

Violence and power: a critique of Hannah Arendt on the ‘political’

Keith Breen

School of Politics, International Studies & Philosophy,

19-21 University Square

Queen's University Belfast

Belfast BT7 1PA, Northern Ireland

k.breen@qub.ac.uk

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Abstract In contrast to political realism's equation of the 'political' with domination, Hannah Arendt understood the 'political' as a relation of friendship utterly opposed to the use of violence. This paper offers a critique of that understanding. It becomes clear that Arendt's challenge to realism, as exemplified by Max Weber, succeeds on account of a dubious redefinition of the 'political' that is the reverse image of the one-sided vision of politics she had hoped to contest. Questioning this paradoxical turn leads to a critique of Arendt's separation of violence and power and, consequently, her attempt to insulate a politics of friendship from one of hostility and coercion. However, political realism is not thereby affirmed. What is required, instead, is a view of the 'political' that accepts the interwovenness of violence and power but also emphasizes the normative ideals of moderation and care.

Key Words Arendt • the ‘political’ • Weber • realism • power • violence • friendship • enmity • moderation

I Introduction

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.¹

Writing during the turbulent events of the late 1960s, Hannah Arendt observed that ‘what Sorel remarked sixty years ago, “The problems of violence still remain very obscure,” is as true today as it was then.’² For Arendt this obscurity was necessarily the case, given that the modern conception of the ‘political’ and the venerable tradition of thought on which it relied were themselves characterized by fundamental obscurities and misunderstandings. The core traditional misunderstanding, one uniting ancients and moderns, Left and Right, but finding clearest expression in ‘political realism,’ was that politics is essentially a matter of ruling and being ruled, of domination. The tragedy of this misunderstanding was that it helped eclipse a rival non-dominative understanding of politics, and in so doing contributed to the rise of 20th century totalitarianism. Certainly, totalitarianism entailed a fundamental reversal of ‘the basic commandments of Western morality’ and therefore also a fundamental break in Western political thought.³ Yet this break was born of long held ideas and beliefs that totalitarian leaders only drove to an extreme conclusion.⁴

This article explores just one of the intellectual and practical errors that Arendt deemed crucial to totalitarianism's perverse radicalization of the Western tradition, the 'realist' identification of violence with power presumed in the reduction of the 'political' to ruling and being ruled. Arendt believed that in conjunction with the confusion of necessity for freedom and the rise of late modern mass society, such identification inevitably suppressed the authentic experience of the 'political.' Given this, it is no overstatement to argue that the different currents of her thought are united by a sustained attempt to distinguish violence from power and to resurrect an alternative concept of the 'political,' that 'age-old treasure' which manifested itself gloriously yet fleetingly in the ancient *polis* and during modern revolutions, in particular the American Revolution.⁵ Astounding though it may seem from a scholar of totalitarian terror and revolutionary upheaval, her key argument is that the supposedly 'realistic' equation of politics with command and obedience issues from a illusory desire to escape political life; that violence is not the essence but in fact the 'opposite' of power; and, finally, that a politics grounded upon violence is essentially 'anti-political.' Arendt's line of thought becomes less astounding, however, when viewed from the central assumptions of her political philosophy: that vocal plurality, not coercive rule or hostility, is the fundamental condition of political life, and that the essence of power is not domination but 'acting-in-concert,' friendship.

In the following I set out Arendt's rationale in drawing such a dramatic contrast between violence and power, and ask whether this contrast is ultimately tenable. Section II details her reading of Plato's fateful substitution of 'work' for 'action,' which placed a dominative metaphoric at the heart of Western political thought. Reflection on this substitution and its influence on subsequent thinking, specifically the eminently realist writings of Max Weber, provides a basis for exploring Arendt's novel re-valuation of the 'political' and her denial that

violence is 'political.' On first glance this ambitious re-valuation seems to support the oft repeated claim that 'few authors of the twentieth century offered a more comprehensive alternative to Weber's political and sociological thought.'⁶ However, while Arendt's re-valuation does have the beneficial effect of showing Weber's conception of the 'political' to be hyperbolically bloody-minded, close scrutiny of her work reveals significant problems. As argued in Section III, the Arendtean ideal of the 'political' presumes a questionable dualist ontology --- *poiesis* versus *praxis*, necessity versus freedom, the 'social' versus the 'political' --- that succeeds in purging politics of violence only by inverting realism's conceptual hierarchies. Thus, where Weber thought solidarity applicable in private relations and instrumental domination appropriate in the political realm, Arendt reverses this thinking, imagining the private (and social) sphere to be governed by a logic of calculative manipulation and the political realm by civic friendship and 'human togetherness.' Not only does this response preserve Weber's basic assumptions, albeit in inverted form, but it also leads to large areas of human endeavour being understood in thoroughly instrumental terms, specifically the socio-economic.

Extending this critique in Section IV, it is then argued that even within Arendt's own narrowly circumscribed account of the 'political,' the phenomena of violence and power remain intimately interwoven. This becomes clear when considering her thoughts on 'justified' violence, ochlocracy (power as mob-rule), the foundational act of constituting republics, and the discriminating faculty of reflective judgement. The thrust of this article is therefore largely negative: that Arendt's separation of violence and power ultimately fails. Nonetheless, recognizing that the 'political' cannot be purged of violence and hostility accentuates the significance of another aspect of Hannah Arendt's work, her ethico-political ideals of moderation and care. It is Arendt's sensitivity to these ideals and their underlying attitude, *amor mundi*, and

not her untenable division between a politics of friendship and an anti-politics of hostility, that justifies her status as a significant political thinker.

II Western political thought and the loss of the ‘political’

In striking contrast to received wisdom, Arendt understands the ‘greater part of political philosophy since Plato’ as an attempt not to comprehend the ‘political’ but to ‘escape from politics altogether’ (*HC*, 222). The essence of what so many sought to flee was first revealed in the ancient *polis*. In contrast to life in the household (*oikos*), which was subject to brute necessity and the dominion of masters over slaves, the Greeks celebrated political life as a life of free action spent in the company of one’s fellow citizens. Action in the specific sense of *praxis* meant the ability to initiate the unprecedented and unforeseeable, which for Arendt corresponds with the condition of natality or human freedom. Acting and speaking in the public realm (*ecclesia*, *agora*), citizens showed who they were, revealed ‘their unique personal identities and thus [made] their appearance in the human world’ (*HC*, 179). Presuming an audience of fellow actors, action also presumed human plurality, the twofold quality of ‘equality and distinction’ or human beings’ similarity in being human and yet uniqueness in terms of their irreplaceable personalities.⁷ The institutional manifestation of this plurality, *isonomy* or equal citizenship, was a cultural achievement which allowed naturally unequal persons to deal with each other as co-builders of a shared world. Generating the intersubjective dimension of the shared world, the frail ‘web of relationships,’ *praxis* was necessarily ‘action-in-concert,’ a mode of endeavour inseparable from the human capacity for speech and in which actors were both doers and sufferers, dependent on others for their freedom (*HC*, 189—190; *OV*, 143)

Appalled by the uncertainty of life in the *polis*, Plato sought to ensure that the ‘ignorant’ many would be led by the few who alone possessed reason. He thereby effected a fateful transformation of the ‘political’ by replacing action conceived as intersubjective *praxis* with action conceived, in Arendt’s term, as monological ‘work,’ which encompasses both fabrication (*poiesis*) and art, in the broad sense of instrumental or technological skill (*techne*). Governed by a logic of purposiveness or instrumentality, work is ‘entirely determined by the categories of means and end,’ the assumption that all matter is manipulable according to a consciously conceived image (*HC*, 143, 153). Thus, with Plato’s substitution the meaning of politics transformed from the doing and speaking of great deeds and words into the disciplining of human life in accordance with the higher realm of Ideas. This resulted in political action being reinterpreted as the prerogative of a single individual, the ‘Philosopher-King,’ modelling a polity and its people according to the inner light of his mind. As Arendt sees it, such modelling implies rulership and domination, which, in turn, imply ‘strength,’ a quality of the individual in isolation from others and finding increase through the employment of violence. The connection between rulership and violence is intimate. Just as the household head used violence to ‘emancipate himself from life’s necessity,’ so too does the Platonic ruler deploy it to render subjects obedient (*OR*, 114; *IP*, 149). But whereas the former deployed violence where it was necessary, in the pre-political realm, the ruler introduces it into the polity and brings political life to an end, as least in the sense in which it had originally been understood.

