Sovereignty and Plurality: Hannah Arendt's Critique of the Nation-State

by

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Abstract

Hannah Arendt's political theory is a sustained attempt to rethink forms of politics centred on sovereign states. This thesis argues that according to Arendt, the sovereign state, epitomized by Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, was disrupted by international movements that prevented the state from ensuring the physical safety of its population and from creating a vibrant public sphere. As the nation-state matured, it was forced to rely on the trans-national Jewish population for financial support, contradicting the principle of equality at its heart. Human rights became national rights: supposedly universal claims became dependent upon citizenship in a state capable of protecting them. As Arendt shows, states were weakened by imperialist movements, the precursors of twentieth-century totalitarianism. Arendt argues that the ideal of the nation-state cannot be redeemed by sovereignty: politics is a fundamentally pluralistic activity, which entails a freedom inconsistent with sovereignty.

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, the state has played a rather paradoxical role in the discourse of political theory. David Held has stated that:

> On the one hand, in normative political theory, concepts of the political good have been elaborated at the level of state institutions and practices; the state has been at the intersection of intellectually and morally ambiguous conceptions of political life. Political theory, by and large, has taken the nation-state for granted and has sought to place the state at the centre of interpretations of the nature and proper form of the political good. On the other hand, the state has been seen as the key unit of political analysis in modern societies, demarcating the boundaries of society.[1]

At the same time that the central role of the state has been widely (if not explicitly) recognized and accepted, a silence has developed around this very concept. This silence is even more troublesome because of the centrality of the state in political discourse–in essence the categories of political understanding which are determined and disciplined by the state rest on a theoretical foundation which is largely taken for granted.

At a time when the Western democratic states have declared their final global triumph and ushered in "the end of history," this may not seem like such a troublesome state of affairs. It is ironic that, given this recent "victory," the need to reconsider the state has rapidly become more pressing than ever before. This is due to the rise of a growing number on influences. Generally grouped under the rubric of globalism, examples of these concerns include an ubiquitous global web of communication and information technology, the spread of multi-national corporations and the accompanying trans-border flows of capital, and a recognition of environmental problems that endanger populations and regions of the earth which transcend the traditional boundaries of political communities. Each has, in its own

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1. David Held, "Editor's Introduction," in David Held, Ed. *Political Theory Today.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 8.

way, challenged the nation-state's ability to carry out the wishes of its citizens, such that "[m]ore than ever before there are reasons for doubting whether a primary focus on the nature and proper form of the politics of governments and states can legitimately remain the basic subject matter of political theory. At issue is the coherence of the idea of the political."[2] Voices have begun to break through the silence surrounding the state, however. Prominent among them are theorists determined to reconsider the role of the modern state in this global context.

Perhaps the pivotal theorist of the modern state is Thomas Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* was an attempt to theorize a form of political organization in the context of early-modern social and political upheavals. He is therefore often at the centre of efforts to rethink the nature and function of the state in late-modern society. Hobbes wrote during a tumultuous period of British history, and attempted to respond to the challenges posed by the waning influence of Christianity on political life, the subsequent rise of bourgeois society, and the more immediate reality of civil war in England. In the face of this extreme insecurity, Hobbes developed a theory of the state designed to do no more or less than guarantee total security to its citizens. Hobbes began from an imaginary "state of nature," in which individuals lived lives that were, in his famous phrase, "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short"[3]–a reflection, no doubt, of the very real conditions of mid-17th century England. Individuals lived in an environment where they all were equally capable of killing anybody else. The insecurity of

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2. Held, "Editor's Introduction," p. 5.

3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 186.

the state of nature was inextricably bound up with the problem of temporal flux and flows. The dilemma of time inhered in the state of nature:

> Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man. For Warre, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known; and therefore the notion of *Time*, is to be considered in the nature of Warre.[4]

Time, furthermore, is bound up with the notion of movement. The state of nature is a condition in which individuals possess a completely unrestricted liberty. Hobbes analyzes liberty or freedom in terms of motion; these interchangeable terms "signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition; (by Opposition, I mean externall Impediments of motion;)"[5] The solution Hobbes proposed was elegantly simple: a social contract to create a commonwealth ruled by an absolute sovereign. All citizens would surrender their political power to the sovereign, who would therefore possess total power. In exchange, the sovereign would ensure a secure, stable society. Such a solution was an attempt to resolve the predicament of a life of pure temporality. It was, in effect, designed to regulate the motion of men through the spatial construct of the state:

> But as men, for the atteyning of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an Artificall man, which we call a Common-wealth; so also have they made Artificiall Chains, called *Civill Lawes*, which they themselves, by mutuall covenants, have fastned at one end, to the lips of that Man, or Assembly, to whom they have given the Soveraigne Power; and at the other end to their own Ears. These Bonds in their own nature be weak,

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4. *Leviathan*, p. 186, emphasis in original.

5. *Leviathan*, p. 262.

> may neverthelesse be made to hold, by the danger, though not by the difficulty of breaking them.[6]

Hobbes has become the paradigmatic political theorist of the modern state, of political space and time. He "has become an archetype of those thinkers for whom time and change constitute a problem to be overcome ... by attempting to abandon time entirely."[7] The attempt to abandon time, to discipline it through spatial categories such as the state was not limited to Hobbes, but has been "crucial in the construction of the most influential traditions of Western philosophy and socio-political thought."[8] Such attempts, however, have been problematized by a growing temporal acceleration and dislocation that destabilizes spatial categories beyond their ability to cope with them. Nevertheless, such an expression of the rationale for politics continues to hold great sway, both in political practice–such as claims by Quebec politicians that a sovereign Quebec is necessary for the protection of its unique language and culture, or concerns that the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment undermines the sovereignty of the nation-state–and within the discourse of political theory itself. The challenge, as R.B.J. Walker states, is "to attend to the most fundamental assumptions about the relation between unity and diversity and between space and time through which the early-modern answer was fixed and permitted to enter into the most

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6. *Leviathan*, pp. 263-264, emphasis in original.

7. R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 112.

8. Walker, *Inside/Outside*, p. 4.

pervasive practices of modern political life."[9] In short, the challenge is to reconsider the Hobbesian solution.

This thesis will demonstrate that Hannah Arendt's political theory is a sustained attempt to rethink forms of the political centred on sovereign states. More importantly, it will demonstrate *why* Arendt theorized a non-statist form of politics in her later works. To do so, it will focus primarily on her critique of the modern nation-state, a critique that comprises a significant aspect of her text, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. This thesis revolves around two major themes of Arendt's critique. First, it will look at the rise of the nation-state to show how the nation-state was forced to contradict the basic principle of equality as it matured, a principle at the heart of the nation-state. Second–and more importantly–it will examine Arendt's critique of the doctrine of sovereignty, a necessary component of the nation-state. I will show that for Arendt the sovereign status of the nation-state led directly to its implication in a number of problems and conditions that prevented it from fulfilling its role as provider of both a secure home for its citizens and a space within which meaningful political action could occur. The specific problems I will consider include the dilemma of human rights and statelessness, the rise of the bourgeoisie to positions of political influence, and the growth of imperialist and totalitarian movements. Taken as a whole, these elements form what was for Arendt a searing indictment of the nation-state as a form of political organization, and illustrated vividly the need to rethink the practice of politics in the wake of the destruction of World War II.

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9. Walker, *Inside/Outside*, p. 22.

In terms of her identification within political theory, Hannah Arendt is something of a nomad. She wrote in the context of a discipline fraught with labels, categories, and "-isms," and yet she consistently evaded precise location within this descriptive framework. Arendt herself was not bothered by the ambiguous (some might say contradictory or paradoxical) nature of her work. In response to the question, "What are you? ... What is your position within the contemporary possibilities?" her answer was straightforward:

> I don't know. I really don't know and I've never known. And I suppose I never had any such position. You know the left think that I am conservative, and the conservatives sometimes think I am left or I am a maverick or God knows what. And I must say I couldn't care less. I don't think that the real questions of this century will get any kind of illumination by this kind of thing.[10]

Such a response is to be expected from a thinker who "considered methodological discussions to be self-indulgent and irrelevant to real political problems."[11] However, this has not stopped her critics and commentators from attempting to categorize her work–attempts rendered problematic by the wide-ranging nature of her topics. During her life, she was considered to be firmly entrenched within the Anglo-American tradition of political theory, beginning with her magnum opus, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and continuing with later writing about such topics as the student and peace movements, the Vietnam War and *The Pentagon Papers*, and other topics of interest mainly to an American readership. However, these were all subsumed within her larger political project, a reinvigoration of the Western

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10. Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in Melvyn Hill, ed., *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 333-334.

11. Lisa J. Disch, "More Truth than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 21(4), 1993, p. 666.

political tradition through an examination of fundamental political concepts and categories: power, violence, freedom, authority, public and private, action and thinking, and so on. Since her death in 1976 (but especially since 1989), there has been an explosion of secondary literature examining her work and assessing her contributions to political thought. Much of this diverges from the Anglo-American focus that is predominant in the literature,[12] and approaches her political theory from schools of thought that exist largely on the margins of contemporary political discourse, such as feminist[13] or Continental theory. This latter aspect of the literature is one of the more interesting and fruitful: although the inspirations Arendt

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12. The earliest book-length treatment of Hannah Arendt–and the only one to see publication during her lifetime–was Margaret Canovan's *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd. 1974. Other examples of early Arendt scholarship include Peter Fuss "Hannah Arendt's Conception of Political Community," *Idealistic Studies*. 3, 1973, 252-265; Dolf Sternberger "The Sunken City, Hannah Arendt's Idea of Politics," *Social Research*. 44, 1977, 132-146; Leon Botstein and Martin Jay "Hannah Arendt: Opposing Views," *Partisan Review*. 45(3), 1978, 348-380. Melvyn A. Hill, Ed. "The Fictions of Mankind and the Stories of Men," in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979; James W. Bernauer, Ed. *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987; Shiraz Dossa *The Public Realm and the Public Self: The Political Theory of Hannah Arendt*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989.

13. Just a few examples from this burgeoning literature include Patricia Bowen-Moore *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*. London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd, 1989; B. Honig "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, Eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political*. London: Routledge,1992, pp. 215-235; Mary G. Dietz "Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics," in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, Eds. *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 231-260; Lisa J. Disch *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994; Bonnie Honig, Ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995; Ann M. Lane "Hannah Arendt: Theorist of Distinction(s)," *Political Theory*. 25(1), 1997, 137-159.

drew from theorists such as Heidegger[14] and Nietzsche[15] have been well established, a number of writers have begun making connections between elements of Arendt's thought and concerns typically associated with various "post-" schools of thought, such as post-structuralism, post-modernism, or post-colonialism.[16] The result of all this is a situation

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14. See, for example, Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), esp. pp. 172-195 of volume two, *Willing*; also Hannah Arendt "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," *New York Review of Books*. 17(6), 1971, 50-54.. See also Margaret Canovan "Socrates or Heidegger? Hannah Arendt's Reflections on Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research*. 57(1), 1990, 135-165. Of late, Arendt's personal relationship to Heidegger has overshadowed the intellectual relationship between them, spurred on mostly by Elżbieta Ettinger's *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), a text most notable for its artful use of innuendo and insinuation as tools of scholarly research. For opposing perspectives of this text, see Richard Wolin "Hannah and the Magician," *New Republic*. October 9, 1995, 27-37, and Ann M. Lane "Hannah Arendt: Theorist of Distinction(s)," *Political Theory*. 25(1), 1997, 137-159, esp. pp. 139-141. An alternate account of this period in Arendt's life, one that avoids Ettinger's gossipy, tabloid style, can be found in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), her masterful biography of Arendt.

15. See, for example, Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*, esp. pp. 158-172, where she identifies Nietzsche along with Heidegger (see note 5, above) as the two last theorists to adequately discuss the problem of the will. For an interpretation of Nietzschean themes in Arendt's conception of political action, see Dana R. Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action," *Political Theory*. 20(2), 1992, 274-308; Bonnie Honig "The Politics of Agonism: A Critical Response to 'Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action' by Dana R. Villa," *Political Theory*. 21(3), 1993, 528-533.

16. See Villa, Dana R. "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere," *American Political Science Review*. 86(3), 1992, 712-721; David Ingram, "The Postmodern Kantianism of Arendt and Lyotard," *Review of Metaphysics*. 42, 1988, 51-77; Bonnie Honig, "Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic," *American Political Science Review*. 85(1), 1991, 97-113; Norma Claire Moruzzi "Re-Placing the Margin: (Non)Representations of Colonialism in Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. 10, 1991, 109-120; Jeffrey C. Isaac *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. The linkages between Arendt and other post-structuralist theorists are readily visible on the surface, and offer numerous opportunities for further research. The similarity between Arendt

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where Arendt is many things to many people. She is, depending upon who you read, liberal, conservative, communitarian, elitist, neo-Aristotelian, a civic republican, a thinker essentially defined by her Jewishness, and on and on. Lisa Jane Disch's characterization of Arendt scholarship expresses the situation well: "Unlike the academic industries that have sprung up around interpretation and application of the theories of John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, or Michel Foucault, the attention to Arendt's work has been significant without generating anything of the consistency of a school of political thinking or an approach to politics."[17]

In spite of this divergence, Hannah Arendt is generally considered to be a primarily *political* theorist, as opposed to a philosopher. She attempted to engage with the most pressing and worrisome political developments of her time, such as the rise of totalitarianism and the fate of the political in a modern, mass society of labourers. Her goal was to come to grips with the implications of these phenomena for modern politics, and try to rescue politics from the challenges posed by them.

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and Foucault with respect to their notions of power and their historical method is one example. Also notable is Paul Virilio's apparent incorporation of Arendtian themes into his analyses of technologies of speed, such as in "The Primal Accident," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, Brian Massumi, Ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 211-218, as well as in *Bunker Archeology*, translated by George Collins (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), an analysis anticipated by Arendt when she wrote that, "[m]en now live in an earth-wide continuous whole where even the notion of distance, still inherent in the most perfectly unbroken contiguity of parts, has yielded before the onslaught of speed. Speed has conquered space, and ... it has made distance meaningless, for no significant part of a human life–years, months, or even weeks–is any longer necessary to reach any point on the earth." *The Human Condition.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 250.

17. Lisa Jane Disch (1994) *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 2, f.n. 1.

At the same time as she is recognized as a theorist trying to reinvigorate modern politics, there appears to be a consensus on another aspect of her work. Whatever Arendt may be or to whatever school of thought she may belong, she is anything but a theorist of the state. That this consensus must have been reached implicitly is the only conclusion that can be drawn from a survey of the literature, which does not substantively address the question of "Arendt and the state."

This situation is even more perplexing given how it conflicts with the notion of Arendt as a *political* thinker, since in the modern age there is no more prototypically political community than the state. The state is at the heart of conceptions of the political, and the object of political effort and analysis. Examinations of Arendt's conception of politics that do not confront its relationship to the state, therefore, seem to be ignoring a crucial facet of analysis. Peter Fuss's oft-quoted article, "Hannah Arendt's Conception of Political Community"[18] is notable in this regard. He draws extensively upon *The Human Condition* to cast Arendt as a theorist whose conception of political community begins and ends with the ancient Greek *polis*. Putting aside for a moment the merits of such a depiction, at no time in the article does he mention the state, or try to tie this conception of politics to the modern state. Such question-begging–why we or Arendt should care about a new conception of political community when the state is already there–is fairly representative of the literature. Arendt is interpreted as a theorist trying to reconceptualize the political, but her work is abstracted from the idea of the state, the idea that has made the modern conception of the political possible. Such readings de-contextualize and ultimately distort Arendt's political

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18. *Idealistic Studies* 3, 1973, 252-265.

theory. There are exceptions to this general rule. Margaret Canovan's second book on Arendt's thought notes the centrality of Arendt's diagnosis of the nation-state to her overall argument about the rise of totalitarianism, but goes little beyond that. Jeffrey C. Isaac's excellent interpretation goes further. Isaac contextualizes Arendt's "rebellious politics," as he calls it, in relation to her critique of the state. While he lauds Arendt for theorizing a conception of politics that is not reliant upon the state, he is at the same time critical of her for "ignoring the state" and the possibilities for a progressive, emancipatory politics inherent in it. Whatever we may think of this assessment, it at least recognizes that the problem of the state was at the centre of Arendt's political theory.

There are two primary ways in which Arendt's critique of the state has been overlooked. First, readings of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt's first major text, have tended to overlook the critique of the nation-state contained therein. The notable exception is Canovan's text, mentioned above; however, her analysis of this aspect of *Origins* is brief. Second, theorists focusing on Arendt's post-*Origins* texts, and therefore on her attempt to reinvigorate the political realm, have not contextualized her work with reference to her critique of the state. This thesis suggests–if only tentatively–that our reading of Arendt as a theorist relevant *now*, will be enriched by considering her as an early commentator on the problem of the nation-state in an era of accelerated movement. She was one of the first to recognize that movements threatened the secure political space established and protected by the state.

The first chapter will concentrate on the methodology Arendt employed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Her analysis of the decay of the nation-state was a central aspect

of her more general project, which was to map the rise of totalitarian movements and regimes in Germany and Russia. The first part of the chapter considers how Arendt's reading of the state fits into the larger framework of her argument. It will show that what Arendt thought to be most important about the rise and eventual "fall" of the nation-state was determined in large part by her historico-political project. The second part focuses on how Arendt conceptualizes the rise of the nation-state, and those aspects of the nation-state that she saw as the most important to understand, given her larger concerns.

