

located in subjective intent and motive (Cavalletto, 2007: 102-103; Schutz, 1976). For interpretive sociology meaning is prior to action; for Arendt meaning postdates or comes at the end of the action sequence. The internal world of the self, of subjectivity, is the prime focus of this tradition of sociology, whereas Arendt's particular brand of phenomenology sees the internal subject as "darkness" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 244; Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 149), producing instead an analysis of the social world that remains external to the subject and that focuses upon the world of appearance.

A key element of the methodological significance of Arendt's contribution to social science is found in Arendt's critique of immanence or interiority and how, despite this, she develops a mode of understanding both indebted to and at odds with the mode that grew out of the explanation/understanding debate, how she develops a robust notion of self, and an analysis of action that is arguably more social (in the sense of intersubjective) than that employed by interpretive sociology. Arendt's dismissal of issues concerning motive and intent—of Cartesian subjectivity—does not accord with what she called the "two-world theory" of subject/object and does not fit with a sociology divided by agency and structure (Arendt, 1978b). The goal is to unpick Arendt's ontological understanding of reality so that it illuminates traditional sociological concerns in a novel manner while at the same time illuminating Hannah Arendt, the author, and Arendt's narrative of the modern age.

This thesis, then, is an exercise for assessing the work of Hannah Arendt against the background of sociological enquiry. As such, the thesis is guided

insofar as it addresses fundamental disciplinary themes: methodology, epistemology and ontology. Though Arendt undoubtedly held assumptions and developed methods, she neither wrote a methodological work nor developed a theoretical outlook conducive to the construction of one post-facto. She spurned methodological thought and, despite a few occasions, shied away from discussing herself outright in her work. Authors, in her terms, are “mercifully hidden” from their “methods, criteria and values” and even though these methods and criteria may appear “quite manifest” to the author’s readers, Arendt's claim is that they only “*seem*” to be (Arendt, 1978b: 211). Although “quite manifest” is not the way this reader would put it, the following chapters nonetheless attempt an account of Arendt's thought concerning her own intellectual work (on the occasions these thoughts were put to paper) and the unsystematic framework she produced for addressing the world and its reality. And yet method becomes all the more important to an examination of Arendt’s work in light of her assertion that the epistemological concerns with truth and knowledge are not relevant to social and political reality.

This chapter found that while Arendt is critical of methodology (that is, fixed frameworks and theoretical models for explaining the social world), despite her protestations, she outlines a ‘method’ or ‘approach’ for understanding social novelty. What makes this method distinctive for social science is the fact that it concentrates upon social novelties and anomalies that do not fit with the social scientific tendency to enquire into social regularities. Arendt’s view therefore provides a long needed and distinctive approach for dealing with new, unexpected, anomalous events. What heightens the significance of this finding

is that Arendt argues that the most meaningful elements of social reality emanate out of unpredicted and unexpected novelties and that therefore a method trained upon novelty is of vital importance to social analyses for political, ethical and ontological reasons.

In Chapter 3, Arendt's ontology is explored as the ground of her position on methodology and epistemology. It is argued that Arendt's ontology, while multidimensional, depends upon natality elevating it to the condition from which her methodological and epistemological arguments emanate. Moreover, Arendt's challenge to the traditional metaphysical separation of true being and mere appearance furthers her insistence of the significance and import of novelty for human existence, for social change and for human identity. Central to human existence, natality and novelty cannot be flattened out into biological, psychological or "social" categories. That Arendt is able to provide a method for detecting and interpreting novelty despite her anti-methodological position is promising for the development of new sociological approaches to novelty.

Chapter 3: Case 1: Natality, Ontology, Action

This chapter has before it a number of tasks. The primary aim is to show that Arendt's take on methodological and epistemological matters results from a prior ontological stance, from an ontology that emerges from the condition of natality. Because Arendt's starting point is what confronts her as appearance, what *makes itself known* to her, the epistemological question of how one comes to hold knowledge (posed from the interior position of one's consciousness toward the outside world) is not raised. The problem with developing a methodological starting point from which to read social reality is, again, that it attends to the world from the unworldly space of the head imposing upon it categories of thought that—even if developed from previous encounters with the reality of the social world—do not account for the novel nature of social reality. This is precisely the point from which Arendt is critical of 'theory' as something that anticipates, prepares, and delineates: it enforces its categories upon what is found in the world (novel or otherwise). And yet it is the novel instances of reality that are most damaged by the methodological and epistemological approaches. Novelty, Arendt argues, needs protection by constantly requiring the abandonment of prior ways of thinking (of prejudgements), demanding that attention is paid first and foremost to the appearing reality (rather than the methods and theories) that attends us.

Arendt's ontology is explored in this chapter in terms of how she distinguishes between the active life (the *vita activa*) and the life of the mind (the *vita contemplativa*) and these are explored by setting out the ontological basis of social novelty. In this sense, the content explored in this chapter turns away from questions that are strictly methodological and epistemological towards the ontological foundations of Arendt's thought and as such accounts for Arendt's prior ontology. It is important to recognise that Arendt's ontology focuses on "conditions" of human existence, as opposed to determinants, as Arendt views human life as enduring relative conditioning alongside occasions of freedom, creativity and unpredictability indicated through novelty (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 9). Novelty is conditioned itself, but by natality: the fact that people are born into the world and are beginners. Furthermore, the chapter highlights action (the paradigmatic human capability for novelty) as a case study in the pursuit of demonstrating both the ontological basis of novelty from which Arendt begins her task of understanding and as an alternative way for conceptualising action different from traditional sociological accounts of action. We begin here with the sociological theories of action (Parsons and Weber) as a spring board from which to consider Arendt's alternative. Arendt's route is suggested as a way for solving the issue of action as construed by social science by "saving" novelty from theories that do not see (at best, poorly account for) human natality and novel events. Following this, the modern concept of "process" and its form of "movement" is assessed in Hegel's writing (the key exponent of "process") as a key influence as to why natality is underdetermined and overlooked in the modern age. Finally, Arendt's ontology is explored as both emanating out her

account of natality and as the basis for her position concerning methodology and epistemology.

3.1. Theories of Social Action (Parsons and Weber)

This section explores the concept of action, a pivotal concept for sociology and social science more widely, by comparing the theories of Parsons, Weber and Hegel with that of Arendt. As argued here and in Chapter 2, Arendt develops a phenomenology of appearance that is grounded ontologically in the appearance of novelty, in the materialization of the condition of natality. Arendt's ontology of the *vita activa* (delineated via labour, work, and action) argues that natality and novelty are made manifest at its highest or purest level through human action in the public realm, what Arendt refers to as the "space of appearance". By focusing on action, this section aims to demonstrate that Arendt's theory of action solves or goes beyond traditional theories of action by providing a reading that is capable of identifying and accounting for novelty in the social world—something traditional social science has so far neglected. The analysis demonstrates how traditional theories of action have tended to focus on the subjective aspects of action which reside in the hidden interiority of actors' minds, precisely the realm where Arendt argues novelty never appears. By focusing on the subjective meanings and elements of action, sociological theories preclude the possibility of novelty being a part of their theories of action. Furthermore, Arendt's ontology, as argued below, is articulated via metaphors of movement that illustrate the differences within the

vita activa and the sociological theories examined tend to reify action, depriving it of the "impulse" and provocation that defines novel action.

Exhaustive and influential, Talcott Parsons' outlines his contemporary theory of action in *The Structure of Social Action* (1968 [1937]). Parsons reformulated and assembled the seemingly disparate contributions of four principle social theorists—Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim, and Weber—into a synthesized system: the voluntaristic theory of action. The voluntaristic approach views action in terms of a causally ordered means/end schema located in the subjective understanding of the actor and analyzed objectively by the scientist. This method is intimately involved in situating actions within the historically determined normative rules and ideals which bind the actors and affect both their motivation and movement. In doing so *The Structure of Social Action* (1968 [1937]) fails to adequately address human novelty by focusing on a causally ordered subjectivity determined by normative rules. Parsons' book is really about the *structure* of social action: in other words, Parsons works to understand action in the narrow scientific sense of an object to be studied—a structure to analyze in terms of its smallest reducible parts:

> For the purposes of the theory of action the smallest conceivable concrete unit is the unit act, and while it is in turn analyzable into the elements to which reference has been made-- end, means, conditions and guiding norms--further analysis of the phenomena of which these are in turn aspects is relevant to the theory of action only in so far as the units arrived at can be referred to as constituting such elements of a unit act or a system of them. (Parsons, 1968 [1937]: 48)

And yet this is not an external object as action is defined by Arendt, but primarily a psychologised object of internalised subjective deliberations and externalised norms. Parsons reifies action as a thing, something which has a particular structure that can be separated and defined in terms of constituent parts: unit

acts. And these unit acts are further rendered as means, ends, conditions and selected standards or norms which guide the actor in terms of his or her conceptualization of ends. Fredric Jameson, interestingly, situates the problem of such an analysis:

> ...anyone who has leafed through Hitchcock stills, however, in the attempt to illustrate - or at least peg for memory's sake - this or that significant moment in his films, learns, with a certain salutary astonishment, that the isolated frame in Hitchcock conveys very little of what we come to identify as the crucial matter: namely, movement itself. (Jameson, 1992: 49)

Action, then, is more than a conglomeration of atemporal, non-spatial facts; as Hegel (1977 [1807]) shows us, it is not a *thing* capable of dissection. Note, however, that I do not mean that Parsons considers the characteristics of the unit act to be ahistorical. There is a definite difference between something which is atemporal and non-spatial and something which is ahistorical. For example, the means one has to write a letter change historically: today email and other digital messaging platforms are available. And if one is living in the former USSR, then the ends of a letter may historically alter as one can write to people in North America with the purpose of a free exchange of information in mind. So Parsons analysis can certainly be said to be amenable to historical utilization. Yet the unit act as defined remains an atemporal, non-spatial concept as the voluntaristic theory of action virtually ignores the element of movement. Movement is a critical element in the understanding of Arendt's ontology (Clark, 1997) and is the framework within which novelty is identified. The appearance of novelty is defined in terms of a rupture that first punctuates an otherwise endless cycle of change and then initiates a new movement against this monotony: "without action and speech, without the articulation of natality, we would be doomed to swing forever in the ever-recurring cycle of becoming" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 246).

It seems fairly evident that actions move through time; even Parsons notes that "the concept end always implies a future reference" (Parsons, 1968 [1937]: 732). In fact, he argues that the first important implication of his definition is its basic, essential temporal quality (Parsons, 1968 [1937]: 45). But this 'important' first implication is only noted briefly and then forgotten, nullifying the importance Parsons believes he has granted it. What function, then, does time serve the structure of social action? Ultimately, time's importance is shifted to the status of what one might call a 'validity tool' leaving the remainder of the book to work towards analyzing the individual, atemporal characteristics of the unit act. In other words, Parsons merely uses the temporal quality of action as a sign which, for him, signifies the sociological study of action to be a 'science':

> Physical time is a mode of relationship of events in space, action time a mode of relation of means and ends and other action elements. *All* known empirical scientific theory apparently involves one or the other of these two basic frames of reference, physical space-time or the means-end schema of action. Action is *non*-spatial but temporal. (Parsons, 1968 [1937]: 763)

The temporality of action, then, is only important to Parsons as a marker of scientific legitimacy. In other words, the temporal quality of action is not important or does not yield any important consequences in itself for the theory of action. Time is not meaningful in itself but, rather, is utilized as a means to the end of scientific validity.

Action is, on the other hand, discussed temporally by Parsons, although only briefly in small portions of the book, in terms of historical progress or historical change. However, to note fleetingly the movement of history or evolution or to merely acknowledge that actions take place within time does little toward furthering an understanding of movement, the background and context within

which novelty emerges, within which natality asserts itself. The majority of action theories continue to analyze their subjects and their actions as static entities, bereft of novelty, that used to be, are, and always will be the way they are characterized on the page.

For Max Weber (1978 [1922]), like Parsons, social action is defined subjectively as goal-oriented activity. In *Economy and Society*, he argues that social action is an individual's behaviour which is "meaningfully related to the behaviour of other persons" (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 1375). Social action, then, is the particularly unique or individual way that a person reacts to the social world—it is bred of individuals, not homogenous collectives which display reactive or imitative behaviour. Social action is the way I, an individual, orient or direct myself, in terms of my own idiosyncratic perspective, to the potential and consequential action of a plurality of other individuals. Sociology cannot be the study of imitation or spontaneous reaction because such behaviour, according to Weber, does not involve the subjective meaning that underlies interpretive sociology (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 22-24). Therefore, to use an example that Weber offers, in a crowded city street when a rain shower breaks, one cannot call the simultaneous action of people opening their umbrellas *social*. Such action he calls "homogeneous mass behaviour" because of its "mass-conditioning" and ought to be the subject of mass psychology (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 1377-1378).

For Arendt (1998 [1958]), the necessary condition of action is an arena where plurality can be exercised and disclosed. The key is freedom: "for action and

politics, among all the capabilities and potentialities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 144-145). Arendt argues that the fundamental goal of politics is freedom. However, this is not the freedom of possessive individualism, but rather a freedom that pervades a plural group of people that have surpassed their initial earthly necessities. Freedom and action, in the end, collapse into one as the manifestation of natality: "Men [sic] *are* free—as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom—as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 151).

3.2. Movement, Process, and Action

How do we move, and how is movement relevant to theories of action and social change? I move my arm as I reach to pick up a mug—but is this movement? A tree moves as it grows and blossoms and it can be seen to move as it propagates and spreads itself through new saplings. In the same way, ideas spread and move from teachers to pupils and so today I can learn of Aristotle in the way I may learn of Baudrillard. Is this movement? Movement is not a 'this', it is not a thing. Because movement is not a thing it resists definition and resists our attempts of pointing to it. Note the section on the "Here and the Now" in Hegel's (1977 [1807]: 63) *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

> The Now is pointed to, *this* Now. 'Now'; it has already ceased to be in the act of pointing to it. The Now that *is*, is another Now than the one pointed to, and we see that the Now is just this: to be no more just when it is.

Hegel shows the 'here', the spatial coordinate, to be the same as the temporal

coordinate, the ‘now’:

> ‘Here’ is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and is converted into its opposite: ‘No tree is here, but a house instead’. ‘Here’ itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc., and is indifferently house or tree. Again, therefore, the ‘This’ shows itself to be a *mediated simplicity* or a *universality*. (Hegel, 1977 [1807]: 60-61)

Hegel’s purpose is to demonstrate the instability and uncertainty of the particular: that the particular must be mediated by a universal or general ‘here’ or ‘now’ in order to arrive at the truth of the being of the particular. Such an argument was used by Hegel to counter the self-certainty of empiricism and demonstrate the power of his ‘negative’ thinking. The importance of Hegel’s difficulty in locating the “here” and the “now” lies in recognizing that things should not be reified, that they are constantly undergoing processes of change. Hegel was trying to demonstrate the strength of the universal, yet he accomplished much more than this, not by showing that particulars are always mediated by universals, but, by illustrating that things are mediated by movement. What mediates and forever abides is movement itself. One cannot pinpoint an individual because that individual is always moving through time and space; the individual is now one thing and then another, here one place and there another. It is this movement of becoming that Arendt refers to as “process” and against which, in spite of which, novelty and natality appear. The movement of History conceptualised as process detected in Hegel is the historicism that Arendt identifies with the modern conception of history and which she sees as symptomatic of the rise of the “social”, discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The rise of the “social” and of the social sciences is coincidental with history understood in processual terms where, as Hegel identifies, individual things, individual moments, individual natal events cannot be understood in themselves but only as an element and exponent of the overall process of

historical change. History and social change understood this way irons out the possibility of radically new emergence, seeing everything as causally linked by the process of becoming:

> To our modern way of thinking nothing is meaningful in and by itself... Invisible processes have engulfed every tangible thing, every individual entity that is visible to us, degrading them into functions of an over-all process. The enormity of this change is likely to escape us if we allow ourselves to be misled by such generalities as the disenchantment of the world or the alienation of man [sic], generalities that often involve a romanticized notion of the past. What the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event and the universal meaning, have parted company. The process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance. (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 63-4)

Hegel might have captured the transient character of life in the overall process of becoming, but it is against this which Arendt posits human natality and the unexpected character of novel events. Arendt's aim, which is a cue the social sciences would be well worth adopting, is to overthrow the "monopoly of universality and significance" that the movement of the modern concept of history entails so that the significance and reality of novelty might be detected and understood.

Hegel's movement from being-in-itself to being-in-and-for-itself, the process of continuous becoming, is not a movement that has a beginning or an end but is an eternal movement. This movement is not just any movement but the restless striving of negation. There are, then, two movements which comprise Hegel's process of becoming: the circular movement of negation and never-ending striving. Hegelian movement is like the movement of a cyclist. The circular movement of pedalling whereby each revolution returns you to the original starting point is similar to the movement of negation. Hegel argues, "The movement is the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end" (Hegel, 1977 [1807]: 488). Yet the

cyclist will not get anywhere unless he or she continues incessantly cycling. And so the restless negation, the persistent cycling, yields the, at times deviating, linear voyage of becoming. Being is not one thing, one negation, or one particularity, it becomes a certain form of existence only when one *continually* negates present for future potentialities; it becomes, as Marcuse argues, “absolute unrest” (Marcuse, 1941: 66). As a result, Being is, as it is in Goethe’s *Faust* (1961 [1808])[19], a movement which exemplifies freedom and continually preserves this freedom by forever negating the particular as it strives unceasingly toward its idea or notion. “Being-for-itself is not a state but a process, for every external condition must continuously be transformed into a phase of self-realization, and each new external condition that arises must be subjected to this treatment” (Marcuse, 1941: 139).

Through restless, unceasing negation the world becomes Spirit. Unending movement becomes timeless, constituting the finality or end of Hegel’s philosophy. The finality of self-realization is eternal unceasing negation which suggests the collapse of time:

> Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time. It is the *outer*, intuited pure Self which is *not grasped* by the Self, the merely intuited Notion; when this latter grasps itself it sets aside its Time-form, comprehends this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuiting. (Hegel, 1977 [1807]: 487)

The eternity in which Hegel’s philosophy culminates is one where time has come to a standstill because it no longer represents the *history* of singular

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19 He kindles in my breast a savage fire
And keeps me thirsting after that fair image.
Thus I reel from desire to enjoyment,
And in enjoyment languish for desire.