Plato’s transformation of the ‘political’ was fateful insofar as most subsequent thinkers unconsciously endorsed the premises of his thought (*OV*, 134—139; *HC*, 222). While Arendt believes this true for nearly all modern ideologies, it is most apparent in the ‘political realism’ propounded by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Max Weber. Focusing on Weber, ‘political realism’

has nothing to do with ‘metaphysical’ or ‘moral’ realism, the claim that the universe is directly knowable or that our moral beliefs have an objective status; rather, it refers to the belief that politics is a realm of warring interests where truth or right plays a minor role.⁸ In this sense Weber clearly rejects the ethical utopianism underlying Plato’s *Republic*. But in other key respects his work represents a modern radicalization of Platonic assumptions, specifically the emphasis on rulership and on politics as an essentially instrumental activity. In place of the ‘Philosopher-King’ Weber famously celebrates the ‘charismatic leader,’ yet both figures presume a stark division between a politically active few and an ‘intellectually proletarianized’ passive mass.⁹ The Weberian justification for this division is the same as it was for Plato, that only the elect, those marked out by extraordinary talent, are competent to govern. And implicit in this separation of elites and masses is the Platonic view of politics as a mode of fabrication concerned with making and re-making the polity. In fact, Weber drives Plato’s substitution of work for *praxis* to its logical conclusion, shearing it of philosophical euphemism. An instrument to any number of good and evil ends, ‘one can define the ‘political’ character of an association only through [its] *means* --- which, though not peculiar to it, is at all events indispensable for its nature: violence’ (*ES*, 55; *PV*, 78). At heart, then, political life involves a coercive imposition of one’s will, power being simply ‘the probability that *one* actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite *resistance*’ (*ES*, 52, my emphasis).

In this, Arendt contends, Weber and his fellow realists give voice to a venerable prejudice of Western political thought, the ‘pernicious’ identification of freedom with ‘sovereignty’ or the idea that actors are free only to the extent that they are independent from others and triumph over them (*BPF*, 163; *HC*, 234). This identification is ‘pernicious’ insofar as it locates the standards and well-spring of political action within the inner self, thus disavowing human plurality and the

‘web of relationships’ constituting the shared world. Weber’s *Verantwortungsethik* or ‘ethics of responsibility’ is a case in point. Unlike the *Machtpolitiker*, who cynically acts for the sake of power only, and the *Gesinnungsethiker*, who surrenders blindly to absolute ideals, the *Verantwortungsethiker* acts in accordance with a ‘matter-of-factness,’ ‘sense of proportion,’ and ‘feeling of responsibility’ that take into account what is possible and what impossible in the pursuit of his ideals (*PV*, 115—122). But these ideals, as well as the commitment to responsibility itself, are rooted in the actor’s ‘cause,’ in ‘the god or demon who is [his] overlord’ (*PV*, 115). Whether others share in this ‘cause’ is irrelevant since what counts is the inner will.

Freedom as sovereignty is inseparable from a second prejudice of Western thought, that all political beginnings are necessarily violent beginnings.¹⁰ Acting politically means initiating in the form of command, insisting ‘This far and no further!’ In Weber, as in Machiavelli, this prompts the view that to enter politics is to contract with ‘diabolical powers’ and to accept that ‘the attainment of “good” ends ... pay[s] the price of morally dubious means’ (*PV*, 121, 123). Neither Machiavelli nor Weber commended immorality, for both sought an economy or minimization of violence. Yet the mature actor must face the truth that ‘the reasons of state’ follow autonomous laws which inexorably condemn the politician to ethical paradox, to embracing the doctrine of lesser evil.¹¹ A cold, calculative impersonality is therefore a prerequisite in the political realm. Indeed, it is an inevitable consequence of the world historic process of rationalization that ‘precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal relations.’¹² Solidarity, ‘genuine brotherliness,’ and a fundamental regard for the other belong in the religious and intimate spheres of life, but are by necessity alien to the political actor.

There is much shared ground between Arendt and Weber. Both emphasized the contingency and unpredictability of political life. Both likewise were convinced that absolutist adherence to the doctrine of ‘love’ and ‘fraternity’ expressed in ‘the Sermon on the Mount’ runs counter to the ‘fundamental relativity’ of the ‘interhuman realm.’¹³ But whereas for Weber love is inapplicable in politics because politics is conflict, for Arendt it is inapplicable because love’s intense intimacy effaces ‘friendship’ or solidarity, that essential political bond in which actors are simultaneously related and yet separated. Collapsing solidarity into love, Weber therefore banished both from the ‘political.’ As Arendt sees it, this disastrous turn stemmed from an insistence on ‘the role of violence’ that was due not to a ‘so-called realistic insight into human nature’ but a ‘futile’ yearning for omnipotence, for a quality that would transcend actors’ mutual dependence (*OR*, 39). This quest for omnipotence or absolute sovereignty lends credence to the means-end reasoning underlying Machiavelli and Weber’s doctrine of lesser evil, the belief, germane to man as maker or fabricator, that actions are justified solely in terms of their results. Yet for Arendt such means-end thinking is ‘ruinous’ in politics (*MDT*, 147; *OV*, 177). It is ‘ruinous’ because it naively assumes we can know the eventual consequences of our deeds and, more seriously, reduces human beings to pliable matter which can be dispensed with at will. In short, far from protecting us from greater evil, the doctrine of lesser evil actually threatens to lead us to it, as is revealed by the history of 20th century totalitarianism, where the acceptance of a host of lesser evils gradually concluded in ‘the acceptance of evil as such.’¹⁴

To counter the murderous logic of instrumental reason, of the means of violence transforming into the end of political life, Arendt urges a fundamental break with traditional thought, insisting that the real ‘meaning of politics’ only ‘comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them --- that is, in sheer human togetherness’ (*IP*, 117;

HC, 180). Directly contesting realist assumptions, this prompts her thorough-going separation of violence and power. Vocal and plural, power is the essence of all government and, because ‘inherent in the very existence of political communities,’ an ‘end-in-itself’ (*OV*, 151). Violence, by contrast, is mute and monological, a physical mode of interaction relying on implements and without intrinsic relation to politics’ prime condition, plurality. Against Weber’s reduction of power to domination, violence and power are therefore not only different phenomena, but in fact ‘opposites’ --- ‘where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent’ (*OV*, 155; *IP*, 147). As revealed by countless tyrannies, violence arises where power is being lost, where the bonds between citizens have been irreparably damaged. Thus, ‘while violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it,’ since ‘power comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action.’¹⁵ And this power disappears the very moment actors cease to interrelate as free equals, when domination supplants solidarity and persuasive speech.

Defining violence as politics’ essence, Weber expresses a yearning for omnipotence that paradoxically can only conclude in ‘impotence,’ in the loss of power (*HC*, 202). But if Weber gravely misinterpreted power, he and Machiavelli also misinterpreted political beginning. Just as power presumes intersubjective speech, so too does the act of founding, of beginning anew, presume the presence of others. Of course, this has been occluded by the prejudices of Western thought and the disastrous events initiated by actors blinded by them. Believing falsely that violence can generate power, the French Revolutionaries inevitably equated beginning with the imposition, through majority dictate, of a coercive or ‘imperative’ constitutional law (*OR*, 164, 181; *OV*, 138). Yet the American Revolution, which never descended into terror, tells an ‘unforgettable story’ of a political beginning which relied not on ‘dictating violence’ or

imperious charisma but on ‘mutual promise and common deliberation’ (*OR*, 213—214). True to their experience of ‘public happiness,’ the Americans alighted upon a form of law whose essence is not coercive but *relational*. In other words, their act of constituting a republic generated ‘*rappports*’ that ensured an enabling and enduring connection between ‘partners whom external circumstances have brought together’ (*OR*, 187—188). For Arendt the significance of this is that constitutional law, properly conceived, is primarily ‘directive,’ bringing institutionalized activities such as citizenship into being, and only secondarily, if at all, ‘imperative,’ commanding what can and cannot be done (*OV*, 193; *IP*, 179). Reciprocal promising, rather than compelling violence, underlies all authentic political beginnings.

Reflecting on power and political foundation, Arendt is therefore led to the novel conclusion that despite the horrors of the 20th century the use of force lies ‘outside the political realm, strictly speaking’ (*OR*, 19). However, she does recognize an ineliminable, if highly circumscribed, role for implemental violence in two respects.¹⁶ The first, as already suggested, concerns the ‘realm of necessity,’ by which Arendt means those arenas of human life directed towards satisfying natural or biological need, in contrast to the free arena of politics. In antiquity such need was satisfied in the private sphere by the ‘violent injustice’ of enslaving others and living off their labour (*HC*, 119). In modernity and the modern sphere of the ‘social,’ which melds the private and public, technology replaces slavery as the means for satisfying natural necessity. While happily different from the direct domination of slavery, as *techne* technology, including the administrative structures putting it into effect, nonetheless exhibits the ‘element of violation and violence’ that is ‘present in all fabrication’ (*HC*, 139). It is for this reason that Arendt warns against confusing the ‘social’ with the ‘political,’ ‘necessity’ with ‘freedom.’¹⁷ For the attempt to solve social issues, such as poverty, through political means can only have the

twin result of economic chaos and of introducing the principle of manipulation or fabrication into the political realm, thereby destroying solidarity.

