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Conference topic:

- (changing) perspectives on the “human condition”

Title: *Praxis, logos and theoria* – the threefold structure of the human condition

**ABSTRACT** (400 words)

Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* is famous for the distinction between *Vita Activa* (the intersubjective life of action) and *Vita Contemplativa* (the contemplative and solitary life in the realm of thought). This distinction has been the target of critique made by political theorists, philosophers and social scientist alike. One of the most problematic aspects of this distinction seems to be the question of how the *Vita Activa* and *Vita Contemplativa* are interrelated. Why oppose thinking and acting? Is not thinking a form of praxis?

In this paper I argue that in order to understand how the two modes of human life are interrelated, careful attention must be paid on how Arendt uses the concepts of *praxis* (action), *theoria* (theory) and *logos* (language). I claim that Arendt is making neither an ontological nor a transcendental distinction between two radically different modes of being. She is not promoting a dualistic ontology or an elitist conception of society. Instead, Arendt claims that the two realms are tightly intertwined in the multifaceted human life. For Arendt, philosophy is a form of practice that is always tied to the use of language. Unlike the Ancient Greek philosophers and later rationalist thinkers - for whom reason (*nous*) precedes language (*logos*) – Arendt holds that thinking is always already linguistic. Human beings think in terms of concepts and metaphors. The disclosure of who someone is happens by means of speech and action. Thus, it is politically significant what concepts we use for describing various events and phenomena. This awareness of the role of language brings in also an element of responsibility into Arendt’s philosophy. Political action (*praxis*) requires a theoretical framework according to which human beings can act politically. However, this theory cannot be conceptualized in the form of a totalitarian or divine law. Instead, for Arendt the contingent and fragile human habitat must be supported by legal institutions and agreements such as international law. The relevance of Arendt’s philosophy is thus still significant when analyzing such contemporary political phenomena as the “war on terrorism”.