(Goethe, 1961 [1808]: 313)

subjects towards their own self-realization. Becoming is understood as a continual unceasing movement without end but, precisely because of this, can no longer be expressed in time—it loses its "Time-form". However, this end can only be conceived in terms of world historical time, not biological, individual human time. So in the end, this movement would be an "absolute unrest" because while the logical movement of History has ended, the physical movement of humankind continues: humanity keeps cycling, keeps moving even if history does not. With this, the individual is lost as are individual acts and novel events as all singularity is lost to the overall movement of becoming. No thing stands out, no novelty appears, when read in terms of this modern conception of history.

Hegel recognised the importance of tracking movement, as did Arendt. However, Hegel's goal was to devise a specific order against the natural flux of time, an order that imposed inevitability and unceasing striving onto history. Arendt, too, saw an alternative to the cyclical repetitions of nature, but her alternative was also opposed to the Hegelian process of becoming. The concept of nature and the modern concept of history are linked by "the concept of process: both [nature and history] imply that we think and consider everything in terms of processes and are not concerned with single entities or individual occurrences and their special separate causes" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 61). Turner (2000: 241) suggests that "once 'history' as a process with a meaning or as a product which can be 'made' is abandoned… post-historical human beings are confronted more directly with the problem [of] how to sustain a position in this world." Perhaps Arendt's response holds out some alternative

that avoids falling into the old historicisms: Arendt's alternative is the "miracle" of natality that "saves the world… from its normal, 'natural' ruin", the condition that assures novel events and new beginnings, and that returns to human beings a dignified significance and meaning to their action (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 247). It is to ontology and the meaning and significance of novel action that we now turn.

3.3. Ontological Conditions: The Experience of Thought and the *Vita Activa*

Arendt's ontology is grounded in two modes of living: activity attending to the earth and world located in the external domains beyond the confines of the mind (Arendt, 1998 [1958]) and mental activity undertaken from within the confines of the mind (Arendt, 1981). Arendt follows the philosophical tradition's terminology and broader acceptance of these modes, referring to them as the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, and further subdivides these broad activity orientations into more granular forms of activity that she relegates to the public and private spheres of human existence. Arendt subdivides the *vita activa* into the activities of labour, work and action, and the *vita contemplativa* into the activities of thinking, willing, and judging. Arendt's critical assessment of this ontology is explored in terms of her ontological interpretation of philosophical and theological experience that, because it turns away from the common public world and withdraws introspectively into thought, is unable to recognise, let alone theorise, the novel events of the world.

It is important to recognize that the distinctions between the active and contemplative life and how they have been characterised have always been drawn from the sphere of thought, leading to an undervalued, underdetermined and confused understanding of the *vita activa*. In this distinction Arendt also notes their inequality, that the categories have always been hierarchically valued and that one, the *vita contemplativa*, depends upon the activities of the other, the *vita activa*, for its being at all. However, this dependence has not favored the *vita activa* in that it has been interpreted as the servant of thought rather than valued activities that ought to be nurtured to the end of contemplation. However even this underlabourer value, which Arendt refers to as its "very restricted dignity," is false as it is not valued in itself or on its own terms but instead in terms of providing for a wholly different set of activities in the life of the mind (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 16). The upshot is a philosophical tradition that deals with politics and the social world inadequately, interpreting it only as a disturbance that requires instrumental management, rather than reflecting the reality of lived experience of an active life in all its variety and natality.

According to Arendt (2006 [1968]: 24-25), “our tradition of political thought began when Plato discovered that it is somehow inherent in the philosophical experience to turn away from the common world of human affairs; it ended when nothing was left of this experience but the opposition of thinking and acting, which, depriving thought of reality and action of sense, makes both meaningless.” For Arendt the denigration of the *vita activa* originated in "the discovery of contemplation as the philosopher's way of life" during Greek

Antiquity and particularly with Plato's thought. In fact, it would seem that "pre-Socratic philosophy" would be a contentious way of describing early Greek thought as she claims Plato and not Socrates is the turning point, identifying Platonic thought with the advent of "philosophy" proper (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 14). The Homeric order that came before Plato was not defined in terms of philosophy but rather in terms of "polis life" and had been attuned to differentiating the activities of labor, work and action. In fact, it took "the trial of Socrates and the conflict between the philosopher and the *polis*," claims Arendt (1998 [1958]: 12), for thought about politics to begin at all. Socrates was charged and convicted of impiety and corrupting the minds of Athenian youth. If politics had not seemed worth considering before, Socrates execution brought to the forefront the pressing need for philosophy to concern itself with mundane matters. However Arendt believes the philosopher's newfound concern with politics has more than just a little hint of false pretense: the concern is not for the sake of politics itself but rather to ensure the safeguarding of all things philosophical.

Similarly Arendt queries the authenticity of neighbourly love for the Christian in her work *Love and Saint Augustine*, when she asks how the Christian, whose truth and reality emanate out of an unworldly relation to God, "can be at all interested in his [sic] neighbor" (Arendt, 1996 [1929]: 7). For Arendt, both political philosophy and theological writings oriented to community and political affairs produce theories with ulterior motives, theories lacking a genuine interest in politics and social community. Christianity led to a further sedimentation of a dismissive attitude toward politics: "Christianity, contrary to

what has frequently been assumed, did not elevate active life to a higher position, did not save it from its being derivative, and did not, at least not theoretically, look upon it as something which has its meaning and end within itself" (Arendt, 2000: 168). Christianity conferred a religious sanction upon the abasement of the *vita activa*, something unknown to the Greek way of thinking or to Antiquity. But the hierarchical valuation of contemplation over action originated in Greece, coinciding with the discovery of contemplation as the philosopher's way of life that as such was found superior to the political way of life of the citizen in the polis. Arendt, too, wonders why the hierarchy had not undergone any fundamental change with the advent of the modern age and in particular the "revaluation of all values" undertaken by thinkers such as Marx and Nietzsche (Arendt, 2000: 168). The suggestion is that nothing changed because the fundamental structure of the system did not change or was not rethought but rather merely inverted: "it lies in the very nature of the famous turning upside-down of philosophic systems or hierarchies of values that the conceptual framework is left intact" (Arendt, 2000: 168).

Public life and novel events do not show up on the horizon of philosophical and theological contemplation because the ontological basis of these activities is based upon a withdrawal from the world, a withdrawal from the public realm into the interior realm of thought. In this sense, Arendt is not blaming philosophy of theology for relegating worldly activities, but she does suggest via her ontological categorization of mental activities (Arendt, 1978b; Arendt, 1978c; Arendt, 1982) that philosophy is the least worldly of the mental activities whereas judgement (as opposed to thinking and willing) is the most worldly of

the mental activities because it attends to particulars, necessary to the task of understanding. However, it is Arendt's contention that the debates in the social sciences have tended to take their cues from the Western tradition of philosophy, adopting their perspectives. Arendt's ontologically based re-interpretation of the human condition is therefore constructive for a social science that wishes to redress its neglect of novelty.

Arendt's question, "What does an active life consist of? What do we do when we are active?" is premised upon the validity of a division between two distinct, almost unbridgeable "ways of life" referred to traditionally as the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* (Arendt, 2000: 167). The understandings handed down concerning the active life, concerning the *vita activa*, have all been produced from within the realm of thought, from the perspective of the *vita contemplativa*. Arendt is not suggesting that the *vita activa* could ever come to terms with its character from within the state of its own activity (as if labor, work or action could somehow become the thought necessary for its own apprehension). On the contrary, what Arendt suggests is that the *vita contemplativa* has not attempted to understand the active life in the terms of the *vita activa* but rather in terms of the interests of the life of the mind. This has been to the detriment of our understanding of the active life and meant that the active life has always been understood to be inferior to the life of the mind. Consequently an analysis of what sort of perspective or interests emanate from the mental life is required. Arendt consciously turned against any philosophical tendencies in her thought and worked at thinking politically, correcting people who introduced her as a philosopher or who described her work as philosophy. In order to think from the

perspective of the active life she had to turn against the bias of the contemplative life. Although Arendt's turn to an exclusive examination of the mental life did not occur until the end of her life (Arendt, 1978b; 1978c), Arendt's approach to the study of the vita activa is predicated upon a critical stance towards the life of the mind, particularly as it was manifested in the tradition of philosophy.

While it is impossible to go through life without ever partaking in an active life, "we can't doubt—and no one ever doubted—that it is quite possible for human beings to go through life without ever indulging in contemplation" (Arendt, 2000: 167). The primacy of an active life is not, then, only as a predecessor or prerequisite to thought but it is the only part of the distinction that cannot be avoided. The *vita contemplativa*, on the contrary, must be provided for, it is not inevitable or unavoidable in the way the activities of the *vita activa* are.[20] Arendt's starting point for her ontology is the Western tradition of thought, by which she largely means the Western tradition of philosophical thought. She starts here because it is this tradition that she wishes to define herself against, because it continues to inform our thought, because it has been called into question in the modern age (via the break in tradition), and because the distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* is a distinction thrown up by this tradition and one which Arendt takes as valid and as her starting point for rethinking the traditional way of understanding ontological capacities. Because Arendt begins her analyses of the *vita activa* and the *vita*

[20] This emphasis seems to have altered by the time Arendt wrote *The Life of the Mind* where "thought," now a specialized mental process distinct from willing and judging, is seen to be as necessary as labor.

contemplativa from the perspective of political community, she is able to orient thought to the world, orient philosophical questions away from speculative contemplation towards a mode of thinking focused upon the particularity of social novelty. This is a move away from professional thinking towards spectatorship and a move away from the contemplation of universals towards the judgment of particulars. The reconciliatory understanding Arendt gestures toward in her early writings become in her later work the capacity for judgment required by a community of spectators that judge the particular novelties of our world, rather than the universals of the withdrawn, supra-sensual world of the philosopher. Furthermore,

Consequently, Arendt's concern is that because the *vita activa* has always been defined from the biased perspective of the *vita contemplativa*, the varied activities of the *vita activa* have not been distinguished. "Seen from the viewpoint of contemplation, it does not matter what disturbs the necessary quiet so long as it is disturbed" (Arendt, 2000: 168). Because it is only the disturbing of the quiet that matters to thinking, it doesn't matter whether it is labor, work, or action that does the disturbing and consequently matters little what makes any of these "disturbing" activities different from the other. The only significant distinction for the realm of thought was the division between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* and this division naturally favored the life of the thinker. It is this hierarchical ordering that Arendt puts to one side or accepts as valid only so that she can bring the problem of the *vita activa's* impoverished assessment to light and then begin examining what differentiations exist for the active life.

3.4. Ontological Considerations of the Human Condition

When Arendt refers to the "active life" she refers to the *vita activa* as opposed to the *vita contemplativa*. The *vita contemplativa*, marked by the undisturbed quiet of the mental life, distinguishes itself from all activity that disturbs it. Underlying this distinction is Arendt's assumption or unquestioned acceptance of its validity, a validity that she recognizes as acknowledging not only differing "human activities" but indeed "two distinct ways of life." Arendt frames human existence within a set of ontological “conditions” as opposed to ontologies that presume a specific form of human nature—to be capable of knowing human “nature” would require the ability to see beyond ourselves, from the vantage point of a God (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 10). The primary conditions identified are “life itself, natality and mortality, worldliness, plurality and the earth” from which Arendt argues arise two “realms” of human inhabitance, the private and public realms (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 11). The fundamental human activities of labour, work, and action are seen as occupying appropriate positions in line with these realms where labour occupies the private realm, work tends to straddle the two realms (the process of production is private, but when the product of work is complete it is sent out into the public realm), and action requires a public realm, the “space of appearance”, in order for it to appear at all.

As physiological beings conditioned by life, Arendt recognises the need for human beings to labour. Labour is what is required to satisfy the biological

needs of the human body which she separates from the activity of work that produces durable works for the establishment of a place in the world. Labour, as it tends to the biological life process, does not go anywhere, does not produce any enduring products, instead it daily toils in a cyclical, repetitive manner to maintain life (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 96-99). Human labour is of the body, oriented to species as well as individual survival, and dwells in the private sphere which Arendt explains phenomenologically in terms of it being a realm of “darkness” where its activities require the protection of privacy, of being “hidden” from sight (Arendt, 1998 [1958[: 62-63). As repetitive, cyclical activity supporting life, the products of labour have no lasting or endurance, being consumed or spoiling within a short time of their preparation. The activity of work, on the contrary, aims at the production of durable works that (once fabricated within the private realm) go out into the world to endure and provide continuity between generations in the establishment of the world. The production process of work is linear, defined in terms of a means-end linear project and demonstrates the human ability to master and dominate nature, and this ability to establish a lasting world is one of the features that sets human beings apart from animals. While labour is defined by necessity, the urgent necessity to maintain life (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 87), work produces works that do not spoil but endure independently in the world, transcending individual life spans and contributing to the ability to map individual lives and history to linear stories of human existence. Action, the only activity that requires for its appearance a public realm, depends upon the conditions of human plurality and natality to generate new beginnings. It is this capacity to generate novelty that occupies a central place in her ontology and it is the manifestation of

novelty produced by human action that occupies the central focus of this thesis (action is elaborated more fully below after the ontological basis of earth and world are established). Social science that neglects to capture this in its research threatens to run roughshod over the plurality of human existence, flattening social reality with methodologies and frameworks designed to enshrine social trends and regularities at the expense of unpredicted and unexpected novelty.

The ontological conditions of human existence are “given”: human beings are born—life is given; this birth, a new beginning, is natality—the capacity to begin new thing and initiate novel events is given; the other side of life is death or mortality—this may seem like something taken, but is nonetheless a given fact of life on earth; we are born into an already existent world that human beings construct and shape—this is the given artifice where, born as strangers, humans seek a “home”; plurality is the fact that each human being is unique and different from all others—plural distinctiveness and diversity is given no matter what commonalities social science identify; and human beings are earth limited creatures with material bodies whose needs are met from the material of the earth—the earth is given as that upon which we are born. The *vita activa,* are the modes of active intervention with which human beings survive on earth and establish a distinctively human artifice in the world. The very structure of the phrases “in the world” and “on earth” betray quite nicely the distinction that Arendt wishes to make between earth and world. In other words, placing the status of the self and the world in relation to these familiar turns of phrase

demonstrates the ontological difference and character of two important concepts in Arendt’s schema of the human condition.

What betrays the difference of earth and world in these expressions is their prepositional structure. It does not seem to matter in practice whether “on earth” or “in the world” is preceded by who, what, why, when, where, or how, or for that matter whether they are placed in the middle or at the end of the sentence. Yet what does not work is the attempt to say “What *in the* earth is that?” or “Why *on* world did you do that?” The reason why the prepositions “in” and “on” are incommutable with what may at first appear to be interchangeable nouns, earth and world, is that earth and world are incommutable concepts. Martin Heidegger’s discussion of earth and world in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is one that sees the two ultimately opposed to each other. He speaks of earth and world as related by a “rift”, that the earth “juts up” into the world, and that there is a process of “wresting” which takes place in the setting up of a world upon an earth. “A world of human products and activities is established by taming and utilizing the earth on which it rests. The earth fights back, overgrowing, destroying and reclaiming our works if we do not tend and protect them. Earth and world need each other. The world rests on earth and uses earthly raw materials. Earth is revealed as earth by the world” (Inwood, 1999: 50). Heidegger maintains that “the conflict is not a rift (*Riss*) as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other. This rift carries the opponents into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground” (Heidegger, 1971: 63). *The Origin of the Work of Art* sees the origin of

art in this rift created between earth and world, the rift is the intimate juncture which binds and separates them, it can be the locus of truth.

Somewhat reluctantly, Richard Polt says that the earth/world division could be seen as a reinterpretation of the "trite distinction between nature and culture" (Polt, 1999: 137). Viewed from the perspective of the nature/culture divide the earth is literally *sub*cultural; it lies below the world that is culture. For Heidegger the earth is the ground on which we build our world, the *sub*structure upon which humankind sets forth. The world is the realm of human activity and dwelling, it is "the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject" (Heidegger, 1971: 44). According to Gerald Bruns, "what counts is the environmental character of the world: the world is the "wherein" wherein we live and which involves us in everyday practical ways." [Bruns: 29] When one exclaims "What *on earth*..." one points quite simply to the fact that social, political, historical, indeed human existence is founded and supported *upon* the material ground of the earth. And when one cries "What *in the world*..." one implicitly refers to the state of "being-in-the-world," to the "wherein" of the world, where we are always surrounded by or among the objects, systems, and structures of human endeavour.

Martin Heidegger's work influenced Hannah Arendt from the time she was his student beginning in 1924 (a time incidentally when Heidegger was highly active in formulating his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time)* until her death in 1975. The nature of this influence continues to be a contested topic of academic scholarship and speculation. However this is alluded to only briefly here as it relates to Arendt's concern for the world. Arendt, too, argued that

people "live on the earth" and "inhabit the world," that the earth can be interpreted in some sense as earthly nature and the world as the realm of works and durable things. Yet Arendt's conception of earth and world fits into a much broader conception of the "human condition" and takes on, Margaret Canovan argues, "a highly distinctive [and] characteristically humanist contrast between the home that men [sic] have made for themselves and the natural environment to which they belong as biological creatures" (Canovan, 1994: 106). As such, Arendt's conception of earth, the domain of nature, "owes nothing to Romanticism" (Canovan, 1994: 107) and is starkly opposed to the artificiality of the world as "home" which can preserve and nourish human possibility. The world, as argued above, is an artifice, a space where works endure and provide the basis human remembrance and permanence, but it is also the "space of appearance" where more than works appear. This space of appearance is the public realm of action and is therefore the appropriate place to enact and detect human natality in the new beginnings of action. While works are creative, they are planned and managed and therefore do not capture natality as unexpected unpredictability central to the novelty of human action.

Human beings are, according to Arendt, biological, earthly creatures that suffer a mortal existence inherent in each individual's rectilinear progression from birth until death. In order to maintain one's earthly existence over a stretch of time, individuals must continually produce and consume things, such as food and clothing, in accordance with the material necessity of the earth. The condition of the earth in many ways corresponds to the realm of the private sphere where humans toil continuously to satisfy these requirements. But in

order to extend themselves beyond the limits of their physical grounding on earth, beyond birth and death, people create works and partake in events that serve to outlast their finite time on earth. By leaving behind works, deeds, and words that strive to attain immortality in the objective world of things of the public sphere, individuals can potentially endure across generations and throughout time in this "material repository of memory" (Benhabib, 1996: 108). This ontological status poses a problem for philosophy and for social science in its attempts to think and understand such a world, and such lives.