Chapter two focuses on Arendt's analysis of human rights and statelessness. While human rights were meant to be inherent in all human beings, Arendt argues that they were in reality enjoyed only by those who were citizens in a state capable of protecting them. "Human rights" in effect were "state rights," and so large numbers of stateless people were denied what was supposed to inhere in their simple humanity. This situation shows the degree to which the state is an artificial form of political community, responsible not just for protecting rights that supposedly pre-exist the state (an early justification for the state), but for creating and protecting these rights at the same time. Arendt argues that these rights are necessary if individuals are to participate in political affairs, and thus the failure to extend them to all people bespoke the state's inability to create a truly inclusive home in the world. This "homelessness"–the lack of access to a political space that allows individuals to reveal their true humanity–is only one aspect of statelessness, however. Those who were not citizens and therefore could not depend upon protection from a state were not only denied entrance to the political realm, but also the very basics of physical safety.

Chapter three turns to Arendt's analysis of the relationship between politics and economics as it manifested itself in the imperialist movement of the late 19th century. Arendt argues that prior to this point, the two realms of politics and economics co-existed more or less independently. This situation did not change until they came into conflict, at which point the economic principles of capitalism challenged the political principles according to which the nation-state was organized. These two sets of principles, according to Arendt, were in complete opposition to one another. The political principles of the nation-state were based on the notion of boundaries: for the public realm to emerge, it had to do so within a spatially delimited area. Capitalism, on the other hand, required unlimited growth and was therefore hindered by boundaries. Imperialism was born when the economy came up against the political boundaries of the nation-state. It introduced the capitalist principle of unlimited expansion into the political realm, and challenged the conception of politics at the heart of the nation-state. This situation demonstrated the degree to which the nation-state was unable to cope with challenges to the principles at its foundation.

The fourth and final chapter will turn to the texts that Arendt wrote after *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Given the critique that she elaborates in that volume of a state incapable of ensuring the basic safety of millions of people (let alone a vibrant and secure political realm), Arendt then seeks to reconceptualize the political so that it is not reliant upon such a deeply flawed form of political community. This reconception is rooted in Arendt's misgivings about the doctrine of sovereignty. Traditionally, the sovereign status of states has made politics possible. It expresses that society's right and ability to decide its own course of action in its own interest–to be sovereign is to be free. It creates the state as the primary

political actor in international affairs, and determines the object of domestic political action, the decision-making body or bodies within the state. Arendt argues that sovereignty and freedom, rather than being synonymous, are in fact antithetical. Arendt opposes the notion of plurality to the doctrine of sovereignty. She argues that freedom is not something that is possessed, but something that is experienced as a product of political action. Action, meanwhile, is always action in concert with others. Therefore plurality, rather than sovereignty, is required for politics to take place and freedom to emerge. In challenging the supremacy of sovereignty to politics, Arendt conceptualizes a situation in which there is not one single, over-arching political space, but rather a multiplicity of political spaces affording numerous opportunities for political participation.

Writing the State: The Nation-State as Historical Thread

> *Antisemitism (not merely hatred of Jews), imperialism (not merely conquest), totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship)–one after the other, one more brutally than the other, have demonstrated that human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities.*[19]

Arendt's first major work of political theory, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is a study of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes in Germany and Russia, respectively. The historical scope of the text is impressive, tracing numerous historical and philosophical currents throughout the modern age, charting their development as they culminated in totalitarian regimes. Arendt witnessed the rise of Nazism, and this was a pivotal moment in her life, as it was for so many others. It shifted her interest from the abstract concerns of philosophy to the worldly realm of politics.[20] This direct experience created in Arendt a concern not with simply elucidating the nature and practices of totalitarianism, but with *understanding* total domination. Understanding, as Arendt theorizes, approaches its object much more amorphously than do processes of definition and description–understanding is not the same as a simple enumeration of features or characteristics. It is "an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with, reconcile ourselves to reality, that

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19. Hannah Arendt, "Preface to the First Edition," *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953), p. *ix*.

20. It also resulted in a geographical shift, as Arendt was one of the few who managed to escape. She fled Germany in 1933, and made her way to France. She lived there for eight years before fleeing again, this time to New York. See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, pp. 150-156.

is, try to be at home in the world,"[21] and was complicated by the fact that totalitarianism was a product of the very political and philosophical tradition it so deeply challenged. Arendt's study is also important not only in itself, but because it framed much of her later project. It is always on the horizon of Arendt's vision, a spectre haunting her singular devotion to re-invigorating politics in the 20th century. This work is divided into three volumes, entitled *Antisemitism*, *Imperialism*, and *Totalitarianism*, respectively.

The first volume of *Origins* concerns itself with the social and political experience of Jewish people in Europe from the middle of the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century.[22] Although anti-Jewish feelings predate this period, she restricts her focus to this time because it is crucial for the growth of antisemitic feelings into *ideology*. Ideologies, distinctively modern phenomena, are "isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single

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21. Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," *Partisan Review*. 20(4), 1953, 377-392, p. 377.

22. Arendt's discussion of the social dimension of antisemitism is not particularly relevant to her argument about the nation-state, and thus will not be examined here. It is interesting to note, however, that one of the themes she looks at, the distinction between "pariah" and "parvenu," is an important aspect of her work. Where the parvenu ignores fundamental aspects of her identity for the sake of belonging, the pariah embraces and celebrates her difference. Some commentators have argued that Arendt's theory of the pariah could be used to form the basis of a reconception of political action and resistance. See, for example Leon Botstein, "Liberating the Pariah: Politics, The Jews, and Hannah Arendt," *Salmagundi*. 60, 1983, 73-106; Ron H. Feldman, "The Jew as Pariah: The Case of Hannah Arendt," in Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*. Edited by Ron H. Feldman. (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1978); Jennifer Ring, "The Pariah as Hero: Hannah Arendt's Political Actor," *Political Theory*. 19(3), 1991, 433-452; Judith N. Shklar, "Hannah Arendt as Pariah," *Partisan Review*. 50(1), 1983, 64-77.

premise."[23] In considering the formation of ideologies directed explicitly against Jews, Arendt rejects two alternate explanations. According to the "scapegoat theory," what happened to the Jews could have happened to any other group–the fact that it happened to them was thus the equivalent of bad luck. The theory of eternal antisemitism held that hatred of Jews throughout the modern era was a manifestation of sentiments that were present at all times in history. Accordingly, antisemitism in general and particular events like the Holocaust are "outbursts [that] need no special explanation because they are natural consequences of an eternal problem."[24] Arendt argues that both theories are the result of a wilful forgetting: they "refuse to discuss matters in specific historical terms."[25] Understanding the nature of antisemitic ideology and its impact on totalitarian movements, according to Arendt, demands a historical reading of its development.

The first volume of *Origins* traces the historical path along which antisemitic ideologies developed in Europe. These ideologies did not actually make an appearance in European politics until about the middle of the nineteenth century. Their emergence coincided with the beginning of the breakdown of the nation-state, and they reached the height of their popularity and influence when the nation-state finally "collapsed." This correlation was no mere coincidence, as the fortunes of the Jewish people had become inextricably linked to that of the nation-state due to the crucial role they played in its development. The determinant of citizenship in the nation-state was nationality, and thus, the

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23. *Origins*, p. 468.

24. *Origins*, p. 7.

25. Arendt, *Origins*, p. 8. See pp. 5-8 for Arendt's discussion of both theories.

Jews were not granted the benefits of membership in the body politic. However, the Jews were able to acquire some degree of security by becoming the principal financiers of the state's activities. This occurred at a time when there was a general distrust of the state, and no social group wanted to become involved in its activities. At the same time, the state was beginning to play a greater role in everyday life, such as in economic affairs. Because the Jews played such a central economic role in the life of the nation-state, they were able to achieve some measure of protection under the law, despite their lack of formal citizenship.

However, the cost of this was an increasing identification of the Jewish people with the state; that is, the fortunes of the Jews rose and fell with the fortunes of the state. When the state began to break down under a combination of economic and political pressures, the backlash was directed at the Jewish people. Arendt closes the first volume with a meditation on the Dreyfus Affair, the famous case in which a Jewish officer of the French General Staff was accused and convicted of espionage. The Affair, Arendt argues, was indicative of the depth and extent of anti-Jewish sentiments throughout Europe at the close of the nineteenth century.[26] It is during this period that imperialist movements became a forceful presence on the European political stage, and challenged the conception of political action at the heart of the nation-state.

In the second volume of *Origins*, Arendt argues that the growth of imperialism and the decline of the nation-state are intimately linked because the economic philosophy of the former, in effect, the philosophy of capitalism, directly conflicted with the political foundation of the latter. Imperialism developed during the last thirty years of the nineteenth

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26. *Origins*, ch. 4.

century primarily as a response to the economic limitations imposed by the borders of the nation-state. In search of new markets and opportunities for investment, the bourgeoisie looked outside the state, commencing the export of superfluous capital and people. This process was made possible by "the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie,"[27] according to Arendt, who became interested in politics only when they realized the need for political power to safeguard and promote their economic ventures. Prior to the imperialist age, these ventures took place within the confines of the nation-state, in areas of society in which government was not involved. Thus, until investment capital actually crossed the limits of the nation-state system, there was no direct conflict with the nation-state, and the bourgeoisie saw no need to become politically active.

This "overseas imperialism" was monopolized by the countries of Western Europe, which touched off feelings of frustration and resentment in Central and Eastern European nations. They had been left out of the rush for overseas land, and the ensuing economic and political gains. This led to the birth of "continental imperialism" and the "pan-movements," Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism, movements to which Nazism and Stalinism respectively owe much of their existence.[28] The most important difference between continental imperialism and the overseas imperialism to which it was a reaction was that the colony was not geographically separated from the nation. Simultaneously left out of the imperialist rush for land and expressing their belief in their right, like that of other peoples, to territorial expansion, the only outlet for this expansionist drive was to turn on the nation-states of

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27. *Origins*, ch. 5.

28. *Origins*, ch. 8.

Western Europe. The pan-movements were hostile not only to particular nation-states, but to the nation-state in general. Indeed, while continental imperialism was a manifest failure in terms of geographical expansion, it "succeeded in realizing the imperialist hostility against the nation-state by organizing large strata of people outside the party system."[29] Overseas imperialism was the opposite of this: wildly successful at colonization, but unable to effect significant changes in the domestic political structure.

The two types of imperialism did share an emphasis on the unifying principle of race over that of nationality, but even this manifested itself differently. Arendt argues that in overseas imperialism, the turn to race was a response to the absolute otherness of the native tribes encountered by the imperialists. Outside of the context of "civilization"–i.e. the nation-state system–the only thing that could have caused people to be so "savage" was race, or so the argument went. In continental imperialism, on the other hand, the emphasis was on race over nationality right from the very start: "Its race concepts were completely ideological in basis,"[30] whereas the absorption of race thinking into the ideology of overseas imperialism was a product of experiencing the Other: "race was the emergency explanation of human beings whom no European or civilized man could understand and whose humanity so frightened and humiliated the immigrants that they no longer cared to belong to the same human species."[31] In any event, both types of imperialism had profound impacts on the

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29. *Origins*, p. 250.

30. *Origins*, p. 224.

31. *Origins*, p. 185.

nation-state, and also on the totalitarian movements that grew out of them. Arendt devotes the third volume of her study to totalitarianism proper.

The final volume of the trilogy for the most part foregoes the detailed historical analysis so prominent in the two previous volumes. Having already presented her history of the events and conditions which coalesced into totalitarian regimes, Arendt turns to look at the mechanisms of power and the paradoxically formless structure of totalitarianism. The key to totalitarian rule is the extent to which the entire fabric of everyday social and political life is completely torn to shreds. One of the primary means by which the population is controlled is the liquidation of the atomized, class-based society that was predominant across Europe, and the formation of a mass society. This is a society completely without structure and stability, in which individuals are without any ties to other people or society as a whole, ties previously secured through class membership. This shapeless, shifting mass, Arendt argues, is so entirely without anchorage or direction that it becomes highly susceptible to movements offering the slightest hint of salvation.

Salvation reveals itself as the totalitarian movement. Its ideology, couched in the language of "scientificality," proclaims the "infallibility" of the movement, arguing that it is "a mere interpreting agent of predictable forces."[32] The most novel aspect of totalitarian regimes, meanwhile, is their use of terror as a primary means of control of the masses. By exploding the distinction between guilty and innocent and constantly redefining the bounds of legality, totalitarianism creates a highly unpredictable society, in which the only stability can be found through faith in the movement. This indeterminacy explains why ardent

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32. *Origins*, p. 349.

followers of the regime, even at the highest levels of power and influence, confessed to crimes they never committed: in the grip of an unstable existence, the only reality, the only truth, was what the movement declared to be real or true. This constant upheaval of everyday life mobilized the totalitarian belief that "everything is possible." A society without anchors is a society capable of being made to do anything. The ultimate expression of this principle, according to Arendt, was the concentration camps. The camps were horrifically successful in instituting an entirely unprecedented mode of existence, one which destroyed, "under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior," and transformed "the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not."[33]

The structureless nature of life under totalitarianism is replicated in the organization of the totalitarian regime. The organization of power does not resemble the normalized, hierarchical nature of other political systems, according to Arendt. Likening it to the internal structure of an onion, she argues that totalitarian regimes are composed of numerous overlapping layers. This structure "makes the system organizationally shock-proof against the factuality of the real world."[34] However, even such a design, in spite of how different it is from traditional arrangements of power, implies that somewhere underneath all these layers there is a stable core. This core, however, is not stationary, but is instead constantly

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33. *Origins*, p. 438.

34. Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977 [1961]), p. 100.

moving, thereby preventing the organization of resistance from within while the layered nature of the organization prevents the identification from without of the true locus of power.

As is evident from this synopsis, *Origins* covers a large historical and conceptual range, crisscrossing and backtracking over a number of themes which Arendt argues coalesced into totalitarian regimes. Thus, the structure of Arendt's argument is at odds with the very title of the text. To find the "origins" of something, as Arendt thought a traditional historian might, is to pursue singularity, to trace back that phenomenon to the primordial historical event or condition that produced it. Arendt was actually against the decision to use *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as the title of her text, since it misrepresented her project. As Lisa J. Disch relates, the working title Arendt proposed was instead, "The Elements of Shame: Antisemitism–Imperialism–Racism." The change to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* "redefines the work itself. Where 'Elements of Shame' announces a study that violates the conventions of social science to explain a contingent event that is incomprehensible within that framework, 'Origins' suggests a causal analysis that appears to follow those conventions."[35]

Arendt addressed this distinction between traditional historiography and her own approach in her reply to Eric Voegelin's famous review of *Origins* in a 1953 issue of *Review of Politics*. "All historiography," according to Arendt,

> is necessarily salvation and frequently justification...These impulses are already implicit in the mere observation of chronological order and they are not likely to be overcome through the interference of value-judgements which

35. Disch, "More Truth Than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt," pp. 675-676.

> usually interrupt the narrative and make the account appear biased and "unscientific."[36]

The problem Arendt faced was "how to write historically about something–totalitarianism–which I [Arendt] did not want to conserve but on the contrary felt engaged to destroy."[37] Traditional historical method offered no guidance: the standard "objective" approach was obviously useless in this instance, and to simply add condemnation and stir would do little to help avoid this trap of justification and salvation. She resolved this dilemma by writing a text in which "the elementary structure of totalitarianism is the hidden structure of the book while its more apparent unity is provided by certain fundamental concepts which run like red threads through the whole."[38] Margaret Canovan's recent reinterpretation of Arendt's political thought highlights the centrality of these interwoven threads to her overall project through reference to a letter Arendt wrote to her editor prior to the initial publication of *Origins*. In it, Arendt identifies five crucial elements of her study, the "fundamental concepts" mentioned in the above quote. These elements include, in no particular order,

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36. Hannah Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," *The Review of Politics*. 15(1), 1953, p. 77. The issue of value judgements and bias in Arendt's treatment of totalitarianism has been an issue for some commentators. Robert Burrowes, in his 1969 essay "Totalitarianism: The Revised Standard Version," (*World Politics*. 21: 272-294), claims that "*The Origins of Totalitarianism* is flawed as an aid to systematic comparative political analysis by its judgemental and pejorative tone." Locating totalitarian regimes within some comparative schema was not a concern for Arendt, who undertook a primarily political, rather than an academic engagement with the phenomenon of totalitarianism.

37. "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," p. 77.

38. "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," p. 78.

"antisemitism, decay of the national state, racism, expansion for expansion's sake, [and] alliance between capital and mob."[39]

Arendt herself did not attach greater significance to any one of these five themes, since that would be inconsistent with her approach–the thread metaphor illustrates this quite clearly. She felt that traditional historiography presented an account composed of a single narrative, tracing developments through time in a straight line from the start of the thread to its end, from origin to culmination; Arendt's multiple threads, however, intersect one another throughout *Origins*.[40] Metaphorically, Arendt produces a woven fabric in place of a single thread. It is thus rather confusing to read the comments of Ian Kershaw, who claims that the "basic argument" in *Origins* "explaining the growth of totalitarianism–the replacement of classes by masses and the emergence of a 'mass society'–is clearly flawed."[41] Whether or not such an explanation is "clearly flawed" is something of a side issue, since Arendt is not making that claim in the first place; her explanation of the growth of totalitarianism is in fact much more complex. Ironically, in dismissing what he claims to be Arendt's argument,

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39. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 28. Canovan derives this information from Arendt's "Outlines and Research Memoranda," a part of the Arendt papers held in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

40. Arendt's own historical method thus has strong affinities with Michel Foucault's conception of genealogy, which also "opposes itself to the search for 'origins.'" (See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, Ed. New York: Pantheon, 1984). The similarities and differences between Arendt's and Foucault's thought comprise an area with considerable potential for analysis, although to my knowledge, it has yet to be comprehensively examined.

41. Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* Third Edition. (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), p. 21.

Kershaw actually seems to confirm Arendt's suspicions about the "blinkered" nature of the majority of historical research, which seeks to reduce the explanation of historical events to a single cause. Isolating any one of Arendt's themes to the exclusion of the others is like pulling out one of the threads: it will unravel the fabric of her argument.[42]

Given the interwoven nature of her argument(s), there is an implicit danger in concentrating on Arendt's treatment of the nation-state to understand its role in her study of totalitarianism[43] (and, to a limited degree in this context, her overall body of work). Although I wish to give this treatment the attention it has not received to date, and that it fully deserves, I do not want to lapse into a reductivist stance, whereby every aspect of Arendt's political theory of totalitarianism (and similarly her later (re)formulation of politics) can be explained by her diagnosis of the state. Once again, the thread metaphor is helpful: the conceptual threads that Arendt employs interconnect with one another continually–it is impossible to come to terms with Arendt's treatment of antisemitism, for example, in a theoretical vacuum. The rise of antisemitism as Arendt understands it is intimately linked to the decline of the nation-state, and those two elements on their own are only contributors to the rise of

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42. Of course, Kershaw is correct in the sense that Arendt's concept of a mass society is central. She identifies its creation as a necessary–but *not* sufficient–factor in the ability of totalitarianism to govern as it does. Note also that Arendt does not even recognize it as one of her "fundamental concepts." The destruction of a class-based society and its replacement with an amorphous mass society is a crucial aspect of the consolidation of totalitarian power. It does not, however, factor into her explanation of the "growth of totalitarianism," *per se*. This sort of difference illustrates nicely the disjuncture Arendt envisioned between her own goals, questioning *how* the emergence of totalitarianism was possible, and those of traditional historians, who she thought investigate the question of *why* totalitarian regimes arose in Germany and Russia.

43. This danger is therefore present in any restricted consideration of these five major themes.

totalitarian regimes. It is impossible to detach one from the other, and thus an understanding of one requires an understanding of both. Of course, such a claim does not mean that for a full exposition of Arendt's conception of the state, one must reproduce the entire argument in *Origins*. However, a concentration on the thread of the state must inevitably draw upon the other threads in Arendt's conceptual fabric without attributing to it a fundamental role. Similarly, the crisis of the state that Arendt documents is one aspect of the general political malaise endemic to modern society against which Arendt situates her text.[44]

And yet, it is misleading to argue that Arendt is concerned with "the state," i.e., the state as an abstract theoretical construct, in the first place. To the degree that she offers a historical account, she is not writing a history of *the* state, but rather a history of a particular variety of state, the modern nation-state and as a critique of the modern state, it is also a critique of the form of the political rooted in the modern state. That Arendt is focussed on such a historically and geographically specific manifestation of the state should come as no surprise since it is entirely consistent with her political and historical aims. Insofar as the state has a role to play in the formation of totalitarianism, Arendt sought to analyze it "in historical terms, tracing ...[it]...back in history as far as I [Arendt] deemed proper and necessary."[45] This meant coming to terms with the state in its distinctively modern incarnation as nation-state.

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44. Totalitarianism, meanwhile, is not that malaise, but is a particularly horrifying and extreme manifestation of this malaise, which infects daily life across the Western world.

45. Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," p. 78.

As we saw previously, Arendt's theory of the nation-state is embedded within an analysis of a range of themes that combine to form *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Getting at this theory therefore necessitates extracting "the decay of the national state" from the other threads in Arendt's argument. What this really amounts to, therefore, is contrasting Arendt's concept of the nation-state with her consideration of the totalitarian "state" in *Origins*. A central binary which structures Arendt's argument is the way that totalitarian regimes differ from normal states. What is crucial for Arendt is not simply *that* totalitarian regimes differ from normal states, but rather it is *how* they differ that concerns her. The term "normal" must be applied cautiously, since it refers to a wide range of polities, from representative democracies to tyrannies and dictatorships. From the perspective of understanding totalitarianism, however, the differences between these states are irrelevant. Only the common feature is crucial: political systems from democracies to dictatorships all belong within, and can be understood through, a system of state-centric political thinking. "Totalitarian rule," on the other hand, "confronts us with a totally different kind of government,"[46] one which "has exploded the very alternative on which all definitions of the essence of governments have been based in political philosophy, that is the alternative between lawful and lawless government, between arbitrary and legitimate power."[47] It is this distinction that allows us to categorize states along a continuum. In exploding this distinction, totalitarianism, as we will see, explodes the very concept of the state.

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46. *Origins*, p. 461.

47. *Origins*, p. 461.

Seeking a greater understanding of the nature of "the very alternative on which all definitions of the essence of governments have been based in political philosophy" does not necessarily require an in-depth understanding of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism: although the breakdown of the nation-state contributed to the rise of totalitarianism, the reverse does not hold. Totalitarianism itself is centrally but not solely responsible for the breakdown of the nation-state. However, because totalitarianism "explodes" the basic category at the heart of western political thought's understanding of political systems and represents for Arendt the extreme antithesis to the western political tradition, her description of totalitarian movements is highly illustrative of the nature of "normal" states. Arendt's theory of totalitarianism thus plays a relatively minor role in elaborating her theory of the state, except, as is the case with all binaries, in showing what the Arendtian state is not.

"State," or "Nation-state?"

In her discussion of the state, Arendt's terminology shifts back and forth between "state" and "nation-state." The distinction she draws between the two related concepts is a crucial aspect of her argument. The unhyphenated "state" serves almost as an ideal type for Arendt, an unrealized, although perhaps not unrealizable, category against which the historically occurring nation-state can be compared. When compared in this way, the nation-state ultimately fails to live up to the promise of the state as a type of political community.

As Canovan points out, Arendt views the state as an artificial rather than a natural entity.[48] It did not exist in all times and in all places but arose in response to a specific set of conditions and circumstances. For Arendt, the rise of the fully-fledged nation-state in particular is a result of the newly found political equality that came about after the feudal era. It did not appear suddenly out of nothing, but began "under the tutelage of the absolute monarchies"[49] and evolved over the course of many decades. Arendt does not devote a great deal of time to this period when the nation-state was in its infancy and which she considers to have decisively ended with the French Revolution, since it did not have significant implications for the European countries in general. The emergence of the nascent nation-state structure did not affect the masses at all, "who continued to live in a more or less feudal order,"[50] and had little immediate political impact, especially when compared with the revolutionary nature of the fully fledged nation-state that emerged at the time of the French Revolution. Arendt summarizes this period only to contextualize the later development of the nation-state, and a brief discussion of this time will serve the same purpose here.

There was a strong link between the social and the political realms under feudalism, such that there was, practically speaking, no distinction between them. The nobility established itself as the class upon which the monarchy could rely for financial support, and thereby identified itself as the ruling class. When the support of the nobility began to wane, the absolute monarchs searched for another class in society with which they could make a

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48. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, p. 32.

49. *Origins*, p. 14.

50. *Origins*, p. 14.

similar arrangement. In the interim, they turned to individual "court Jews" who could supply the necessary income to fund their (primarily military) ventures. This was, however, a fairly limited interim arrangement, and the monarchs' search ultimately proved to be a failure:

> [b]y the end of the eighteenth century it had become clear that none of the estates or classes in the various countries was willing or able to become the new ruling class, that is to identify itself with the government as the nobility had done for centuries.[51]

The absolute monarchies had failed to find a social group willing to act as the political representative of the entire nation, as the nobility had under feudalism. This failure, Arendt writes, "led to the full development of the nation-state and its claim to be above all classes, completely independent of society and its particular interests, the true and only representative of the nation as a whole."[52] The body politic of the nation-state had become fully sovereign, separate both from those who form the government and from the population within its borders. As David Held states, "in the language of the times, it [the state] was an 'artificiall Person', quite distinct from the person or assembly who must bear or represent it."[53] This distinction was a revolutionary change in the form and manner of rule.

This, according to Arendt, was the historical pattern of events which led to the rise of the nation-state. However, Arendt never does explicitly define what she understands by the term "nation-state," enumerating the necessary and sufficient conditions for a political body to be considered a nation-state. However, a number of characteristics can be gleaned

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51. *Origins*, p. 17.

52. *Origins*, p. 17.

53. David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 38. 'Artificiall Person' is a quote from Thomas Hobbes.

from various aspects of her text. I would like to first briefly turn to a section of Held's discussion of the nation-state, one which lays out a number of characteristics typically associated with modern states. Held writes that "the concept of the nation-state, or national state, as some prefer, ought not to be taken to imply that a state's people necessarily 'share a strong linguistic, religious, and symbolic identity.'"[54] Furthermore, Held points out that 'nation' does not mean 'nationalism.' The conjuncture of the two elements, nation and state, does not signal a necessary harmonization of political institutions with national interests. Rather, "what makes the 'nation' integral to the nation-state ... is not the existence of sentiments of nationalism but the unification of an administrative apparatus over precisely defined territorial boundaries."[55] Held notes that while there are instances where these boundaries do completely enclose an entire single nationality, there are also numerous cases where the nation-state contains multiple nationalities.

Arendt, on the other hand, argues that the conjoining of nation(ality) and state was necessary for fundamental aspects of the nation-state to flourish, such as the notion of equality. The modern state arose during an era in which the principle of the equality of all people spread throughout Europe, and was a founding principle of the nation-state. Equality of all citizens was fundamental to the body politic of the nation-state, which more than any other form of the state could not grant privileges to a particular segment of the population and still claim to uphold the principle of equality. The challenge, however, was that humans,

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54. Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, p. 49.

55. Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Society*, p. 172, quoted in Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, p. 49.

according to Arendt were inherently *un*equal. Outside of the political realm, individuals possess a range of ascriptive qualities, characteristics and capabilities which radically differentiate them from one another. These attributes constitute "the dark background of mere givenness, the background formed by our unchangeable and unique nature," and this background "breaks into the political scene as the alien which in its all too obvious difference reminds us of the limitations of human activity--which are identical with the limitations of human equality."[56] In the public realm, where political action is inherently a process of action in concert with one's peers, the capability for action is constrained by the level of equality. But this difference, when it emerges in the political realm, a difference stemming not from an individual's words and deeds but from characteristics over which they have no control, breeds hostility and fear. They represent "those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to destroy."[57] The resort to nationality as the basis of citizenship is a response to this danger, and Arendt argues that it is a response found not only in nation-states, but in other highly advanced political communities, as in the *polis* of Ancient Greece. Basing the nation-state on an ethnically homogenous population, she states, reflects the "hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiations which by themselves arouse dumb hatred, mistrust, and discrimination..."[58] This particular facet of the nation-state highlighted the schism between state and nation-state. Arendt points out that "the state inherited as its

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56. *Origins*, p. 301.

57. *Origins*, p. 301.

58. *Origins*, p. 301.

supreme function the protection of all inhabitants in its territory no matter what their nationality, and was supposed to act as a supreme legal institution."[59] However, because of the rise of national consciousness, this goal was subverted, such that nationality became the determinant of citizenship. In effect, although this was not explicitly proclaimed to be the case, "only nationals could be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions..."[60]

This does not mean that Arendt's argument about the link between nationality and the state is incompatible with most standard definitions of the modern state. As the opening of this chapter makes plain, Arendt's theory of the nation-state is heavily influenced by her historico-political project. She does not argue that a state must always be nationally or ethnically homogenous if it is to be properly labelled a "nation-state." Rather, Arendt illuminates the way in which national homogeneity was entwined with the nation-state's development and consolidation of political power. The nation-state arose and came to its full expression during a period in history when Europe was in the midst of a push towards national sovereignty. The impact of this was especially felt in Western Europe, where the nation-state tradition took root and flourished. The means according to which a people could declare to the rest of the world that they were civilized, that they had come of age as a nation, was by organizing their political community along national lines: political nationhood was

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59. *Origins*, p. 230.

60. *Origins*, p. 275.

a cardinal indicator of national maturity.[61] These three concerns, therefore, are historically tied in with one another, and it is impossible to consider questions of territory and institutions without understanding how the development of these aspects of the nation-state are connected with issues of nation and nationality.

As we shall see below, the nascent nation-state could not support itself without establishing a special relationship with the Jewish people, thereby creating a situation of necessary inequality. As mentioned in the above summary of the first volume of *Origins*, Arendt demonstrates the fundamental role the Jewish people played in the early development of the nation-state. A look at this section of the text reveals how national homogeneity reflected on the growth of a unified "administrative apparatus." Once again, it must be pointed out that Arendt's purpose is not to illuminate particular aspects of the nation-state in the abstract, but to consider the interplay between these aspects and other conditions of European life which contributed to the decay of the nation-state. We cannot, therefore, learn much from Arendt about the bureaucratic apparatus *per se* that is needed to maintain the nation-state, but what we can learn further highlights the importance of nationality to the

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61. Arendt's discussion of the process of nation-building in Germany is especially interesting in this light. German national consciousness was a highly "negative" phenomenon, since it "had not been the fruit of a genuine national development but rather the reaction of foreign domination." (*Origins*, p. 167) In an effort to unite the various German states, the emphasis shifted towards arguments about the common tribal origin of the German peoples. Arendt discusses this because it laid the framework for "race-thinking" in Germany later during the period up to and including the rise Nazis to power. (It also highlights the manner in which "nation" is a constructed category like any other.)

growth of the modern state.[62] This apparatus began to develop early on in the life of the nation-state, according to Arendt. She continues:

> This was meant to be for administrative purposes only, to be sure, but the range of interests, financial and otherwise, and the costs were so great that one cannot but recognize the existence of a special sphere of state business from the eighteenth century on.[63]

Because it created a body politic in which nationals were equal as citizens, the nation-state could not then turn to a particular group within the nation to finance its business, as the nobility did under feudalism. Doing so would politically privilege that class, and therefore contradict the principle of national equality. The Jewish people at the dawn of the nation-state were in a rather precarious position: their population widely dispersed throughout Europe, they were everywhere non-citizens, essentially dependent upon the goodwill of governments for protection.

To remedy this situation, the Jewish people stepped in to assume to role of financiers of the state's activities. In return, the umbrella of the state was extended to cover them–to provide them with the same security afforded to citizens. The emancipation edicts, designed to extend full protection under the law to Jewish people, "had a double function and an ever-present equivocal meaning."[64] On the one hand, they were an expression of the demands of equality made by the very nature of the nation-state. On the other hand, they were "the clear

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62. In her later works, Arendt did consider the role of bureaucracy in modern society and in relation to politics. Referring to modern governance as a process of "housekeeping on a national scale," she was harshly critical of the extent to which politics had become synonymous with mere administrative matters.

63. *Origins*, p. 17.

64. *Origins*, p. 12.

result of a gradual extension of specific Jewish privileges, granted originally only to individuals [the Court Jews], then through them to a small group of well-to-do Jews,"[65] and eventually to all Jews, when the financial demands of the nation-state required large-scale funding. Thus, according to Arendt, the emancipation edicts were symbolic of both equality and privilege; more importantly, however, they represent the earliest recognition of the fact that special action was needed to accommodate the presence of minority peoples who did not belong to the "proper" nationality to automatically receive protection under the law–that the nation-state was inherently flawed, in other words. Not only did it require the extension of privilege to the Jews to protect them, but the nation-state itself needed it if it was to survive and remain effective as a means of political organization.

Throughout her discussion, Arendt constantly shifts her frame of reference back and forth: at times she is talking about particular nation-states or "the" nation-state, and at times she seems to be speaking of the nation-state "system." The notion of a system of nation-states flows directly from the concept of national sovereignty. A corollary to the belief that one's own nation has the inherent right to manage its own affairs, to govern itself as it sees fit, is that other nations share the same right. This tenet of the nation-state system was not intended to be divisive. It shares nothing with nationalist sentiments, for example, which trumpet the superiority of one group of people at the expense of other groups. It was an expression of the "national principle according to which mankind was a family of nations vying for

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65. *Origins*, p. 12.

excellence..."[66] The reciprocally held belief in the national right of self-determination was not meant to be divisive, but was meant to contain the germ of a larger unity: the whole was to be greater than the sum of its national parts.

More than a merely laudable goal, Arendt intimates that such a conception of "mankind" was necessary if the nation-state was to remain a viable form of political community–which it ultimately did not. The system as a whole was especially susceptible to the slightest instability, both "internal" and "external." As soon as "mankind" was not seen as a collection of nations co-existing harmoniously, the ability of the nation-state to promote the interests of the nation was jeopardized. As the numbers of stateless people continued to multiply early in this century, for example, remedies to the problem were quickly sought out. One such solution open to the state was to insist "on its sovereign right of expulsion"[67] to rid itself of stateless people. However, because other states were equally unwilling to accept them, the only option open to the state was to smuggle "its expelled stateless into the neighbouring countries, with the result that the latter retaliated in kind."[68] The lesson to be learned from this exercise was that "full national sovereignty was possible only as long as the comity of European nations existed."[69] Statelessness was also in part an "external" phenomenon, and in combination with imperialism and total war, opened rifts in the nation-state system that never did heal. The moral of history was clear: just as totalitarianism could

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66. *Origins*, p. 126.

