

Freedom as a Mode of Thought: Hannah Arendt

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This paper focuses on Hannah Arendt's ideas concerning freedom and the political in the Greek polis. By outlining the structure of the notions of labour, work, and action in relation to thinking, responsibility, and necessity, it aims to explore the possibility of thinking about freedom in the context of contemporary society. Arendt's phenomenological reflections on the nature of human beings and the significance of the political in Western society within the framework of the decline of Europe encompass a broad spectrum of themes. It traces the origins of Western culture and exposes how the evolving dynamics of the private and public, thought and action, and the progress of science and technology have contributed to a way of thinking that has led to the emergence of totalitarianism.

Keywords: *freedom, work, labour, action, political, human being*

“What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing”
Hannah Arendt

In the modern age, significant shifts in human self-understanding have occurred, prompting reflection on the essence of humanness in contemporary times. This leads to the crucial question: can the true, original meaning of freedom be restored in Europe? These inquiries are interconnected, and the absence of a coherent systematic philosophy in Arendt's work underscores her commitment to cultivating a thought process that is vital and authentically reflective. Her thinking, rooted in ontologically significant questions, forms a political theory grounded in profound philosophical insights. Arendt, despite never identifying as a philosopher, addresses essential themes, interweaving the political, freedom, and thought. Her reflections on the human experience in the world are deeply entwined with considerations of place and the act of thinking, resonating with the realities and practicalities of human activity, especially when confronting the painful historical events of 20th-century Europe. These two dimensions, it appears, serve as the cornerstones of Arendt's thought, embodying a vitalism of time and space. Firstly, Arendt de-substantializes the political, illustrating that plurality, freedom, and unpredictability are inseparable elements essential for constructing a meaningful world. Secondly, she regards spatiality as the fundamental condition of human existence. These two principles form the bedrock of Arendt's political theory. A pivotal question arises in this context: What does freedom entail in her thought, and where does it find its place in the contemporary world?

In *'The Human Condition,'* Arendt directs attention to a pivotal event in recent history: the 1957 launch of the first-ever man-made object into the universe. This

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milestone marks a crucial point in human history—a 'step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth.' Arendt's contemplation of this event prompts a profound reevaluation of human existence. She raises the fundamental question: Is this departure from natural conditions merely a pursuit of progress and a demonstration of the spirit of scientific exploration, or does it delve deeper, suggesting broader implications related to technological progress that may potentially undermine and alter the ontological status of the human being in the world?

Arendt develops a comprehensive political hermeneutics, grounded in fundamental ontological insights into human existence in the world. Here, thinking and acting intertwine in the realm of the public. Originally, Arendt intended to title her work *The Vita Activa* to underscore the focus on the three fundamental activities of human beings. However, recognizing that in the Western tradition, *'vita activa'* was often conceived in opposition to and subordinate to *'vita contemplativa,'* considered a passive state of contemplation, she ultimately refrained from this title. In Arendt's framework, thinking and acting coincide, intimately connected to questions of freedom and responsibility. Her concept of *'vita activa'* takes a distinctive orientation, diverging from the traditional reception of the term.

Arendt's political thought is inherently hermeneutical, signifying, firstly, that human beings lack a pre-given nature by which actions can be judged. Secondly, it asserts that human activity is reflexive—individuals, as creators of the world, are, in turn, conditioned by the things and deeds they create. This notion is rooted in Heidegger's assumption about the historicity of human beings. However, Arendt extends this argument beyond the realm of being and into the political sphere, demonstrating that human beings are conditioned by their activities in the world. She articulates this through three capacities: labour, work, and action. Arendt looks to the Greek polis as a model where these activities were distinct, each forming a different life-form and establishing specific relationships between human beings, space, and time. Labour, essentially centered on the pure maintenance of life, engages with the natural level of human existence, perpetuating the circular time of everydayness. In the Greek polis, labour, tasked with addressing life's necessities, was relegated to the slaves. On the other hand, work represents the activity that crafts the world of artifice — creating durable and purposeful objects. Work contributes to worldliness, sustaining and establishing the rectilinear order of time, intimately connected to the lifespan of the human being. The third mode of life that Arendt distinguishes is action and speech, fundamentally differing from the former two. While labour and work can be realized in solitude, preserving the private sphere, action takes place in the public domain, establishing the political realm as a space of appearance. Importantly, action does not necessitate or yield any material medium or artifact. The political realm constitutes the space of freedom—a canvas for the creation of historical narratives that bestow higher meaning upon human life. Unlike mere necessities of life, the political is a realm where individuals, by acting politically, exercise the freedom to achieve a form of immortality—being memorialized among others and inscribed in history. Arendt posits that the true freedom of human beings emerges

when liberated from the necessities inherent in the maintenance of life, finding expression in the shared realm with others. A human being is not born free; rather, they are born for freedom.