Arendt certainly felt she was offering a conception of earth and nature which avoided Romanticism, something she argued Heidegger's work had not entirely been able to accomplish. In the 1946 essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" Arendt stated that "Heidegger really is (let us hope) the last Romantic" and further argued:

> Heidegger has drawn on mythologizing and muddled concepts like 'folk' and 'earth' in an effort to supply his isolated Selves with a shared, common ground to stand on. But it is obvious that concepts of that kind can only lead us out of philosophy and into some kind of nature-oriented superstition. If it does not belong to the concept of man [sic] that he [sic] inhabits the earth together with others of his [sic] kind, then all that remains for him [sic] is mechanical reconciliation by which the atomized Selves are provided with a common ground that is essentially alien to their nature (Arendt, 1994: 181).

In other words, Heidegger's conception of earth and world is based upon an isolated view of the individual, and what is worse a view which substitutes the plurality which Arendt saw as the basis for the world with the ground of a common nature in his "muddled concepts [of] 'folk' and 'earth'." Furthermore, Heidegger's world is merely a world of works and of things; as Hanna Pitkin states, "for Heidegger the world means only humanly produced or altered material objects" (Pitkin, 2000: 304). The individual spectator observes the world of works without anyone to discuss the works with. There are no people

that populate Heidegger's world, and consequently no account of the *bios politikos*, no space for a world of speech and deeds. Elisabeth Young-Breuhl writes, "nonegoistical Existenz philosophy was what Jaspers and Arendt strove for, and the concepts that are central to both their works—concepts of community, friendship, dialogue, plurality—were formulated in explicit reaction against the legacy of nineteenth-century romantic individualism, the inheritance of the tradition of solitary philosophizing far from the world of others" (Young-Bruehl, 1982: 218-219).

According to Arendt, humanity is neither free and sovereign nor entirely lacking the capabilities of self-determination. Although conditioned by the material basis of our existence, humans construct a world that consists of the things we produce by temporarily overcoming the necessities of the earth. Free from the earth's requirements, the world sets up a common space within which human beings construct conditions that are artificial, not natural. A key characteristic of the artifice is the stability and durability it provides to human life which would otherwise swing relentlessly with the necessities of material existence. "If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men [sic]" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 55). The world provides an objective "in-between", the common material and infrastructure within which people move and conduct their affairs. And the world provides an immaterial, subjective "in-between" that Arendt calls the "web" of human relationships and which overlies and overgrows the objective space which separates and relates humans. Arendt claims,

> the term ‘public’ signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men [sic] and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as the affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made [sic] world together. To live in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men [sic] at the same time.... [gathering] us together and yet [preventing] our falling over each other, so to speak (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 52).

Understanding this world is pivotal for this thesis, arguing that social science has so far underdetermined the significance of human natality and novelty at the heart of human action. By becoming preoccupied with endless methodological and epistemological disputes, social science misses what, according to Arendt, rein before our very eyes: the novelty that demarcates and initiates the significant actions and events of human existence.

3.5. The World of Novel Action

Arendt’s world is a public, appearing world and while it is populated by the objective works of our hands, it is also populated by unique individuals who enact their individuality through novel action and interaction in the world. Works may provide stability and durability and may manifest creativity, but they do not express the unexpected and unpredictable quality of human action that is fundamental for the enactment of the condition of natality. Action is the only human activity whose unique place of habitation is the public world, the sphere where individuals come together to establish their plurality and confirm a common reality. Novelty as the unexpected and unpredicted emerges out of this interaction which Arendt refers to as action’s boundless character:

> action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes. Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others. Thus action and reaction among men [sic] never move in a closed circle and can never be reliably confined to two partners. This boundlessness is characteristic not of political action alone, in the narrower sense of the word, as though the boundlessness of human interrelatedness were only the result of the boundless multitude of people involved, which could be escaped by resigning oneself to action within a limited, graspable framework of circumstances; the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation. (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 190)

There are two things worth noting from this extract. First, the boundless unpredictability of action is circumscribed by plural interaction: action's unpredictability is boundless because it acts into a web of relationships where each interaction garners a further unpredictable response. In other words, the unpredictability of action relies upon an active sphere of intersubjective actors, not upon the internalised subjectivity of Parsons or Weber's actor. Subjective intent can only be considered the locus of action's meaning when considering the lone actor from the perspective of a solitary (rather than intersubjective) mind. Secondly, the boundless character of action cannot be escaped by limiting or controlling the number of interactions, suggesting that laboratory models or controlled experiments are unable to rein in this aspect of action. Empirical experiments that control number are unable to prevent boundless unpredictability and so are ineffective and unable to model action the unpredictable character of novel actions.

In addition to action's boundless quality, Arendt identifies "inherent unpredictability" as that which "arises directly out of the story which, as a result of action, begins and establishes itself as soon as the fleeting moment of the deed is past… its full meaning can reveal itself only when it has ended" (Arendt,

1998 [1958]: 191-192). This inherent unpredictability prevents both deductive and inductive explanations for action. More akin to Glynos and Howarth's (2007) account of retroduction, Arendt's approach to understanding human natality is here construed as the basis for a retroductive mode of reasoning that runs counter to positivism's universality and causal determinism. Glynos and Howarth (2007: 79) cite Arendt's account of freedom (here they allude to her concept of natality in all but name) as the ontological basis for their retroductive approach:

> In sum, social structures and forms of life are not only composed of relations of hierarchy and domination; even more pertinently, they are marked by gaps and fissures, and forged by political exclusions. And the making visible of these gaps in the structures through dislocatory experiences makes it possible for subjects to identify anew, and thus to act differently. Expressed in a slightly different idiom, this moment of identification is neatly captured by Hannah Arendt's rethinking of freedom, which runs counter to the current liberal hegemony. In her essay 'What is Freedom', free decisions and actions are likened to miracles, which are characterized as an ability 'to begin something new', that is, to set in motion events and practices that cannot be controlled and whose consequences cannot be foretold. Indeed, echoing her once-mentor Heidegger, freedom involves the '*abyss* of nothingness that opens up before any deed that cannot be accounted for by a reliable chain of cause and effect and is inexplicable in Aristotelian categories of potentiality and actuality' (Arendt cited in Žižek 2001: 113). (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 79)

In fact, Arendt reminds her readers of a premodern methodological approach to history that clashes with the historicist model of a "reliable chain of cause and effect" (Arendt, 1978c: 207). The premodern approach is understood in terms of isolated events demarcated by the breaks of beginnings and ends that allow actions and events to be read in their particularity, as disturbances and interruptions of causal and/or historicist 'process':

> What is difficult for us to realise is that the great deeds and works of which mortals are capable, and which become the topic of historical narrative, are not seen as parts of either an encompassing whole or a process; on the contrary, the stress is always on single instances and single gestures. These single instances, deeds or events, interrupt the circular movement of daily life in the same sense that the rectilinear ßios of the mortals interrupts the circular movement of biological life itself. The subject matter of history is these interruptions—the extraordinary, in other words. (Arendt, 2006 [1968], p. 42-43)

What Arendt is keen to argue is that novelty does not appear so long as action is interpreted within the confines of the processual movement of historicist change and so long as social science concentrates upon the social regularities that constitute this historicist change. On the contrary, the detection of novelty requires an ontological approach that reads the unexpected and the unpredicted via an ontology of appearance attentive to “making visible of these gaps in the structures through dislocatory experiences” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 79), attentive to actions and events as gaps or breaks with discrete beginnings and ends.

As explained in Chapter 2, reality is coincidental with appearance and can be affirmed only between people in the public realm. This reality is more objective than any reality construed from the standpoint of epistemology because, rather than a justification derived cognitively, it justifies reality inter-subjectively via a community of participants in conjunction with common sense, the community sense. That reality “appears” out in the world is what objectivity means for Arendt and without this we are deprived of the unexpected reality that emerges out of plural and natal action. A world without reality affirmed via novel actions is a world “deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, …deprived of an "objective" relationship with [others] that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, …deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself” (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 58). Novelty enacted through action “comes from nowhere”, enacts itself in a boundless, limitless environment, and is inherently unpredictable. This certainly does not seem to

be a solid ground for establishing realty and yet Arendt grounds her ontology in the concept of natality. Natality is the fulcrum from which Arendt's ontology emerges because, even though it is not a determining condition, it is what guarantees life and guarantees new beginnings, without which human affairs would languish "in it normal, 'natural' ruin" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 247).

Arendt intends for this ontological approach to challenge the tradition of Western metaphysics by overcoming the two-world theory's division between the sensory and supra-sensory worlds, between "(true) being and (mere) appearance (Arendt, 1978b: 23). The "world" in Arendt's definition is external to the introspective examination of "desire or will or hope or yearning," external to "the 'inner dwelling' of the soul and the dark 'chamber of the heart'" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 158). However, Arendt insists that "*we are of the world and not merely in it,*" that through novel action—through word and deed—each of us "appears" together distinctly out of our shared human plurality. Politics is "not the beginning of something but of somebody," it does not answer the question "Who am I?" but rather the question "Who are you?" and so is directed away from the self and into the world. Which is not to say that it ignores the self or the individual but rather that it confronts selfhood in an entirely unmodern way. That is, it leaves the question of the self to the interplay of the world: individuality makes itself present to others, not to oneself, it manifests itself only in the space of appearance where others are able to view, to judge, indeed to enjoy it. Questions of self and individuality are explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The world is, primarily a place of distinction, it is the space of appearance whereby works, deeds, individuality, reality itself appears self-evidently to us, standing out against the unending cyclical monotony of nature. It is the space, Arendt argues, where *being and appearing coincide* (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 194-195). As such, Arendt's conception of the world opposes a philosophical tradition that since Plato (1941: 227-235) has taught us to ignore that which appears to us, to ignore the appearances of the cave which are after all merely *skia*, or shadows, of reality, in favour of that which lies beyond the world of appearance. Arendt, similarly to Heidegger, reaches back to pre-Socratic Greece to challenge this: "The traditional concept of truth, whether based on sense perception or on reason or on belief in divine revelation, had rested on the two-fold assumption that what truly is will appear of its own accord and that human capabilities are adequate to receive it" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 276). Both Arendt and Heidegger develop a "dialectic of concealment and revealment," the difference between the two, according to Villa, is that "Heidegger's thinking of being as appearance is determined throughout by a philosophical bias in favour of 'the hidden ground' of presence" where truth, *aletheia*, is construed in the struggle of being and appearance (Villa, 1996: 154-155). What Arendt's ontology of appearance demonstrates is that she was able to solve the "dialectic" that troubled Heidegger: "Arendt is suggesting that we view appearances or 'surfaces' as the highest mode of being" (Villa, 1996: 153). This surface appearance is what appears of its own accord in the public realm, in the space of appearance which is the only realm fit for novel action. Arendt's ontology is able to provide such a different reading of human action, of the "social", and of the self because natal appearance, novelty that cannot be

denied in its appearance, requires an anti-methodological method that holds firm to novelty as it appears at the surface.

3.6. Précis

The ontological aspect of novelty dealt with in this chapter is where Arendt's distinctions between the active life (the *vita activa*) and the life of the mind (the *vita contemplativa*) are explored in terms of setting out the ontological basis of social novelty. In this sense, the content explored in this chapter turns away from questions that are strictly methodological and epistemological towards the ontological foundations of Arendt's thought and as such provides the basis for Arendt's prior ontology. Arendt's ontology focuses on the conditions of human existence, as opposed to determinants, as Arendt views human life as enduring relative conditioning alongside opportunities of freedom, creativity and the unpredictable.

Chapter 4: Case 2: Natality, the Rise of 'the Social', Process

4.1. Movement and Novelty

As discussed in Chapter 3, a discourse of forms of movement/motion underpins Arendt's account of human activities and occupies the central framework for her understanding of major historical shifts. This is significant for Arendt's interpretation of natality because action (the manifestation of natality) is the only activity that Arendt defines in opposition to movement—it is a non-movement as it is defined by its impulse, its *initium*. Furthermore, natality is disruptive, interrupting and unsettling established forms of movement in history and nature. Of the forms of movement Arendt identifies, these are expressed metaphorically and are used as part of the explanation and justification for Arendt's hierarchical valuation of human activities (Arendt, 1998 [1958]; Clark, 1997). Labour and nature move cyclically, work and the human artifice develop linearly (with an inconsistent but fine distinction drawn between unilinear and rectilinear movement) whereas action is understood in terms of unpredictability and spontaneity (as discussed in Chapter 3) and therefore lacks a mode or form of movement, being understood rather as an interruption or break in movement. Movement (or, rather, our reading of social change in terms of the historical movements of traditional cyclical repetition and modern linear development) is the base or background against which the 'human' emerges

via novel rupture. In the modern age, the human sphere of action and politics has been perverted and understood unilinearly in terms of a biopolitical emergence that limits the possibilities for genuine political action and novelty, and it is here that social science emerges alongside the rise of the "social" and the emergence of "population" with life as the aim and purpose of politics (Arendt, 1998 [1958]; Foucault, 1991; Mills, 2004: 83).

Sociology operates conceptually and methodologically within the framework of the "social". Problematically for Arendt, the "social" renders novel events anomalous, preferring instead to focus upon scientific regularities and social tendencies[21]. Natality is operative in Arendt's thought as the constitutive or base element upon which her analyses rest, a natality understood in terms of a non-moving rupture or unpredictable impulse that stands out equally against the regularity of both circular and linear motion. This standing-out Arendt accounts for in terms of appearance, an appearance that she iterates as external, objective and surface based and that she counterposes to a scientific practice that aims to 'uncover' truth, that understands reality as hidden and in need of active unearthing. It is this reading of novelty and natality in terms of appearance that advises Arendt's methodological writing and that informs her novel reading of traditional sociological concepts and contemporary events. This assessment is theoretical, historical and normative and one which yields

[21] This tendency is not unlike that which interested Evans-Pritchard (1976: 159) in his study of the Azande: "The reader will naturally wonder what Azande say when subsequent events prove the prophecies of the poison oracle to be wrong. Here again Azande are not surprised at such an outcome, but it does not prove to them that the oracle is futile. It rather proves how well founded are their beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery and taboos. The contradiction between what the oracle said would happen and what actually has happened is just as glaring to Zande eyes as it is to ours, but they never for a moment question the virtue of the oracle in general but seek only to account for the inaccuracy of this particular poison."

a novel contribution from which to reconsider traditional sociology. The aim here is to explore Arendt's connections between natality, appearance and movement in terms of their implications for Sociology, in terms of the object of sociological analyses, the social, and the methods appropriate to novelty in terms of human action and the self. In this Chapter, it is the specific status of the social with regard to these interconnections that will be explored.

4.2. The Social and Society

Perhaps it is altogether too unhelpful, even problematic, for sociologists to speak broadly and inclusively of "society" and its related "social" issues and forms. Casual and convenient reference to "society" or the "social" may be too unspecific and meaningless unless one is trying to demarcate it from realms such as the psyche or nature—although this too is not without its problems, conjuring up an often untenable dissociation between realms that permeate each other and confound each other's particularities. Even when society or the social world has been taken by theorists and dissected into parts, forms, types, and functions and thereby into seemingly more specific entities with seemingly more specific forms of existence, society remains something that crosses cultures and eras. The concept of society provides the sociologist with a general theoretical outlook that equally suits the study of ancient Greek city states, medieval monastic movements, feudal monarchies, 20th century labour disputes.

Most sociologists would agree that the discipline of sociology arose at a specific time, with specific concerns. And many would probably agree that it could not have arisen at any other time, that its historical occurrence is somehow the result of, perhaps even coincident with, historical developments and events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Equally unproblematic is the historical appearance of the *idea* of society and the social. Arendt herself traces the origin of the term "social" and "society" and explains its current general meaning: "It is only with the later concept of a *societas generis humani*, a "society of man-kind [sic]," that the term "social" begins to acquire the general meaning of a fundamental human condition" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 23-24). This is because the idea of the social had not been considered a specifically human characteristic during classical times, pointing to the historical nature of this general meaning and in terms of its inconsequence for Greek thought.

> It is not that Plato or Aristotle was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, the fact that man [sic] cannot live outside the company of men [sic], but they did not count this condition among the specifically human characteristics; on the contrary, it was something human life had in common with animal life, and for this reason alone it could not be fundamentally human. The natural, merely social companionship of the human species was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for the human animal as for other forms of animal life. (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 24)

Consequently the idea and concept of "society" and the "social" is something that can be mapped historically but not something that affects the reality of social forms and factors.

Yet how many would concede that the *object* of sociological inquiry—society or the social—is itself historical, arising at a specific moment in history and therefore possessing the potential for eventual collapse? How many would be willing to say that sociological analysis is only relevant to a particular form of civilization with particular historical roots? An historicized and specified

sociological object could call into question the very validity and cogency of much social analysis—and not just in terms of studying the types of worldly existence that occurred before the rise of society. But in terms of the research of groups, events, and structures that today lie outside of that historically particular form of existence we call society. And, perhaps more disturbing, in terms of a future decline of society upon which sociology could be sent to the museum to continue ever-proliferating analyses of expired social forms and phenomena.

Of course this argument assumes a rather narrow understanding of the discipline of sociology: the diversity of research objects and perspectives that fall under the rubric of sociology today would seem difficult to tie to a specific understanding of society. A loose, unspecified view of society allows many objects of study and provides the basis for a critical suspicion of the natural and the inherent, of the normal and the unchallenged. The problem is that if sociology arose at a particular time in history, in the midst of a particular political and economic order, then could not sociology, the study of society, be tainted by the situation within which it was born, bound by the objective conditions within which its very possibility arose? Could not the very development of sociology be the result of the rising intensification of a gradual change in human relations and values specific to the modern age and to capitalism or to development of governmentality (Foucault, 1991), rather than the result of a sudden awareness of the social character of our existence? Could not this change in human relations and values be the development of an entirely new realm—society—with its own distinct logic, rather than the development of a

new *type* of society? Subsequently, sociologists would be vulnerable to transposing this distinctive logic—the historically specific characteristics and values of society—onto peoples and individuals that currently stand outside of society and onto past political and economic orders that were never aware of society.

That there could be something, somebody, or some group that somehow stands outside of society, that somehow does not bear the description of the term social, seems today almost unthinkable (even for the sociologist understood as the stranger, Bauman (1990) is at pains to point out that sociologists are both inside and outside at the same time and so unable to shake off the social). Yet for Arendt (2006 [1968]: 199-200), the very fact that the social sciences and psychology have cast their studies in terms of an antagonism between society and the individual, attests to the fact that there are individuals that have not and probably never will wholly assimilate to society.[22] Significantly, Arendt (2006 [1968]: 199-200) argues that the 'individual' was "defined and indeed discovered" only after reflection upon the rise of a new reality, society, suggesting that not only is the emergence of society a novel ontic reality but the emergence of the individual also constitutes a novel ontic reality.