Rejecting pacifism, Arendt also admits that violence may be ‘rational’ and appropriate in certain crisis moments. These include wars of self-defence, liberation from oppression, the dramatization of grievances, and even attempts to gain ‘a hearing for moderation’ (*OV*, 176; *OR*, 142, 299). Yet she repeatedly denies that such violence can be classed as ‘political,’ her argument being that it has no relation to the experience and meaning of political life. Where power is ‘legitimate,’ directing its appeal to some past moment of joint action, reasonable violence is ‘justified,’ instrumentally appealing to the future ends it aims to achieve (*OV*, 150—151). It is the power generating bond of ‘acting-in-concert’ that provides the enduring ground of the ‘political,’ whereas physical violence can only be a short-term measure, employable if and when the ‘web of relationships’ stands under threat. Indeed, because always ‘silent,’ violence is at best politically ‘peripheral’ or ‘marginal,’ for ‘man, to the extent that he is a political being, is endowed with the power of *speech*.’¹⁸ Thus, to think war and violent struggle the essence or lasting basis of politics is, Arendt insists, to glorify the ‘antipolitical,’ a glorification which, when removed of limits, slides easily into atrocity and terror (*OR*, 19).

III Arendt’s dualist ontology and ‘inverted realism’

The foregoing revealed the novelty of Hannah Arendt’s reflections on violence and power and her reasons for rejecting political realism. Certainly, there is real wisdom in this rejection. Extrapolating from Arendt’s warnings as to sovereign rulership, it becomes clear that Weber’s adherence to this idea, together with a celebration of charismatic individuals, leads his

Verantwortungsethik into extreme subjectivism. As sovereign ruler, the leader's 'cause' may demand that others be taken into account or it may not; what matters is that it is *his* cause, that *his* life derives sense from it. Thus, there exists an acute paradox in Weber's claim that 'he who seeks the salvation of the soul ... should not seek it along the avenue of politics,' for the only measure he has of politics is precisely the actor's soul (*PV*, 125—126). The negative consequences of this paradoxical subjectification are threefold. First, the contrast between a fanatic *Gesinnungsethik* and Weber's worldly *Verantwortungsethik* gives way, for both in the end are rooted in an inscrutable subjective commitment. Second, the distinction between non-manipulated and manipulated political legitimacy also collapses, since Weber's criterion of legitimacy is, in line with his subjectivist assumptions, simply the *de facto* belief on the part of the ruled that a political order is appropriate, proper, and *not* whether such belief is itself warranted, a result of genuine interaction as opposed to propagandist distortion.¹⁹ Finally, although he seeks an economy of violence, Weber is encouraged by the image of a sovereign maker to regard other actors' natality as a frustrating source of 'resistance' to the leader's will, rather than as an enabling pre-condition of one's being able to act at all. In turn, this emphasis on resistance and its overcoming contributes to his one-sided reduction of the 'political' to domination, to violence being considered the essential logic of political life. It is then but a short step to glorifying violence, to seeing the existential import of the 'political' as being encapsulated in 'death on the field of battle' (*RRW*, 335).

By contrast, in Arendt's philosophy this line of reasoning is impossible. Because plurality is the condition of political life and power, the authentic basis of political ethics is intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity entails that the legitimacy of political orders depends not simply on individual belief, which can be 'arbitrary and merely idiosyncratic,' but on the

‘process of exchange of opinion against opinion’ (*OR*, 227). And given that this process of exchange necessarily relies on speech, violence cannot be the prime determinant of political action.

But if Arendt successfully lays bare and places a halt upon the hyperbolic one-sidedness of Weber’s thought, does she also provide, as Baehr and others believe, a ‘far-reaching alternative’ to the tradition from which it stemmed?²⁰ To provide a far-reaching alternative, she would have to fundamentally dispute the realist assumption that domination is an inescapable part of human interaction. She would also have to transcend the conceptual categories and binaries impelling realist thinking. Yet looking more deeply into the structure and categories of Arendt’s thought, it is clear that instead of transcending realism’s assumptions she in fact reproduces them in her ontology of the human condition. Reproducing them, she also gives veiled yet concrete sustenance to the realist worldview.

The point of this criticism becomes apparent once we consider Arendt’s reflections on the great ‘rebels’ standing at the end of the Western philosophical tradition: Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. Ever since Plato set the world of ‘appearance’ in opposition to the realm of ‘Ideas,’ the Western philosophical tradition had been defined by a specific hierarchization of human capabilities, the supremacy of reason and contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) over all earthly activity (*vita activa*). This hierarchy endured until the beginning of the modern age. The ‘greatness’ of Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche is that they understood the modern world ‘as one invaded by new problems and perplexities which our tradition of thought was unable to cope with’ (*BPF*, 27). For Kierkegaard the key problem was the rise of modern science and scepticism, which threw both the efficacy of reason and the existence of God into radical doubt; for Marx, the birth of historical consciousness (as articulated by Hegel) and the appearance of a

labouring society, which fundamentally questioned the age-old priority of philosophy over action; and for Nietzsche, the relativization of all ethical, artistic, and religious ideals by the nihilist ‘social linkages and commerce’ of 19th century European culture, which fatally undermined the ancient belief in transcendent, timeless standards. Seeking to comprehend modernity’s perplexities, these three ‘tried desperately to think against the tradition while using its own conceptual tools’ (*BPF*, 25). In doing so they each effected a radical inversion of the traditional hierarchy of human capabilities. With Kierkegaard this inversion took the form of a leap from reason, and the scepticism underlying scientific thought, into sheer faith. In Marx it involved a turn from contemplation to action, but action now understood as labour (labour-power), traditionally the most reviled of human capabilities. Finally, with Nietzsche it entailed an ‘inverted Platonism’ where sensuous earthly life usurped the position once occupied by suprasensuous ‘Ideas.’

What is of interest here is not the particularities of each of these rebellions, but what Arendt believed they had in common. In her view they had an ‘ominous similarity’ in that each paradoxically ended in the extinction of what it sought to uphold (*BPF*, 29). In short, while Kierkegaard wanted to restore the ‘dignity’ of faith against modern science, Marx human action against theory, and Nietzsche earthly existence against transcendent ‘Ideas,’ their philosophies ended by reducing religion to an affirmation of the absurd, by subordinating philosophy and politics to ideological ‘laws of history,’ and, finally, by surrendering both earthly life and the transcendent to nihilism. The central problem was that in the moment of performing their radical inversions Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche were nonetheless dependent upon, reproduced, the binaries of traditional thought. As Arendt puts it, it is in ‘the very nature of the famous “turning upside down” of philosophical systems or currently accepted values, that is, in the nature of the

operation itself, that the conceptual framework is left more or less intact.²¹ Given this, if one term of the binary framework, whether faith or sensuous life, is emphasized to the near exclusion of the other, reason or contemplation, the result can only be that the meaning of *both* terms is lost, since both have ‘significance only in ... opposition’ (*BPF*, 36). For Arendt, the lesson of these grand failures is simple. Because there is no possibility of resurrecting pre-modern philosophy, we have no option but to think without the ‘bannister’ of traditional systems of thought and to refuse all binary hierarchizations of human capabilities (*HA*, 336—337; *HC*, 17; *UP*, 309).

Accepting the above, it would be remarkable if Arendt were herself to fall victim to binary thinking. Yet it is clear that her re-valuation of the ‘political’ hinges upon several ontological binaries or dualisms. At the most basic level, there is the opposition between nature and culture, between mere life (*zoe*) in its biological and psychological regularity and authentic life (*bios*) as lived in the human artifice or world (*HC*, 96—97). This then feeds into an opposition between necessity and freedom, necessity being associated, we saw, with labouring and biological need, freedom with the unconstrained and spontaneous interaction of equals. The opposition between freedom and necessity is linked to a third dualism, that between *poiesis*, work, and *praxis*, action. Human beings can only respond to life’s necessities with either violence, by compelling others to labour for them, or through technology, the machines and techniques controlled by ‘neutral’ experts (*OR*, 65). As already explained, violence and technology are necessarily associated with mute *poiesis*, by definition an instrumental and manipulative human capability. The instrumentality of *poiesis* is in stark contrast with *praxis*, which is instead premised on the condition of vocal plurality and transcends all means-end calculation. To this Arendt adds her key spatial dualism between the private realm, which also incorporates the ‘social,’ and the

public realm, strictly speaking. Where the private realm is properly viewed as the sphere of necessity and the violent or technologically aided fulfilment of biological need, the public realm is the sphere of free citizenship, of those things which are amenable ‘to decision and persuasion’ (*OR*, 114).