67. *Origins*, p. 283.

68. *Origins*, p. 284.

69. *Origins*, p. 278.

not truly be total unless and until it spanned the globe, the nation-state could not be completely secure as long as influences could emerge from outside the nation-state system. It is to an examination of just how these outside pressures affected the nation-state that we will now turn.

"Human" Rights vs. "State Rights"

> *No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as "inalienable" those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves. Their situation has deteriorated just as stubbornly, until the internment camp–prior to the second World War the exception rather than the rule for the stateless–has become the routine solution for the problem of domicile of "displaced persons."*[70]

The issues of human rights and "statelessness" jointly offer a compelling illustration of the impact of the modern state on large strata of the European population. It is no accident that Arendt discusses the two in tandem: those most in need of a doctrine of *human* rights have historically been stateless people, those who have been stripped of their citizenship and of their home in the world–in short, everything *but* their humanity. In theory, these rights were inherent in all humans. In practice, only those who were citizens of a state able to safeguard these rights enjoyed them; "human rights" were effectively supplanted by "state (or national) rights," possessed not by human beings but by citizens. The ultimate tragedy of this situation was that millions of people thrown into such a life as "mere" humans would ultimately lose even that status in the concentration camps, institutions designed to degrade humans into mere animals. Through her critique of this situation, Arendt reveals the role she envisioned for the state, especially in relation to political practice. The nation-state, however, was unable to play such a role because of inherent problems, such as the possibility of statelessness.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man outlines the rights that are to belong naturally to all humans as well as the role of the state in protecting those rights. The rights enumerated

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70. *Origins*, p. 279.

are familiar to citizens of western democratic states: freedom of speech, assembly, and expression, protection against excesses of state power, and so on. It was drafted in 1789, just prior to the French Revolution. This was also, according to Arendt, the moment when the nation-state achieved maturity, and that nation-state *par excellence*, the French Republic, burst onto the stage of European history.[71] This seeming coincidence is actually anything but: the nation-state and the doctrine of human rights are, in a manner of speaking, siblings. Their parent was "the revolutionary concept of equality."[72] It challenged the belief that the nature of society, that which determined the way things were, flowed from the top down, from the dictates of religion or history or tradition. The ultimate expression of this challenge was the Declaration of the Rights of Man. This Declaration, Arendt wrote, "was a turning point in history. It meant nothing more nor less than that from then on Man, and not God's command or the customs of history, should be the source of Law."[73] Human rights became politicized; they were now a matter of "government and constitution," no longer a product of "social, spiritual, and religious forces."[74] At the same time, they were also foundational. They were "proclaimed to be 'inalienable,' irreducible to and undeducible from other rights or laws," and therefore, "no authority was invoked for their establishment; Man himself was their

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71. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, p. 32.

72. *Origins*, p. 11.

73. *Origins*, p. 290.

74. *Origins*, p. 291.

source as well as their ultimate goal."[75] The doctrine of human rights and the nation-state were both responses to the profound social and political upheavals experienced across Europe. Where human rights were the response to "micro" conditions–the changing status of the individual as a result of the delegitimation of pre-modern socio-historical narratives–the nation-state was a "macro" level phenomenon. It arose out of the ashes of the feudal socio-political structure.

Because the law in general, and human rights in particular, had become an object of political consideration, the state took on a new importance. It became not just the enforcer, but also the creator of the law. The law was to be the ultimate expression of political equality, as it ideally applied to all citizens in the same manner, regardless of whatever individual or group characteristics differentiated them. Without the law forged by the state, attempts to enforce any standard of right and wrong in an age when old sources of authority had been delegitimized were doomed to failure:

> By lawful government we understand a body politic in which positive laws are needed to translate the immutable *ius naturale* or the eternal commandments of God into standards of right and wrong. Only in these standards, in the body of positive laws of each country, do the *ius naturale* or the Commandments of God achieve their political reality.[76]

Laws can only have relevance for political affairs, therefore, if they are "positive laws." Arendt's conception of positive law is in tune with the legal and philosophical tradition of "legal positivism," which argues that "whatever is enacted by the lawmaking agency is the

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75. *Origins*, p. 291.

76. *Origins*, p. 464.

law in the society."[77] Positive laws are most commonly distinguished from natural laws, the "immutable *ius naturale* or the eternal Commandments of God" in the above quote. Positive laws separate questions of legality from questions of morality: a law need not be moral to be legal. Arendt takes up this point in terms of the source of the law's authority. Positive laws do not rely upon a transcendent realm of authority, such as religion. Arendt notably puts a rather unique spin on this, as she includes the "laws of history" or the "laws of economics" within a broad definition of "natural law." Totalitarian regimes, she argues, are attempts to realize in space these temporal laws. Stalinist totalitarianism purports mobilize the inexorable economic laws of class conflict, the temporal nature of which springs from its basis in the Marxist conception of history. Nazi totalitarianism proclaims to make manifest racialized laws of history, which proclaim the German people to be the destined rulers of the world. The laws of God are eternal, and thus removed from the human world; similarly, the temporal basis of totalitarianism locates the movement's authority in the future realization of these laws, and is thus equally removed from the here and now. Of course, positive laws may–and often do–fall in line with these transcendent realms, "translating" transcendant laws into standards applicable to human affairs. The crucial point, however, is that if these "natural laws" (broadly defined) are to have any authority in the political realm, they must be made immanent.

Positive laws are an instrument of the state whose purpose, to Arendt, is to create the space within which community can be secured and political action can take place. The law, and therefore the state that assumes responsibility for enacting and enforcing the law, is first

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77. Martin P. Golding, *Philosophy of Law*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 25.

and foremost an instrument of stability, meant to contain and limit the inherently provisional, temporal nature of human life. That positive laws are inertial forces to counter the transitory nature of human existence does not mean that they are cast in stone. They are "changing and changeable according to circumstances,"[78] but are "primarily designed to function as stabilizing factors for the ever-changing movements of men."[79] The word "movement" is here used with precision, and not merely for whatever rhetorical force it may possess. It is no accident that Arendt employs the notion of movement in this context and also in reference to imperialist and totalitarian movements. She does so to draw attention to the temporal character of human existence in the absence of some outside force that can impose a degree of order. For what is movement or motion but a question of a *change* of location over time? Space becomes not totally but highly irrelevant. Time is the key, and in, as it were, "living in time," human beings forego the order and certainty offered by spatial enclosures. Positive law is meant to construct just such an enclosure; it is, therefore, a spatial entity, opposed to the flux and danger of a temporal existence.

Although Arendt is usually described as a unique political thinker, one who defies categorization according to any particular school of thought, her perspective on the relationship between space and time and politics in *Origins* is fairly conventional (although as I will propose in Chapter Four, her later works can be read as diverging significantly from this convention). Temporality is viewed as a threat, something that can and will undermine the stability and security of political communities. By extension, the only refuge from the

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78. *Origins*, p. 463.

79. *Origins*, p. 463.

dangers of time is that offered by a spatially enclosed political community, in this case the nation-state. In the context of modern political thought, perhaps the most vivid theorist of space and time is Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes paints a picture of humanity in a "state of nature," their movements untethered to any stable fixtures. In short, they lead a temporal existence lacking any stability or fixity in space. The result is the infamous "war of all against all" and a life that is "nasty, brutish, and short." The solution, of course, is the Leviathan. An absolute state to which individuals surrender all of their rights in exchange for their own security, it captures them within a spatial enclosure. The Leviathan's boundaries impose a limit on and regulate the movements of people. The similarities between Hobbes and Arendt in this regard are striking. For both theorists, the political space of the state is needed to buttress the inevitable chaos apparent in "the ever-changing movements of men."[80]

For Arendt, this space serves very important and specific purposes. One of these was the creation of a condition of equality among the citizens who inhabit this space. In making such a claim, Arendt is very explicitly arguing against the tenets of the Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration proclaims that, human beings, by virtue of their very humanity, are inherently equal. People did not need to be "made" equal, since such equality was an ever-present fact of life. Arendt, however, holds the opposing view: human beings are by their

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80. It should be apparent that while Arendt and Hobbes agree in their assessment of the problem, they disagree in their assessment of the required solution. While this aspect of their relationship is largely implicit within *Origins*, Arendt does concentrate explicitly on Hobbes as a prototypically bourgeois thinker–Hobbes as political economist for the bourgeoisie–in the second volume on Imperialism. We will therefore return to Hobbes in the following chapter dealing with the links between politics and economics in the Arendtian state. The argument there, as we shall see, once again can be read in terms of space, time, and movement.

very nature *un*equal, owing to the differentiation of skills, personal characteristics, etc. The notion of equality was thus not a natural, but an artificial idea: "We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights."[81] The state was meant to be the political structure which would embody and make real and effective this decision.

Furthermore, the political equality created and ensured by the laws of the state is not only an end in itself, but also a means to an end. It prepares the groundwork for the establishment of community and the possibility of political action. Without equality, political action is, according to Arendt, next to impossible:

> Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals *and only with his equals.*[82]

Political action accomplishes two things, one of which Arendt develops further in her post-*Origins* texts, the formation of identity,[83] and one which she refers to in this quote, the

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81. *Origins*, p. 301.

82. *Origins*, p. 301.

83. Arendt argues that identity is a highly amorphous and shadowy phenomenon, one which the individual cannot locate in isolation from other individuals. It is, essentially, a singularly unique aspect of the individual, signifying "who" a person is as opposed to "what" a person is. This distinction is a crucial one for Arendt. Enumerating a list of qualities and characteristics, such as race, gender, etc, identifies "what" a person is. None of these are unique to the individual; they are in a sense possessions, something a person "has" whether they want them or not. They are furthermore qualities upon which a stable political community cannot be constructed. Identity, who a person is, cannot be enumerated in such a manner, as a list of traits and characteristics. It is not something a person "has," but rather something disclosed to others through speech and action. The "disclosure of 'who' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is–his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide–is implicit in everything somebody says and does." (*Human Condition*, p. 179)

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building of "a common world." Political action in concert with one's peers provides individuals the opportunity to establish and live in a community with others. This community is crucial, according to Arendt, for a truly human life. Living in a community with one's equals opens up a space in which ideas, opinions, and beliefs can be shared with others, and in which action can become significant, rescued from the vicissitudes of time. The importance of the nation-state was that through the creation of political equality and the protection of human rights, it provided an arena within which this individuality could be expressed and community could be built. The nation-state set out to satisfy what was from Arendt's perspective a necessary aspect of living a fully human life. As the enormous number of stateless people indicated, however, it also created a situation in which this effectively could be denied to individuals and entire social groups.

We can turn to *The Human Condition* to see how Arendt understood the "arena" the nation-state was to create–i.e. the public sphere. It is a realm where individuals come together and reveal themselves through speech and action. It is within this "space of appearances" that the distinctive identity of an individual–"who" he or she is as opposed to "what"–is revealed. Equality is a prerequisite for action in this realm, because under Arendt's conception of political action, it is by definition "action in concert," and one can only act in concert with one's peers. If this fundamental condition of equality is not fulfilled, the relationship between individuals becomes asymmetrical. It takes on elements of a

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Identity is thus reciprocally defined, and its revelation is not a process of self-disclosure, but a disclosure to others. Once an action takes place, it cannot be undone, and can produce reactions unforeseen when the original action took place. The continual give and take of action and re-action results in an identity that is never fixed, but constantly (re)constructed.

command/obedience situation. This removes the element of freedom from what is done, and Arendt is clear in stating that what distinguishes the realm of action from other aspects of human existence is that coercion plays no role in the public realm.[84] These combined actions, finally, constitute "the web of human relationships." This web is spun, Arendt tells us, whenever people come together and act and speak "directly to one another."[85] Once again, the spatial imagery of Arendt's language is illuminating. A web is built from numerous overlapping and crisscrossing strands, held together only by the simple fact of this intersection. Similar to that spun by a spider, the assemblage of events put into motion by instances of action constitute a "web." Because people act into this web of relationships, action is always *inter*action. The result is a complex pattern of actions and reactions such that tracing the consequences of a particular action becomes effectively impossible--at least to those who are not temporally removed from the events. Action thus possesses an inherently unpredictable character, which defies any attempts to know in advance the outcome.

Being temporally removed, the idea of "looking backward," (re)introduces the concept of time to Arendt's conception of the state. The function of the state, as we have seen, is to provide a home for the "ever-changing movements" of human beings. Because of the highly provisional nature of these movements, the danger of forgetting is an ever-present

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84. Arendt argues that the presence of freedom was a fundamental aspect of the *polis* of Ancient Greece: "What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in this political realm..." (*The Human Condition*, p. 31) This situation is not unique to Ancient Greek society, either. It is an inviolable element of all political life: "Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance." ("What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future*, p. 149)

85. *The Human Condition*, p. 183.

one. And for Arendt this is perhaps the worst danger of all: to forget action is to deny the actor a truly human life. To fully understand the role of remembrance in Arendt's thought, it is necessary to contextualize political action within the *vita activa*, the active life of human beings–put simply, what we "do."

Action is only one aspect of the *vita activa*, one third of the triumvirate of labour, work, and action. Labour is perhaps the most basic of the three. The purpose of labour is to sustain biological existence; it satisfies the essential needs of human life. The realm of labour is not a realm of freedom: necessity holds sway. Temporally, the act of labouring is the most impermanent: "the mark of all labouring [is] that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent."[86] Time under labour is circular: it is a continual process of satisfying the same bodily requirements over and over again; just as the rhythm of the biological world is circular (birth, life, death, rebirth), so too is labour-time.

The purpose of work is to construct artifice. "Work," Arendt tells us, "provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings."[87] The products of work are made to endure, unlike the products of labour. Where the results of labour barely outlast the act of labouring, the distinguishing feature of the "world of things" is precisely its quality of duration, or durability. They are at the same time use objects, and thus their "consumption" occurs over an extended period of time–they are, indeed, used rather than

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86. *The Human Condition*, p. 87.

87. *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

consumed: "what usage wears out is durability."[88] Similarly, where the temporal process at the heart of labour is circular (and therefore fleeting), work is governed by a strictly linear conception of time. It finds its beginning in the model or plan and comes to a dual end in the finished product. "The finished thing is an end product in the twofold sense that the production process comes to an end in it ('the process disappears in the product,' as Marx said) and that it is only a means to this end."[89] What survives, therefore, what lasts through time, is neither the work process nor the worker, but the thing itself.

Action, finally, exists in a rather curious relationship to labour and work. Whereas it is a simple matter to define labour and work in terms of what they accomplish, there is no similar definition for action. There is, in other words, no *telos* inherent to action. Action is the result of plurality, the basic fact that "we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."[90] Like work, action has a definite beginning, but the similarity ends there. Because we act into a constantly changing web of human relationships, it is impossible to undertake an action with any reasonable certainty about the outcome. There is a vaguely linear process at work–as with anything that possesses a definite origin–but it differs fundamentally from that dominating the process of work. Work moves in a single straight line from origin to culmination. The after-effect of action, however, is highly fragmented because actions spawn re-actions, which perpetuate an action and at the same time start a whole new chain of events. The ability to

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88. *The Human Condition*, p. 137.

89. *The Human Condition*, p. 143.

90. *The Human Condition*, p. 8.

construct a story around instances of action can only come after, with the benefit of hindsight. The only definite outcome of action is the creation of history through story-telling, but even this depends upon the presence of others who will remember.

Action is thus the only aspect of the *vita activa* that allows human beings the opportunity to be remembered. Labour is anonymously cyclical, and in work what lasts is the end product, not the worker. But what survives in action is not the result (as it cannot be known in advance with any certainty, and is to a large degree the product of forces beyond the actor's control), but the actor and the act itself. It is not the case that actions will always be remembered, but the possibility that they may be remembered creates the conditions for a fully human life. Remembrance and history are possible only if action is possible. Action, furthermore, can only occur in the public realm, and for Arendt the glorious potential of the nation-state was that it was to create just such a space (to be clear: the nation-state and the public realm are not coextensive. The public realm is a particular space within the nation-state, existing alongside other spheres, economic, social, and so on). The history of statelessness, however, reveals another story altogether.

The human rights embodied by the Declaration of the Rights of Man were thus of central importance in the nation-state's attempt to secure a stable space for its citizens. Arendt, it should be noted, does not discuss the particulars of those rights which are traditionally located under the rubric of "human rights."[91] Instead, the bulk of her discussion

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91. However, Arendt points out that the right of asylum is a special case due to its nature as the only "international" right of the Rights of Man. Significantly, this right was never really abolished, but neither was it ever enforced: "But though the right of asylum continued to function in a world organized into nation-states and, in individual instances, even survived

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concentrates on the nature of political equality and its relation to human rights. Because the Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaimed rights to be inherent in every human being, the notion of equality was "built in," so to speak. The doctrine of human rights expressed the fundamental equality of all human beings, an equality that was crucial for the formation of political community, and gave them the rights needed for the full exercise of their political capacities. Human beings were inherently equal, and it was the duty of the body politic to ensure and safeguard this equality. Sadly, the countries of Europe never lived up to the lofty ideals of the Declaration. While the document championed the notion of a set of basic and inalienable rights for all people, the actual enjoyment of these rights was limited to a relatively small number of people, those with a claim to citizenship in some state. In effect, these basic freedoms were privileges bestowed upon the few, rather than rights guaranteed to and enjoyed by all. The source of this tension can be traced to the notion of "man" implicit in the declaration. It was an abstract, universal being, stripped of any contextualization, a figure outside the matrices of time and space. It was, as Arendt says, a being "who seemed to exist nowhere, for even savages lived in some kind of social order."[92] The challenge posed was thus one of how to translate the articles of the Declaration into enforceable standards. The upshot of this was that only those who lived under a political system capable of safeguarding human rights actually enjoyed these rights. Arendt continues her reading of the perception of the day:

(...continued)
both World Wars, it was felt to be an anachronism and in conflict with the international rights of the state." *Origins*, p. 280.