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[22] In her essay *The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Political Significance*, Arendt (2006 [1968]: 199-200) claims that "...the rise of the social sciences as well as of psychology ...are still centred around conflicts between society and the 'individual.' The true forerunner of modern mass man [sic] is this individual, who was defined and indeed discovered by those who, like Rousseau in the eighteenth century or John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century, found themselves in open rebellion against society. Since then, the story of conflict between society and its individuals has repeated itself time and again in reality no less than in fiction; the modern and no longer so modern, individual forms part and parcel of the society against which he [sic] tries to assert himself [sic] and which always gets the better of him [sic]."

While it is clear from Arendt (2006 [1968]: 200) that the latter development of *mass* society has greatly lessened the chances for individuals to resist socialization,[23] it is also clear that by developing an historical specification of society her political theory stakes the claim for pre-societal, pre-social forms of reality that occurred before the modern age and non-social forms of reality that currently exist outside of society. And it is also clear that the political potential and hope of Arendt's thought lies with these people and their ability to perceive reality in a potentially anti-social manner.

Arendt's problematic, then, is how to articulate alternative forms of existence, alternative political possibilities, within a modern age where the rise and development of society is slowly swallowing up all spheres of resistance, all spheres of distinctively public and distinctively private life, such that even forms of resistance and opposition are being articulated in social terms, in terms of a new type of social order or society rather than in political terms, in terms of the foundation of a new body politic based upon strictly political principles.

That social scientific critiques of society only look for different ways of restating social equality and social justice misses Arendt's claim of the radical difference between the social and the political, and between the social and the private. The rise of the social sciences corresponds to, in the words of Arendt (1998

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[23] In *The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Political Significance* (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 200). Arendt states: "There is, however, an important difference between the earlier stages of society and mass society with respect to the situation of the individual. As long as society itself was restricted to certain classes of the population, the individual's chances for survival against its pressures were rather good; they lay in the simultaneous presence within the population of other non-society strata into which the individual could escape, and one reason why these individuals so frequently ended by joining revolutionary parties was that they discovered in those who were not admitted to society certain traits of humanity which had become extinct in society."

[1958]: 28), “the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, [but] a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state.” Continuing, she argues that in this new social realm,

> we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but “national economy” or “social economy” or *Volkswirtschaft*, all of which indicate a kind of “collective housekeeping”; the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call “society,” and its political form of organization is called “nation.” (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 28-29)

In *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), Arendt develops a political project that hinges upon the division of the private and the public and that she loosely models upon the Greek *polis*. Her (1998 [1958]: 28) critique of society serves this project by explaining the “rise of the social” in terms of the decline of historically separate private and public spheres. These distinct realms Arendt did not see as natural divisions but as historically produced and linked to the development of the ancient city-state. The distinction between the private and public realms is based upon the activities that these spheres represent where the differences “between activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life” are definitive (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 28).

Arendt saw labour as intrinsically private, the toil necessary for the preservation of life: immediately as an individual, more generally as a species. Work she believed crossed both spheres, in which the actual creation of work is an intensely private activity while the work itself, once finished, enters a public world where criticism and interpretation bring the work an entirely new and public life of its own. Action and speech are the only activities solely oriented

to the public realm of politics and whose very condition is the plurality of individuals that compose and hold together the space of publicity (the issue of action here is raised more fully in terms of important issues concern the natality and ontology in Chapter 3). Arendt's explanation of the introduction of an entirely new realm into this schema, society or the social realm, is very much defined in terms of the alteration of the hierarchy of the *vita activa*: the three fundamental modes of human activity—labour, work, and action. She sees the rise of the social as the infiltration of private labour into the public realm and therefore the displacement of action and speech with the necessity-laden character of private life. The rise of the social and the fall of "public man [sic]" are one and the same development where the gradual infiltration of private interest into public politics, "the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm," delineates the modern age (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 45). Displacing the public realm with its devotion to public participation, its love of civic duty, was a new "social" realm, a public realm for sorting out and bartering private, once familial, concerns. As Arendt sees it, politics today has become an expression of social situations, class positions, and economic stakes. As such, politics cannot be free because it becomes tied to necessity, to the private, familial concerns of maintaining life, not to the concerns of maintaining a free and shared body politic. As such, the opportunities for novel action fade leaving a strengthened "social" realm and even less call for methods for detecting new beginnings.

The socialization of politics reflects specific changes endemic to the modern age, changes that liberated people from a conception of history that endlessly

replicated old political and economic orders, changes that began around the time of the French Revolution with the decline of the nobility and subsequent development of the bourgeoisie, changes that saw, not the beginning of a new type of society, modern society, but, the very beginning of society itself. Arendt's earlier works—in particular *Rahel Varnhagen* (1997 [1957]) and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1994 [1948])—reveal an analysis of the historical development of society, an analysis based upon European Jewry who, Arendt points out, had never been accepted by and had always lived alongside of society. For the history of the Jews is the history of a people whose claims in the public world have historically had to rely on their disinterested detachment from it. Jewish financiers, who had for centuries provided loans for government finances, were a closed group who were granted special status and political protection for their services, a group that was considered dependable precisely because as a rootless people they had never properly belonged to, and therefore had no personal stake in, the social world. However, the special status of these court Jews (the Jews, Arendt claimed, to which Western Jewry owed its emancipation) became increasingly precarious with the decay of homogenous government and emergence of a parliamentary nation-state. With the establishment of a tax system, government gained greater financial security and the Jews lost their affiliation to the nobility and with it their political security. In exchange they opted for economic security (Arendt, 1994 [1948]).

"The first class in history to achieve economic pre-eminence without aspiring to political rule" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 123), the bourgeoisie were a society of

competitors that, Arendt argues, the political philosophy of Hobbes foreshadowed well:

> [Hobbes] gives an almost complete picture, not of man [sic] but of the bourgeois man [sic], an analysis which in three hundred years has neither been outdated nor excelled... A being without reason, without the capacity for truth, and without free will—that is, without the capacity for responsibility—man [sic] is essentially a function of society and judged therefore according to his [sic] "value or worth . . . his [sic] price; that is to say so much as would be given for the use of his [sic] power." This price is constantly evaluated and re-evaluated by society, the "esteem of others," depending upon the law of supply and demand. (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 139)

Ultimately, Arendt sees the origin of society, the origin of the social, as the rise of the bourgeoisie, a group that acted upon the insight that privilege, rank, title, and class could be obtained on the basis of merit and not just birth, that the social and political order and its change were not regular and predestined but amenable to alteration, even control, by human effort. But once it had become clear that the nation-state as a system of government was unfit for the accelerated capitalist growth of imperialism and therefore for the further success of the bourgeoisie, a struggle between "state" and "society" became inevitable. The gradual take-over of the nation-state by the bourgeoisie marked the period of imperialism as "the first stage in political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than the last stage of capitalism" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 138). The results of this take-over and its effects upon the relationship between the private and public cannot be overstated. The political emancipation of the bourgeoisie released the standards of private, individual interest and desire for power as principles to guide the public realm and its actions, principles expressed by such proverbs as "nothing succeeds like success," "might is right," "right is expediency" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 138).

In light of Arendt's own position as a stateless Jew and the Enlightenment's belief in social and political reform, it may not come as a surprise to see that her early writing on political resistance and opposition, on the relationship between the individual and society, is articulated in terms of assimilation, in terms of the differences between the Jewish "*pariah"* who maintained an antagonistic relationship to bourgeois society and the Jewish "*parvenu"* who aspired to be a part of bourgeois society (Arendt, 1997 [1957]: 237-249; Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 54-68; Arendt, 2007: 275-297). For the Jews, assimilation to society as defined by the bourgeoisie was the way to emancipate themselves from their condition as a rootless and marginal people. In *Rahel Varnhagen* (1997 [1957]), a pre-political, pre-Nazi study of one individual's, one *pariah's*, struggle with social recognition, Arendt claims,

> The world and reality had, for Rahel, always been represented by society. "Real" meant to her the world of those who were socially acknowledged, the parvenus as well as the people of rank and name who represented something lasting and legitimate. This world, this society, this reality, had rejected her. She never saw the other possibility, of joining those who had not arrived, of throwing in her lot with those who like herself were dependent upon some sort of future which would be more favourable to them. ... She had never been able to fit her private ill luck into a scheme of general social relationships; she had never ventured into criticism of the society, or even to solidarity with those who for other reasons were likewise excluded from the ranks of the privileged. (Arendt, 1997 [1957]: 220)

What no one realized was that the Jewish question was a political and not a social issue, that assimilation to society by gaining "rank, money, success, or literary fame," by gaining some sense of social equality and social rights, was not the key to happiness, let alone political security (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 60). For the 20th Century saw the rise of Nazi totalitarianism and with it the destruction of any political and legal equality that Jews had then attained. "But to Rahel, with her still unblemished Enlightened concept of the certainty of progress from which would come reform and a reshaping of society, all struggle

was alien. The important thing was to get into this society which was already progressing. For, as she saw it, only in this society was it possible for one to be historically effectual" (Arendt, 1997 [1957]: 220). But "historically effectual" here means an effective exponent of History as process, rather than an effective opportunity to partake in novel action.

Perhaps the problem, then, runs deeper than the merely conceptual, than merely staking a claim for historically specifying society. By not recognizing "society" as a specific form of human organization with a specific history, might not sociology work towards universalizing society and thereby transform alternative forms of public and private existence into social ones? In other words, might not sociology work to reinforce the "social" reinforce a diminished public realm of novel action. Sociology has attempted to criticize society from within society, by assimilating itself to the various forms of social life, because, according to popular belief in the social sciences, everything is social.[24] This viewpoint is particularly problematic for social novelty as this notion of the social is widespread within sociology and the social sciences and flattens social reality. As a "taken-for-granted" entity, the social in effect precludes or excludes novelty and is a marker for all the forces supposedly inherent within society and yet which it is unable to explain. Because Arendt begins with and prioritises social novelty as that which drives social change, delineates history, and constitutes reality, her theory and methods provide a critical resource for

[24] See Halewood (2014: 95) For more detailed discussions of the ramifications of considering everything to be social, see Michael Halewood's (2014) *Rethinking the Social through Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Whitehead* and Bruno Latour's (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern* and (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory.*

establishing this sorely neglected aspect of social science—something this thesis aims to redress.

Furthermore, the problem is that socialization, the fact that we turn all facts of life into social facts, has meant that the desire to transform our conditions has led us to look for social rather than novel political ways for us as individuals to attain happiness, security, empowerment and liberation. As Arendt (1997 [1957]: 220) derisively puts it (when reflecting upon Rahel Varnhagen's understanding of her social situation and possibilities), "only in this society [is] it possible for one to be historically effectual". And so one of the key differences between Arendt and sociology lies in their fundamentally differing approaches to social critique. Arendtian critique takes place outside of society, on behalf of those individuals that have never been able to reconcile themselves with society, and aims for non-social alternatives and prospects. In the end, sociological critique might find itself to be a non-critique by working towards legitimating, promoting, and sedimenting this modern form of human organization. Because sociological critique assumes a social landscape bereft of novelty (or at least where novelty is considered to be epiphenomenal or at best insignificant), it disregards and abandons the novel events and actions that, according to Arendt, provide human beings with the best conditions and opportunities for dignified existence.

Finally, it should be noted that Arendt (2006 [1963]) took a primarily positive stance towards the spirit and ideals of the American and French revolutionary traditions and that it was in these traditions that she saw modern hope and

potential as she sees the spirit of revolution as an incarnation of natality and novelty: "the spirit of revolution – a new spirit and the spirit of beginning something new" (Arendt, 2006 [1963]: 280). That people can compact together to institute new political bodies is an idea central to her thought, an idea that owes its roots to the revolutionary tradition of the modern age. To the extent that Arendt held ambivalent views on the principles of this tradition, the source of this ambivalence comes down to her distinction between the social and the political, where social emancipation actually means *individual* emancipation on the levels of economic pursuit and social status while political emancipation, the result of human cooperation and action, establishes a common political realm for the preservation of human plurality, natality, spontaneity, and individuality. Social emancipation provides the space for the development of private, individual pursuits, provides freedom from politics and from the subsequent political responsibility that goes hand in hand with human action. Arendt (2006 [1965]) illustrates in *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* the problematic that social sciences have created by reducing everything to the level of the social:

> If the defendant excuses himself [sic] on the ground that he [sic] acted not as a man [sic] but as a functionary whose functions could just as easily have been carried out by anyone else, it is as if a criminal pointed to the statistics on crime—which set forth that so-and-so many crimes per day are committed in such-and-such a place—and declared that he [sic] only did what was statistically expected, that it was mere accident that he [sic] did it and not somebody else, since after all somebody had to do it. (Arendt, 2006 [1965]: 289)

Arendt's greatest fear is that social, historical, or psychological explanations of the situation will swallow up the responsibility of individual actions and the natality that ontologically establishes this responsibility (something that traditional sociology is unable to conceptualise). And Arendt does not just mean

political responsibility: “By delegating his [sic] political rights to the state the individual also delegates his [sic] social responsibilities to it: he [sic] asks the state to relieve him [sic] of the burden of caring for the poor precisely as he [sic] asks for protection against criminals. The difference between pauper and criminal disappears—both stand outside of society. The unsuccessful are robbed of the virtue that classical civilization left them; the unfortunate can no longer appeal to Christian charity” (Arendt 1994 [1948]: 141-142). Historically sociology has not dealt properly with the issue of responsibility, on either the political or the social level and this is a consequent of ignoring the natal aspect of human action that substantiates the possibility for responsibility.

Here links should be drawn between natality and responsibility. If human action is reduced to the social, reduced to social norms, expectations and statistical probabilities, this then eliminates not only the active, creative aspects of action, but removes the possibility of adding anything new to the world and with it the bond actors have to each other and the world. Sociology has long considered bonds a central aspect of the study of society, but it has tended to read this functionally in the manner of Durkheim and Nisbet. In effect this excludes the role natality and novelty play in the formation of political community and with it the “miracle” that is continually renewed when establishing the bonds of community. Arendt views the novelty engendered in the foundation and renewal of political community as a secularised miracle; it is “the miracle that saves the world” (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 247). A sociology that ignores the novelty that natal actors bring about and that levels this out with a functionalism

that sidelines natal individuality in favour of statistical expectations will continue to struggle to find a genuine place for responsibility in its remit.

Like all “classical” social theorists, Arendt is a critic of the modern age. But unlike these theorists she seeks to show that what characterizes the modern age is no new form of society, but rather ‘society’ itself. The upshot of this is a theory that pinpoints society as a particular historical phenomenon with a specific origin and potential conclusion and that claims to offer a more favourable and radical critique of the modern age, of society, than those tendered by the social sciences.

4.3. Society: A Novel Development

Crucial to the pursuit of sociology is the idea of society, articulated as either an object (“British society”, “Western society”, some totalized conception of society as a whole) or an adjective of this object (social ties, social problems, social history, social order). Not an object one can point to, less a subject one can talk to, society remains the organizational fulcrum around which sociological research turns. Even sociological traditions which do not consider society their object of analyses continue to study and refer to individuals in terms of their social histories, as parts of social groups and social movements, and with reference to social inequality, social justice, social solidarity and social mobility. That we have come to categorize things as social is, Hannah Arendt (1998 [1958]: 38-49) claims, a recent phenomenon no older than the modern age, a

phenomenon that cannot merely be attributed to a sudden awareness of the "social" character of our existence. Rather, the advent of sociology reflects specific changes endemic to the modern age, changes that liberated people from a conception of history that endlessly replicated old political and economic orders, changes that began around the time of the French Revolution with the decline of the nobility and subsequent development of the bourgeoisie, changes that saw, not the beginning of a new type of society, modern society, but, the very beginning of society itself. In this sense, the emergence of the social and society is one of the key novel events of the modern age that Arendt maps in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) and one, as seen below, that is coincident with, if not the same development, as the emergence of "population" and biopolitical governmentality that Foucault (1991) maps in his later writing.

That there could be something, somebody, or some group that somehow stands outside of society, that somehow does not bear the description of the term social, seems today almost unthinkable. Yet, as discussed previously, this is precisely what Arendt proposes. Jews, students, and homosexuals are among those she believes to be excluded from, and therefore to exist outside of, society. Important for Arendt, those that lived outside the grasp of society designated and brought to bear upon the modern age the conflict or antagonism between society and the individual.

> ...the rise of the social sciences as well as of psychology ...are still centred around conflicts between society and the 'individual.' The true forerunner of modern mass man [sic] is this individual, who was defined and indeed discovered by those who, like Rousseau in the eighteenth century or John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century, found themselves in open rebellion against society. Since then, the story of conflict between society and its individuals has repeated itself time and again in reality no less than in fiction; the modern and no longer so modern, individual forms part and parcel of the society against which he [sic] tries to assert himself [sic] and which always gets the better of him [sic]. (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 199-200)

In terms of the historical development of society then, Arendt saw the room left for the individual—in opposition to a newly developed mass society—as continually decreasing, until the rise of totalitarianism with its combined use of ideology and terror virtually crushed the individual in favour of a homogenized mass society. Arendt continues:

> There is, however, an important difference between the earlier stages of society and mass society with respect to the situation of the individual. As long as society itself was restricted to certain classes of the population, the individual's chances for survival against its pressures were rather good; they lay in the simultaneous presence within the population of other non-society strata into which the individual could escape, and one reason why these individuals so frequently ended by joining revolutionary parties was that they discovered in those who were not admitted to society certain traits of humanity which had become extinct in society. (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 200)

Arendt's arguments bear some resemblance to those of Raymond Williams (2015 [1976]: 294), where, in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, he notes in his entry for "Society":

> ...in seeing society as an object (the objective sum of our relationships) it was possible, in new ways, to define the relationship of man [sic] and society or the individual and society as a problem. These formations measure the distance from the early sense of active fellowship. The problems they indicate, in the actual development of society, were significantly illustrated in the use of the word social, in eC19, to contrast an idea of society as mutual co-operation with an experience of society (the social system) as individual competition. These alternative definitions of society could not have occurred if the most general and abstract sense had not, by this period, been firm. It was from this emphasis of social, in a positive rather than a neutral sense, and in distinction from individual, that the political term socialist was to develop.