It is vital to recognize the import of Arendt’s complex, yet recognizably dualist, ontologizing. If her landscape of the human condition holds true, then reality divides into distinct spheres where distinct logics govern. Thus, the ‘political’ is connected with plurality, with freedom, with intersubjective speech, and therefore with power; the ‘non-political,’ conversely, is associated with nature, with mute necessity, with technical prowess, and therefore with violence. Furthermore, Arendt is not merely offering a description of reality, but also an evaluation of the human condition. The ‘political’ represents a more uniquely human mode of being than the ‘non-political’ insofar as the ‘political’ enjoys an especially close connection with human plurality, freedom, and natality. Her phenomenology of the human condition is therefore simultaneously an axiology, and one, moreover, which sets up an unmistakable prioritization in the system of human goods, it being ‘obvious’ that action occupies ‘the highest position’ (*LWA*, 30).

Unsurprisingly, numerous criticisms have been offered of Arendt’s ontological dualisms.²² The majority concentrate on her separation of the ‘social’ and the ‘political,’ the key claim being that she is led by a regrettable ‘essentialism’ to neglect that ‘there is a much more intimate connection between the ‘social’ and the ‘political’ than she frequently suggests.’²³ Arendt stands guilty, the critics contend, of neglecting questions of social justice, of exhibiting disdain towards the labouring masses, and of endorsing a nostalgic vision of the ‘political’ that is utterly impractical under modern conditions. However, what is important here is the way in which

Arendt's thought itself shares an 'ominous similarity' to the 'turning upside down' operations which she attributed to Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. We saw earlier that Weber drew a sharp distinction between the world of intimate relations and salvation, on the one hand, and the realm of politics, on the other. The disenchanting processes of rationalization have forced all genuine 'ethics of brotherliness' into the private sphere, whereas the public sphere of politics has necessarily become a 'dominion of unbrotherliness,' the impersonal and autonomous 'dignity of the polity' resting overwhelmingly on 'force' (*RRW*, 357, 335). However, Arendt responds not by thinking beyond the 'bannister' of realist thought, but by inverting its conceptual structure, the private sphere of necessity and the 'social' now being determined by a dominative impersonality, the public sphere of equal yet distinct actors being instead the space for solidarity and friendship. Thus, while the terms of her particular reversal differ from that of Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche, the form remains the same, with a similar tendency towards hierarchization and a re-valuation which preserves the framework of that which it sought to transcend.

The paradoxical effects of this inversion are clear. Arendt counters the nightmarish violence of 20th century totalitarianism by ascribing a logic of intersubjectivity and vocal being-together to power and the 'political,' but the cost of this re-valuation is the ascription of a logic of domination and technocratic rule to the non-political realms, in particular the 'social.' *Only* 'by means of violence, by forcing others to bear the burden of life,' she claims, did the ancients escape from necessity into freedom, and *only* through manipulative technologies, which replaced human 'tools' with machines, was this 'old and terrible truth' overcome (*OR*, 114). From this three intolerable consequences follow. The first is a truncation and de-radicalization of citizenship as an ideal. The promise of politics is the human capacity for beginning anew, but because so much is excluded from the authentically 'political' the scope for the exercise of that

capacity becomes extremely limited. The ‘social’ and the ‘household’ now banished from politics, all that seem to remain are founding, preserving the contours of republics, and public display. The second negative result is that the master-slave relation suffers depoliticization, the problem of poverty and economic oppression being transformed from an ethical into a technical one of finding a technology that will substitute for human tools.²⁴ Gone, consequently, is the recognition that such oppression stems from human relations *per se*. In its place is a naïve faith in technology to solve humanity’s ‘natural’ needs underpinned by a ‘politically dangerous myth’ that there are realms of human life where managers and social engineers have pre-eminence.²⁵

However, as already suggested, by far the most significant consequence of Arendt’s inversion of Weber is that his realist definition of the state as the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence is transferred from its political context and rooted in the ‘non-political’ as a totalizing, incontrovertible truth. The danger of this, of course, is that once Arendt’s questionable division between freedom and necessity, the ‘political’ and the ‘social,’ *poiesis* and *praxis*, is rejected, it is just a simple step to surrender to simplifying temptations and to assume that the same realist logic applies foundationally to all interpersonal activities. As with Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche, Arendt’s binary ontologizing threatens to implode in on itself.

IV Indissoluble bonds: on the fundamental interwovenness of violence and power

That Hannah Arendt should legitimate a violent instrumentalism in vast spheres of human existence is deeply ironic when she had originally set herself the task of contesting the Platonic roots of Western political thought. In the above I pointed to the dubious ontology underlying this turn and some of the negative consequences it has for her project as a whole. Once these

consequences are recognized, two conclusions become inevitable. The first is that Arendt in no way offers a 'far-reaching alternative' to the time-honoured emphasis on domination, since her alternative presumes an indirect affirmation of that emphasis, albeit in the realm of the 'social.' The second is that, given the problematic status of her dualisms, it becomes plausible to suggest that necessity and violence belong no more uniquely to the 'social' and 'non-political' than do non-coercive freedom and power to the 'political,' in other words, that the risk of politics is far more acute than she allows.

It could be said in Arendt's defence that her thorough-going separation of violence and power and the idea of the 'political' which results are happily independent from her dualisms. My goal here is to demonstrate the flaws in any such defence by pointing to the inseparability of violence and power. The argument is threefold. I begin by questioning the empirical status of two key Arendtean claims vis-à-vis violence and power, namely, that violence arises out of impotence and that violence can never generate power. This interrogation leads into a second critique showing politics and force, power and violence, to be *interwoven* phenomena. My argument then concludes by revealing this interwovenness, in light of Arendt's own thoughts on the constitution of republics and the discriminating faculty of judgement, to be an *inherent*, rather than incidental, feature of political life. Only by acknowledging this inherent interwovenness can the full import and challenge of politics be understood.

i. The empirical status of Arendt's claims

We saw that for Arendt 'to speak of non-violent power is actually redundant,' since violence and power are 'opposites' (*OV*, 155). Violence can easily eradicate power by destroying the bonds between actors, but it remains wholly incapable of engendering it. Certainly, there is truth to this

broad claim. Arendt rightly recognizes that in many instances violence issues from ‘frustration,’ either on the part of authorities who feel their control ebbing or of citizens who are denied political expression.²⁶ But it is *not* always true, contrary her unqualified claim, that violence issues from impotence or, more significantly, can never engender power. Beginning with the question of impotence, there are several historical examples of failing regimes responding to a loss in their power in largely non-violent ways. As Arendt herself remarks, the British Empire answered the movement of Indian independence not with ‘administrative massacres’ but by conceding its demands, even if grudgingly.²⁷ The same will to concession, to accepting the existence of plurality, can also be seen at work in the ‘Velvet Revolutions’ that signalled the end of European state socialism. The link between impotence and violence is therefore contingent, a question of historical context, not theoretical generalization. Conversely, it is also true that violence frequently signals not impotence but in truth an *abundance* of power. The plebiscites held during the first phase of Nazi rule were simultaneously legitimating and emboldening devices, encouraging a radicalization of the regime’s domestic and foreign policies. Furthermore, every student of contemporary guerrilla movements knows that the success of their military struggles depends on the active support of large sections of the civilian population. In such cases it is not dwindling power but an assurance of continued support that stiffens resolve and sustains campaigns of violence.²⁸

But just as violence can signify an abundance of power, so too can it be a key factor in the *generation* of power and solidarity among groups. The 1916 Dublin Rising is a case in point. Before Easter 1916 the vast majority of Irish Catholics were content to follow the Irish Parliamentary Party’s constitutional route to Home Rule, the militant leaders of both Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers enjoying only limited support. However, the fighting precipitated by the

declaration of a republic and, more significantly, the brutal suppression of the defeated rebels, led to a marked heightening of national consciousness among ordinary citizens, which was later to successfully maintain republican insurgency during the War of Independence. The tremendous power enjoyed by the IRA leadership in that war was consequently a power born of fire, of 'blood sacrifice.'²⁹ Moreover, following arguments advanced by John Keane, a very similar story can be told of the American Revolution.³⁰ Mortally threatened by British forces, American morale stood in danger of total collapse towards the end of 1776. What proved key in preventing this collapse was the astounding victory won at Trenton on 26th December, when a poorly equipped American force overwhelmed a larger and better resourced Hessian army. This violent act, carried out at a crucial juncture, bolstered and revived American solidarity and resolve, eventually contributing to the American triumph over King George. As Keane therefore notes, the Battle of Trenton flatly contradicts Arendt's generalizing supposition that violence always undermines power. Instead, what it shows is that at certain moments violence and power are '*positively* related,' that their ties are often ones of reciprocal reinforcement.³¹