92. *Origins*, p. 291.

> If a tribal or other 'backward' community did not enjoy human rights, it was obviously because as a whole it had not yet reached that stage of civilization, the stage of popular and national sovereignty, but was oppressed by foreign or native despots. *The whole question of human rights, therefore, was quickly and inextricably blended with the question of national emancipation; only the emancipated sovereignty of the people, of one's own people, seemed to be able to insure them.*[93]

Rights that were supposed to be inherent in all people, a product of their very humanity, were possessed only by "civilized" people who had reached a particular stage of political maturity. Political maturity, in turn, was revealed by the presence of the nation-state. The laws of the nation-state were "supposed to embody and spell out in the form of tangible laws the eternal Rights of Man, which by themselves were supposed to be independent of citizenship and community,"[94] and in situations where national laws did not measure up to the standard set by the Rights of Man, the citizens of that political community "were expected to change them, by legislation in democratic countries or through revolutionary action in despotisms."[95] Human rights were in effect replaced by "state rights," that is to say rights which not inherently a part of being human, but which were a privilege of being a citizen of some nation-state.

Furthermore, because the modern state is also inevitably a nation-state, this meant that large groups of people who were living within the boundaries of the nation-state, but were not citizens of that state, had no legal recourse if their rights were violated. To the degree that one's existence as a fully human being depended upon membership in a political

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93. *Origins*, p. 291, emphasis added.

94. *Origins*, p. 293

95. *Origins*, p. 293.

community, the members of these groups did not exist at all. Not only was this a fact of life for Jews scattered across Europe, but in the early 20th century and indeed, to this day, the huge numbers of refugees, created either by shifting boundaries during and after wartime or by people fleeing their homeland to escape war, starvation, persecution, or any number of threats, also became stateless. They were dependent upon the goodwill of the authorities of the territory in which they found themselves.

In practice, therefore, the Declaration became a more or less irrelevant document, which "never became law but led a somewhat shadowy existence as an appeal in individual exceptional cases for which normal legal institutions did not suffice."[96] The political problem which most clearly revealed this contradiction between the theory of the "Rights of Man" and the practice of "human rights," as well as revealing the inherent tensions of the nation-state, was the growing population of stateless people. Arendt states that,

> [m]uch more troubling in fact and much more far-reaching in consequence has been statelessness, the newest mass phenomenon in contemporary history, and the existence of an ever-growing new people comprised of stateless persons, the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics.[97]

Arendt argues that compared to the other crises that "undermined the stability of Europe's nation-state system,"[98] the presence–indeed, the very *possibility*–of statelessness demonstrates the inherent problems of the nation-state system. It is a predicament that erupted from the inside, so to speak, arising not due to external influences such as the impact

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96. *Origins*, pp. 280-81.

97. *Origins*, p. 277.

98. *Origins*, p. 270.

of imperialism but rather as a result of the intrinsic structure of the nation-state. The unhyphenated state is a political body characterized first and foremost by the priority of the rule of law over all individuals within its territory. The law was the great equalizer. The nation-state, however, fundamentally altered this aspect of the state. Because of the peculiar historical circumstances under which it arose, a homogeneous population was deemed necessary if the new system of states was to function effectively. The criterion of this homogenization was of course nationality. In a system where nationality was the determinant of citizenship, those who did not belong to the proper nationality were by definition excluded from the body politic of the nation-state: "only nationals could be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions."[99] The ever-present tension between the nation and the state was thus resolved, and "the transformation of the state from an instrument of law into an instrument of the nation had been completed; the nation had conquered the state, national interest had priority over law..."[100] The resulting limitation to citizenship effectively excluded large numbers of people from membership and participation in the state.

Arendt's discussion of the rights the stateless people lost is a fascinating and instructive one. This section of *Origins* contains Arendt's most impassioned and forceful critique of the modern state, and for good reason. Arendt experienced first-hand the precarious nature of statelessness, since she herself was not a citizen of any country from the

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99. *Origins*, p. 275.

100. *Origins*, p. 275.

time she fled Germany in 1933 until she received her American citizenship in 1951.[101] The existence of stateless people demonstrated forcefully just how problematic the notion of the "Rights of Man" had come to be in an era dominated by the nation-state; these rights, "supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable–even in countries whose constitutions were based on them–whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state."[102] This is the ultimate result of statelessness, and for Arendt the most crucial aspect of this phenomenon that befell millions of people in her own time, and continues to do the same to this day. Because "human rights" are in actuality national rights, protected by and dependent upon citizenship in a nation-state, "what we must call a 'human right' today would have been thought of as a general characteristic of the human condition which no tyrant could take away,"[103] but in reality was something else entirely. The ultimate irony of this situation, for Arendt, was that the nation-state was trumpeted as the hallmark of a civilized society. However, only in this most civilized of societies, "a completely organized humanity, could the loss of home and political status become identical with expulsion from

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101. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 113-258. Interestingly, the period of Arendt's life in which she was a citizen of no political body whatsoever was also the most politically active period of her life, as she assisted Jewish organizations while in France (from 1933 to 1941), and then engaged in numerous debates within and about the Jewish diaspora during the 1940's in New York. This apparent contradiction itself signals the need to rethink the state-centred theory of politics, so that it can accommodate a wider range of political practices, all of which may not be tied to the state.

102. *Origins*, p. 293.

103. *Origins*, p. 297.

humanity altogether."[104] Adding further to the irony was the fact that stateless people who obeyed the law could count on being completely ignored, while stateless criminals would at least receive some level of attention from the state.[105]

The concept of statelessness is closely related to another concept, this one uniquely Arendtian, that of worldlessness. Statelessness, as we have seen, is essentially a lack of legal standing in a community. One is not recognized in any way; invisibility, therefore, is the hallmark of statelessness. Worldlessness, on the other hand, cannot be described in this manner. It is not a legal matter, but instead reflects the way the majority of people experience everyday life under conditions of modernity. Michael Gottsegen's recent interpretation of Arendt begins from the position that her analysis of the masses and mass society is one of the central concepts one must come to terms with in order to fully comprehend the relationship between *Origins* and Arendt's subsequent works.[106] Life in a mass society is the quintessence of a worldless existence:

> the conditions of modern life have conspired to agglomerate the bulk of the population into a mass in which feelings of loneliness, meaninglessness, and

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104. *Origins*, p. 297.

105. Arendt at one point discusses how the only two ways that refugees and other stateless people could improve their position in society was either by resorting to crime ("Only as an offender against the law can he [the stateless person] gain protection from it. As long as his trial and his sentence last, he will be safe from that arbitrary police rule against which there are no lawyers and no appeals.") or if they were lucky enough to be born geniuses, "[a] much less reliable and much more difficult way to rise from an unrecognized anomaly to the state of recognized exception..." While at first their exceptional nature–in terms of nationality–served to exclude them, it was only a further deviance from the "norm" that could bring them once again under the umbrella of the state. See *Origins*, pp. 286-287.

106. Michael G. Gottsegen, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 3.

> anonymity correlate with real social isolation, worldlessness, and atomization.[107]

Although this phenomenon is particularly marked in totalitarian societies, Arendt does not argue that the growth of mass society is solely within the domain of totalitarianism. As this quote implies, the dangers of mass society inhere in "the conditions of modern life," conditions which exist to some degree in all Western societies. The conditions of totalitarian mass society, therefore, does not differ in kind but in degree from the conditions of other communities in the West.

Worldlessness is also experienced politically, or more specifically, to be worldless is to be without a political space in which to act. Political action and the presence of a human world in which to act are mutually reliant upon one another. This is not a tangible world of objects, but is instead a world "which consists of words and deeds and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly *to* one another."[108] It is a space where humans appear before one another, where politics occurs and the fullest experience of human existence can be gained.

Gottsegen links up the condition of worldlessness with that of being stateless. He points out that "Arendt does not directly relate her analysis of the worldlessness of the stateless to her consideration of the condition of the masses of mass society,"–what I have here identified as a more general condition of worldlessness experienced across western

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107. Gottsegen, p. 3.

108. *The Human Condition*, p. 183, emphasis in original.

societies–but argues that there are significant similarities between them.[109] While the two are very similar concepts, there is a crucial difference, one that should not be glossed over. As can be surmised from the reality of worldlessness as a fact of life for many in modern states, it is possible to be a citizen and still be worldless. The opposite, however, does not hold true. A stateless person–under conditions where the nation-state holds sway–is also a worldless person, but a worldless person is not necessarily stateless. The difference may seem slight, but it is fundamental. A stateless person is deprived not only of a place in the world to act and speak, but of any level of stability or physical security whatsoever. Citizens in a mass society may also be lacking a world constituted by their interactions with others, but at the very least they can rely on some degree of physical security.

An excellent example of this is revealed in the discussion of the steps taken by the Nazis as a prelude to their extermination of the Jews that Arendt takes up in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,[110] One such step, in countries that were either occupied or allied with the Nazis, was the preparation of legislation to make stateless those people the Nazis wanted to send

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109. Gottsegen, p. 6.

110. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (New York: Penguin Books,1994 [1963]). *Eichmann* is often considered to be a companion piece of sorts to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. On the surface, of course, this is true, since they both address the same historical and political phenomenon: the events of the Holocaust. However, they differ in certain fundamental aspects, most notably Arendt's description of the Nazis: in *Origins*, Arendt condemns them as exemplars of the most *radical* evil, almost devils incarnate (indeed, she compares the concentration camps to a sort of Hell on earth); in *Eichmann*, however, she proposed the notion of a *banal* evil; as she says of Eichmann, "[d]espite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a 'monster,' but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown," (p. 54) but that "[h]e was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness–something by no means identical with stupidity–that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period." (p. 287-8)

to the concentration camps. This step, according to Arendt, "was important on two counts: it made it impossible for any country to inquire into their [the victims'] fate, and it enabled the state in which they were resident to confiscate their property."[111] Ultimately, this step was probably a mere formality, just another aspect of the bureaucracy of murder.[112] That Arendt thought it was most likely a symbolic act more than anything else is apparent in a comment she makes after relating the experiences of the Nazi regime in Denmark. When it came time to round up the German Jews who had sought refuge in Denmark, their statelessness was turned against the Nazis to thwart their efforts: "[t]he Danes, however, explained to the German officials that because the stateless refugees were no longer German citizens, the Nazis could not claim them without Danish assent."[113] However, it was not their statelessness that ultimately protected them, but rather the desire of the Danish government to do so. Because they did, "none of the preparatory moves, so important for the bureaucracy of murder, could be carried out, and operations were postponed until the fall of 1943."[114] In any event, it is instructive to see how the notion of statelessness was strategically deployed by the various parties involved. For the Nazi regime, the stripping of citizenship was the final step of a process designed to remove any possibility of resistance to their genocidal plans.

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111. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 115.

112. Arendt captures the nature of this bureaucracy succinctly: the bureaucrat possessed an "'objective' attitude–talking about concentration camps in terms of 'administration' and about extermination camps in terms of 'economy'..." (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 69).

113. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 172.

114. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 172.

The Danes, on the other hand, turned the refugees' statelessness against the Nazis, arguing that their lack of citizenship removed them from the Nazis' sphere of influence.

As the first chapter highlighted, from its inception the nation-state was a highly problematic form of political community when trying to accommodate a non-national element within its borders. This chapter has expanded upon that theme, drawing out the specific implications of statelessness: the absence of a legitimate claim to possession of human rights, and therefore an exclusion from the public world in which they could exercise these rights and reveal their unique humanity. This does not mean, however, that citizens of the nation-state actually experienced the sort of political realm that the nation-state was, in Arendt's view, supposed to institute. The consolidation of political power in the hands of the bourgeoisie and the rise of imperialism introduced principles that subverted those of the body politic of the nation-state, further preventing the development of a substantive politics sympathetic to the Arendtian vision. The next chapter will examine the impact of this subversion on the nation-state.

Intersections of the State: Politics and Economics

> *When, in the era of imperialism, businessmen became politicians and were acclaimed as statesmen, while statesmen were taken seriously only if they talked the language of successful businessmen and 'thought in continents,' these private practices and devices were gradually transformed into rules and principles for the conduct of public affairs.*[115]

Boundaries are integral to the modern state. The state is by definition a form of spatial enclosure, although the importance of this containment has fluctuated across historical time and space. The pre-modern states of Europe, with their highly fluid boundaries and overlapping claims to authoritative rule, can be more accurately described as possessing "frontiers" rather than borders. Regardless of their name, they bear little resemblance to the highly rigid borders of the modern nation-state. This chapter will examine two manifestations of boundaries in Arendt's discourse on the state in *Origins*. The first is territorial: the modern nation-state, if it is to be an effective form of political community, must be a geographically bounded entity. In being so bounded, the state constitutes and institutionalizes the arena within which political action can occur. This produces the need for a specifically *foreign* policy as distinguished from the typical policy concerns of the nation-state–in other words, the theory and practice of international relations.

The second type of boundaries, in contrast to those *between* states, are those *within* states These boundaries demarcate the various spheres of life within the modern state: political, economic, social, religious, and so on. They are therefore less distinctly geographical than those between states, but are no less important. In a modern democracy, for example, certain sites become privileged domains within which "real" politics is said to

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115. *Origins*, p. 138.

take place (such as legislatures). Of course, this process of segregation is itself a highly political act, since it can legitimize and normalize oppressive practices, such as the subordination of women and their relegation to the private sphere.[116] Such practices have been the subject of insightful and penetrating critiques from a number of "marginal" perspectives, such as feminism, post-structuralism, and Marxism. This challenge to the traditionally liberal doctrine of separate spheres creates a fertile ground for political contestation: as one contemporary theorist has pointed out, "[t]he State appears to hold the key to economic development, to social security, to individual liberty, and, through increasing weapons 'sophistication,' to life and death itself."[117] Understanding the nature of these intersections between state and society is therefore important for accurately conceptualizing the state and imagining new forms of critical resistance.

The Origins of Totalitarianism is, among so many other things, a meditation on the manner in which these boundaries between state and society have shifted throughout modernity. These shifts had a decisive impact upon the nation-state, and therefore have resulted in a reshaping of the political. Arendt undertakes this analysis by charting the rise of imperialism, which had profound consequences for the relationship between politics and economics. She argues that the era of imperialism resulted in the first major clash between the political and the economic in the modern era, between the nation-state and the forces of

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116. See, for example, V. Spike Peterson, "Security and Sovereign States: What is at Stake in Taking Feminism Seriously?" in V. Spike Peterson, Ed., *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*. (Lynne Reinner Publishers: Boulder, Colorado, 1992), especially pp. 45-49.

117. Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 3.

capitalism. The result was a redefinition of the political, and a corresponding weakening of the nation-state. This was the legacy of "overseas imperialism." "Continental imperialism," on the other hand, was represented by the "pan-movements"–Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism–that developed in response to the Western European control of overseas imperialism. As the name implies, this was a form of imperialism directed not outwards at far-flung lands, but instead inward, toward the rest of Europe. It was a movement motivated primarily by resentment over the exclusion of Eastern European countries from the colonization of Africa and other territories. The ideology of the pan–movements was driven by "race-thinking," amassing and mobilizing adherents by arguing that it was their destiny as a race to subjugate and rule other races. The emphasis on mobilization and motion is key, as Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism are fundamentally *movements* inherently hostile to the stability and relative inertia of the state. They are also important to Arendt because they are the antecedents of the later totalitarian movements and regimes that came to power in Germany and Russia. And as a movement that seeks–and ultimately cannot survive without–*total* domination, totalitarianism attempts to completely obliterate any distinction between state and society.

The aim of this chapter will be threefold. First, I will examine Arendt's discussion of overseas imperialism to bring to light the contradiction and conflict between the values of capitalist economics and those of the nation-state. Second, the dynamic between movements (both imperialist and totalitarian–in this context the broad similarities are more important than the particular differences) and parties (the primary political organization within the nation-state) will be considered. Finally, there will be an analysis of totalitarianism

in power, to highlight how the structures and organizations of total domination differ from those of nation-states.

Although the bulk of Arendt's argument about the relationship between the state and civil society is carried out in *Imperialism*, she does address the issue in the previous volume, *Antisemitism*. That discussion does not significantly illuminate any aspect of Arendt's theory of the state. Nevertheless, it historically situates the later analysis, and must therefore be briefly addressed. As we saw earlier, the nation-state arrived fully fledged in Europe only after the absolute monarchs were unable to find a social class capable of assuming the role previously held by the nobility under feudalism. In essence, they were unable to forge a permanent link between the state and civil society, and with the rise of the nation-state, the link was broken completely. The nation-state existed apart from society, above the divisions of economic or social class. It did, however, assume a central economic role in the life of the country when it "chose to establish itself as a tremendous business concern."[118] The nation-state was driven to this position because of its conflict with the bourgeoisie. Arendt claims that the bourgeoisie went the way of private investment, avoiding all involvement with the state and refusing active financial participation in what appeared to be an "'unproductive' enterprise."[119] The Jewish people stepped into this financial vacuum, and this eventually paved the way for the growth of antisemitism as an ideology. Antisemitism flourished as the power and influence of the nation-state gradually declined. What is important for our purposes here, however, is Arendt's contention that for the first century or so of the nation-

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118. *Origins*, p. 17.