These three passages illuminate a problem which arose in Arendt's early, prepolitical work *Rahel Varnhagen* (Arendt, 1997 [1957]) and which later informed her political project, developing out of a reaction to the totalitarian regimes of her time. Not only does the emergence of the social initiate the development of social science with its reassessment of reality in terms of social laws, regularities and normative expectations, but the rise of the social overgrows the traditional spheres of publicity and privacy radically altering the political horizon in such a manner that now only social, assimilable possibilities

are available, rather than genuinely novel political beginnings. Arendt states, “it is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects of each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 40). In short, the problem is one of the social exclusion of novelty and spontaneity and the fixating of all methods of social analyses upon the expected and mundane. As she later put it in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]: 41), the “rise of the social” further displaced an already declining public realm with its concern for public participation, its love of civic duty, and instead provided people with a public realm for sorting out and bartering their private, once familial, concerns. This public realm devoted to private needs she called the “social” and what were once political opportunities and goals now transmogrified into a state structure of administrative housekeeping bent upon maintaining, if not creating, a mass society with the aim of conformism and assimilation rather than distinction, creativity and novel political ventures.

4.4. Précis

The history of the modern age is the history of our assimilation to this social realm, to society, and its logical development for the individual, for the *pariah*, has been such that the “individual forms part and parcel of the society against which he [sic] tries to assert himself [sic] and which always gets the better of

him [sic]" (Arendt, 2006 [1998]: 200). That the "individual forms part and parcel of the society" is of the very essence of sociology and, hence, Arendt's difficulty with the "social" sciences strikes deep to the core of its guiding tenets. That rebellion against society only looks for different ways of delineating social equality and social justice misses Arendt's claim of the radical difference between the social and the political. No one, she argued, recognised that the Jewish question was not a social problem but a political one, that assimilation to society by gaining rank, title, money, or social acknowledgment, by gaining some sense of social equality and social rights, was neither the route to equality, nor political and legal acceptance. For in the end political security and social security are as alike as chalk and cheese, and whatever level of social security Jews had managed to attain could not save them from the popular cries of "death to the Jews" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 82).

Chapter 5 examines the concept of self in terms of the acting self—the self as it appears at the surface of the world—and in terms of her method derived from an ontology informed by the condition of natality. The subject of biography is raised as a way of differentiating between those public natal actors who as "persons" illuminate the world and the unworldly introspective biographies of "individuals". Via Kierkegaard and Augustine, Arendt sets out her distinction between two modes of biography referred to as the "exemplar" and the "exception", which is then discussed in relation to the distinction Arendt draws between the pariah and the parvenu. The distinction between pariah and parvenu are then mapped to Arendt's distinction between people as "who's" and "what's", signifying on the one hand the emergence of self via natal political

action and immortalized via posthumous fame and, on the other, the self, determined socially by “what” they are in society and inherent to the social climbing parvenu. The dualities examined in terms of the self, conclude with the examination of responsibility and thought as applied to the case of Eichmann where Arendt confronts the novelty of evil in Eichmann. Here she applies her surface phenomenology while remaining fixed upon the novelty of Eichmann on trial, demonstrating Arendt’s ability to maintain this method to produce a judgement that shook the prior frameworks and theories of evil.

Chapter 5: Case 3: Natality, Self, Biography

> As both Lévi-Strauss and Gadamer would say, only when confronting another culture, or another context (confronting them, let us clarify, in a purely cognitive, theoretical mode), can the intellectual 'understand oneself'. Indeed, the confrontation with the other is first and foremost the recognition of oneself; an objectification, in terms of a theory, of what would otherwise remain pre-theoretical, subconscious, inarticulate.
>
> Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, 9.

> I only quote others the better to quote myself.
>
> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 166.

The previous two chapters spoke of Arendt's critique of the modern conception of history, of the process of becoming that subsumes all particulars under the rule of the overall process. In this sense, History eradicates all particulars (particular events, particular acts, and individuals), relegating individual responsibility to something swallowed by process. Arendt (despite being critical of modern subjectivism, being critical of sociology's identification of subjective meaning with intentionality, and being critical of self-examination and solipsistic reflection) presents a theory of self and interest in persons and biography that coincides with her methodological claims concerning novelty and that chases down the natal aspects of individuals that she felt illuminated the times in which they lived. There is certainly a second aspect to natality enacted in the public realm: not only does endow people with the power to begin novel interventions but natality also provide the condition for the revelation of identity and self

through action (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 176-177): With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity… its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative." This chapter aims to explore Arendt's concept of self both as an instance of novelty and, in its definition and description, as the product of Arendt's phenomenological method based upon the ontology of natality as appearance.

Arendt's writing on self bears upon issues of authorship and biography, of method and epistemology, of novel action and intention, of moral judgment and provides the basis for a social theory that prioritises external appearance over depth and immanence. Arendt sees the "English-style" biography as one of the most admirable genres of historiography, different from other biographies in that it illuminates or "refracts" history via the "prism of a great character so that in the resulting spectrum a complete unity of life and world is achieved" (Arendt, 1968: 33). Instead of illuminating the individual via the analysis of an historical period—that is, instead of making history the subject of the biography and the person the causal consequent—biography sketches social and political circumstance through the framework of a "great character's" life. This is not to say that history is here the product of a person or in some way caused by an individual, but rather that through the documentation of a person a "*unity* of life

and world is achieved" (Arendt, 1968: 33, emphasis added).[25] However this biographic ideal Arendt sees as suitable only to the "lives of great statesmen [sic]" and is not suited to those "whose significance lies chiefly in their works, the artifacts they added to the world, not in the role they played in it" (Arendt, 1968: 33) The implication is that biographical work is not acceptable unless it comments upon history or illuminates the world. And because Arendt rejects the model of biography that comments on history in order to explain the life of an individual, she requires a life that was part and parcel of the world, that is, a life significant because it intervened publicly in the world.

Neither life through history nor history through life, but a model which achieves a unity of life and world. Neither history as subject (such that it determines life), nor life story as paramount (such that history or the world fade from sight). Writers and artists do not make acceptable subjects because their significance does not lie in their life stories but in the works they produced; their lives, according to Arendt, are significant for the world, only where they emerge distinctly and separately from their works: "*Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he [sic] is himself [sic] the hero—his [sic] biography, in other words; everything else we know of him [sic], including the work he [sic] may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he [sic] is or was" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 186). Biography is a form or genre of historiography and historiography's subject is the world and the history that comes to document and preserve bygone worlds—including its participants.

[25] In this way, Arendt's preferred mode of biography resists the historicism discussed in Chapter 4 that Arendt sees as coincident with the rise of the social.

Nonetheless, while on the one hand Arendt claimed that biography is more suited to statespersons, on the other hand she herself wrote a number of short biographical pieces (some that she referred to as "silhouettes") of which the majority are in fact noteworthy because of the works they left to the world and not because of their political action in it.

Biography, then, is that mode of enquiry into persons where a person's life gains significance and dignity because its involvement in the world ensured participation in the natality of the world—biography in this sense captures that side of novel action where the actor appears as a "who" (distinct from "what" he or she is or was)[26] that enacts and contributes to natality: this side of action "is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself [sic]" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 177). Biography oriented toward the novel actions of persons forgoes introspection for the actor's natal appearance. The following section selects from the biographical writings Arendt produced, writings that she referred to as "Silhouettes" (it is entirely likely that Arendt chose this term as a challenge to Plato's (1941: 227-235) denigration of *skia* or shadows that he refers to metaphorically as the illusory world of appearance).

[26] For a helpful discussion of Arendt's distinction between the "who" of the self and the "what" of the self and their link to identity and natality, see Bonnie Honig's article, "Arendt, Identity, and Difference": "Like freedom then, identity, according to Arendt, is not given; it must be attained through action. Until we act, we only know 'what' we are. What we are is composed of the roles we play in the private realm and of our 'qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings, which [we] may display or hide.' Through action and speech, 'men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.'" (Honig, 1988: 83).

5.1. Silhouettes

Hannah Arendt is perhaps best known for works like *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1994 [1948]) and *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), works which are broad sweeping and theoretical, historical and politically pointed. But there is another Hannah Arendt interested in individual people, an Arendt who wrote works such as *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (Arendt, 1997 [1957]) and her collection of "silhouettes" *Men in Dark Times* (Arendt, 1968). What is important is to realise that the relationship between the two is that of a continuum and not where history directs the individual or vice versa. In *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt (1968: vii) describes her subject as “persons—how they lived their lives, how they moved in the world, and how they were affected by historical time.” Arendt emphasizes the conditions of the world in which these people were situated, the “Dark Times,” that link the people who she admits “could hardly be more unlike each other” (Arendt, 1968: vii). Yet she warns the readers not to read the essays as, or see the people as, “representatives of an era, [as] mouthpieces of the *Zeitgeist*, [as] exponents of History (spelled with a capital H)” (Arendt, 1968: viii). Note here on process and history

In “Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio,” Arendt distinguishes between the individual and the person, a distinction she claims ought to be made instead of the traditional distinction between the subjective and the objective (Arendt, 1968: 72-3). Arendt is pushed to make this distinction because Jaspers’ award is “not only for ‘excellent literary work,’ but also for ‘having proved oneself in life’” and, consequently, the award requires a “*laudatio*, a eulogy whose task is to praise the man [sic] rather than his [sic] work” (Arendt, 1968: 71). She suggests that

this is something rather out of tune with “modern people who move mistrustfully and awkwardly in the public realm” and she hearkens back to the Romans for whom public life was more familiar and important (Arendt, 1968: 71-2). Arendt cites Cicero concerning eulogies and goes on to explain that “a eulogy concerns the dignity that pertains to a man [sic] insofar as he [sic] is more than everything he [sic] does or creates. To recognize and to celebrate this dignity is not the business of experts and colleagues in a profession; it is the public that must judge a life which has been exposed to the public view and proved itself in the public realm” (Arendt, 1968: 72).

This “dignity that pertains to a man [sic],” that exists publicly and in excess to his or her works or products, is what Arendt refers to as “person” and is what she opposes to the “individual” (Arendt, 1968: 72). The individual, on the contrary, is the subject who on their own ruminates upon and toils to produce a work for public consumption. Arendt maintains that “the subjective element, let us say the creative process that went into the work, does not concern the public at all” (Arendt, 1968: 73). This is what on other occasions Arendt claims comprises the motive or intentional content of an author’s work and is something that the author cannot know, let alone an external reader or viewer. The concept of individual, then, is an aspect of the breathing, eating, embodied subject that Arendt maintains is of no concern to the public at all and is more suited to the realm of privacy.

The “person,” on the contrary, Arendt cleaves from this living self, imbuing it with an external independence—an independence from the biological life, not

from the objective work produced by this life. The "person," although originating in the biographical individual, is liberated and accompanies or adheres to the works produced by this life. But this may only be the case for exceptional authors: "but if this work is not only academic, if it is also the result of, 'having proved oneself in life,' a living act and voice accompanies the work; the person himself [sic] appears together with it" (Arendt, 1968: 73).

From the perspective of the producing subject, the subjective element of the "individual" is "easier to grasp and much more readily at the disposal of the subject" (Arendt, 1968: 73). "Individuality" is more apparent to the author in his or her privacy, but there it remains, in the realm of unobserved subjectivity, out of the vantage point of the watchful public. The "person" or "personality," on the contrary, that attends the work is more akin to being objective, being readily disclosed to the public (while at the same time hidden from the view of the individual author). "Personality" is objective and apparent to the public but is subjective and hidden from the individual subject him or herself. Personality "is very hard to grasp and perhaps most closely resembles the Greek *Daimon*, the guardian spirit which accompanies every man [sic] throughout his [sic] life, but is always only looking over his [sic] shoulder, with the result that it is more easily recognized by everyone a man [sic] meets than by himself [sic]" (Arendt, 1968: 73).

And yet it is just such an explanation (one that relies on the subjective/objective distinction) that Arendt wished to avoid when she offered the terms individual and person. Personality, she insists, is "valid without being objective". This gets

to the heart of Arendt's claim for personality as the prerogative of the public and as unsuited to scientific disciplines who utilise the subjective/objective distinction. Just because Arendt does not wish it to be understood as objective does not mean she considers it any less valid.

5.2. Kierkegaard's View of the Self

Kierkegaard always speaks only of himself. Hegel speaks only as the exponent of his system.
"Soren Kierkegaard" in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, 46.

In the early 1932 essay *Soren Kierkegaard*, Arendt draws attention to the modern "revolt in philosophy" that prepared the ground for Kierkegaard, "the first thinker to live in a world constituted much like our own, that is, in a wholly secularized world stemming from the Enlightenment" (Arendt, 1994: 46). And, at the same time, she considers Kierkegaard (along with Nietzsche) as signifying the end of Romanticism. The revolt in philosophy Arendt paints against Kierkegaard's Christianity, for "what did the revolt in philosophy have to do with Christianity?" (Arendt, 1994: 45). What is the specific Christian aspect of Kierkegaard that Arendt notes and of what import is it to the individual's place in the modern world and the link between a Christian mode of biographical, self thinking and a romantic, proto-modern one?

The philosophical developments that permitted the German appreciation of Kierkegaard were of two variants: the thought of Nietzsche in conjunction with *lebensphilosophie* or life-philosophy and what Arendt refers to as the "parallel

development" of *erlebnisphilosophie* or experience philosophy (Arendt, 1994: 45). In both movements, philosophy as a *systematic* mode of inquiry was challenged to its roots. Crucially, this was the "revolt of a *philosopher* against philosophy" (Arendt, 1994: 45; emphasis added). The revolt, then, is the revolt of the living, breathing person who engages in philosophizing. The new importance of philosophy is not the abstract system of philosophical thought or the product of philosophizing but rather the embodied activity of philosophizing itself. The meaning of philosophy is displaced from an external system of thought to an embodied experience of the act saved the reality of the individual philosopher—the living and breathing thinker—from what had been the all-significant system of philosophy. "This meant the salvation of the individual's subjectivity" (Arendt, 1994: 45).

Experience philosophy took this new perspective and applied it to the world the philosopher examined. By rejecting the subsumption of particulars under general categories, the philosopher aimed for "a personal apprehension of the object itself… The crucial point here is not the methodological innovation but the opening up of dimensions of the world and of human life that had previously remained invisible to philosophy or that had had only a derivative shadow existence for it" (Arendt, 1994: 45). It is not the method that is important but the recognition or "opening up" of the idiosyncratically lived experience of the philosophical act. Philosophy manifests itself only in the activity of concrete subjects who occupy specific positions within what we now refer to as the social world. Although not an issue for Arendt's essay, these theoretical

developments also helped prepare the terrain for the sociological mode of inquiry.

Kierkegaard makes this point in his condemnation of Hegel's thought as prototypical of philosophy itself: "philosophy is so caught up in its own systematics that it forgets and loses sight of the actual self of the philosophizing subject: it never touches the 'individual' in his [sic] concrete 'existence'" (Arendt, 1994: 45). It is not that the individual or the particular plays no part in Hegel's philosophy but rather that it is understood only in the abstract, there is no concrete appearance. Kierkegaard's stance on individual subjectivity is refracted via his Christianity and put in terms of "the fundamental paradoxicality of Christian existence: to be an individual—insofar as one stands alone before God (or death)—and yet no longer to have a self—insofar as this self as an individual is nothing before God if its existence is denied" (Arendt, 1994: 46). This paradox Arendt explains more clearly in her later essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" (Arendt, 1994).

Arendt's (1994) commentary on Augustine is useful in that it provides an historical schematic for understanding biography and self. Biographical understanding is split into three periods: ancient Greek, Christian, and modern. Each division has its own significance: the ancient Greek (with its external biographies of great actors) and Christian periods are broken by Augustine who produced the first autobiography with *The Confessions* and thereby changed forever the relationship between selfhood and writing (even the modern period's transformation from the Christian mode Arendt felt to only have been

possible with the change brought forth by Augustine). So, the rupture caused by Augustine separates the ancient Greek period from both subsequent periods: prior to Augustine biographical writing was produced externally about others whereas after Augustine autobiographical self-consideration became possible. From the perspective of the first period, the two subsequent periods are the same.

The second break occurs with rising secularisation, with the decline of the authority of God, and with the rise of the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment's attempt to ground a new authority in Reason, Progress and History. This second break is largely understood as a break in differing modes of autobiographical reflection, in thinking about the self. Whereas the earlier Christian variant of self-reflection Arendt refers to as "edifying" and in Germany followed the pietistic tradition, the later Romantic cum modern turn abandons any authority like God to which an individual might appeal and thereby make life meaningful. The significance of individual life now has no external authority to which to appeal but can gain meaning only through the endless introspective search of inner, psychological content. Individual lives now embody a level of autonomy and as such are self-justifying; although significance is still sought this is largely understood to be relative and idiosynchratic. In terms of biography, the modern rupture marks a turn away from understanding life as a generalising "example" to seeing individual life as a unique "exception."

This idea of living life as an exception Arendt first encounters philosophically in the work of Kierkegaard who sought to embrace the paradox of existence by

living life as an exception. For Kierkegaard this was a philosophical response to the systematic nature of philosophy (although put in terms of the embodied, subjective, lived experience of an exceptional life). Secularisation was having an effect upon philosophy itself: in the same way that individuals were being thrown back upon their subjective thoughts and feelings because there was no longer the external authority of God to appeal to, philosophers were beginning to confront the reality of their lives and existence because the authority of philosophical systems (such as Hegel's for Kierkegaard or perhaps Plato's eternal sky of ideas) excluded any consideration of themselves as thinking beings. Philosophically this was marked in Germany by the writings of Nietzsche and the developments of *lebensphilosophie* and *erlebnisphilosophie*. The theoretical perplexities of this period helped nurture the ground from which the modern social sciences sprang and consequently embedded at the centre of social scientific debate a variant of the opposition between the universal and the particular, that of structure and agency. The modern problem is how to accommodate this dichotomy if the starting point of Nietzsche (as well as life philosophy and experience philosophy) is taken to heart: the embodied reality of the subject who thinks and therefore actualises the universal, the living reality of the specific sociologist who theorises the social system (note that this accounts for Arendt's early interest in Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, the sociologist who is able to destructure theoretical systems by taking seriously the Ontic, the particular existential position or situation-boundness of the theorist). Kierkegaard's answer was to embody the paradox of this in the life of the Christian as "exception" but, as Arendt points out, this ultimately produced the negative result of a radical scepticism toward

both the universal and the particular, toward both the general system and the unique individual. Furthermore, to enact life as a Kierkegaardian exception is to live a radically inward, introspective and subjective life, it is to produce a radically unworldly Christianity [note here this was Arendt's interest in Augustine in her thesis: that he produces a Christianity that was precisely interested in the love of neighbour, and so worldly].