Despite her generalizations, Arendt was aware of the power generating dimensions of violence, even while she denied them theoretical articulation. Arguing in 1941 that a people unable to defend itself is doomed to undignified innocence, she called for the foundation of a Jewish Army that would not only defend Jews from Nazi genocide but also signal to the world the 'beginning of a Jewish *politics*.'³² For Arendt the significance of this natal yet undeniably violent undertaking would have been its re-invention of Jewish identity and solidarity from one that had previously been defined by plutocratic philanthropy to an alternative based squarely on political criteria, that is, the Jews as an emancipated people conscious of their worldly identity and capable of self-organization.³³ In other words, war and engagement in warfare were to be the

crucible of Jewish self-respect, indeed freedom. The same reasoning also underlies Arendt's discussion of René Char's recollections of fighting for the French Resistance. In the midst of a struggle 'against tyranny and things worse than tyranny,' Char and his comrades constituted a 'public realm where --- without the paraphernalia of officialdom and hidden from the eyes of friend and foe --- all relevant business in the affairs of the country was transacted in deed and word' (*BPF*, 3—4; *OR*, 280). 'Sucked into politics,' these men and women 'had become "challengers," had taken the initiative and ... begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear.' Decisively, however, their experience of freedom was enabled by a moment of extreme emergency and it was 'lost' as soon as the emergency had passed, to be replaced by 'the old empty strife of conflicting ideologies' (*BPF*, 4).

ii. Violence and justification

What the foregoing reveals is that Arendt's generalizations, even by the light of her own reflections, do not universally hold. Admittedly, she did concede that violence and power 'usually appear together' (*OV*, 151, 146). Yet she failed to note what the above examples clearly show, that in key moments violence and power not only appear together but stand in a *symbiotic relation* and that in this relation they are not at all opposed but mutually reinforcing, force feeding into solidarity and solidarity in turn augmenting force. These empirical doubts point to further reasons for questioning Arendt's excision of violence from the authentically 'political,' reasons which, as implied by the issue of symbiotic relation, suggest that violence and power are *interwoven* phenomena. One such reason stems from Arendt's idea of 'justified violence,' violence which is used for limited political ends in moments of crisis, but whose meaning is of 'marginal' political significance. As was explained, for Arendt power is 'legitimate,' whereas

violence can never be legitimate but only 'justified,' instrumentally appealing to the short-term goals of self-defence or liberation from oppression. However, what remain unacknowledged here are the problematic implications which follow for her identification of politics with friendship and non-dominative 'being-with.' The first of these is that her critique of Weber's 'lesser evil' doctrine collapses. Her complaint was that far from protecting us against 'greater evil' this doctrine actually leads us to it, the means of violence transforming into the end of politics. Arendt's argument does have relevance, in that it was the unthinking acceptance of the resort to violence which led totalitarian movements to spurn all boundaries and restraints. Yet Arendt cannot respond to totalitarian excess by simply endorsing the principle of solidarity, 'the concern of one is the concern of all,' for in accepting 'justified' violence she concedes that solidarity is sometimes perilously inappropriate.³⁴ She fears the threatened loss of limits, yet all politics, including her own, must at times take the risk of using violent means, and therefore all politics, not just Weber's Platonism, is constrained to accept the inescapability of 'lesser evil.' Assuredly, the exercise of violence demands great caution, but the 'political' can no longer be defined *exclusively* in terms of friendship. Destructive, certainly, but violence now appears an authentic part of politics, hardly something 'outside the political realm, *strictly speaking*' (*OR*, 19, my emphasis).

A more profound consequence of thinking violence 'justifiable' is the disruption of Arendt's elementary opposition between vocal power and mute physical force. When violence *can* be justified as a means towards political dramatization or reform, then whether a specific violent deed is deemed justified or not depends upon debate among actors. This 'act of justification,' as suggested by John McGowan, is therefore a 'performative whose success depends on convincing one's interlocutors that violence really [is] necessary.'³⁵ The

unavoidability of such debate in the moment of ascertaining justifiability suggests, in turn, that violence is not at all mute, but relies *temporally* upon the political processes of speaking and ‘being-with’ others, no matter how small the group. But if so, then the divide between it and speech is far less sharp than Arendt believes, since there can be no act which is not embedded within a wider web of acts and relationships. Furthermore, in presupposing a plurality of actors, whether they be conspirators, revolutionaries, or ordinary citizens, political violence cannot be equated with mute or monological dominative sovereignty. For even ‘the totalitarian ruler, whose chief instrument of rule is torture,’ Arendt admits, needs a vocal inner coterie and ‘a *power* basis --- the secret police and its net of informers’ (*OV*, 149, my emphasis). In its execution the violent deed depends upon magnified strength, but the processes preceding, enabling, *and* initiating its execution presume plural speech and ‘acting-in-concert,’ the very bedrock of Arendtean politics.

That violence is not identifiable with the use of implements *per se* finds further confirmation in Arendt’s intermittent ruminations on the intrinsic negativities of power, discussed under the label ‘ochlocracy or mob-rule’ (*HC*, 203; *OV*, 141; *HA*, 333). The predominant tone of her analysis is celebratory. Power is that wondrous *dynamis* generated when people combine to establish a public realm wherein the glory of their deeds find preservation. Yet power also exhibits uniquely destructive qualities. Only power, not violence, can destroy individuality; only power, not the use of implements, can extinguish the strength, independence, and spontaneity of persons (*OV*, 143; *IP*, 162). Although never assuming the impossible form of dominative sovereignty, the ‘being-with’ identifiable with power frequently takes the form of a peculiarly oppressive mode of acting together where exceptional individuals, as perceived by thinkers as diverse as Tocqueville, Mill, and Nietzsche, are suffocated by majority opinion, scorn, ostracism, or harassment. The important point here is that while power in this guise may

not correspond to Arendt's strict definition of violence as the destructive use of implements, it does coincide with the notion of *coercion*, of directly forcing others to act against their will.³⁶ And such coercion sometimes assumes horrific proportions. It was their acting together, not primarily their possession of killing technology, which enabled a handful of SS guards, friends among themselves, to control and systematically dehumanize countless camp inmates.³⁷ Power, in other words, has a constitutive connection to 'being-with' but that connection can be even more balefully injurious than 'pure' or implemental violence, which, as was just seen, also has a constitutive temporal connection to 'being-with.' What all this suggests is that Arendt's account of violence as an essentially mute deployment of instruments represents a crude phenomenology blind to the various forms direct domination takes, the least effective being perhaps the use of arms.

iii. The inseparability of violence and power

In conjunction with the empirical examples cited previously, these arguments show that by Arendt's own account violence and power, coercion and speech, are often intimately *interwoven*. As 'justifiability' suggests, sometimes steps have to be taken which endanger peace and stability, disrupt solidarity, and make enemies of fellow actors, a truth downplayed by Arendt's identification of politics with non-coercive friendship. Yet she might still insist on seeing this interwovenness as an incidental matter of 'perverted forms' of acting-together or, if occurring in uncorrupted polities, a question of instrumentally deploying violent means when tragic occasions arise, but not a basic feature of the 'political' as such. Even if sometimes necessary, the use of violent means remains 'anti-political' insofar as it undercuts solidarity, the basis of all politics. There is point to this retort. Violence does threaten chaos and if solidarity is defined as the

foundation of political existence, then violence is ‘anti-political.’ Yet, while foundational, solidarity is *never* politics’ sole foundation, despite Arendt’s definitions. Indeed, the *inherent* interwovenness of violence and power, enmity and solidarity, is in fact implied by her answer to Weberian charismatic authority, the act of constituting a republic.

Reflecting upon the unique challenge of political beginnings, Arendt seeks to combine revolution and preservation in a constitutional law that is relational, not commanding. Such law, she believes, originates in the act of mutual promising and is upheld by the practice of augmentation, which overcome respectively the paradox of ‘unconstitutional’ authority and the paradoxical relation between the initial act of foundation and the freedom of subsequent generations (*OR*, 160—162, 223). For a constitution to be genuinely authoritative and stable it must be present to citizens as meaningfully theirs and this is achieved only if citizens accept it as something they could have mutually endorsed had they been present during its original formulation. Similarly, the initial act of foundation and future freedom are reconciled by the practice of constitutional amendment. Indeed, without the capacity to be amended or augmented, a constitution’s authority dies, for authority must be responsive to ever-changing circumstances (*OR*, 202).