For Arendt, the political, as the space of plurality, is forged by free and equally distinguished citizens who contribute their unique perspectives to common deeds. This realm is the creation of the common, a process that imbues new meaning and shapes the human world. It transcends the worldliness and utility that tie human beings to the level of animality:

“Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the common nature of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of positions and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object.” (Arendt 1998, p. 58)

The human condition of labour is life itself.

The human condition of work is worldliness.

The human condition of action is plurality.

The characteristics assigned by Arendt to labour and work reveal their close connection to the conditions under which human life on Earth has been given, implicating a mode of thinking conditioned by necessity—a primarily instrumental one:

“Labour manifests itself in extremis in the form of dehumanizing automatic processes and compulsive repetitions that displace the human death; work manifests itself in extremis in the form of dehumanizing fabricating processes and instrumentalized objectifications that violate human life.” (Villa 2000, p. 97)

In contrast, action establishes the 'in between' world and shapes the space of plurality, forging relations among distinct yet equal citizens. The political realm cannot be exercised in isolation or solitude; rather, it requires the participation of individuals in shared discourse. Political speech, unlike the instrumental and necessary nature found in the household (*'oikos'*) defined by labour and work, takes on the character of action, becoming an integral part of a political lifestyle.

If we consider these three activities as distinct modes of thought, it becomes intriguing to explore their ontological interconnection in contemporary society. In the Greek polis, these activities were separated into the three parts of society. Arendt, however, does not advocate for the acceptability of slavery as a part of society. Instead, she aims to demonstrate that the logic of labour must be excluded from the political realm. This mode of life, ideally, serves as the avant-garde of human existence, where speech becomes an avant-garde form of action, not driven by practical aims but serving to expose oneself to others, creating a common world imbued with meaningfulness. In this context, the political necessitates a form of thinking untainted by pre-given motives or adherence to general principles; it constitutes free action. As political action aligns with historical narrative, its essence lies not in the material realm but in the realm of free and truthful thinking, as manifested in narrative and remembrance. Arendt underscores the Socratic

virtue of thinking, aimed at cultivating truthful citizens. (Arendt, 1977, p. 81) Thinking, she argues, is indispensable for politics, and truthful thinking is inherently motivated by freedom, in stark contrast to the practical considerations of sciences driven by instrumentalization and necessity. Action and speech converge when they presuppose an answer to the question 'Who are you?' posed to a newcomer in the realm. This answer reveals the individual both in words and deeds, highlighting the revelatory and initiatory aspects of action and speech. Notably, action without speech would forfeit both revelation and subject, underscoring the ontological tie between speech and truth, as well as being and thinking.

Arendt's comprehension of truthful thinking and the political, which bestows human existence with meaning in opposition to scientific thinking, requires closer observation. To elucidate her understanding of truth and the notion of meaning in the political, she refers to Leibniz's distinction between two kinds of truths — truth of reason and truth of fact. According to Leibniz, the only reliable truth is the truth of reason, exemplified by mathematical reasoning, which is intrinsically necessary, and its opposite is *per se* impossible. In contrast, the truth of fact is considered to be contingent, allowing for the possibility of opposite states of affairs.

Leibniz, following an ages-old tradition dating back to at least Plato, regards mathematical reasoning as a paradigm for thinking, assigning a higher ontological value to necessity over contingency. Arendt diverges from this tradition, asserting that if the truth of reason is universally accessible to everyone with equal cognitive abilities, the truth of fact can never be witnessed by everyone. Moreover, she emphasizes that 'the true opposite of factual, as distinguished from rational, truth is not error or illusion but the deliberate lie.' (Arendt, 1977, p. 59).