A further significance of this history of biography and self (drawn out of the early Augustine essay) is that it points to a rationale for understanding what links Arendt's first two works: her Doctoral dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929]), and her biographical study of the Romantic socialite *Rahel Varnhagen* (Arendt, 1997 [1957]). The dissertation at first blush seems miles away from the salon culture of 19th Century Berlin and the Jewish question of assimilation discussed in terms of pariah and parvenu. Augustine, the topic of the dissertation, is the solitary turning point that separates an external conception of self from the internal, autobiographical view. And Rahel Varnhagen embodies the inward turn of the romantic movement; Varnhagen was after all the originator of the Goethe cult in Berlin, Goethe whom Arendt considered to be the "culmination" of the change from the Christian exemplary mode to the autonomous, self-developing mode of modernity: "The concept of grace gave way entirely to one of autonomous self-development, and we find the culmination of this change in Goethe, who conceived of personal history as 'an image cast in constant, living change'" (Arendt, 1994: 27). The idea of personal history as "an image cast in constant, living change" is precisely Rahel's own self-understanding as Arendt portrays it.

5.3. The Self in Modern Philosophy

The dualistic tension between the internal hidden realm and the external natal surface, between what the tradition of sociology has put as agency and structure, faced a modern challenge when Nietzsche (and life and experience philosophy) called attention to the lived, embodied experience of subjects. Arendt examines this development within philosophy more closely in her essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" and at times (particularly in the essay "Philosophy and Sociology") relates this change to a growing sociological perspective. It is ironic that sociology seemed to have largely developed its own take on this divide precisely around the time that Nietzsche et al. were calling it to question. But perhaps this has more to do with the desire for sociology to be taken as a rigorous scientific enterprise than anything else. Arendt's early references to sociology have a distinctly more sympathetic tone in comparison to the disparaging comments produced once she moved to the United States. Whether it was the change in times or the contrast of American sociology to its European roots, Arendt clearly had fallen out of favour with the sociology she encountered after World War II. Insofar as sociology drew its impulse from the wish to represent the embodied reality of peoples, Arendt held an interest in its development.

As for her own contribution, both Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958])and *The Life of the Mind* (1978b; 1978c) portray an effort to examine

our external and internal states of activity as lived, embodied experience. This desire is clear in the reclamation of older terms used to designate these two spheres, *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, with their clear emphasis on life or *vita*. (It is worth noting, however, that Arendt is perfectly comfortable adopting the duality between these two spheres of activity and does not establish a model of embodied existence that incorporates both sides concurrently. It is not that there is never any crossover, these are after all a variant of ideal or pure types. But the distinctions themselves possess a greater reality than the areas of overlap; without the distinctions one is left swimming in a well blended soup.) But it is perhaps more important that the term *vita* refers to life in the sense of biography; Arendt's use of the term life in *The Human Condition* is more specific than her use of the latin term *vita*, referring to biological life rather biographical life. Biological life on the one hand is defined by the necessity of bodily function and is shared by human beings with all living organisms. Biographical life on the other hand is distinctly human:

> The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitutes worldly events, is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography; it is of this life, *bios* as distinguished from mere *zoe*, that Aristotle said that it is 'somehow a kind of *praxis.*' For action and speech… are indeed the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told, no matter how accidental or haphazard the single events and their causation may appear to be." (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 97)

The distinctive trait of humanity is individuation. The schematic Arendt draws concerning the changing conception of biography is, in a sense, a broad history of human life, a broad history of the modes whereby people reflect upon and narrate stories of social life. But this is not a neutral history, rather it is a history that examines the manner in which the tradition of western philosophy produced a set of assumptions that validated its own activity (philosophy) to

the detriment of others. Arendt is generally characterised in precisely this manner, as the theorist who reinstates politics to its former glory, the theorist whose deepest concern is "love of the world." The two novel turning points that seem to have particular significance for her are the novel events of birth of Christ and the French and American revolutions. In terms of Arendt's historical outline of biographical understanding, the two main turning points coincide with the aforementioned, the first stated quite clearly with the composition of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* while the second lacks a pinpointed event and is discussed in terms of the decline of the authority of God and the rise of Romanticism.

In "What is Existential Philosophy?" Arendt points to Hegel as the philosophical turning point, a turning point that had significance for Kierkegaard's advance of the "exception" as the only stance suited to modern times. Hegel was the last philosopher to identify Being with thought, to identify the reality of what is with philosophical contemplation. Arendt considers this identification as the centre of western philosophy and argues it reached its zenith in the "strangely unified whole" of Hegel's philosophical system (Arendt, 1994: 164). What put Hegel's system into question was the living reality of the philosopher him or herself who seemed to be all but entirely removed from Hegel's dialectically operating system. [Why the philosopher should now come to recognise their individual embodied existence and not in times prior to this is a question I have yet to answer]. The history of modern philosophy, Arendt suggests, diverges along two paths: the first accepts Hegel's parameters and the second rebels against Hegel by rebelling against the equation of Being with thought. "This epigonal

character is common to all the so-called schools of modern philosophy. They all attempt to re-establish the unity of thought and Being, whether they achieve that harmony by proclaiming the primacy of matter (materialism) or of mind (idealism) or whether they play with various perspectives to create a whole that bears the stamp of Spinoza" (Arendt, 1994: 164).

While Arendt sees Hegel as the last in the line of philosophers to hold to the ancient philosophical assumption of the unity of Being and thought, she claims that Kant is the real instigator, although unknowing progenitor, of the modern turn in philosophy. "Kant, who is the real, though secret, as it were, founder of modern philosophy and who has also remained its secret king until this very day, shattered that unity. Kant robbed man [sic] of the ancient security in Being by revealing the antinomy inherent in the structure of reason" (Arendt, 1994: 168). In terms of understanding Arendt's position in relation to her account of modern thought, Arendt's discussion of Kant is perhaps telling. Kant, who we identify with the Enlightenment, is the origin of the modern turn even if the turn did not begin until after Hegel with the work of Schelling. Kant's importance for Arendt is not only that he pointed to the neglected reality of the individual in philosophy, but that he did this by preserving the "autonomy of man [sic]" while at the same time making this autonomy subject to the necessity of the natural world. "For Kant, man [sic] has the possibility, based in the freedom of his [sic] good will, to determine his [sic] own actions; the actions themselves, however, are subject to nature's law of causality, a sphere essentially alien to man [sic]. Once a human act leaves the subjective sphere, which is man's [sic] sphere of freedom, it enters the objective sphere, which is the sphere of causality, and

loses its element of freedom" (Arendt, 1994: 171). Although this is not the way Arendt sees things, there are certain similarities here to her approach in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). While action's freedom is not lost to a "sphere of causality" it is tempered by the world of other's it acts into. It is the condition of unpredictability that sullies any absolute freedom of the individual.

5.4. Modesty, Fame and Immortality

Fame, according to Arendt, is a "social phenomenon" for which—Arendt quotes Seneca here—"the opinion of one is not enough" (Arendt, 1968: 155). In Arendt's discussion of fame, love and friendship is posed on one end of a spectrum where the recognition or opinion of one is all that is needed against fame, on the other end, that requires the "testimony of a multitude which need not be astronomical in size" (Arendt, 1968: 154). Between friendship or love and fame lies reputation—"the highest recognition among one's peers" (Arendt, 1968: 154)—although Arendt adds that the opinion of one is enough when it comes to friendship and love. Posthumous fame, it would seem, is a special sort in that it opposes certain aspects of the social nature of fame. But note here that posthumous fame in Arendt's eyes is different because it is in a sense non-social, it does not arise in the lifetime of the individual because they do not fit with the social order, because they are "*sui generis*." "Posthumous fame seems, then, to be the lot of the unclassifiable ones, that is, those whose work neither fits the existing order nor introduces a new genre that lends itself to future classification" (Arendt, 1968: 155).

So for Arendt, the question of fame comes down to an issue of social value or social discrimination, discrimination which she sees as constitutive of society itself and one which cannot be extinguished without extinguishing the social realm itself. The social value of fame is decided upon by taking into consideration the "what" of a person rather than the "who": "the point is that in society everybody must answer the question of what he [sic] is—as distinct from the question of who he [sic] is—which his [sic] role is and his [sic] function, and the answer of course can never be: I am unique, not because of the implicit arrogance but because the answer would be meaningless" (Arendt, 1968: 155). This answer is meaningless because social values and social issues are not concerned with who you are--which *is* a matter of uniqueness but revealed through political action and speech in the public realm--but with what you are the social position you hold, the strata within which you fit, the social class that you are a part. The unique "who" you are does not fit any social category because categorization and classification run counter to individuality which, at the same time, fails to function or be useful to an order defined by classification: "no society can properly function without classification, without an arrangement of things and men [sic] in classes and prescribed types" (Arendt, 1968: 155; 1998 [1958]: 176-178).

Benjamin's posthumous fame is of interest to Arendt (1968) (who we know was entirely disinterested in social matters but concerned rather with politics) because it points up the essentially *disfunctional*, antisocial character of Benjamin, disfunctional in that he did not satisfy the social realm's need for

classification: "the trouble with everything Benjamin wrote was that it always turned out to be *sui generis*" (Arendt, 1968: 155). Arendt's concern for posthumous fame, then, is for its ability to distinguish the character of the individual who lived at odds with society, the pariah as opposed to the parvenu, whose absolute originality was at odds with the conformity that society requires in classification and discrimination. "Posthumous fame seems, then, to be the lot of the unclassifiable ones, that is, those whose work neither fits the existing order nor introduces a new genre that lends itself to future classification" (Arendt, 1968: 155). So Benjamin did not fit any of the social "whats" that society would have been prepared to fit him to: "his erudition was great, but he was no scholar; his subject matter comprised texts and their interpretation, but he was no philologist; he was greatly attracted not by religion but by theology... but he was no theologian...; he was a born writer, but his greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations; he was the first German to translate Proust... and St.-John Perse... but he was no translator; he reviewed books and wrote a number of essays on living and dead writers; but he was no literary critic; he wrote a book about the German baroque and left behind a huge unfinished study of the French nineteenth century, but he was no historian, literary or otherwise; I shall try to show that he thought poetically, but he was neither a poet nor a philosopher" (Arendt, 1968: 156).

In terms of method, Arendt links the unclassifiable character of Benjamin the writer to Benjamin’s fascination with the art of collecting and its ability destroy systems of classification, systems that strip objects of their unique quality by subjecting them to an overarching classificatory system: “Thus the heir and

preserver unexpectedly turns into a destroyer. 'The true, greatly misunderstood passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive. For this is its dialectics: to combine with loyalty to an object, to individual items, to things sheltered in his care, a stubborn subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable.' [Benjamin, 1930] The collector destroys the context in which his object once was only part of a greater living entity, and since only the uniquely genuine will do for him [sic] he [sic] must cleanse the chosen object of everything that is typical about it" (Arendt, 1968: 199-200). A book collector and quotation collector, Benjamin represents for Arendt a thinker who relinquishes systems of classification that aim to trace the regular and the typical in favour of the individual and unique—this is in part why Benjamin did not "introduce a new genre that lends itself to future classification" (Arendt, 1968: 155).

5.5. Immortality, Testament, Preservation

The impetus for Arendt's political thought is sometimes characterised as one preoccupied with ensuring human dignity, with reclaiming the significance of human glory, and with combatting the political and social forces that lead to human futility and superfluousness.[27] Because birth and death are fundamental conditions of existence, Arendt argues that a key objective in setting up a world is the preservation and remembrance of fleeting human actions as well as the

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[27] See, for example, Peg Birmingham's (2011) essay "Arendt and Hobbes: Glory, Sacrificial Violence and the Political Imagination" where she argues, contrary to the fear oriented focus of Foucault's political philosophy, that the modern political imaginary is better exemplified by the theme of glory and the processes of immortalizing found in the work of Arendt.

immortalization (*athanatizein*)[28] of transient human actors themselves: “Work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time” (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 8).[29] Arendt links immortalization (the reification or materialisation of the transience of life) with the development and delineation of human biography, fame and glory, as exemplary modes of human activity centred upon human mortality. This is distinct but linked to the concept of immortality which Arendt (1998 [1958]: 17-21) traces within Greek thought. The situation for the Greeks was based upon a paradox: that the most futile thing in the human world, actions and deeds, are at the same time the greatest of things. This is paradoxical because their conception of greatness was understood in terms of permanence: i.e., the greater a things duration or permanence, the greater the thing. Immortalizing is important for natality, particularly the dignity of the natal actor, because while novel action may appear brightly, it leaves nothing behind and so is one of the most vulnerable

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[28] Arendt (2006 [1968]: 46) cites Aristotle when discussing the activity of immortalizing: “*athanatizein*, in the Aristotelian terminology, an activity whose object is by no means necessarily one's own self, the immortal fame of the name, but includes a variety of occupations with immortal things in general”.

[29] See also: “The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfilment and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all arts, the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been. The materialization they have to undergo in order to remain in the world at all is paid for in that always the "dead letter" replaces something which grew out of and for a fleeting moment indeed existed as the "living spirit." They must pay this price because they themselves are of an entirely unworldly nature and therefore need the help of an activity of an altogether different nature; they depend for their reality and materialization upon the same workmanship that builds the other things in the human artifice. The reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors. Human life, in so far as it is world-building, is engaged in a constant process of reification, and the degree of worldliness of produced things, which all together form the human artifice, depends upon their greater or lesser permanence in the world itself” (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 95-96).

of the human activities to being forgotten. This paradox will be explored in more detail shortly. Prior to this, it is important to note that Arendt's thought is world oriented; it divulges her love of the world, her *amor mundi*. As early as Arendt's doctoral dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine*, one finds this characteristic theme brought to the fore as love of neighbour. Arendt's question is how the Christian, whose truth and reality emanate out of an unworldly relation to God, "can be at all interested in his [sic] neighbor" (Arendt, 1996 [1929]).

In addition to Arendt's take on the unworldly nature of Christianity, Arendt's negative assessment of philosophy is due in no small part to it's unworldly orientation portrayed iconically in Plato's parable of the cave: philosophers leave the deceptive world of their fellow human beings to turn inwardly to the eternal ideas of the mind. That philosophy claimed from early on to be preoccupied with death is only a natural assessment of an activity that shuns the normal world of the living for the eternal sky of ideas, that welcomes the separation of body and soul in the pursuit of pure thought. Another example is Arendt's assessment of romantic love that takes you away from the world and into a private relationship. And Marx too continued the tradition of those who had neglected the importance of the world: Arendt insisted that "world alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]).

Opposing this tradition of political philosophy written from the perspective of those unconcerned with the world, that is from the perspective of philosophers concerned only with preserving and securing the life of the mind, Arendt

occasionally quoted Machiavelli: the love of my city/republic is greater than the love I have for myself. But Arendt's *amor mundi* was not a love that one might expect of a statesperson; in short the worldly love of an actor. Rather Arendt's love was the love of a spectator. The love of a writer, poet, historian. Arendt had a special interest in poets and literary writers and viewed the task of history similarly (a view of history which she saw in blatant contrast to the practice of history in her time):

> The poet in a very general sense and the historian in a very special sense have the task of setting this process of narration in motion and of involving us in it. And we who for the most part are neither poets nor historians are familiar with the nature of this process from our own experience with life, for we too have the need to recall the significant events in our own lives by relating them to ourselves and others. Thus we are constantly preparing the way for 'poetry,' in the broadest sense, as a human potentiality; we are, so to speak, constantly expecting it to erupt in some human being. When this happens, the telling-over of what took place comes to a halt for the time being and a formed narrative, one more item, is added to the world's stock. In reification by the poet or the historian, the narration of history has achieved permanence and persistence. Thus the narration has been given its place in the world, where it will survive us. There it can live on—one story among many. There is no meaning to these stories that is entirely separable from them—and this, too, we know from our own, non-poetic experience. No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story (Arendt, 1968: 21-22).

Concern with immortality, although of relatively little matter today, was important during pre-Socratic Greek antiquity when there was the attempt to circumvent human mortality by remembering and preserving great deeds in historical and poetic writing. History and poetry acted as the solid objectification of what was considered, paradoxically, both the most praiseworthy and great as well as most fleeting and futile of humanity: human action.

> The scene where Ulysses listens to the story of his own life is paradigmatic for both history and poetry; the 'reconciliation with reality,' the catharsis, which, according to Aristotle, was the essence of tragedy, and, according to Hegel, was the ultimate purpose of history, came about through the tears of remembrance. The deepest human motive for history and poetry appears here in unparalleled purity: since listener, actor, and sufferer are the same person, all motives of sheer curiosity and lust for new information, which, of course, have always played a large role in both historical inquiry and aesthetic pleasure, are naturally absent in Ulysses himself, who would have been bored rather than moved if history were only news and poetry only entertainment. (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 45)

Two responses were formulated from the paradox which was introduced at the start of this chapter: one from the poets and historians the other from the philosophers. Immortal fame was seen as a virtue to be striven for by the presocratics and this fame/immortality was preserved poetically by poets and historians. Philosophers, according to Arendt, took their cue initially from Parmenides but elaborated it further in Plato arguing for a potential immortality of all human beings through the continued begetting of children. This Plato called the partaking of "immortality through the unity of sempiternal becoming" and declared the begetting of children a law (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 46). "For neither Plato nor Aristotle any longer believed that mortal men [sic] could 'immortalize' (*athanatizein*, in the Aristotelian terminology, an activity whose object is by no means necessarily one's own self, the immortal fame of the name, but includes a variety of occupations with immortal things in general) through great deeds and words" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 46-47).

In the below passage, Arendt suggests that testament or tradition *wills* a future and that this future could be "foreseen in its appearance or its reality" if the tradition is set down such that it can be "foreseen". “Without testament or, to resolve the metaphor, without tradition--which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is--there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creatures in it" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 5). This seems quite different to thinking and understanding, the language is much more active and there is a switch, a switch that finds its point in history/tradition that can

then move from the realm of thought into the realm of action. Testament—set down thought—as an object has entered the world and so can be used to will a future, or foresee an appearance.