The problem, however, with Arendt’s vision is that it supposes mutual promising and augmentation can occur without *remainder*, without there being citizens who vehemently disagree with what has been promised or who resolutely spurn particular augmentations. Certainly, the connection binding citizens is not some ‘identical will which somehow magically inspires them,’ but rather ‘an agreed purpose for which alone the promises are valid and binding’ (*HC*, 245). But this ‘agreed purpose’ which validates an individual promise is always a *specific* purpose, and in being such it necessarily rules out others. Such specificity stems from the nature

of action itself, for to act is inevitably to close off alternative futures by setting in motion processes which are irreversible, can never be subsequently undone (*HC*, 233). In making a specific promise, actors therefore cannot but deny rival promises and purposes.³⁸ In other words, the act of founding is simultaneously an act of constitution and of exclusion, a setting of ‘worthy’ as against ‘unworthy’ goals. And because exclusionary, there is the ever-present likelihood that there will be some who reject the prevailing understanding of ‘citizenship’ as arbitrary and ‘unconstitutional.’ In allowing for gradual change and modification, the practice of augmentation mitigates this problem without solving it, for the very same quandary recurs here, too. Every augmentation is specific, one among a vast number of possibilities.

Arendt could claim to have escaped the paradoxes of founding because she underplayed the many ways in which politics and the world can be interpreted. Actions, she (*HC*, 208) says, ‘possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance,’ but the problem here is that ‘remembrance’ is not at stake, rather *remembrances*. The American Revolution once again proves a telling example. In Arendt’s hands it appears as the collective project of an entire people conjoining in their difference to bring a shared polity into being. No mention is made of the Federalist strategy to limit colonial legislatures in favour of a consciously preferred centralized state or that the constitution was devised in secret.³⁹ There is little mention, either, that the Mayflower Compact, which she (*OR*, 167) deems the precursor of the Constitution, required for its success the deracination of native cultures. In this, as Keenan notes, Arendt repeats the errors of Locke and other contract theorists, whose assumption of ‘the “emptiness” of “the New world”’ provided ‘a model for the “state of nature.”’⁴⁰ In a manner not dissimilar to these 17th century thinkers, what Arendt offers is a ‘fable,’ a story whose purpose is to inspire future action, to empower.⁴¹ The difficulty, however, with her empowerment is that it

screens out the conflictual course of the Revolution. Had it not, she would have realized this event was as much about silencing voices as generating a new one and that such silencing lives on in dominant interpretations. Had she, as well, extended her frame of reference to include 19th century America, she would have had to accept that particular conceptions of citizenship must subdue rival conceptions, even at the cost of war. Because partly fought over who could claim the title 'citizen,' the American Civil War shows law and its interpretation to be simultaneously relational *and* commanding, that the attempt to privilege the relational, as Arendt does, is mistaken.⁴² To legitimate power is to legitimate an 'authoritative' interpretation, and, as the elimination of slavery illustrates, often properly. Constraint, the command 'this far and no further!', is not therefore something secondary or incidental, requiring justification if the need arises, but actually bound up in the origin of polities themselves, their very existence.

The same, finally, is true of reflective judgement. Arendt thinks discriminating judgement --- which gives voice to taste, the sense corresponding to our immediate feelings of pleasure or displeasure --- 'the most important activity in which ... sharing-the-world-with-others-comes-to pass' (*BPF*, 221). As with action, judgement depends on human plurality, the twofold quality of 'equality and distinction.'⁴³ Unlike the cognitive intellect, which compels assent through intuition or logical self-evidence, judgement is thoroughly intersubjective, relying upon a persuasive process of 'representative thinking' which in turn relies upon a shared 'common sense' (*sensus communis*). Yet Arendt's understanding of reflective judgement is unfortunately incomplete. Precisely because *discriminating*, deciding this is wrong, this good, this ugly, this beautiful, judgement and its sense of taste cannot be identified with friendship or human plurality *per se*, since the necessary concomitant of taste, pleasure, and approval is distaste, displeasure, and disgust. This is so because every evaluative category has positive and negative dimensions,

praise making sense only on account of the possibility of censure.⁴⁴ Moreover, in making such evaluations we not only differentiate between attractive and unattractive qualities, but also between individuals who possess or exhibit these qualities. Thus, in a manner analogous to the art critic who discriminates between excellent and mediocre work, in judging political events and circumstances the actor determines who is to be classed correct, prudent, and an ally and who is to be considered mistaken, imprudent, or even an enemy.

Judging is therefore never a simple matter of ‘being-with’ but a complex process of simultaneously ‘being-*for*’ and ‘being-*against*,’ wherein friendship and enmity, liking and disliking, are constitutively interconnected. Arendt’s insistence on persuasion, communication and pleasure is, then, but one side of a broader story encompassing prescription, reticence, and displeasure. Despite one-sidedness, she does acknowledge this core conflictual dimension. Judgement ‘decides not only how the world is to look, but also who *belongs* together in it’ and she was certain that Adolf Eichmann did not belong.⁴⁵ If so, however, she must accept there can never be a combination of equality and distinction without remainder, for some deeds and some actors must be considered beyond the pale. And once it is recognized that ‘being-*for*’ and ‘being-*against*’ are intrinsic aspects of judgement, the ‘principal virtue or excellence of the statesman’ (*BPF*, 221; *UP*, 318), then we are also compelled to acknowledge the ineliminable potentiality for violence in all political relations. For in judging something right or wrong, good or evil, we simultaneously commit ourselves to its realization or prevention in the world, just as do those actors who periodically arrive at judgements utterly opposed to ours.

V Conclusion: the enduring significance of moderation and care

Earlier we saw that Arendt fails to provide a ‘far-reaching alternative’ to political realism, her work being wedded to the conceptual framework and binaries of realist thinking. It is now clear that her separation of violence and power is itself untenable. Not only are there numerous empirical counter-examples to her generalizations, but by the terms of her own thought violence and power are intimately related. Thus, whatever it might be, the ‘political’ cannot be equated with revelatory speech and civic friendship.

The repercussions are both profound and disturbing. Insofar as violence and power are mutually implicated, they cannot be seen as ‘opposites’ but rather as phenomena implicit in every political relation. Thus, far from being ‘peripheral,’ violence lies at the heart of the ‘political.’ This is not a consequence of modernity’s identification of government with brute force or, indeed, of the false turn initiated by Plato, as Arendt repeatedly suggests, but a feature of *all* polities and times insofar as violence permeates or is potentially present in every judgement and new beginning. Moreover, to the degree that engagement in politics is both intrinsically valuable and legitimate in Arendt’s sense, so too is violence at times intrinsically valuable and legitimate. In affirming the ‘political’ we cannot but affirm it in all its fundamental aspects, embracing coercion and domination just as we do speech and solidarity.

On occasion Arendt comes close to conceding this point. Neither violence nor power ‘is a natural phenomenon,’ for both ‘belong to the political realm of human affairs whose essentially human quality is guaranteed by men’s faculty of action’ (*OV*, 179, 133). In other words, violence, like power, bears the imprint of natality and freedom. However, instead of recognizing the full ramifications of this insight, Arendt falls back on a reductive opposition between ‘non-political’ and ‘political’ realms governed by two contradictory logics. A number of reasons explain this peculiar turn. Most obvious is her fear that in modernity violence and war admit of

no limit, that they are ‘not “storms of steel” (Jünger) that cleanse the political air, nor are they “the continuation of politics by other means” (Clausewitz) ... [but] monstrous catastrophes that can transform the world into a desert and the earth into lifeless matter’ (*IP*, 191). Fear of ‘wars of annihilation,’ then, impelled her to endorse an alternative vision which might displace and correct our present understandings of politics’ meaning. But there is a more prosaic reason for her mistaken equation of the ‘political’ with ‘being-with.’ Arendt understood, in contrast to Weber, that all power depends on ‘acting-in-concert,’ that intersubjectivity and solidarity are prime conditions of political existence. However, her error was to equate political solidarity with a general solidarity, political intersubjectivity with togetherness *per se*. Power presumes togetherness, yet this togetherness is nearly always *partial*, a matter of determinate groups of actors combining with specific purposes in mind. And it is precisely this partial solidarity that underlies and enables all forms of political violence. Thinking violence implemental and working with an image of the solitary actor, Arendt neglects that *political* violence, as distinct from other forms, is necessarily group-based and therefore dependent on ‘acting-in-concert.’ Thus, while the isolated ‘machine gunner’ certainly can control a crowd, this control is not simply, as Arendt (*OV*, 163) believes, a matter of his possessing superior killing technology, but also of the web or nexus of relations that places this technology in his hands in the first place and upholds his resolve throughout.