Arendt rejects the necessity of the truth of reason, contending that even mathematical truth, traditionally viewed as necessary, is a product of the human brain—natural and not universally binding. Given that the human being is conditioned by its faculties, Arendt seeks to unveil meaning and liberate thought from the necessity that conditions it. She delineates two types of human faculties: thinking and knowing, drawing on Kant's distinction between reason (*Vernunft*) and intellect (*Verstand*). Intellect, identified as the faculty of cognition and the apprehension of perception, strives to comprehend what is given to the senses.

It is manifested in sciences, in the means-end operation of the mind, and provides us with objective, factual knowledge. Reason, on the other hand, is the faculty of thinking that Arendt explicitly refers to as *thinking* in her philosophy and is foundational to her theory of the political. Reason, conceived as a reflective praxis, involves comprehension. It seeks not merely the verifiable truth but aims to understand *meaning*. Arendt describes it as the 'sixth sense' that imparts meaning to the world, complementing the insights gathered by our other five senses.

"[...] truth is located in the evidence of the senses. But that is by no means the case with meaning and with the faculty of thought, which serves for it; the latter does not ask what something is or whether it exists at all, [...] but what it means for it to be." (Arendt, 1977, p. 59)

We can distinguish that intellect operates with substantial knowledge, rooted in the evidence of the senses or rationality. On the other hand, reason, as the faculty of thought, engages in a quest for relational understanding 'in between' the given, aspiring to grasp the constellation of relations—the meaning of the state of affairs. In terms of the human condition, the pursuit of knowledge might raise questions about 'the human nature,' but it cannot lead us to what Arendt seeks—'the human condition'—providing an answer to *'Who is a human being?'* instead of *'What is a human being?'* Arendt establishes a strong demarcation between common sense (encompassing scientific rationality and practical calculation) and thinking. Common sense seeks to apprehend the given through the senses (*Verstand*) — its desire is 'to grasp,' aiming for truth *within its reach*. In contrast, *Vernunft*, or thinking, strives to explore and establish meaning not directly evident in the immediate grasp of things. It can be likened to the process of wandering and wondering, searching for explanations rather than definitive answers. These two modes manifest in two distinct types of human activity:

“Within [the] metaphors of the manual labourer and the knight-errant, the distinction is consistent. Vernunft can establish meaning while on the quest, and this establishment is its special business – a capacity denied to the Verstand of science and of common sense.”

Arendt doesn't reject the connection between thinking and knowing; she introduces this distinction methodologically to elucidate the consequences of the prevalence and manifestation of each in the human world. Thinking and knowing are interrelated, but in the scientific enterprise, thinking assumes a specific role—operating as a means to an end. The outcome of this means-end operation is knowledge. While the end is determined by a non-scientific question—'what is worth knowing'—and although withdrawn from the world of evidence and appearances, it serves to discover better methods or more promising approaches toward the goal: reliable, verifiable, and usable knowledge:

“Science in this respect is but an enormously prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected. [...] The very concept of an unlimited progress, [...] is the best documentation of the fact that all science still moves within the realm of common sense experience, subject to corrigible error and deception.” (Arendt, 1977, p. 54)

The modern world, according to Arendt (1998, p. 248), is characterized by the triumph of common sense and marked by three significant events – the discovery of America, the Reformation, and the invention of the telescope. Of these, the development of a new science that contemplates the nature of the earth from the viewpoint of the universe is considered most crucial. Arendt refers to Archimedes' *dos rnoi pou sto* (Arendt 1998, p. 262) and contends that, while we remain bound to the earth, we have discovered a way to act and think from this universal Archimedean standpoint, as if standing outside. She notes, 'even at the risk of endangering the natural life process, we expose the earth to universal, cosmic forces alien to nature's household' (Arendt 1998, p. 262).