The fear here, as always, is of oblivion: the failure of memory. Again in this discussion a strong similarity to the essay on “Understanding and Politics” (Arendt, 1994): the difficulty of people who confront something new and unforeseen, who "did not even know how to name it" (Arendt, 2006 [1968]: 6). The "Tragedy" was not that the freedom had been lost but that those who had experienced it had not left testament concerning it, that there was nowhere left for it, that "there was no mind to inherit and to question it, to think about and to remember."

5.6. The Social Self

The narrative thus far suggests an historical schematic for delineating differing modes of biographical or self thinking, significant for Arendt who sought the preservation of the fleeting quality of natality and novel action in the public realm. An advantage of this schematic is that it provides a rationale for making sense of the connection between Arendt's first two large projects. Saint Augustine is a crucial turning point in this history in that he opens up an autobiographical form of reflection that not only became foundational to Christian practice but that continues to influence self perception in the secular modern world. The collapse of the authority of God did however fundamentally

alter the manner of biographical reflection. What had been for centuries during the middle ages understood as exemplary life stories were now recast as exceptional. For Kierkegaard living life as an exception was the only way of properly confronting the paradox at the centre of human existence: that we are both individual and part of a whole.

The paradox Kierkegaard defined is the paradox Arendt identifies as pivotal to understanding Jewish existence in the modern period beginning in the middle of the 18th century. Under these conditions, the paradox as Arendt examines it is a paradox associated with discriminated and persecuted groups rather than the general condition of existence Kierkegaard describes. As a discriminated group, the Jews were not accepted as a whole into respectable society or into the political classes. (The distinction between society and politics is noted here because occasionally individual Jews managed to gain admittance, but Arendt's argument is that where individuals succeeded socially they found themselves politically vilified and when a Jew gained political acceptance they were socially shunned. Arendt maintains that the Jewish problem was a political problem but that the Jews themselves always sought the solution to their problem socially, social assimilation was the overwhelming solution.) Individual Jews managed to occasionally gain acceptance, however this was precisely because they were exceptional Jews. The paradoxical reality is that exceptions were both representative of the Jews and accepted because they were exceptions to this fact: "it was this very ambiguity--that they were Jews and yet presumably not *like* Jews--which opened the doors of society to them.

If they desired this kind of intercourse, they tried, therefore, 'to be and yet not to be Jews'" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 56).

Feeding this phenomenon was the modern discourse concerning equality of condition and the new 18th century humanism that looked to all peoples as being equal examples of humankind. Like the new humanism, the "discourse of equality demands that I recognize each and every individual as my equal" but the "great challenge to the modern period, and its peculiar danger, has been that in it man [sic] for the first time confronted man [sic] without the protection of differing circumstances and conditions" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 54). In other words, Arendt is suggesting here that difference and plurality is fundamental to human existence. Yet in the situation where equality is assumed there is no pretext to explain the differences that inevitably appear, "and thus all the more unequal do individuals and groups become.... Whenever equality becomes a mundane fact in itself... there is one chance in a hundred that it will be recognized simply as a working principle of a political organization in which otherwise unequal people have equal rights; there are ninety-nine chances that it will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is 'normal' if he [sic] is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he [sic] happens to be different" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 54). The interpretation of equality where there is a one in one hundred chance Arendt claims to be a political conception of equality whereas the latter interpretation she considers a "social concept". Under such conditions, real differences become disproportionately amplified and the likelihood of social discrimination increases. Interestingly, Arendt also suggests that these conditions also account for the opposite scenario, for the

likelihood of a disproportionate fascination with difference. These two tendencies ironically are responsible for the pincer movement that leads to an artificial typification of differences that resulted in the "formation of a Jewish type" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 55). For Arendt, there are significant differences between the equality produced in the public realm of natal actors and the equality sought in the social realm. The first she sees as anchored externally in the bright light of the appearance, whereas the second sought equality via an internal, biological inherence.

> The *Confessions* bear witness to that other, Christian empire that Augustine, at the close of antiquity, opened up for centuries to come: the empire of the inner life. 'Soul' for the Greeks did not in any way mean the inner life. Soul represented man's [sic] essence but not the mysterious and unknown realms of his [sic] inner world that were no less hidden to him [sic] than the distant realms of the outer world. The Greeks did not regard those inner realms as histories of their own lives, as biographies. There are of course in Greek literature *bioi*, lives of great men [sic], which are written by others (but even they are not found before the Hellenistic period). They glorify famous men [sic]. (Arendt, 1994: 25)

Arendt felt that one of the great mistakes of Jewish self-interpretation was to respond to social prejudice and discrimination by attempting to assimilate as individuals into respectable society rather than to seek group political emancipation via externally set laws. The context within which certain post-Enlightenment Jews strove to assimilate, saw equality of condition as a venture to be striven for and a new humanism advancing universal humanity as a pretext to this striving. Arendt's contention is that equality of condition, a dangerous and uncertain goal in her terms, was interpreted socially so that equality was believed to be something carried innately or inwardly by each and every person. From this understanding comes the distinction between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal' which tries to account for difference in a world "where equality becomes a mundane fact in itself" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 54). If Arendt has a preference for how to proceed with the issue of equality it is

politically where equality “is recognised as a working principle of a political organization in which otherwise unequal people have equal rights” (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 54).

It is perhaps not surprising that in the context of an inherently conceptualised equality, individuals believed it easier as individuals to prove their normalcy. And what better subjects to prove the ideology of new humanism than exception Jews, who were both at variance with ‘normal,’ respectable society and yet exceptional, rising above the stock from which they came? For a while, Jews were accepted into higher social circles and particularly into the educated salon cultures of Europe. But their admittance was based upon the paradox of the exception: they must be educated enough to rise above other Jews and yet they must be Jewish enough to prove the claim of a universal humanity amongst peoples. This “special discrimination” and “special favour” succeeded in creating a “Jewish type” that was both akin to the genius of an exceptional learning and akin to an alien exoticism (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 55-7). What was decisive was the typification of Jews along psychological, innate lines that malformed the practice of Judaism into “Jewishness” thereby transforming religious affiliation into racial properties. “As far as the Jews were concerned, the transformation of the ‘crime’ of Judaism into the fashionable ‘vice’ of Jewishness was dangerous in the extreme. Jews had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape. A crime, moreover, is met with punishment; a vice can only be exterminated” (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 87)

> … wherever Jews were educated, secularized, and assimilated under the ambiguous conditions of society and state in Western and Central Europe, they lost that measure of political responsibility which their origin implied and which the Jewish notables had

> still felt, albeit in the form of privilege and rulership. Jewish origin, without religious and political connotation, became everywhere a psychological quality, was changed into 'Jewishness,' and from then on could be considered only in the categories of virtue or vice. If it is true that 'Jewishness' could not have been perverted into an interesting vice without a prejudice which considered it a crime, it is also true that such a perversion was made possible by those Jews who considered it an innate virtue. (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 83)

In terms of elaborating Arendt's conception of self and its relation to writing and biography, a schematic is drawn that presents biographical writing originating roughly during the Hellenistic period, altering radically with Saint Augustine who sparked a tradition of edifying *auto*biographical writing ("I have become a question to myself"), and then during the reaction of Romanticism realigning itself to the tune of an autonomous subject whose origin and meaning was no longer the product of a divine presence but whose origin was sought in the deep recesses of an inner life. As Arendt put it in *The Human Condition*, "The greatness of Max Weber's discovery of the origins of capitalism lay precisely in his demonstration that an enormous, strictly mundane activity is possible without any care for or enjoyment of the world whatever, an activity whose deepest motivation, on the contrary, is worry and care about the self. World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 254).

The relationship to self and other that emerged during the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, however, emerged from the paradox of the individual as "exception." With rising secularisation, a vacuum opened where God once stood as origin and judge of meaning leaving the exception's source of individuality buried in the introspective interstices of the inner self. The background against which the exceptional Jew emerged during the 18th century Arendt refers to as the "dark background of misery and poverty" of a "more or

less unknown mass of 'backward brethren'" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 61, 62). Arendt notes two different sorts of exception Jews, Jewish notables and Jewish intellectuals who came into conflict. Jewish notables had a long history of economic assistance to the political class and is at variance with the understanding of exception that Arendt sees as characteristic of this period: "the Jewish notables wanted to dominate the Jewish people and therefore had no desire to leave it, while it was characteristic of Jewish intellectuals that they wanted to leave their people and be admitted to society" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 64). The difference hinges on the assimilatory character of Jewish intellectuals in which their status as exceptions is judged from the vantage point of society, whereas notable Jews were exceptions primarily from the vantage point of the Jewish mass.

5.7. The Self, the Life of the Mind, and Responsibility in Dark Times

Although Arendt set out as a student of philosophy, she abandoned it for a political theory that was antagonistic to philosophy and metaphysics. Consequently, Arendt was fully aware of how strange her project concerning the mental life might appear to readers and even how discomfiting it was to herself: "What disturbs me is that *I* try my hand at it [an analysis of the "life of the mind"], for I have neither claim nor ambition to be a 'philosopher' or be numbered among what Kant, not without irony, called *Denker von Gewerbe* (professional thinkers)" (Arendt, 1978b: 3). Arendt did not return to examine mental activities out of a desire to return to philosophy for its own sake but

because she was propelled by two nagging issues: Adolf Eichmann's "thoughtlessness" and her neglect of the mental side of human capacities in her book, *The Human Condition*. Furthermore, it ought to be noted that Arendt most likely would not have accepted the description of her examination of the life of the mind as "philosophical." While she touches on issues that are considered the domain of philosophy, Arendt's take on the subject matter is essentially anti-philosophical as it examines the mind from the perspective of the world, from the position of a thinker concerned fundamentally with politics. The mention of Kant's "professional thinkers" alludes to Arendt's claim that thinking, willing and judging are aspects of all human lives and to her disdain with the belief that the mental life ought to be considered the special domain of a select few we call philosophers.

The first spur, Eichmann's thoughtlessness, imprinted itself upon Arendt as an uncomfortable "fact": the person of Adolf Eichmann that confronted her at the trial in Jerusalem produced a concrete impression leading to a claim concerning the nature of evil that was not the result of any premeditated of cogitated "theory" of evil). It was this thoughtlessness that led her to conclude that the most extreme form of evil was not malicious or diabolical but banal and led her to ask whether or not there was something about the activity of thinking that could prevent evil-doing. Only a full-fledged examination of mental activity could put to rest the potential link between thought and evil.

The second, less immediate, spur was the fact that her book *The Human Condition* concerned itself with only one half of the human condition, the *vita*

activa, neglecting to cover the other, mental half: the *vita contemplativa*. Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* to rectify what she saw as a misconception and denigration of politics running through the Western tradition of political thought. The misconception boiled down to the fact that the tradition of discourse concerning the *vita activa*—indeed the term itself—was determined by people devoted to the *vita contemplativa*: “What interested me in the Vita Activa was that the contrary notion of complete quietness in the Vita Contemplativa was so overwhelming that compared with this stillness all other differences between the various activities in the Vita Activa disappeared. Compared to this quiet, it was no longer important whether you labored and tilled the soil, or worked and produced use-objects, or acted together with others in certain enterprises” (Arendt, 1978b: 7). In order to understand this tradition of political thought and how it developed from this perspective it is important to examine the nature of the *vita contemplativa* itself: “What are we ‘doing’ when we do nothing but think? Where are we when we, normally always surrounded by our fellow-men [sic], are together with no one but ourselves?” (Arendt, 1978b: 8).

5.8. Thoughtlessness and the Problem of Evil

Hannah Arendt’s coverage (commissioned by *The New Yorker*) of the 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial at Jerusalem was first published in 1963 as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Arendt 2006 [1965]). In the subtitle lay the seed of world-wide Jewish condemnation and of an infamy that left Arendt, to this day, known for the authorship of this book and for the utterance

of that phrase, “the banality of evil” (Arendt, 2006 [1965]: 252). The Nazi state killed by Arendt’s own estimation somewhere “between four and a half and six million” Jewish victims—many whom Eichmann as head of the Reich Centre for Jewish Emigration had transported to the death camps—and yet Arendt was able to conclude that the “radical” evil she earlier described in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was, in fact, “banal” (Arendt, 2006 [1965]: xxiv; 252).[30] How could this be?

The public reaction to the change of terms was swift and hostile and included many friends who had previously praised Arendt’s analyses in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In response to Gershom Scholem’s searing letter attacking *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt replied that in fact the only issue he had not misunderstood was her reformulation of the subject of evil:

> You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of “radical evil.” … It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never “radical,” that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is “thought-defying,” as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its “banality.” Only the good has depth and can be radical. (Arendt, 1978a: 250-251)

In a certain sense, this sounds as if Arendt is returning to Saint Augustine of her doctoral years (Arendt’s (1996 [1929]) PhD thesis *Love and Saint Augustine* was translated into English in 1996) who argued that evil has no nature itself but is rather the corruption or privation of the good that only itself exists: “For what is that which we call evil but the absence of the good?”

[30] Arendt’s discussions of evil are not always transparent and although it is taken that the discrepancy in conceptions of evil lies between either a “radical” or “banal” conception, Arendt occasionally exchanged “radical” for “absolute” and even “incalculable,” and—while she maintained relatively consistent use of the term “banality” from the Eichmann trial onwards—she also on at least one occasion referred to banal evil as “rootless evil” in the essay “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” (Arendt, 2003: 95).

(Augustine, 1974: 65). But for Arendt, unlike Augustine, the emphasis is not upon an evil that "corrupts" a natural good, an evil that penetrates the surface of the body as a "disease" or "wound," or an evil that plumbs the depths of our souls ("what are called vices in the soul") (Augustine, 1974: 65-66). Rather the banality of extreme evil lies in its lack of depth ("it spreads like a fungus on the surface") and its lack of roots, and neither is it nor does it corrupt in terms of a "demonic" or actively motivated corrupting force: "there is nothing" (Arendt, 1978a: 250-251). And unlike Augustine's belief that, prior to evil's corruption, there exists a natural state of goodness ("whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good"), Arendt attacks all notions of a human nature, good or otherwise (Augustine, 1991: 124-125). Regarding human goodness, Arendt's thought is more akin to Kant who argues against the conception of a "state in which various philosophers hoped preeminently to discover the natural goodliness of human nature" (Kant, 1960: 29). Yet, while Arendt's passages on radical evil acknowledge Kant as the source of both the phrase and our thought on "radical evil" (Kant's (1960) *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* sets out an argument for the existence of radical evil), her conception in effect differs significantly from Kant's and later abandons the idea of a "radical" evil altogether.

Kant (1960) discusses the grounds of human evil in his work *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* by opposing it to two extremes: a necessary evil that is constitutive of the human species in general—of residing in humanity's sensuous nature—and a demonic evil resulting from a corrupt, morally

legislative reason that contravenes our natural moral law (the categorical imperative) in favour of the principle of self-love. Kant's claim concerning human evil is that, "He [sic] is conscious of the moral law but has nevertheless adopted into his [sic] maxim the (occasional) deviation therefrom" (Kant, 1960: 28). Kant is keen to dispel any idea of a human nature that is innately good, yet Kant does not want to wind up with an argument for either a conception of human being that is blind to the categorical imperative because of a thoroughly evil will or of a conception that marks evil as constitutive of human beings as a species and therefore as necessary. Evil, on the contrary, is seen as "predicated" of human beings as a "propensity" that is not a necessary evil but a naturally predisposed evil and therefore a "moral" evil. Key to Kant's outline is his desire to maintain humanity's freedom and consequently humanity's accountability, but it remains that this *tendency* is "rooted in man [sic]": "we can further call it a radical innate evil in human nature (yet none the less brought upon us by ourselves)" (Kant, 1960: 29). For Kant, the radical character of evil relates to a fundamental aspect of our humanity, it is radical because, like the "fall of man [sic]," it goes to the core of our being and is the basis of the human potential to ignore the equally fundamental moral calling: "This evil is radical, because it corrupts the ground of all maxims" (Kant, 1960: 33).

While Kant illustrates his argument with specific accounts of evil, the examples are given primarily as way of dispelling any belief in human innate goodness or peacefulness rather than as indicators of what might be considered specifically "radical" evil. This is because Kant's idea of radical is more a deeply imbedded psychology, a propensity to commit evil rooted in our nature as humans;

"radical" pertains to evil's quality, it is precisely its original dictionary definition: "of or pertaining to a root or roots" or "Of qualities: inherent in the nature or essence of a thing or person; fundamental" (Onions, 1933: 1648). However, Arendt's writing concerning radical (and often "absolute") evil hearkens back less to the philological basis of the term "radical" than to its modern use as advanced or extreme. And the emphasis is plainly upon concrete, historical situations under totalitarian rule that brought about a situation of radical evil.

Arendt's use of the phrase "radical evil" appears in the second and subsequent editions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*[31] (Arendt, 1994 [1948]) as that which "emerged in connection with a system in which all men [sic] have become equally superfluous" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 459). Key to the onslaught of human superfluousness is the development of concentration or extermination camps found in the two totalitarian systems Arendt identifies, Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Totalitarian rule produces "total domination" only in these camps that become for it "the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 438). Human superfluousness is brought about by "experiment" in the "scientifically controlled conditions" of the camps by virtue of the destruction of moral personhood, juridical personhood and finally individuality itself. When Arendt talks about radical evil as the bringing about of human superfluousness she makes a claim about the nature of humanity itself. Humans as opposed to animals (as noted in Chapter 3) are,

[31] Arendt's early discussions of absolute or radical evil occur in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as well as earlier published articles that were later revised for use in *The Origins*. Furthermore, there are three editions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that differ in their final sections where Arendt discusses the issue of evil (although the significant differences relating to evil are found in the changes made in the second edition compared to the first).

more than anything else, plural beings that defy any specific human nature. Humanity is defined as plurality: "we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 8). What made the evil perpetrated under the conditions of concentration camps radical or absolute was that they produced or manufactured bodies that strove "to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual,… [with people] reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 438).

In addition to the destruction of human plurality, the concentration camps eliminated spontaneity, an equally important aspect of humanity: "The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghostly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behaviour and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not; for Pavlov's dog, which, as we know, was trained to eat not when it was hungry but when a bell rang, was a perverted animal" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 438). Radical evil strips human beings of humanity by creating conditions where all act alike, thereby losing the plurality that marks their humanity. In addition, the loss of unique, individual action is accompanied by the reduction of action to automation: all acts are predictable about which the idea of laws fit better than tendencies. When individuation, a hallmark of humans as opposed to animals, is abolished there is the loss of spontaneity

and all melt into one: "For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man's [sic] power to begin something new out of his [sic] own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 455).