119. *Origins*, p. 17.

state's existence, the bourgeoisie had nothing to do with it. They were highly apolitical, avoiding public life to concentrate on their private economic affairs. This was the general historical situation in Europe until the last decades of the nineteenth century. In contrast to what went on before, these decades were marked by "the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie" and their emergence onto the stage of European politics. For Arendt, the link between imperialism and the bourgeoisie is clear: "imperialism must be considered the first stage in political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than the last stage of capitalism."[120]

The theorist against whom Arendt writes in this context is Thomas Hobbes. Arendt argues that Hobbes more than any other theorist illuminates the nature of the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the nation-state.[121] She claims that he is not just the primary but the sole philosopher of the bourgeois class. He "is the only great philosopher to whom the

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120. *Origins*, p. 138. The allusion to imperialism as "the last stage of capitalism" is of course a reference to Lenin's claim to that effect.

121. Given that Arendt was writing on the relationship between the bourgeoisie, the economy, and the state in late 19th-century Europe, one would expect her to at least briefly address the contribution of Marxism to our understanding of that period. However, Arendt's project was quite rigidly guided by her primary concern, which was "her wish to draw attention to the 'subterranean currents' out of which totalitarianism had emerged, and to stress the degree to which it constituted a radical break with Western political and philosophical traditions." One such current, as we saw in the first chapter, was the "decay of the national state," and to show how the rise of the bourgeoisie to political power contributed to this decay, Arendt turned to Hobbes. Arendt's engagement with Marxian thought, not only in *Origins* but throughout her life, is a complicated one, and a full consideration of it is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, a couple of important points bear directly on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. One critique of *Origins* is that Arendt's concept of totalitarianism is based too heavily on Nazi totalitarianism, and many of her conclusions cannot be applied to or are contradicted by the Soviet experience. Arendt was aware of this shortcoming, and had planned a companion volume examining the "totalitarian elements in Marxism." This was never written, although certain aspects of what she intended to write did appear in later works. See, Margaret Canovan's "'Totalitarian Elements in Marxism'," Chapter Three of *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, pp. 63-98.

bourgeoisie can rightly and exclusively lay claim, even if his principles were not recognized by the bourgeois class for a long time."[122] *Leviathan* provides the bourgeoisie with the ideal moral and political framework to pursue their dream of unlimited accumulation of wealth. This framework, furthermore, is a total one, leaving nothing out or to chance: "there is hardly a single bourgeois moral standard which has not been anticipated by the unequaled magnificence of Hobbes's logic."[123] Hobbes' theory of the state flows from his conception of human nature, although as Arendt points out, he did not conceptualize "Man" in the abstract, but rather "bourgeois man." The picture of bourgeois man Arendt draws from Hobbes is of a being without any intrinsic characteristics or qualities to determine his own worth, a man who is "essentially a function of society and judged therefore according to his 'value or worth ... his price; that is to say so much as would be given for the use of his power.'" This price is socially determined, a result of the fluctuations of supply and demand.[124] These fluctuations are not beyond influence however, as Hobbes's definition of power shows. Arendt states that

> power, according to Hobbes, is the accumulated control that permits the individual to fix prices and regulate supply and demand in such a way that they contribute to his own advantage.[125]

The fixing of prices and the regulation of supply and demand is undertaken entirely without regard for anybody or anything else. All that concerns the Hobbesian individual is the

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122. *Origins*, p. 139.

123. *Origins*, p. 139.

124. *Origins*, p. 139.

125. *Origins*, p. 139.

maximization of his own profit and property. In short, all that matters is the accumulation of power, because as more property and wealth is acquired, greater power is required to protect it. Despite this disparity in power, human beings in the Hobbesian state of nature are all inherently equal because they each possess the ability to kill another–even the weakest can stab a person in the back. This fact of life creates a situation of great instability. The fear and distrust which pervades relations between people obstructs the normal functioning of the process by which prices are set and transactions take place. The need for stability and security to ensure the continuation of these relations is what drives the need not just for a state, but for a Leviathan, a state possessing absolute power.[126]

The theory of the state Hobbes expounded in *Leviathan* holds a unique position in the history of Western political thought. Arendt argues that it is the only theory in which there is no unifying principle transcending the interests and concerns of the individual:

> Hobbes's *Leviathan* exposed the only political theory according to which the state is based not on some kind of constituting law–whether divine law, the law of nature, or the law of social contract–which determines the rights and wrongs of the individual's interest with respect to public affairs, but on the individual interests themselves, so that 'the private interest is the same with the publique.'[127]

To safeguard these private interests, individuals mutually agree to surrender all of their political power to the state. In other words, the basis of the state is power, a power that is delegated by all individuals to the state. The state therefore "acquires a monopoly on killing and

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126. *Origins*, p. 140.

127. *Origins*, p. 139.

provides in exchange a conditional guarantee against being killed."[128] The corollary of this is that all "social responsibilities" are also delegated to the state; the individual is thus relieved "of the burden of caring for the poor precisely as he asks for protection against criminals."[129] The result is a society of completely atomized individuals, each pursuing their own self-interest under the umbrella of an all-powerful state to which they owe their loyalty only to the extent that it protects them from each other and ensures the normal functioning of the economy.

As Arendt points, out, this lack of a unifying myth in Hobbes's theory of the state creates what looks on the surface to be a paradox. The state stems from the desire to escape the fear and instability that pervades the "state of nature." However, the body politic that Hobbes envisions to escape from this situation is itself unstable. For Arendt, this instability manifests itself in two ways. The first stems from the total absence of shared values tying individuals to the state or each other, beyond the need for protection. Membership within the state "does not change the solitary and private character of the individual ... or create permanent bonds between him and his fellow men."[130] The sole purpose of the state is to act as the police; concerns about the creation of community are irrelevant. However, divorced from any ends beyond itself, amassing power does not in itself guarantee the long-term survival of the state, and without the construction of "new props from the outside," it would inevitably "collapse overnight into the aimless, senseless chaos of the private interests from

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128. *Origins*, p. 141.

129. *Origins*, pp. 141-142.

130. *Origins*, p. 140.

which it springs."[131] The state must either self-destruct or seek new avenues for the accumulation of power. This is the second source of instability, one stemming not from the population's relationship to the state, but from the state's own *raison d'être*. Paradoxically, to remain stable, the state must constantly expand.

Hobbes himself obviously did not consider the Leviathan to be unstable–his political concerns drove him to theorize anything but an unstable form of political community. Hobbes was witnessing the very beginning of the shift from a feudal to a capitalist society; his stroke of genius, according to Arendt, was in seeing precisely where these changes would lead:

> What Hobbes actually starts from is an unmatched insight into the political needs of the new social body of the rising bourgeoisie, whose fundamental belief in an unending process of property accumulation was about to eliminate all individual safety.[132]

The dangerous possibility that this social change would, intentionally or not, "eliminate all individual safety," drove Hobbes to theorize a state which would accomplish the exact opposite. The Hobbesian state seeks to create an environment of complete safety and absolute peace and stability through the delegation of all political power from the individual to the state. From Arendt's perspective the era of imperialism marks the first historical moment when Hobbes's principles, embodied in the political aspirations of the bourgeoisie, found their way onto the political stage, and the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the nation-state began.

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131. *Origins*, p. 142.

132. *Origins*, p. 142.

Arendt argues that up until the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the period when imperialism developed, the bourgeoisie as a class was largely apolitical. The nation-state neither interfered with their quest for greater wealth nor did it seem to open new avenues for the flow of capital and generation of wealth, and thus they could afford to ignore it. They were "up to then ... the first class in history to achieve economic pre-eminence without aspiring to political rule."[133] Their aspirations changed significantly, however, once it became apparent that the nation-state stood in the way of their economic goals. Although pivotal gains were made by the bourgeoisie during the imperialist era, neither the nation-state nor the bourgeoisie won decisively. The resistance offered by the national institutions of the state resulted in only partial victories for the bourgeoisie, whose quest to restructure those institutions to suit their own purposes was "always only half successful."[134] The impact of this period in terms of "the decay of the national state," however, is more directly apparent, and set the stage for later challenges from the continental imperialist movements.

The clash between the nation-state and the bourgeoisie was seemingly inevitable. Capitalist rationality, Arendt argues, is driven by one fundamental precept: the "inherent law" of capitalism is the need for "constant economic growth."[135] This drive for expansion, for an "increase in actual goods to be used and consumed,"[136] was necessary if the capitalist economy was to remain healthy. The concept of expansion was born out of "the realm of

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133. *Origins*, p. 124.

134. *Origins*, p. 124.

135. *Origins*, p. 126.

136. *Origins*, p. 125-6.

business speculation, where expansion meant the *permanent* broadening of industrial production and economic transactions characteristic of the nineteenth century."[137] This expansion could be workably achieved for quite some time, since there was nothing inherently economically problematic with the idea of a constantly growing level of economic production and consumption within the nation-state. Ultimately, the capitalist economy confronted not an economic obstacle to growth but a political one. It encountered the borders of the nation-state. Imperialism was born out of this meeting:

> Imperialist expansion had been touched off by a curious kind of economic crisis, the overproduction of capital and the emergence of 'superfluous' money, the result of oversaving, which could no longer find productive investment within the national borders.[138]

Arendt is not claiming that imperialism was the first move capitalism had made towards the development of an international economy. As we saw in the first chapter, the nation-state had always allowed for a particular international dimension (the "brotherhood of nations"), and likewise capitalism. This international trade, however, was primarily within the nation-state *system* as a whole, and there was relatively little risk in commerce between nation-states. In this respect, the economy could grow without demanding that the nation-state expand along with it. Therefore, the economic aspect of imperialism in and of itself–the quest for new sources of raw materials and new markets for the goods produced from those materials–posed little danger to the integrity of the nation-state. However, economic growth through imperialist expansion was significantly different from the growth that preceded it, and

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137. *Origins*, p. 125, emphasis added.

138. *Origins*, p. 135.

occurred entirely within the boundaries of the nation-state. Imperialism brought Europeans face to face with the African and the Indian, exotic peoples with different customs and traditions and skin colour. To the "civilized" Europeans, they harkened back to an earlier, less "advanced" and therefore more dangerous time. A sure sign of savagery: they had not yet even realized that most European indicator of a civilized society, the nation-state. The bourgeoisie therefore demanded the protection of their superfluous capital (invested in mining, agriculture, etc.) by their national institutions, from the dangers posed by foreign, "primitive" people. It was an easier, less threatening task to ask that the state, for which expansion was a largely foreign idea, expand, than it was to consider restructuring economic practices, so that the economy would not have to choose between expansion or stagnation. It was easier to expand something not amenable to expansion than it was for the bourgeoisie to question their own economic practices.

With imperialism, the bourgeoisie introduced the notion of expansion into the realm of politics. As Arendt states, "expansion as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism."[139] The purpose of political expansion was to continually acquire ever greater amounts of power, in order to protect the bourgeoisie's economic investment. Political expansion as it was manifest in imperialism was an entirely novel goal for political action, according to Arendt. Of course, expansion as a political goal pre-existed this moment, although in a rather different form and for different ends. Imperialist expansion was in some respects similar to the older practices of conquest and empire-building. The difference, Arendt argues, is twofold. First, these practices were undertaken

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139. *Origins*, p. 125.

by a different sort of political community. She uses the example of the Roman Republic, which differed from the nation-state in that the basis of the Republic was law. This was an instrument that could be used to unify the disparate conquered peoples under the sway of the Republic. However, the modern nation-state is not a political community like the Roman state, and it could not accommodate the notion of expansion without serious consequences for the body politic of the nation-state. Second, previous expansionary aims were for a quite definite purpose, the goal of empire building. There was always a sense in which the expansion was finite and circumscribed, limited to very definite territorial and political aims. Imperialist political expansion, however, did not have any similar restrictions holding it back. It was a quest for power, not for the sake of empire or nation, but for the sake of power. It could never be a finite process, Arendt argued, because power unhinged from any telos beyond itself, such as the national good, cannot support itself. Power must prop itself up through the acquisition of even more power. For all practical purposes, the process must continue indefinitely, lest it collapse on itself, a point that Hobbes made all too clearly. This process of continual expansion to rule other nations is incompatible with the nation-state because of the unique role of borders in the constitution of the modern state.

Although borders have always existed in one form or another, they have had varying roles in different times and places. In the ancient Greek *polis*, belonging to a city-state was the determinant not only of citizenship, but of humanity–as Aristotle's dictum, "man is by nature a political animal" illustrates.[140] Furthermore, the edge of the city-state was the limit

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140. Keeping in mind, of course, that Aristotle's use of "man" in this context was no accident–the category of "citizen" systematically excluded the vast majority of the (continued...)

of politics: the wars and violence that were a fact of life outside the *polis* were by definition apolitical.[141] War was not "politics by another means," but the end of politics altogether. Similarly, the nature and function of borders changed in other historical eras. David Held identifies this as one major differentiation between the "political units" of pre-modern Europe and the modern nation-state. These regions were far from being discreet, rigidly bounded territorial entities. Held describes feudal organization as a "political system of overlapping power and divided authority."[142] The boundaries of these pre-modern states were fluid, constantly open to challenge and change. They did not strongly demarcate regions from one another, and claims to legitimate rule often crossed over these borders.

The importance of boundaries increased significantly with the rise of the nation-state. Indeed, boundaries are so necessary that the nation-state could not exist as nation-state without clearly defined boundaries. According to Arendt, nation-states "more than any other political bodies were defined by boundaries and the limitations of possible conquest..."[143] It is no mere accident or coincidence of history or terminology that the modern state is at one and the same time a nation-state and a state that relies so heavily on borders for its very

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(...continued)
population, namely women and slaves.

141. See Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1990 [1963]), p. 12. Arendt argues that politics in Ancient Greece was defined as a discursive process of argumentation and persuasion undertaken with one's equals. Acts of violence were by definition apolitical because of their coercive nature. Arendt draws on this in her own conception of politics, which relies heavily on the human capacity of speech.

142. David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, p. 32.

143. *Origins*, p. 133.

existence. As we saw in the previous chapter, the concept of the nation-state often refers to a particular political arrangement, a precise separation of space into discrete regions, each with its own administrative and coercive structure. There is often little or no connection between these bordered geographical areas and nationality or ethnicity. Arendt, however, focuses on the link between nation-states and nationality in her reading of the evolution of the nation-state. Borders, for Arendt, pointed to a unique aspect of the nation-state when compared to other forms of political organization, one intimately linked to nationality: borders allowed for the mobilization of consent.

Arendt states that the nation-state is based on "a homogenous population's active consent to its government."[144] Unlike in political communities such as the Roman Republic, Arendt argues that the basis of the nation-state is not the law, but the nation. A common, shared nationality is the ground in which the nation-state takes root. In making this claim, Arendt draws a sharp line between a national foundation for states and a legal one; the law, for Arendt, is an "anational" institution. In applying to everybody equally, the law ignores national differences. Although the legal tradition in states like the Roman empire is of course the product of a particular cultural milieu, its strength lies in the fact that it is not limited to that restricted domain. Arendt argues that the source of the Empire's stability lay precisely

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144. *Origins*, p. 125. She does not explicate exactly what she understands by this concept, however. We are offered neither a mechanism according to which this consent is sought by the nation-state, nor a means by which the population can give its consent. However, Arendt's theory is driven by her historiographical concern, and the precise nature of these mechanisms is undoubtedly a secondary issue. The general contours of her conception of consent as it applies to the experience of imperialism can be traced, in spite of this silence on Arendt's part.

in the universality of the law, "so that conquest could be followed by integration of the most heterogenous peoples by imposing upon them a common law."[145]

Nation-states, however, are not based upon such a common law. They have their basis in a shared language, history, and culture. The body politic of the nation-state is founded upon the "active consent" of individuals who share in that common history, language, and culture to political institutions and rituals rooted in these commonalities. This need for consent explains why the nation-state is so reliant on borders, and is less able than other forms of political organization to incorporate conquest and expansion. The border locates the limit of the nation, and therefore the extent to which consent has been or must be sought. A population is able to give consent to a body politic that shares its own heritage. Conversely, a nation cannot consent to rule by another nation. As Arendt states:

> The nation, however, conceived of its law as an outgrowth of a unique national substance which was not valid beyond its own people and the boundaries of its own territory.[146]

This had important implications within the context of growing imperialist movements. It put the nation-state directly into conflict with the interests of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie, needing to develop new markets and opportunities for economic growth, sought to expand their economic reach across the globe. However, to safeguard their investment, they also demanded the protection of the nation-state. Political expansion was required to accommodate economic expansion. This is the situation alluded to in the quotation that opens this chapter: a strange inversion whereby businessmen become

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145. *Origins*, p. 125.