The universal and rational standpoint of modern science has also influenced philosophy, notably introduced through the famous Cartesian doubt. This philosophical stance exemplifies modernity's inclination to challenge traditional notions of truth based on sensory experience, revelation, or reason. Cartesian doubt eroded human confidence in the world, leading to the collapse of the traditional duality between being and appearance. In this doubt, the concept that truth, in an absolute sense, exists at all was questioned. Rather than adhering to the understanding that appearances merely hide the true being, a different kind of being emerged – one that actively creates its own appearances. The modern age remains haunted by the consequences of this doubt. Firstly, because the world and senses are deemed unreliable, capable of unveiling grand illusions. Secondly, it has implications for the human condition. It became evident not only that the world was not ruled by God but that some malevolent force, enticing human beings into a web of illusion, had taken its place. The overarching uncertainty resulting from this realization led to the perception of a human being as a 'creature that harbors a notion of truth only to endow it with faculties that will never enable it to reach any truth, never allow it to be certain of anything.' (Arendt 1998, p. 277). Arendt observes that this motive has been a decisive aspect of modern morality since its emergence. What was irreversibly lost was the certainty in any truths that could be universally accepted. This loss fundamentally weakened the level of conviction, introducing latent doubt into the human mind. Cartesian thinking is grounded in the assumption that the only things the mind can be certain of are those created by the mind itself. This marked the ascent of modern sciences with a particular emphasis on mathematics, a trend that intensified in the modern age with the industrialization of all spheres of human experience. The Archimedean point in the Cartesian context shifted into the human mind itself; what was now considered common sense was actually the very structure of the human mind that happened to be common. The criterion for truthful knowledge became the appropriate play of the mind with itself. Without any doubt, this process signifies the shift and alienation of the human mind from worldliness, sensuality, and given reality. Neither God nor an evil spirit can affect the certainty that 'two and two is four.'

Interestingly, along with the new philosophy, modern science emerged with a belief in progress and immense optimism in humanity's ability to learn and think. This optimism wasn't applied to each individual but to the succession of generations capable of accumulating knowledge and advancing mankind. Arendt notes that 'Progress became the project of Mankind, acting behind the backs of real man—a personified force that we find somewhat later in Adam Smith's 'invisible hand,' in Kant's 'ruse of nature,' Hegel's 'cunning of Reason,' and Marx's 'dialectical materialism' (Arendt, 1977, p. 153).' This introduces the third mode of thought alongside thinking and scientific cognition – logical reasoning. Logical reasoning produces knowledge in the mind that is reliable to the mind—logical deductions from self-evidence and the subordination of the particular under the general. Logical reasoning can be understood as the production of this 'personalized' sphere of knowledge, creating the world of theory which, in the modern age, is applied to actual states of affairs and experiences to analyze and

predict outcomes. With each step of ever-further rationalization and functionalization of the faculties of the human mind, the human being has become increasingly alienated from the *non-functional* and *unnecessary* realms of life. This process results in a more utilitarian approach, stripping certain spheres of life of their sacredness. In this context, the feature of measurability has taken the place of the sacred, not necessarily in a religious sense.

This same structural shift has been manifested in the political, social, and economic organization of Western society based on the new understanding of humanity as a rational 'subject.' In the pre-modern world, economic and political structures were interconnected, with private property and wealth being indistinguishable and constituting the political status of a free citizen. However, in the modern world, there is a collapse of the private and public in the social domain. Historically initiated by the transformation of private property into a public concern, the rise of economics coincides with the expropriation of the private property of peasants around the time of the Reformation. This transformation fundamentally changed the understanding of wealth and property, introducing the rise of common wealth.

In the modern world, property has been detached from its sacredness and bondage to a specific place, becoming nothing more than privately consumable wealth without any further *political* meaning. This initial stage introduced a centuries-long process of the distinction between private and public that later escalated in capitalism, where wealth transformed into capital capable of producing more capital. Capital began to lead its own *personalized* life. Changes in the perception of private property do not necessarily abolish private property itself; rather, this shift implies a certain alienation both in terms of place and the meaning of wealth. Wealth and property are no longer bound to the earth, house, or a specific location; they are virtually changeable and mobile. These changes have not only deprived humans of a place in the world in a political sense but also from a home as a shelter from the outer world. Since the public has become the concern of the private, and the private the only concern of the public, it is the social realm where the only common concern is each individual's private interest, leaving no place for political action.