Of course, it could be argued that this misses the point of Arendt’s re-valuation of the ‘political,’ which was not to mirror the present but to provide a crucial yet indeterminate ideal by which to judge our current failings.⁴⁶ Ignoring this ‘utopian’ aspect of her work, we therefore capitulate to the enervating belief underlying political realism, that we are doomed to complicity in domination and coercion. However, to argue along these lines is to overemphasize the

emancipatory potential of Arendt's thought and to misinterpret the critique offered here. As to the first point, we saw that the excessive cost of her re-valuation of the 'political' is an 'inverted realism,' that is, the totalizing ascription of a logic of domination and technocratic rule to the private and 'social' realms. What results is not a thoroughgoing challenge to political realism, but in fact a de-politicization of the socio-economic and thus a paradoxical de-radicalization of citizenship as a living ideal. To avoid this, it is necessary to reject Arendt's dualisms, a point implicit in the above arguments. Furthermore, my goal in critiquing Arendt has not been to dismiss regulatory ideals or to deny the importance of ethics, far from it. Rather, it has been to correctly thematize the political realities with which ethical reflection must begin. Chief among these realities is the mixed stuff of political life unfortunately denied by Arendt when she ascribed to the 'political' a singular, non-dominative logic. To highlight the interwovenness of violence and power is not to revert to political realism, which is similarly false in presuming but one underlying logic, but instead to make the mediating claim that politics is about speech *and* coercion, friendship *and* enmity.

Standing between Arendt and realism, this mediating view demands that we think the logic of domination and the logic of solidarity, of violence and of power, together, since crude dualisms lessen our understanding of politics' potentialities and dangers. To equate the 'political' with domination is, as Arendt properly remarks, to condemn ourselves to self-annihilating cycles of revenge and reaction; by contrast, to equate it with friendship is to occlude those temporally urgent moments where decisions and discriminations have to be made under conditions of staunch dissensus and with the possibility that they might prove grievously inappropriate or wrong. Recognizing this truth means acknowledging that ethical-political reflection must address the inescapability of *strategy*, of actors being enmeshed in conflicts and having to respond to

these in ways which make adversaries or even enemies of others. Because actors inhabit relational networks and inherit histories over which they have little control, the avoidance of conflict and strategy is more often than not a matter of brute luck, stability being an undeniable good whose possession is hardly guaranteed for all times and contexts. 'Crisis' means a weakening of foundational accord in which stability gives way to fluidity. Yet fluidity is at once both a threat and an opportunity. It increases the likelihood of communal violence and unrest, the costs of which are frequently borne by the weakest groups, and yet promises the chance of changing political orders for the better. This, in short, is the meaning of 'risk.' Certainly, it would be unwise to equate politics as such with moments of grave risk. There will be times when antagonism can be converted into a contestatory, yet non-violent, agonism; when diverse actors will opt for a path of compromise or *modus vivendi*; and, finally, even moments where they achieve broad consensus on generalizable interests. But this should not occlude the truth that there will also be occasions when antagonism is ineradicable, when compromise is unacceptable, and when consensus is fanciful illusion. In such moments the only resort actors have is to try to effect a new political order by the least destructive means at hand.

But if political-ethical reflection must encompass antagonism and strategy, should we finally take our leave of Hannah Arendt? Notwithstanding her false turns, I believe that response would be mistaken, as becomes clear if we once again return to Weber. For strategy to remain ethical means acknowledging that when coercion and hostility are inevitable, this does *not* entail that everything is permitted. Despite avowing an 'ethics of responsibility,' Weber substantially weakens this normative caveat. He enjoined actors to 'help right to triumph by the use of force,' warning that otherwise they may be responsible for greater evils, and yet he believed that politics is fundamentally a contract with 'diabolical powers,' that ethical and political life follow

incommensurable laws (*RRW*, 334; *PV*, 123). But were politics truly a contract with diabolical powers there could be little possibility of helping the right or good to triumph, since the right and good would have no purchase on this realm. Instead, no action would be beyond the pale, no deed too heinous, in the quest for power. Scathingly critical of the *Machtpolitiker*, Weber's 'ethics of responsibility' nonetheless concludes with a *Machtpolitik* of its own where the claims of justice are recognised and yet denied.

Whatever the strategic attitude may be it cannot be 'diabolical,' for then all talk of responsibility would be pointless. A vigorously ethical conception of strategy, by contrast, denies that ethics and politics abide by different laws and instead views ethics as an immanent response to the challenges of politics. It is here that Hannah Arendt proves enduringly instructive. Although defending an untenable vision of the 'political,' she remains significant on account of her ideal of *amor mundi* or 'love of the world' (*IP*, 203). The importance of this ideal or attitude for an ethical conceptualization of strategy becomes apparent once we recognize Arendt's unique position within contemporary political theory. As Margaret Canovan shows, Arendt stands out among 20th century thinkers in lauding natality and revolutionary beginnings and yet pointing to the need for conservation, for preserving the relationships and institutions that sustain political life.⁴⁷ It was a symptom of 'our loss,' she claimed, 'that these two elements, the concern with stability and the spirit of the new, have become opposites in political thought and terminology,' the one claimed by conservatives and reactionaries, the other championed by radicals and revolutionary ideologues (*OR*, 223). This loss is tragic for it occludes a central truth of political life: that without change the polity slowly atrophies, but without boundaries and restraint it hurtles towards self-destruction. Motivating this self-destructive tendency is *hubris*, the overweening pride which tempts us to unleash incalculable biological and cosmic forces upon

the world or to compel others into conforming to our ideal conceptions of humanity (*HC*, 202). But *hubris* only partly explains Arendt's concern for boundaries and conservation, for it is action itself which threatens the endurance of the world (*HC*, 190—191). Action is the most meaningful of human being's activities, the sign of their spontaneous natality, but because bringing new and unforeseeable processes into life, this very natality can also take horrendously unpredictable paths. Thus, the inner meaning of 20th century totalitarianism is not simply the wild extremes of ideology and terror, but the chilling spectacle of natal action annihilating the human plurality and spontaneity that are the conditions of its becoming (*OT*, 438).

It was for this reason that Arendt sought to limit political action through constitutionalism and the maintenance of durable political institutions, both of which are inextricably linked with the human faculties of promising and forgiving. These measures and faculties give expression to the twin principles underlying the attitude of *amor mundi*, 'the old virtue of moderation' in the pursuit of our ends and the willingness to care for the diverse plurality of human beings (*HC*, 191). In short, action's 'enormous risks' are avoided only if human beings celebrate the existence of others and exhibit *humanitas*, the quality of being able to nurture and add to the world held in common.⁴⁸ The implications for an ethical conception of strategy are clear. Viewed under the attitude of care, strategy remains ethical if it avoids succumbing to a dehumanizing enmity where opponents are reduced to mere objects, if, as Arendt, quoting Sorel, observed, it holds to a 'spirit of fighting without hatred and "without the spirit of revenge"' (*OV*, 167). In place of a purist insistence on the absolute rectitude of one's values and goals, which denies the plurality of perspectives and slides easily into fanaticism, strategy must therefore exhibit a fundamental concern for the intersubjective realm that separates and yet relates diverse actors. But for this realm to endure and our deeds not to degrade into atrocity, the same moderation and restraint

which inform relations of friendship must also govern our actions during inevitable moments of antagonism and coercion. This means, in turn, that the ultimate criterion for strategic acts is not success, but success in a reflective, non-Pyrrhic sense, whether our deeds truly advance the ends and ideals sought, whether they endanger these ends and ideals by generating even greater enmity, and, whether, finally, they abide by the principles of interaction as far as possible, if not by their letter then at least in their spirit. The extreme of strategy is killing, but such killing must not, in the words of both Kant and Arendt, be such that it “would make mutual confidence in ... subsequent peace impossible.”⁴⁹ Under the vision of the ‘political’ articulated here violence is an irreducible element of our power, of all our projects and promises, but that violence ought never to be such as to eliminate the possibility of forgiveness or of future promises and new beginnings.

Notes

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¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1958), 200, hereafter *HC*.

² Arendt, ‘On Violence,’ in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 105—198 (134), hereafter *OV*. The Sorel reference is to his *Reflections on Violence* (1906).

³ Arendt, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations,’ *Social Research*, 38, 3 (1971): 417—446 (435), hereafter *TMC*. On the radical break signalled by totalitarianism, see also Arendt, *The Origins*

of *Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1966), 459—479, hereafter *OT*; Arendt, ‘Mankind and Terror’ (1953), in *Essays in Understanding: 1930—1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 297—306; Arendt, ‘Understanding and Politics’ (1953), in *Essays in Understanding*, 307—327, hereafter *UP*; Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 26, hereafter *BPF*; Arendt, ‘Hannah Arendt on Hannah Arendt’ in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn Hill (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1979), 301—339 (313), hereafter *HA*.