146. *Origins*, p. 126-7.

statesmen and *vice versa*. In asserting pressure on the nation-state to accommodate their expansionist interests, the bourgeoisie in effect imposed economic rationality on the political realm. But the limitless growth that was perceived as economically ideal was a formula for political disaster. "The political structure," Arendt tells us, "cannot be expanded indefinitely, because it is not based on the productivity of man, which is, indeed, unlimited."[147] To conquer another nation and impose a foreign law on them contravenes a principle tenet of the nation-state system, the equality of all nations and the concomitant right of each to self-determination. Such an imposition was rarely successful, leading either to an awakening of national consciousness and subsequent rebellion, or to a degeneration into tyranny.[148]

Further, the protection of capital is accomplished by exporting the nation-state's instruments of violence, the police and the army. Just as the political power of the state is harnessed and directed by the nation, and thereby limited in its scope, the nation-state's instruments of violence are also circumscribed by national interests. Within the nation-state, Arendt argues that the nation restrains and guides the institutions of the state.[149] As soon as the instruments of violence are exported beyond the borders of the nation-state, however, they are no longer bound by concerns about the "national good." The distinction between national rule and imperial domination becomes clear. The colonies are not controlled through

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147. *Origins*, p. 126.

148. *Origins*, p. 129.

149. *Origins*, p. 136.

a power rooted in, controlled by, and serving the nation, but through instruments of violence untethered from any such restraints.[150]

Party vs. Movement

The rise of overseas imperialism, driven as it was by a paramount concern for expansion and the economic "bottom line," had important consequences for the nation-state. It was not, however, the sole imperialist movement, nor the most influential. The counterpart of overseas imperialism was continental imperialism. In a broad sense, they shared a common goal, to expand their political control to other territories. They are, however, also fundamentally distinct, as demonstrated by the terms Arendt uses to describe them, in where they took root and where they sought to expand. The nation-states of Western Europe were the dominant players in overseas imperialism, which was directed outward beyond Europe to other continents. Continental imperialist movements, on the other hand, grew in the states of Eastern Europe, largely as an expression of resentment over being left out of the overseas imperialist rush for land. Correspondingly, it was pointed inward at the objects of their resentment, at the nation-states of Europe. Differing in their specific aims, the two types of imperialism also differed in their effects, in terms both of their effectiveness and their implications for the nation-state. Overseas imperialism was incredibly successful in continually appropriating territory, but attempts to institute changes in national political structures were largely–although not entirely–unsuccessful. Continental imperialist

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150. The distinction between power and violence is important for Arendt, who argues that the terms have become conflated. See "On Violence," in *Crises of the Republic*, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1972), pp. 105-198.

movements, on the other hand, did not realize their dream of bringing the rest of Europe under their rule. They were, however, successful in harnessing hostility towards the nation-state to organize people outside of traditional political structures.

There appears to be something of an inverse relationship between these two goals, territorial expansion and change to national political structures. The reason for this stems from the inward/outward dichotomy that differentiates continental and overseas imperialism. Directing their efforts beyond the nation-state system, the bourgeoisie had little interest in domestic political matters. Their "political emancipation," as Arendt terms it, created an interest in the nation-state only to the extent that it could be harnessed to further their expansionist desires. Expansion was the primary goal, and change in national political structures subordinate, pursued only insofar as it would aid in realizing the primary goal. Continental imperialist movements reversed this emphasis. Motivated by a feeling of exclusion from the scramble for wealth, they turned their energies towards the nation-states that excluded them. Their primary focus was therefore not the capture of territory, but the destruction of those nation-states. Assuming control of this area was not an end in itself, but rather a means to a different end. The dialectical play between the two types of imperialism is evident in their combined impact: "[t]he nation-state system's ruin, having been prepared by its own overseas imperialism, was eventually carried out by those movements which had originated outside its own realm."[151]

The primary "traditional political structure" that continental imperialism repudiated in its organizational structure was the political party. The party was the primary vehicle

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151. *Origins*, p. 250.

through which citizens of a nation-state could participate in political affairs. The party had a legitimate function within the mechanism established to accomplish the transfer of political power. It was thus tightly integrated within the body politic of the nation-state, and the repudiation of the political party was an outgrowth of continental imperialism's hatred of the state. Arendt discusses two variants of the party system. The British system was characterized by the presence of two main parties. To form the government, a party would therefore require a majority of votes cast. The nation-states of continental Europe, on the other hand, possessed a multi-party system. Under this system, parties rarely, if ever, captured the majority required to assume power. Governments were typically composed of a coalition of often disparate interests.

The "fundamental distinction" between the British two-party system and the Continental multi-party system therefore revolved around "the party's function within the body politic."[152] This function was determined by the proximity of a party to political power. Within a two-party system, there was an identification between the state and the government because "one party always represents the government and actually rules the country, so that, temporarily, the party in power becomes identical with the state."[153] Furthermore, although the party in power is identified with the power of the state, this does not mean that the party in opposition is left out in the cold. Arendt states that:

> [a]s the two parties are planned and organized for alternate rule, all branches of the administration are planned and organized for alternation. Since the rule

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152. *Origins*, p. 252.

153. *Origins*, p. 252.

> of each party is limited in time, the opposition party exerts a control whose efficiency is strengthened by the certainty that it is the ruler of tomorrow.[154]

Within multi-party systems, the function of the political party was not to assume full political power, and therefore in essence to become the government. Because of the highly fractured nature of contests for political power, there was no opportunity for a party to solely assume power. Governments were a product of coalitions between parties, and there was never an identity between party and government. This perpetual distance between party and governmental power–between party and state–produced widespread feelings of alienation. Parties never enjoyed the feeling of becoming the government, but only of being able to grasp a limited and fleeting amount of power. Where the party in effect becomes the state in the Anglo-Saxon system, the Continental state is always above parties, distinct from their particular, private interests.[155] Because parties in both systems are necessarily implicated in the structures and mechanisms of political power established by the state, they possess a stabilizing function. This was especially true in the two-party system. Arendt clearly prefers the two-party system, since it guarantees a higher degree of stability, by preventing feelings of widespread alienation from political power. This stability provides a measure or reassurance to citizens, who can locate their place in the world–or at least, in the state.

Movements, on the other hand, are rooted in a deep sense of hostility towards the state; as Arendt puts it, "[t]here are no movements without hatred of the state..."[156] The

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154. *Origins*, p. 252.

155. *Origins*, p. 254-255.

156. *Origins*, p. 259.

movements Arendt examines, Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism,[157] were both touched off by a strong resentment towards the nation-state. This relationship was expressed in two different but related ways. There was the frustration over being left out of the overseas imperialist expansion enjoyed by the nation-states of Western Europe, and the tribalism that was "the nationalism of those peoples who had not participated in national emancipation and had not achieved the sovereignty of a nation-state."[158] Because they had not experienced the founding of their own state, the regions in which the pan-movements found the most fertile soil were those in which there was a pervasive sense of rootlessness. Without the experience of living within the nation-state system and therefore under conditions of political belonging, the ideology of the pan-movements could appeal to individuals by offering them a sense of belonging. They preached the divine origin of their own people over and above the religious/Western belief in the divine origin of humanity. This relegated the individual to an inferior, secondary role relative to the nation. One's own divine origin and value was no longer a result of simply being human, but "only indirectly through membership in a people,"[159] contra the Rights of Man. Individual distinctiveness was second to national identity. Those from different nations were the non-divine Other, and fellow nationals were

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157. Although Arendt quite often does not qualify what she means when she employs the term "movement," it must be pointed out that she assigns it a fairly restrictive range of meaning. She speaks of overseas and continental imperialist movements, often alluding to others but concentrating on only those two. They are the most important to her, as they are the precursors of the Nazi and Stalinist totalitarian movements–the other movements she analyzes. My own use of the term will follow Arendt's.

158. *Origins*, p. 227.

159. *Origins*, p. 233.

only important not because of anything they did, but due to a characteristic they had no control over. "Divine origin," Arendt proclaims, "changed the people into a uniform 'chosen' mass of arrogant robots."[160]

The movements mobilize this mass, moulding it into action–into movement. The focus of action is aimed directly at the state, challenging "the institution of the state" itself.[161] Not only is this directed outwards at other states, but it is also aimed inwards at the state in which the movements originated. They bypassed entirely the political processes established by the state, namely the party system, and the social basis of political parties, namely classes. These classes, like political parties, are stabilizing factors, since they provide an individual with a location in society, and a means of positioning themselves relative to others. The ironic feature of this mobilization against the state was that it was seemingly emptied of any actual goal or end. Because the movements coalesced around sentiments of tribal solidarity, they were faced with the fact that "no definite goals or programs could be deduced from the sentiment of tribal belonging."[162] However, the novel aspect of movements was precisely that they could employ a form of organizing their adherents that did not need such policies, since "the only thing that counts in a movement is precisely that it keeps itself in constant movement."[163]

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160. *Origins*, p. 234.

161. *Origins*, p. 264.

162. *Origins*, p. 260.

163. *Origins*, p. 260.

Totalitarianism and the Nation-state

Arendt has been criticized by some commentators who argue that her account of totalitarian regimes is problematic because it does not allow for the comparative study of political systems. She

> does not attempt to locate totalitarianism within a typology of political systems or to analyze it in terms of a general and inclusive set of political categories; instead, she draws a sharp conceptual and theoretical line between totalitarianism and "the traditional political forces–liberal or conservative, national or socialist, republican or monarchist, authoritarian or democratic."[164]

Thus, Arendt has failed to assimilate totalitarian regimes into the accepted framework within which politics is normally understood and made comparable. What this really boils down to, I think, is a claim that Arendt does not describe totalitarianism according to the categories and institutions typical of states, the primary unit in political thought. Arendt was fully aware of this "limitation" in her work, and took it on for a very explicit purpose. To try to shoehorn totalitarian regimes into these categories was seen as a dangerous act of normalization by

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164. Robert Burrowes, "Totalitarianism: The Revised Standard Version," (*World Politics*, 21, 1969, 272-294), p. 278. This sentiment is shared by Herbert J. Spiro and Benjamin R. Barber in "Counter-Ideological Uses of Totalitarianism," (*Politics and Society*, 1, 1970, 3-21), who also argue that totalarianism's implication in American post-war foreign policy limits its potential analytical value: "[a]s an essentialist concept serving as a cornerstone of American counter-ideology in the cold war, totalitarianism has nullified whatever utility it might have had–forgetting for the moment the conceptual objections that can be made to its analytic use–as an explanatory category in modern political science." (p. 21) Interestingly, both Burrowes and Spiro and Barber approach *Origins* as commentators on the concept of totalitarianism–they do not contextualize the text within Arendt's larger theoretical framework or take into account her novel historical approach. See also Bernard Crick, "Hannah Arendt and the Burden of Our Times," (*Political Quarterly*, 1997, 77-84); Irving Howe, "Totalitarianism Reconsidered: Yesterday's Theories, Today's Realities," (*Dissent*, Winter 1991, 63-71); Michael Walzer, "On Failed Totalitarianism," (*Dissent*, Summer 1983, 297-306).

Arendt. Like trying to fit a round peg into a square hole, it could be done, but at the cost of truly being able to understand totalitarianism. This, then, is the crucial point behind Arendt's statement that "totalitarianism differs essentially from other forms of political oppression known to us such as despotism, tyranny, and dictatorship"–that totalitarianism differs from other types of polities not simply in *degree* but in *kind*. Totalitarian regimes are a breed apart, according to Arendt, and any attempt to locate them on a continuum of political systems is futile and misguided. The central fact of totalitarianism is not that it seeks to limit freedom, as authoritarian regimes do.[165] Totalitarianism is unique in that it seeks not merely to limit freedom, but to abolish it completely. In line with this aim is a completely atypical institutional arrangement designed specifically to accomplish this goal.

Totalitarianism ushered in revolutionary changes, and to understand how it tries to totally abolish freedom, it is helpful to consider it using the terminology of revolutions. The word "revolution" conjures images of the cosmos: astronomically, it referred to "a recurring, cyclical movement."[166] Traditionally, revolution was a metaphor for return, a restoration of the old order.[167] Modern usage of the term diverges from this usage, and talk of revolution invokes the sense of something completely novel, a new beginning. From either perspective, the results are similar: following the sweeping changes ushered in by revolutionary parties, there is a point when the process of change and upheaval comes to an end, as the issues and

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165. *Origins*, pp. 404-5.

166. *On Revolution*, p. 42.

167. *On Revolution*, p. 43.

concerns of everyday life intrude. The party loses its "revolutionary momentum"[168] and must then, as the phrase goes, get down to the business of governing. As the new regime stabilizes, the revolution draws to a close–momentum diminishes, movement ceases.

Talk of "revolution," "momentum," and "movements" captures perfectly the manner in which totalitarianism centres on notions of temporality and flow rather than spatiality and inertia. It opposes the stasis and permanence of that prototypical spatial entity, the modern nation-state. With totalitarian revolution, the upheaval never ends. Indeed, it *cannot* end, since the instant this motion ends, stability and normalcy begin to encroach. This is not merely an extension of Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution," although that phrase may best capture the nature of totalitarianism's "perpetual motion-mania."[169] Where Trotsky envisioned a series of communist revolutions in a number of countries, totalitarian societies experience the instability and provisionality typical of revolutionary moments *at all times*.

Institutionally, this "shapeless structure" is embodied in a totally unique arrangement and distribution of power. Arendt likens the arrangement to the internal structure of an onion.[170] An onion is composed of numerous layers upon layers, each layer (with the exception of the innermost and the outermost) simultaneously covering and covered over by another layer. Each layer represents an administrative level within the totalitarian regime, reproducing the offices of the layer underneath it. The result is a multiplication and duplication of offices. This reproduction creates a sense of chaos and instability, as those on

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168. *Origins*, p. 392.

169. *Origins*, p. 306.

170. See Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future*, p. 99-100.

the outside are unable to see beyond the layer closest to them; the inner, more authentic centres of power are therefore hidden, shielded from reality just as society remains ignorant of the true workings of totalitarian power. The spatial nature of the metaphor is revealing: the farther away a layer is from the inner core, the farther away it is from the real heart of power, a distance that is inversely proportional to its proximity to everyday life. The distribution of power in nation-states can also be described through spatial metaphors, such as a horizontal line (representing equality, as in federal states) or a pyramid (where the apex of power is the leader, with power flowing down from him/her), but those metaphors once again reveal how the nation-state is an instrument of stability and order.

Borders are an intrinsic element of the nation-state. They operationalize the doctrine of sovereignty, since a state's claim to the unchecked right to manage its own affairs as it sees fit is meaningless without some idea of where that right begins and how far those affairs extend (and where the rights of other states begin). Similarly, borders act internally to demarcate the sphere of political action–they determine what can properly be considered a part of politics. This chapter has examined different ways in which these borders have been challenged and undermined. The clash between the political and the economic spheres precipitated by the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie highlighted limitations of both the borders between nation-states and the borders within the nation-state. The infiltration of economic principles into the political realm, driven largely by the rise of imperialism, produced a decisive shift towards a conception of politics that hinged on the accumulation of power for the sake of power. Such a politics was contradictory to the nation-state's basis

in the active consent of its population to being governed. Continental imperialist movements were very effective at mobilizing widespread hatred of the nation-state into forceful movements that existed independently of the nation-state. Finally, totalitarian regimes maintained their power by completely abolishing the borders separating the political realm from civil society. Taken together, these phenomena demonstrate forcefully the limitations of a conception of politics rooted in the principles governing the nation-state. Arendt's post-*Origins* texts continue and elaborate on the critique of the nation-state begun in her first major text. In the process she builds on her conception of politics, a politics that is not centred on the state, and is only hinted at in *Origins*. It is to an examination of this continued critique that we will now turn.

Acting Without a Bannister: Toward a Global Politics

> *"What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing."*[171]
> *"You said 'groundless thinking.' I have a metaphor...which I have never published but kept for myself. I call it thinking without a bannister...That is, as you go up and down the stairs you can always hold onto the bannister so that you don't fall down. But we have lost this bannister. That is the way I tell it to myself. And this is indeed what I try to do."*[172]

This chapter will focus on the texts Arendt wrote after the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The prevalent theme throughout Arendt's *Origins* critique of the nation-state is the challenge faced by the nation-state in attempting to forge a space for political thought and action. Ultimately, it was a challenge the nation-state could not live up to, as the previous chapters have demonstrated. The very origin of the nation-state belies the paradox between its basis in the equality of all peoples and the systematic exclusion of entire groups of non-nationals from the benefits of citizenry; the failure to protect the human rights of those who had only those rights, and not the rights bestowed upon citizens, to guarantee them a place in the world demonstrates the incongruence between the theory and the practice of the nation-state as the institutional guarantor of a truly public space; and to the degree that it could create some pale shadow of a vibrant public sphere through the party system, the nation-state was still impotent to prevent it from being overtaken by the narrow economic interests of the rising bourgeois class. For Arendt, the situation was clear: as a means of sheltering and providing security for people, the nation-state proved to be a manifest failure. This failure did not stem from the whims of *fortuna* or simple bad timing, but because the

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171. *The Human Condition*, p. 5.

172. Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 336-337.

very structure of the nation-state made it all but inevitable. Furthermore, it was beyond salvation, unable to cope with the global political environment that emerged after World War II.

This chapter will examine Arendt's post-*Origins* texts to determine the relation of the state to Arendt's (re)conception of the political. The relationship between *Origins* and Arendt's later texts is an interesting and complex one. Various themes that predominate in her later works find their genesis in *Origins*, and many of these works return to specific concerns or issues raised in that text.[173] There is, however, one distinction that can be made: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was primarily a critical work, an engagement with and an attack of those elements of modern western civilization that coalesced into totalitarian regimes, elements that were present all across the west. The works that followed, on the other hand, comprise a project of rebuilding what had been previously critiqued. Given her original critique of the nation-state, it should come as no surprise that Arendt remains harshly critical of the state as the locus of political action.