The real consequence of the social is that it excludes the very possibility of action that was previously relegated to the household, as the common has now become a vast *household*. Economics has attained its status as the social measurement of human activity because humans have become social beings adhering to certain patterns of behavior, representing the only way to express one's individuality, tied to what one 'does for life' and what one consumes. Logically, the social era brings about the liberation of labour as the *meaning* of human life, where one's value is solely measured by one's skill, which can be reduced to mere labour power and productivity. In modern society, thinking follows a means-end pattern, and, according to the three kinds of human activity, a kind of paradox emerges. Although alienated from his milieu, the human being thinks in terms of necessity, which has been elevated to a higher level of value. As Arendt notes, 'It is not that in the modern world there would not be poetry, philosophy, or politics, but the fact that these spheres of human activity are

reduced to satisfying human needs—those of public admiration or financial reward—and are not able to constitute the public sphere as a space in which things are saved from the destruction of time.’ (Arendt 1998, p. 57).

The three modes of life in the Greek polis are directly related to three modes of thinking and, correspondingly, to three kinds of 'discourses' in the contemporary world. In the Greek polis, thought was manifested in the political realm as speech and action; this thinking is free, without any aim, deemed 'useless' as it lacks an end or goal outside itself. Today, this mode of thinking appears to be preserved in philosophy and the arts. Instrumental cognition, on the other hand, manifested in work, created worldliness, and pursued definite aims. It produces knowledge that is practically usable, representing the technological power of scientific progress. Logical reasoning, seemingly elevated to higher reliability, actually represents the measurable brain power of a human being, comparable to labour power. In the polis, this mode of thinking was a task for slaves, representing the power of the *human animal* developed in its metabolism with nature. "The tragedy of the modern age lies in the dominance of this way of thinking, extending its influence across all fields of human expression. It functions as a prevailing mindset in the contemporary world, where the consummation and satisfaction of primal needs, such as 'making a living,' play the central role in human life, regardless of one's pursuits. The ascent of labour, which permeates all spheres of human activity in the modern age, also signifies a radical change in moral standards. As Arendt notes, these standards are 'inspired by the needs and ideals of its most important group of men, the new scientists; and the modern cardinal virtues—success, industry, and truthfulness—are at the same time the greatest virtues of modern science. (Arendt 1998, p. 17).

In the social realm, the human being is led by the mode of rational operating rather than truthful thinking. Here, scientific discourse in the form of economics, social sciences, and anthropology prevails, constituting a mere derivation from common sense and *Verstand*. Rationality, withdrawn from actual involvement in the world, appears to be an attempt at *liberation* rather than the establishment of true freedom. In the modern age, politics, reduced to predictability and statistics, has transformed into a vast administrative apparatus for social maintenance and political technologies. It strives to exclude the very possibility of spontaneous, free actions, categorizing them as deviant and asocial. This aspect reveals the latent totalization of the modern world, where a heterogeneous field of human activity has been subjected to measurable statistics and general rules. Consequently, this process naturalizes human existence to measure and predict its course in the future. The far-reaching political consequences of this trend risk leading to ideologies and principles that may undermine the true value of human beings, as witnessed in totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Arendt addresses this question in her work 'On Violence,' noting the risk of reducing action to random events or irrelevant exceptions, a phenomenon that has occurred with the rise of social sciences aiming to theorize human experience.

“The danger is that these theories are not only plausible, because they take their evidence from actually discernible present trends, but that, because of their inner consistency, they have a hypnotic effect; they put to sleep our common sense, which

is nothing else but our mental organ for perceiving, understanding, and dealing with reality and factuality." (Arendt 1970, p. 110)

When the political transforms into the social, everything becomes predictable at the cost of the future. Governance is replaced by socioeconomic administration, presupposing 'objectivity' and usability. The modern world emerged with the prevalence of a *scientific* ideal in the socioeconomic organization of Europe. The modern age can be defined by the dominance of *scientific* thinking in socio-political organization, transforming it into a mere ideology. Scientific thinking reduces meaning to common sense structures. It is incapable of creating a world, making a *home*, or producing *meaning*. Instead, it has established a society that is predictable and measurable, trapped in the circularity of consummation. This is a society that has altered its temporality and deprived itself of the relationship with the infinite and with immortality. The modern world itself has been determined by technological and practical know-how, derived from the universal, distinguished from natural laws, and divorced from involvement in the realm of appearances:

"[...] there are, indeed, few things that are more frightening than the steadily increasing prestige of scientifically minded brain trusters in the councils of government during the last decades. The trouble is not that they are cold-blooded enough to "think the unthinkable", but that they do not think." (Arendt 1970, p. 108)

A society blinded by the rational speculations of the mind and sheer scientific development is on a train to nowhere, for it lacks the very sense that was inscribed in the origins of Europe — the sense of true freedom, which actually constitutes human beings as truly *human*. Arendt goes so far as to liken it to a desert, a world stripped of everything 'in between,' of everything 'useless' that imparts life with an untimely dimension and allows the actual construction of a world where worldliness and usefulness gain significance. The spirit of discovery, which appears to strive to extend the limits of the human world and experience, ultimately abolishes distance: 'nothing can remain immense if it can be measured, and every survey brings together distant parts, thereby establishing closeness where distance ruled before.' (Arendt 1998, p. 250).

If we distinguish between two basic modes of thought – one instrumentalized and subjected to aims, and the other free – we can see how they are connected to two modes of freedom in Arendt's thought. She refers to the two foundational legends of the Western world – Roman and Hebrew. Both legends assert that the supreme act in which 'We' was constituted as a definable entity implied that 'the inspiring principle of action is love of freedom, both in the negative sense of liberation from oppression and in the positive sense of the establishment of Freedom as a stable, tangible reality.' (Arendt 1977, p. 203). The difference and link between these two terms – negative liberation and actual, positive freedom – have far-reaching consequences for the problematic of freedom in the contemporary world. Both legends begin with an act of liberation (from slavery in Egypt and by the burning of Troy) and are narrated from the perspective of a new state of freedom acquired through the spontaneity of beginning something new. There exists an abyss between the act of liberation from the previous order and true

positive freedom, exercised without any reliable chain of causality. As Arendt puts it, 'liberation, though it may be freedom's condition *sine qua non*, is never the condition *per quam* that causes freedom – there is nothing left for the “beginner” to hold on.' (Arendt, 1977, p. 208).

The abyss that marked the beginning of true freedom has been obstructed by the reliable rationality of modern sciences, particularly starting with Descartes. Theories attempting to reconcile freedom with necessity relied on dialectical speculations, hinging solely on the abilities of the mind. The modern subject, apprehensive of the unreliability of reality, appears to be hesitating on the edge of the abyss. Creating verifiable truth in the mind, they stand before the leap into the unknown to establish positive, life-affirmative freedom. Liberation as purposeful activity presupposes acting in accordance with a certain logic and causality toward a goal, manifesting instrumentalized thinking. In contrast, true positive freedom does not follow this course of intellect; instead, it searches for its own way of being and creates its meaning. The launch of Sputnik marked a symbolic moment, signifying humanity's yearning to break free from the confines of Earth. In the age of technological thinking, characterized by an insatiable drive for discovery, humans seek a form of freedom that transcends their natural condition. However, it becomes apparent that this pursuit may be more about attempting to escape rather than establishing genuine freedom. The role of thinking, especially within scientific discourse, which tends to instrumentalize various aspects of human life, underscores the enduring presence of alienation since the inception of the modern world. Humanity is attempting to escape its own imprisonment through the wrong doors. By challenging natural limits, it poses a threat to the future and reduces life to mere survival. Indeed, the same kind of life will persist in the same kind of imprisonment even if a human being is able to create their own conditions and start living on Mars, for instance. Scientific achievements in the 20th century can no longer be judged according to common sense because scientific reality has become too alienated from the lived experience of human beings. Arendt highlights the real danger of the loss of the political, where deeds could be judged according to what they truly mean for human beings. What is at stake here is not common sense but understanding.