⁴ See, for instance, Arendt, ‘The Eggs Speak Up’ (1950) in *Essays in Understanding*, 270—284.

⁵ *BPF*, 5. See also Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 280, hereafter *OR*.

⁶ Peter Baehr, ‘The Grammar of Prudence: Arendt, Jaspers, and the Appraisal of Max Weber,’ in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. Steven Aschheim (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 306—324 (307). See also Richard Gunn, ‘Politics and Violence,’ in *Theories and Concepts of Politics: An Introduction*, ed. Richard Bellamy (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993), 265—294; Jürgen Habermas, ‘Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,’ *Social Research*, 44, 1 (1977): 3—24; George Kateb, ‘Political Action: Its Nature and Advantages,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana Villa (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 130—148; and John McGowan, ‘Must Politics be Violent? Arendt’s Utopian Vision,’ in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, eds Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 263—296.

⁷ *HC*, 175. See also Arendt, ‘Introduction into Politics,’ in Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 93—200 (117), hereafter *IP*.

⁸ See, for instance, Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 3rd edn (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3—13. It would be absurd to think Plato a ‘realist’ in this sense, given his moral

objectivism and defence of right over might in *The Republic*. However, Arendt is simply arguing that he gave inadvertent support to the political realist view.

⁹ See Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1948), 77—128 (99, 113), hereafter *PV*; Max Weber, *Political Writings*, eds Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 222, 304—308, 351; and Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds Günther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 948—952, hereafter *ES*.

¹⁰ See *OR*, 20, 38. As Machiavelli put it: 'A new prince, of all rulers, finds it impossible to avoid a reputation for cruelty,' *The Prince*, XVII (London: Penguin, 1995), 52.

¹¹ Max Weber, 'Religious Rejections of the World,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 323—359 (334), hereafter *RRW*. On the 'economization of violence,' see *PV*, 119; Gunn, 268; and Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), 220—224.

¹² Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 129—156 (155). See also *RRW*, 339; *ES*: 636.

¹³ *PV*, 119, 124; Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), 27, hereafter *MDT*. For Arendt's view of 'love' and 'fraternity,' as opposed to solidarity, see *HC*, 51—54, 76, 242; *OR*, 79—88; *MDT*, 12—17.

¹⁴ Arendt, 'Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship,' in Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 17—48 (37).

¹⁵ *HC*, 202; *OR*, 175. See also *HA*, 332; *OR*, 151; *OV*, 143, 152, 155.

¹⁶ Margaret Canovan (*Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 187) and Jeffrey C. Isaac (*Arendt, Camus and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven &

London: Yale UP, 1992), 133) both make this point, but without properly emphasizing what Arendt took to be the *non-* and even *anti-*political nature of such violence.

¹⁷ See especially *HC*, 38—49; *OR*, 60—65; 113—115; 273—275; *HA*, 316—317; and Arendt, ‘Labour, Work, Action’ (1964), in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James W. Bernauer (Dordrecht: Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 29—42 (32), hereafter *LWA*. See also the discussion of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in Arendt, ‘Public Rights and Private Interests,’ in *Small Comforts for Hard Times: Humanists on Public Policy*, eds Michael Mooney and Florian Stuber (New York: Columbia UP, 1977), 103—108.

¹⁸ *OR*, 19, my emphasis. See also *HC*, 31; *IP*, 119, 129, 151; *OV*, 177; *OR*, 175; *UP*, 308.

¹⁹ As Weber famously declared, ‘the legitimacy of a system of domination may be treated sociologically only as the probability that to a relevant degree the appropriate attitudes will exist’ (*ES*, 214).

²⁰ Baehr, 323.

²¹ *HC*, 17. See also *BFN*, 28; *TMC*, 435; *LWA*, 30.

²² See, for instance, Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1996), 123ff, 138ff; Richard Bernstein, ‘Rethinking the Social and the Political,’ in *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode*, Richard Bernstein (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 238—259; Habermas, 15; Hanna F. Pitkin, ‘Justice: On Relating the Public and Private,’ in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, eds Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 261—288; and Sheldon Wolin, ‘Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political,’ in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, 289—306.

²³ Benhabib, 123; Bernstein, ‘Rethinking the Social and the Political,’ 249.

²⁴ See especially Hauke Brunkhorst, 'Equality and Elitism in Arendt,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, 178—198 (183). Admittedly, Arendt did not hold firm to this technical understanding, at times affirming the Hegelian point that 'the rule of master over slaves ... did not rest on superior means of coercion as such, but on superior organization of [political] power' (*OV*, 149).

²⁵ Bernstein, 'Rethinking the Social and the Political,' 255; Benhabib, 144.

²⁶ *OV*, 153, 180, 184. See also 'Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,' *Crises of the Republic*, 201—233 (205, 223).

²⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 288, hereafter *EJ*.

²⁸ Indeed, Arendt acknowledged power's emboldening effects, recognizing that it was the power enjoyed by materially weaker peoples, such as the Vietnamese, which ensured victory over more technologically advanced enemies (*OV*, 112, 147, 150).

²⁹ See Robert Fitzroy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600—1972* (London: Penguin Press, 1988), 484.

³⁰ John Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London, New York: Verso, 1996), 76—79.

³¹ *ibid.*, 79.

³² Arendt, 'Die jüdische Armee --- der Beginn einer jüdische Politik?,' *Aufbau*, 14th November 1941: 1, 2. On the shame of 'innocence,' see *EJ*, 122; Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 53; Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Thought*, 186; and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982), 171—175.

³³ Arendt, 'Papier und Wirklichkeit,' *Aufbau*, 10th April 1942: 15—16; Arendt, 'Mit dem Rücken an der Wand,' *Aufbau*, 2nd July 1942: 19. Arendt's position here is strikingly similar to John

Stuart Mill's understanding of a mature, political people as one having a proven history of self-determination and self-help. See Walzer, 87—91.

³⁴ Arendt, 'The Eggs Speak Up,' 284.

³⁵ McGowan, 288.

³⁶ On the distinction between and yet interrelatedness of 'violence' and 'coercion,' which both presume 'force,' see C.A.J. Coady, 'The Idea of Violence,' *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 3, 1 (1986): 3—19 (15).

³⁷ As Arendt implies when considering 'why millions of human beings allowed themselves to be marched unresistingly into the gas chambers' (*OT*, 455). See also *OV*, 149.

³⁸ See especially Alan Keenan, 'Promises, Promises: The Abyss of Freedom and the Loss of the Political in the Work of Hannah Arendt,' *Political Theory*, 22, 2 (1994): 297—322.

³⁹ On her neglect of Alexander Hamilton's 'drive for centralization ... and vision of a national economy presided over by a strong state,' see Wolin, 'Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political,' 298—299, and James Miller, 'The Pathos of Novelty: Hannah Arendt's Image of Freedom in the Modern World,' in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, 177—208 (181). On the far from 'open' circumstances surrounding the drafting and ratification of the 1787 Constitution, see Iain Hampshire-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 197—199.

⁴⁰ Keenan, 321.

⁴¹ The 'fabulist' elements of Arendt's vision of the American Revolution are stressed by Bonnie Honig, 'Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic,' *American Political Science Review*, 85, 1 (1991): 97—114.

⁴² In underplaying the ‘primordial crime’ of Black slavery, Arendt (*OR*, 71), as Benhabib (160) observes, relegated to a parenthesis what would later almost destroy the Republic.

⁴³ *HC*, 175; Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982), 42, 67, hereafter *LKPP*.

⁴⁴ As compellingly argued by Leonard Feldman (‘Political Judgement with a Difference: Agonistic Democracy and the Limits of “Enlarged Mentality,”’ *Polity*, 32, 1 (1991): 1—24) and Julia Kristeva (*Hannah Arendt* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001), 181, 224—225).

⁴⁵ *BPF*, 223, my emphasis. That Eichmann deserved death, see *EJ*, 277—279.

⁴⁶ As suggested by McGowan (263, 284) and Arendt herself (*IP*, 192).

⁴⁷ Margaret Canovan, ‘Hannah Arendt as a Conservative Thinker,’ in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*, eds. Larry May and Jerome Kohn (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 11—32.

⁴⁸ *HC*, 245; *IP*, 186; *MDT*, 15—30. For fuller elucidations of Arendtean ‘care,’ see Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 57—75, and Garrath Williams, ‘Love and Responsibility: a Political Ethic for Hannah Arendt,’ *Political Studies*, 46, (1998): 937—950.

⁴⁹ *LKPP*, 75, quoting Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace,’ in Immanuel Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 89. See also *IP*, 198.