In a letter written to Karl Jaspers in 1951, Arendt explains her discussion of radical evil at the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

> Evil has proved to be more radical than expected. In objective terms, modern crimes are not provided for in the Ten Commandments. Or: the Western tradition is suffering from the preconception that the most evil things human beings can do arise from the vice of selfishness. Yet we know that the greatest evils or radical evil has nothing to do anymore with such humanly understandable, sinful motives. What radical evil really is I don't know, but it seems to me it somehow has to do with the following phenomenon: making human beings as human beings superfluous (not using them as a means to an end, which leaves their essence as humans untouched and impinges only on their human dignity; rather, making them superfluous as human beings). This happens as soon as all unpredictability—which in human beings, is the equivalent of spontaneity—is eliminated. And all this in turn arises from—or, better, goes along with—the delusion of the omnipotence (not simply the lust for power) of an individual man [sic]. If an individual man [sic] qua man [sic] were omnipotent, then there is in fact no reason why men [sic] in the plural exist at all—just as in monotheism it is only God's omnipotence that makes him [sic] ONE. So, in this same way, the omnipotence of an individual man [sic] would make men [sic] superfluous. (Arendt and Jaspers, 1992: 166)

The superfluousness of humans as humans, the destruction of plurality and spontaneity, is given greater redundancy by the fact that it was done under no rationally, self-interested motive: the destruction of inmates' humanity is not carried out as a "means to an end" but as a mere technique of impersonal management. According to Arendt, radical evil did not properly come about until the administration of the concentration camps changed hands from the SA to the SS and the "abnormal" and "bestial" nature of the SA operations "gave way to an absolutely cold and systematic destruction of human bodies, calculated to destroy human dignity; death was avoided or postponed indefinitely. The camps were no longer amusement parks for beasts in human form, that is, for men [sic] who really belonged in mental institutions and

prisons; the reverse became true: they were turned into drill 'grounds,' on which perfectly normal men [sic] were trained to be full-fledged members of the SS" (Arendt, 1994 [1948]: 454). The camps, operating efficiently with the purposeless, "anti-utility" the SS produced in them, defy any humanly comprehensible understanding in terms of motives and rationale.

The result of these conditions is an evil that people are unable to forgive because it cannot be punished and equally an evil that people are unable to punish because they cannot forgive it.

> It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men [sic] are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offenses which, since Kant, we call 'radical evil' and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene. All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance. Here, where the deed itself dispossesses us of all power, we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: "It were better for him [sic] that a millstone were hanged about his [sic] neck, and he [sic] cast into the sea." (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 241)

The remainder of the discussion concerning radical evil will discuss its "incomprehensibility," the feeling of sheer horror that accompanies this, as well as the further realization of what human beings are now capable of doing: this is the "burden of our time" (the title of the first British edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*). A discussion of the futility of the camps and non-demonic nature of radical evil will then follow as I move into a discussion of the banality of evil thesis. I conclude by returning to Kant's notion of radical evil and discussing how it impinged upon Arendt's adoption of the phrase 'banality of

evil' (or more to the point Arendt's unequivocal rejection of the phrase 'radical evil').

It is not difficult to see why Arendt both hearkens back to Kant and at the same time departs from him in her account of radical evil. On the one hand, Arendt is baffled by the extreme nature of the evil of the holocaust, an evil that went so far beyond anything previously encountered that she could not see any way for it to be either punished or forgiven. The difficulty of punishment lies in finding a punishment that somehow fits the crime and the problem of forgiveness… On the other hand, Arendt is does not see evil as having depth or indeed as rising from the depths of any human nature (in fact Arendt is clearly against the very idea of a human nature) but as existing merely on the surface, the surface of a state of affairs run by the nonpersons who are unable to think and realize what they are doing. Thinking here is identified precisely with depth, with the ability to move beyond the appearances and withdraw into the life of the mind.]

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The factual condition of natality—that it is our birth and not our death that defines human beings—separates the political theory of Hannah Arendt from the mortality focussed tradition of Western thought informing social and political thought and the social sciences. Informed by natality, Arendt's thought challenges the social sciences for disregarding novelty in favour of chasing societal trends, social regularities and norms with the goal of establishing predictive social laws. Correspondingly, the social sciences lack an identified methodology for detecting and assessing novelty, a palpable gap in the field. Even in a scenario where social science retains the research of social regularities as its primary task, one would expect social science to seek methods for accounting for the widest array of social realities, including novelty. As it is, novel actions and events are seen as anomalous and inconsequential in explaining the social, yielding a social research field that sweeps aside idiosyncrasy and diversity at the margins while silently ratifying, if not overestimating, coherence and conformity.

This research sought to redress this lack by exploring the work of a prominent thinker who did not identify with sociology and the social sciences, but who

promised a theoretically distinct account of novelty that establishes claims for the unpredicted and unexpected in political, ethical and empirical terms. Of particular interest was Arendt's emphasis upon elucidating novelty in terms of issues and language familiar to the field of the philosophy of social science (although Arendt is no philosopher of social science). This was helpful as the research set out to consider the philosophical and methodological implications of this unmapped reality for the social scientific field. Yet it is crucial to recognise that the problem of natality is not merely a research gap, it indicates a problem at the heart of social science in the concept of the "social". Therefore, simply suggesting the broadening of research methods by way of an additional "tool" would not encapsulate the extent of the issues at hand. The problem with novelty suggests a problem with sociality itself, with the disciplinary frameworks of social science and activities of researchers in pursuit of the social.

With this in mind and the need to assess the relationship between novelty and social science, Chapter 1 explored the wider literature around the topics of novelty, methodology and social science. While novelty is acknowledged as a highly valued indicator of creativity within cultural modernism, novelty is lacking in early sociological writings such as those by Tarde (2013 [1897]. Tarde identifies meaning and significance in repetitive phenomena whereas singular anomalous phenomena are seen as empty and worthless except as a "curious monstrosity". While this concerns the constitution of the 'proper' object of social science, there is a further methodological problem of what procedures and techniques can be used to prepare for and detect unexpected phenomena. Even when novel singular data are detected they tend to be sorted into an

already explained framework thereby annihilating the very singularity or novelty of the phenomenon. Turning to theories of the sociological imagination, novelty appeared in two broad but distinctive modes for Mills (1959) as the novel and creative interpretation of the sociologist utilising the sociological imagination and the individual biographies of which the sociologist tries to make meaning. The finding is that, for Mills, Giddens, Bauman and Young, the novel creativity of the sociologist is valued whereas the individual biographies only gain meaning when the creative imagination of the sociologist is able to link individual biography to broader regularities, that is, to subsume private troubles under the umbrella of public issues. This renders to the sociologist a privileged position that is denied to the vast majority of people, that is that the sociologist can partake in creative, novelty while in the task of drawing significance from 'wider figurations'. This leaves novelty at the level of the intentional, as a mental exercise and fails to recognise the external novelty of human action and unexpected events. While the novelty of the sociological imagination with its 'quality of mind' is prized, the novelty of individual biographies is diminished by being read as an instance or social, biological or psychological trends.

When looking at novelty in theories of society and social change, the theories of Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Parsons were explored. It was found that while theories of social change might imply novelty, on the contrary, these theories put forward historicist models in evolutionist and historical materialist fashion, on the whole reading change as the product of social and psychological laws and causes. Even Kuhn's (1970 [1962]) research tracking scientific revolutions' paradigmatic change, tended to focus on anomaly in

terms of the paradigmatic frameworks that explained the novel event—novelty is unable to be in itself, but can only be understood when normalised by paradigms. After Kuhn, a number of texts that took novelty as its theme were examined yielding studies that focused on creativity and cultural Modernism, and those that interpreted novelty in terms of history, psychology and biology. No text reviewed viewed novelty in terms of isolated novel acts or events demarcated by beginnings and ends, no text saw novelty as a distinct aspect of social ontology that might be studies or reviewed by social science, no text produced a method for detecting novelty.

Chapter 2 looked at Arendt's arguments relating to methodology and epistemology in light of her theory of natality. This chapter reflected methodologically on the work of Hannah Arendt, arguing that methodological formulae are themselves problematic for Arendt because they do not account for the novelty inherent in human affairs. This is significant because the very nature of meaningful human reality according to Arendt is that it is punctuated by the significance of novel events that become the basis of social change and history (she does not suggest that there are no social processes, trends or regularities, but that it is against these processes that social novelty emerges and from which social change and history is demarcated). It was further argued that epistemology—the confidence eliciting justification of knowledge and foundation for truth claims in the sciences—is equally inappropriate for the study of human affairs because human reality requires "understanding" rather than cognition if it is to make sense of novelty (its search is meaning as opposed to truth). Natal or novel events jar and disturb, they put human beings

out of joint, and so understanding is the process by which people come to terms with (that is “reconcile” themselves to) the utterly new events that disturb our world. Additionally, Arendt’s suspicion of self and of self-examination in part lay behind her disinterest in methodology, a topic explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Arendt's shunning of methodology and epistemology emanates from her reading of the composition of human reality, that is to a prior ontological understanding of the social and political world. That ontology precedes epistemological and methodological consideration is important because it is difficult to make sense of Arendt's claims on method and epistemology without first reckoning with this prior ontology. In the case of methodology, it was shown that Arendt could be seen as holding a qualified form of 'method' (to remain trained upon the novel event while resisting the tendency to fit the event to previously conceived categories of thought) but that this 'method' was fundamentally determined externally, by the novel nature of an external, world event which in fact implied an anti-methodology.

The link between epistemology and ontology comes down to the fact that Arendt seems to produce an epistemology related to her conception of "appearance". However it needs to be understood that, unlike conventional epistemological studies, Arendt's claims originate in, and are derived from, her ontology. Most science proceeds by beginning with methodology and epistemology, with ontological reality following. It is therefore difficult to suggest that Arendt’s work is strictly epistemological. By reversing this philosophical

ordering and beginning with ontology, the emphasis shifts from one of justifying knowledge and seeking certainty via the rational model of truth, to one that disregards the issue of certain knowledge in favour of seeking the meaning (via understanding) of novel events that do not need epistemological justification because they objectively “appear”. Consequently, Arendt’s arguments concerning being and appearance must be read from her ontological claims regarding unexpected novelty and do not in themselves constitute an epistemology.

Chapter 3 examined Arendt’s prior ontological position built upon the ontological reality of natality, which is made manifest in human action. Natality, which enables spontaneous and novel action, was first developed conceptually in Arendt’s (1996 [1929]) PhD thesis *Love and Saint Augustine*. Influenced by Augustine’s claim, “In order that there be such a beginning, man [sic] was created before whom nobody was” (Arendt, 1996 [1929]: 55), Arendt maintains that natality and novelty is fundamentally constitutive of human being, which is realised in human action. So while Arendt identifies the conditions of human existence as life, natality, mortality, worldliness, plurality, and the earth, the key condition that impacts upon the issues of methodology and epistemology is natality. This is because Arendt’s phenomenology of “appearance” is justified and grounded in that which appears the brightest of all. In other words, it is novel actions and events that vie for human attention more than other phenomena, novelty cannot help but be noticed as it shines against a horizon of repetition and regularity. This, it was noted, separates Arendt’s ontology from Heidegger’s: whereas Heidegger continued to view the ontological ground of

presence as a struggle between being and appearance, Arendt collapses the distinction viewing all as appearance where what is given on the surface is the highest mode of being. This provides the ontological ground for Arendt's distinctive anti-methodological method for reading novelty and human action.

Action, also a pivotal domain of social science, was considered in the theories of Parsons and Weber where a reified and overly subjective concept of action is given. Arendt, due to her ontology of being as appearance, opposes theories of action that see the meaning of action bound up in the subjective motivation or intention of the actor. Meaning is not something that can be controlled from within the security of the subjective self when it comes to action. This is because Arendt maintains that action is both boundless and unpredictable. Boundless because it acts into a web of other actors whose reactions then set off their own chains of boundless action. The unpredictability of action further complicates the desire to tie meaning to subjective motivation or intention because, within this boundless space of action and reaction, actors can never predict how others will respond to their interventions. Actions, while they are novel beginnings, cannot be understood until an end point for the action is established. Consequently, the meaning of a social act is determined after the fact from the position of spectators, from the standpoint of the world and not the self. Action for Weber, while it may be directed outward to somebody or something social, is in effect understood as a subjective process where meaning is controlled if not determined by the sovereignty of intent. Arendt's method of true understanding, however, stays fixed upon the act as it appears externally in the world to the vantage point of the spectator. Arendt's anti-

methodological method detects the novelty of human action via Arendt's phenomenology of appearance. This approach yields a method where the location of meaning resides outside the immanent realm of an actor's subjective motivation or intention. On the contrary, the location of meaning is determined externally at the point of interplay between the shock of the new and a community of spectators seeking the reconciliatory process of true understanding.

Chapter 3 also introduced the metaphors of movement that contribute to her differentiation of human activities and indicate key historical changes and the concept of "process" that Arendt sees as the embodiment of the modern concept of history. Functioning as an all encompassing process under which all individuals, acts and events are subsumed, process was explored by going back to Hegel's philosophy of history and becoming. The significance here is that in the context of a world where social change is interpreted as process, novelty struggles to emerge or stand out as it becomes incorporated into History devoid of a meaning of its own. This provided foreshadowing for Chapter 4 examination of the rise of the 'social' during the modern age, and where movement was revisited as a background context or horizon against which novelty reveals itself. Arendt, following Augustine, sees human beings as *initium*, the initiators needed to bring about a disturbance or rupture in the monotonous passage of time. These disturbances initiated by human beings break the cycle of nature where humans insert themselves, their projects and their works into an artificial world.

The problem, identified in Chapter 4, was the emergence of a new realm to counter the realms of the private and public, the “social”. Here what is meant by ‘social’ was queried both outside and from within Arendt’s thought. For Arendt, the “social” was congruent with the emergence and transference of the force of nature, traditionally apportioned to the private realm, to the public, political world. The movement, character and urgency of nature gradually infiltrated itself into politics and human action displacing the freedom, indeterminacy and unexpected characteristics of novel human action. Functional, utilitarian and guided by an administrative ethic, Arendt viewed the rise of the social and with it the rise of the nation-state as politics cum administrative housekeeping. Arendt’s narrative of the rise of the social resembles and is analogous to Foucault’s (1991) claims concerning the emergence of biopolitics and governmentality where he sees the modern age as the emergence of “population”, with a welfare state bent on political *economy*, and the development of statistics as a way to manage population. The issue for Arendt, is that the “social” threatened the public sphere and human action, it threatened to replace novelty with mass conformity and with “socially” desirable private, economic interest and lust for power. An all consuming “social” realm that eliminates the possibility of novel action eliminates also the responsibility that goes hand in hand with that action. Social scientists that disregard the unpredictable novelties that natal actors initiate and that flatten the spheres of human activity with a functionalism that marginalises natality in favour of statistical expectancies will continue to find it difficult to locate a genuine place for responsibility in its field.

Chapter 5 examines the intricacies of the self for The dualism of internal/external, of darkness/light, of private/public are used throughout this chapter to demonstrate the critique Arendt mounts against the metaphysical separation of ‘true’ being and ‘mere’ appearance, in favour of Arendt’s phenomenological method of the surface. The chapter concludes with a final case study looking at the character of evil in terms of an internal, rooted, “radical” evil vs the surface dwelling, exterior, “banal” evil she detected in Eichmann. The experience of witnessing Eichmann on trial in Jerusalem was experienced as a novel event by Arendt, it threw her, demanding that she discard her prior theories and frameworks for considering evil. Rather than return to the frameworks to fit Eichmann back into the established understanding of evil, Arendt refused to let go of the novelty that confronted her. The consequences and fallout, the excommunication she endured from sectors of the Jewish community, demonstrated how difficult it is, or just how acclimatised human beings are to the “social”, to the process character of thought that resists the world’s novelty.

For Arendt, natality is “the miracle that saves the world” (Arendt, 1998 [1958]: 247). Natality strikes an existence that would otherwise turn endlessly in nature’s cycle and overthrows our prior forms of understanding, leaving us bereft with only the appearance of novelty itself. So while the tradition of western metaphysics begins or takes its starting point or point of significance from the fact of mortality, Arendt begins with novelty, with new beginnings, with birth, because according to Arendt this is how we appear in the world and how the world appears to us: like a miracle, an appearance from nowhere, rather than the disappearance of death, a loss into the invisible depths.

It is this ontological basis that leads her to focus upon appearance and her rejection of the two-world theory of 'true' being and 'mere' appearance. Significantly Arendt takes the argument further by arguing for a primacy or priority of appearance, as semblance or surface, and it is from this that we find her 'method' enacted as a theory of action understood in terms of an objective rather than subjective meaning of action (rather than action understood in terms of motivation and intent). Human action in the world is made meaningful objectively because it appears to a world of spectators who can confirm and discuss its meaning and significance intersubjectively. Furthermore, Arendt's theory of self which is not illustrated in terms of an interior self, managed/controlled or enabled by introspection, thought, feeling or mind. Rather she sees a conception of self that resides on the surface. This is how Arendt responded to the appearance of Eichmann in Jerusalem, his novelty threw her out of joint as he deified the image of a monster, devil, or sadistic killer. Moreover, Arendt concluded that evil could never be radical (rooted, involving psychological depth) and, at its most extreme, it is only ever banal, overgrowing the surface like a fungus. The social, significant in that it threatens the condition of natality, threatens to destroy the private and public realms (the space for appearance) replacing it with a space where human beings experience life not in its individuality and novelty, but as a species defined by regularity and normalcy.

Arendt anti-methodological method is important for social science because it stretches beyond science by adding to the fields of societal analysis a 'method'

and a cue for incorporating a part of human reality that science has thus far been poor at recognising, theorising, and assessing. Arendt's arguments are significant because they challenge the traditional sociological schools that seek regularity and go further in suggesting that the most significant aspect of reality (what in her terms is the very fabric of reality itself) is human natality and novelty. There is a normative aspect to this argument as Arendt attempts to "save the appearances" as a way for preserving human dignity in terms of their being suited to the only earth and world that they know, and in terms of human action distinguishing itself against the monotony of labour and the tyrannical control of work, in terms of the dignity of human plurality. Natality and novelty are integral to human living, but are neither reducible to the psychological, biological, historical or the "social" Nevertheless, an ability to conceptualise novelty, to recognise its role and status in existence and thought is crucial for social science. It is in this way that Arendt helps provide a methodology for social science, despite her apparent reluctance to provide any such theory.

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