“The quest for meaning is “meaningless” to common sense and common-sense reasoning because it is the sixth sense's function to fit into the world of appearances and make us at home in the world given by our five senses; that we are and no questions asked.” (Arendt, 1977, p. 59)

To find meaning is to make a home. Creating a household and satisfying natural needs is one basic organization of the milieu and everydayness, whereas making a home means finding and creating a fundamentally new status for human beings in space and time, beyond mere survival. Human beings exercise this freedom in responsibility, extended through action, transcending worldliness and everydayness. What I claim is that these three activities represent three different modes of thinking and lead us to a more reasonable analysis of the relationship between thinking, freedom, and necessity. This triad also expresses the hermeneutical structure of Arendt's thought, showing that they are not only

interrelated in the very fabric of human experience, but also that the meaning of this experience can be given only in freedom:

“The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other organisms.” (Arendt 1998, p. 2)

Arendt's conception of freedom places her in opposition to the traditional Western view of a free agent who remains independent from external circumstances and guides his actions by his own will, where unpredictability merely implies being subject to sheer contingency. Arendt's political agent is not a "victim of circumstances"; instead, they embrace the unknown, creating meaning themselves, being truthful and responsible in their appearance. Their action becomes transformative, actively contributing to the creation of the world. Arendt's interpretation of political freedom takes on a different meaning, closely connected to necessity. She upholds the priority of the will's initiatory power over reason's demand for precedent and comprehensibility, a perspective she finds in the thought of the thirteenth-century theologian Duns Scotus. This aspect of Arendt's understanding of the "non-sovereign quality of freedom" (Villa, 2000, p. 181) alters the very concept of the political, legitimizing truthful thinking and spontaneous action in this realm:

“Events, by definition, are occurrences that interrupt routine procedures; only in a world in which nothing of importance ever happens could the futurologists' dream come true. Predictions of the future are never anything but projections of present automatic processes and procedures, that is, of occurrences that are likely to come to pass if men do not act and if nothing unexpected happens; every action, for better or worse, and every accident necessarily destroys the whole pattern in whose frame it finds its evidence.” (Arendt 1970, p. 109)

It is evident that the political, subjected to the mindset of the rational, scientific ideal, loses its spontaneous dimension and, consequently, the possibility to create a temporal relation to the infinite, which is only possible when open thinking, as a search for and establishment of meanings, is present. This quest for meaning, as demonstrated, is "meaningless" for common sense, and Arendt refers to thinking as the "sixth sense," the function of which is "to fit us into the world of appearances and make us at home in the world given by our five senses" (Arendt 1977, p. 59). A society that lives solely according to practical motivations is deprived of the meaning and importance of human life. Freedom, exercised in the political realm, initially appearing as a mere, unnecessary benefit for the privileged, turns out to be the essential activity that actually constitutes the vital condition of the authentic world of humanity. In the Greek polis, wealth allowed individuals to be free for public activity. In the modern world, wealth has become a form of liberation enjoyed by individuals in the act of consumption. Since every human

activity in the modern world is tied to a reward, either in the form of money or prestige, there is no other criterion by which to evaluate one's success than sheer statistics of productivity. These two dimensions (wealth and prestige) satisfy the needs of human beings and inevitably give rise to two basic traits of society—greed and narcissism. The movement and dynamics of these drives are plainly circular and leave no lasting traces in the common world. As mentioned, there is no other meaning for these activities beyond individual benefits and advantages to "maintain life."

Arendt, in her critique of contemporary mass society, argues that common sense thinking and utility discourse have imposed their logic on all fields of human action and experience. In combination with the circularity of consumption, which has become the primary motivation for human activities, this has transformed the West into a mass of predictable beings. People behave according to traceable behavioral patterns, staring hopelessly into the future for an escape.

The changes in the West over the past century indicate an ontological shift in the relationships between the mode of thought of freedom and totalitarianism. Considering the previous analysis, it is worth asking where, in contemporary society, the realm for action and speech, not oppressed by statistically motivated structures (at least partly), is still possible. Also, where the political as a legitimate discourse of creating the common could potentially be developed. If in the Greek polis, the division line between the three modes of human existence could be distinguished in three political classes, then with modernity, we see their transformation into modes of thought as potentialities and values, present ever since the rise of Europe.

We are no longer in the Greek polis, but we can realize and actualize these ideas in new forms and discourses that protect the state of human freedom, considering the notions of meaning and being at home, taking into account the alienation and global homelessness of our times. In the contemporary world, spontaneity and the possibility for truthfulness could be preserved in education and art practices. These fields have the potential to constitute the realm of speech and action where new meanings are created and questioned; where speaking is not merely a form of communication, but rather initiates a genuine conversation about the meaningful, considering the truth and values of the ontological state of human beings.

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