Through her continued critique of the doctrine of sovereignty, Arendt formulated a conception of meaningful political action located "outside" the state. This position is in strong contrast to most conceptions of politics, which identify the state as the arena within which politics must necessarily occur. In this way, Arendt articulates a way of "acting without a bannister" to complement her notion of "thinking without a bannister." Arendt's conception of politics, from this perspective, has definite anarchistic overtones, since it calls

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173. Perhaps the most obvious and certainly the most controversial of these is *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.*

for a radical devolution and relocation of political power from the centre–the state–to numerous centres.[174]

The metaphor that Arendt uses to describe her own theoretical method, thinking without a bannister, also hints at an important aspect of her critique of modernity, one that affords a useful starting point for her analysis of the state. She confronts the modern notion that the possibility of thought and action must necessarily rest upon a stable, universalist ground. *Origins* highlights this well, in attacking the Nazi and imperialist grounding in racism, or the Stalinist proclamation of the proletariat as the universal class of history. She continued these assaults in later works, challenging liberalism's foundation in the detached, sovereign subject, the quest for an objective, "Archimedean" standpoint of the physical sciences (a perspective echoed by the behaviourist school of thought in the social sciences), and so on. Arendt shied away from such bannisters in her own thought not simply because she recognized their inherent theoretical difficulties, but because she witnessed firsthand the horrors that can erupt from putting such foundational, ideological thinking into practice.

Similarly, Arendt criticizes the modern state because it rests on an equally implausible bannister of its own. This bannister, in effect what makes the modern state

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174. This reading of Arendt is thus similar to that of Jeffrey C. Isaac in *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*. Interpretations of and attitudes toward Arendt's post-*Origins* work are diverse to say the least. Some see her as an anti-democratic elitist fearful of the possibilities of a "mass" politics; others read Arendt as a neo-Aristotelian, championing a (particularly naive) revival of the Greek polis; still others identify her as part of the civic republican tradition, as sympathetic to anarchist visions of a grassroots politics, or as a sadly apolitical communitarian. The list could go on. Taken together, these readings compose a challenging and engaging terrain. While some of this is no doubt due to inconsistencies and contradictions within her extensive body of work, much of it is also due to the manner in which her works simply resist definitive attempts at categorization.

possible, is the concept of sovereignty. As a concept constitutive of the modern state, it also constitutes conceptions of the political–at the heart of political action and analysis lies the (often unexamined) sovereign status of the state. Sovereignty can be described as, "the political authority within a community which has the acknowledged right to exercise the powers of the state and to determine the rules, regulations and policies within a given territory."[175] As this description indicates, the concept of sovereignty is highly bound up with the concept of freedom, whether the term is applied to political communities or individuals. A sovereign state is one that is free from external influence, allowed to determine for itself how to order its political affairs (likewise the sovereign individual, a conception of subjectivity at the heart of the various incarnations of liberalism). The doctrine of sovereignty expresses the state's purported independence from external challenges to its ability to effect a particular course of action. The challenges can originate from numerous sources: other states, multi-national corporations, technological change, international organizations, and so on.

Alongside this external dimension is an internal dimension, which relates to domestic politics. The doctrine of sovereignty determines the highest political authority within a territory. One of the earliest modern elaborations of this doctrine can be found in Hobbes *Leviathan*. The Leviathan is an all-powerful state, to which individuals have surrendered political power. This constitutes the state as the site of a "unique political power ... sovereign power or sovereignty–the authorized, hence rightful, use of state powers by the person or

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175. Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, pp. 99-100.

assembly established as sovereign."[176] With the rise of representative democracy and later, universal suffrage, the contestation over this power has become synonymous with politics. The political sphere of legislatures, parliaments, and so on has come to assert a hegemonic control over domestic political discourse. Modern theories of politics focus almost exclusively upon how to achieve this power or influence those who hold it. Answering questions about who governs and how they govern (contesting elections, determination of policy, and allocation of scarce resources) seems to be the alpha and omega of politics and political analysis. Often unacknowledged is the fact that these questions could not be asked the way they are asked in the first place, were it not for the state and state sovereignty creating and maintaining the particular political space in which these questions and their answers can become meaningful.

Arendt recognized early on that the concept of sovereignty was a murky, problematic one. Although it was effective as an impetus to state-building, spurring nations on to achieve statehood in the belief that national maturity was only apparent under conditions of national self-determination, the reality of relations between seemingly sovereign states told a different story of national "independence" altogether. One need look no further than *Origins* to see how theory and practice collided. Arendt tells a story of nascent states, independent from one another on the surface, requiring an international element, the web of Jewish people across Europe, for their very survival; of these same states helpless in the face of huge migrations spawned by the rise of statelessness; of an economic system that depended upon continual expansion, an expansion that neither knew nor respected national boundaries; of the quest

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176. Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, p. 41.

for total domination rooted in the absolute upheaval of everyday life and seeking to enslave the entire globe. On top of it all, this was a story told against the backdrop of total war and the invention of weapons that could destroy all life on earth. Indeed, these tales were not yet complete when Arendt told them, and are still being written today. Questions of how to protect human rights in a global context or respond to the acceleration of capital, cultural, and information flows are ever-present, and relatively new issues such as environmental destruction or the threat of nuclear war have emerged on the international scene to reveal the limitations of the sovereign state.

Arendt frames her critique of sovereignty within a unique formulation of the concept of freedom. As we saw above, traditional elaborations of state sovereignty argue that it is precisely sovereignty which creates and protects the conditions necessary for freedom. This capacity for self-determination is exercised in two different manners. Internationally, states are recognized as independent actors in their relations with other states. Domestically, self-determination creates the space within which citizens are free to choose the course of their own affairs. This is the heart of the concept of *negative* freedom; autonomous actors are free from outside restraints, to act however they please, or not to act at all. Arendt argues that this conflation of sovereignty with negative freedom is false and misleading, because it fails to take account of the worldly conditions under which politics occurs.

The primary condition for politics to take place, according to Arendt, is not sovereignty but plurality. Action[177] owes its very existence "to the fact that men, not Man,

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177. Action is of course one of three elements in what Arendt refers to as the *Vita Activa*, the active life of human beings. The other two elements are labour and work, which (continued...)

live on the earth and inhabit the world."[178] The distinction here between simple multiplicity and plurality is a crucial one, because the presence of difference, the notion that "we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live"[179] is required for action to occur. Recognition of its importance can be gained from looking back to the totalitarian regimes. They sought to eliminate this plurality; by removing the space between individuals that distinguished and connected them at the same time, they attempted to reduce the population to a single, amorphous mass of indistinguishable beings.[180]

The plurality required for political action is revealed through action. Speech and action before others achieves the "disclosure of the agent." This revelation of identity, of "who" a person is as opposed to "what" they are, is a reflexive process. It is not within the control of the actor, because every action begins something new, and this chain of events, of actions and reactions, cannot be guided by the original actor. It cannot be so directed because

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(...continued)
respectively satisfy the biological necessities of human life and construct the built (i.e., artificial) environment in which humans live. For the purposes of this chapter, we need not consider labour and work in great depth (see Arendt's discussion of the *vita activa* in *The Human Condition*). It is important to note, however, that for Arendt action is synonymous with politics; action is always political action, and to speak of one is to speak of them both.

178. *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

179. *The Human Condition*, p. 8.

180. This vision was most fully realized in the concentration camps. See *Origins*, 437-459.

people act in a context established and perpetuated by the actions of the community, what Arendt terms the "web of human relationships."[181]

So far, from the perspective of questions about freedom and sovereignty, such a description of politics is rather uncontroversial. Notable more perhaps for the distinctive terminology Arendt employs, arguing that politics must take place as a group effort poses no necessary challenge to the doctrine of sovereignty as negative freedom. Theories that champion the sovereign actor, be it a state or an individual, recognize that politics is the product of these actors existing in a milieu composed of other (also sovereign) actors. Arendt's critique, however, stems from her belief that political action involves a rather different form of freedom, something akin to positive freedom–although she does not employ that term.

Arendt's conception of freedom is, however, a multi-faceted one, and she avoids succumbing to a one-dimensional either/or choice between negative and positive freedom. She recognizes the importance of the freedom to choose whether to engage in politics. She therefore sees the importance of negative liberty, which is required to make this choice freely–just as there must be a lack of constraints barring people from politics, one cannot be coerced into acting (of course, it is possible to speak of being forced to act due to, say, a feeling of outrage brought on by some event, but this is a different matter). However, she also considers freedom to be associated with politics on another level. Negative freedom can be fairly accurately described as a possession, something one alternately possesses or lacks. Such a description is reflected in language: one either has or does not have the freedom to

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181. *The Human Condition*, pp. 181-188.

choose (how) to act. Arendt's alternate conception of freedom cannot be so described. It is not something that is possessed as a precondition of action, but emerges out of action in concert with others. It is experienced rather than owned. This freedom exists only when people come together to deliberate upon and pursue a course of action–that is, when people come together to take part in politics.

The incompatibility between freedom and sovereignty that Arendt describes now becomes clear. The doctrine of sovereignty portrays political actors as possessing a fundamentally negative freedom. Their political actions and choices are the result of their own process of independent deliberation and decision-making. Under Arendt's conception of politics, however, to limit freedom to this negative connotation is to prevent a more robust type of freedom from being realized. This freedom does not predate one's entrance to the political realm, but makes its appearance only as a result of joint action with others. For politics as Arendt understands it to materialize, actors must relinquish their claims to sovereign status and recognize that politics is possible when and only when such claims are abdicated.

Such a critique of sovereignty, however, remains at the level of the individual. The link back to state sovereignty is made through the further claim that Arendt's conception of politics cannot be realized within modern, sovereign states. These states–or at least, the specific states that concern Arendt–are all representative democracies. They institute a conception of politics in which the primary legitimate object of political effort is state (governmental) power, and have accepted very specific practices to accommodate the transfer of this power.

While it is possible for Arendtian action to occur within this context, the nature of representative democracy is such that these instances are both rare and fleeting. Democratic theory as it is currently practiced provides opportunities for participation, but these opportunities are far too limited in number and in scope. The possibilities for action in modern democracies are, for Arendt, very shallow and unsubstantive. Voting every few years or playing a minor role in the electoral process leaves the participant not with the feeling of taking part in a process of open deliberation and action, but rather of being a small cog in a large and impersonal electoral machine.[182] Arendt argues that representative democracy, rather than opening a space for the exercise of political power, actually relies on a surrender of that power. Arendt's conception of power is similar to her understanding of freedom in that it is not a "thing" that exists independently of political action, but is instead created and sustained by such action. Representative democracies, however, function based on citizens' relinquishing their ability to participate, delegating that authority onto a select few. Readings of representation revolve around two poles. In the first, the representative is put in place to simply carry out the will of the people; in the second, the representative is able exercise some level of discretion–he/she is not simply a conduit for the people's will. The first option is problematic because it reduces politics to administration: "political matters are those that are dictated by necessity to be decided by experts; hence there is no need for Madison's 'medium of a chosen body of citizens' through which opinions must pass and be purified into public

182. He says from personal experience and with only the slightest hint of bitterness.

views."[183] The second form of representation actually closes off entry into the public realm and thus "the people are not admitted to the public realm, once more the business of government has become the privilege of the few..."[184]

As mentioned previously, there have been moments in history that Arendt points to as shining examples of qualitative political action. Most typically, these have been times of revolution, and Arendt remarks that they all share one thing in common, the council system. All revolutions have initially demonstrated the presence of what Arendt refers to as "public happiness," the widespread experience of participation in public affairs. This took place through town halls or workers' councils, and their revolutionary recurrence in the context of such dissimilarity of history and geography makes them worthy of analysis: "It is precisely the absence of continuity, tradition, and organized influence that makes the sameness of the phenomenon so very striking."[185] Arendt laments the fact that although these councils seem to appear wherever revolutions occur, they have always been fleeting endeavours. Either they inevitably succumb to a post-revolutionary centralization and consolidation of power (as in the case of the French or Russian Revolutions), or else no accommodation is made for their participation in the constitution of the new state (as in the American Revolution). These organs possessed the characteristics necessary for widespread participation. Primary among

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183. *On Revolution*, p. 237

184. *On Revolution*, p. 237.

185. *On Revolution*, p. 262.

these was that they reflected "the elementary coincidence of freedom and a limited space."[186] Their intimacy enabled a true "space of appearances" to be opened up, one in which groups of individuals could actively and substantively take part in the public realm. Federal principles, furthermore–the most lasting and important legacy of the American Revolution, according to Arendt–united the various councils together. The result is therefore a multiplicity of public spaces to which individuals have access.

A common criticism of such participatory democracy schemes is that they could not accommodate a large number of participants. In effect, representative democracies function because the political process serves to filter and condense numerous voices and constrain "who speaks." Participation on a large scale would open the floodgates, thereby paralyzing the system and grinding the machinery of government to a halt. What such a claim overlooks, however, is that while a multiplicity of spaces opens politics up to everybody, this does not mean that everybody will participate. Arendt's arguments in this regard have led to charges of elitism. She points out that under situations where the political realm is open to all, only an "elite" will participate. Arendt's elitism, however, is not the sort of "top-down," oligarchic elitism that would be deserving of critique. It is instead an elitism that emerges out of individual decisions about whether to participate. The exclusion that would result, therefore, "would not depend upon an outside body; if those who belong are self-chosen, those who do not belong are self-excluded."[187] The crucial task is to institute a process whereby all have the option to participate in politics if they so wish.

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186. *On Revolution*, p. 275.

187. *On Revolution*, p. 280.

It is necessary to dispel a popular conception of Arendt as a Greek revivalist, a reading that sees Arendt's normative project as an attempt to create these public spaces in the image of the Greek polis. This reading is largely inspired by Arendt's exploration of action contained in *The Human Condition*. Arendt identifies action as one component of the *vita activa*, along with labour, which satisfies the biological needs of human life, and work, which creates the built environment that we inhabit. These three aspects of the active life of human beings form a hierarchy, one that is constantly shifting across space and time. Different cultures at different moments in their history will regard one part of the *vita activa* more highly than the others. Some may consider action to be highest in the hierarchy, such as in Ancient Greece, while others may favour labour or work. Arendt's own normative position is clear: for her, action is the epitome of human activity, as it is only through political participation that one's own unique humanity can be revealed to the world.[188]

At the same time as Arendt put forward her own normative project–trying to reclaim the supremacy of political action–her historical project was, in part, to chart the manner in which the hierarchy of the *vita activa* has changed throughout the modern age. We need not retrace the entirety of her argument in this regard,[189] but can step in at the present day. The 20th century, she argues, has been characterized by the dominance of labour over the other

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188. This valuation of action does not, however, entail a subsequent devaluation of labour or work–Arendt, in focussing on the reinvigoration of political action in the 20th century, was not in any way "anti-labour" or "anti-work." All three facets of the active life on human beings are significant; labour and work are not only necessary as pre-conditions for the possibility of action, but also for the very existence of the species.

189. See "The *Vita Activa* and the Modern Age," her brilliant final chapter of *The Human Condition*.

parts of the *vita activa*. The Western world has become a society in which labour has been glorified in both theoretical and practical terms. This glorification is reflected in the current status of political institutions, which have become focussed predominantly on questions that were at one time purely within the purview of the private realm. The modern state has become a system of "housekeeping on a national scale," where the notion of housekeeping reflects the fact that in Ancient Greece economic matters were dealt with in the privacy of the household.

Because her normative goal was to recapture the supremacy of action, and her analysis was couched in a reading of the Greek experience, the conclusion has been reached that Arendt wanted to reinstate the Greek model of action. Arendt championed the "philosophical adoption, the precise resuscitation of the Greek–or, more exactly, the Aristotelian–concepts of *polis*, politics, and citizenry."[190] By extension, the limit of Arendt's hope for the nation-state was that it begin to model itself more or less closely after the polis of old. She was thus a vociferously anti-modern thinker, seeing nothing redeeming in modern politics. Driven by her revulsion over the horrors of totalitarianism and the general vapidity of 20th century representative democratic politics, she fled back to a historical era characterized by the political primacy of the contest of words and deeds conducted in the light of the public stage.

This reading is mistaken, I think, because it mistakes an aspect of Arendt's methodology for a set of normative claims. While it is true that Arendt devoted a great deal

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190. Dolf Sternberger, "The Sunken City: Hannah Arendt's Idea of Politics," *Social Research* 44, 1997, p. 132.

of time to a dissection of ancient Greek political life, she did not do this to promote it as a complete remedy for the malaise she perceived in modern politics. Arendt recognized that this malaise is a distinctly 20th century dilemma, and as such required an equally distinct solution–what worked in the past under a set of entirely different conditions would not work in the present. However, this uniqueness did not mean that some radical break with the past had occurred; modern politics is both different from and a part of the political tradition it inherited. In seeking a way to recapture some of the value and joy that was once an indelible part of political action, Arendt turned to this tradition, to see how past cultures responded to the sorts of problems and conditions presently facing the (Western) world. She therefore turned to the Greeks because she perceived their society to be one in which political action was supreme. Likewise, she considered the Roman Empire in terms of how they dealt with questions of authority and tradition; this does not mean that she advocated a return to the Roman political system.

However, the sort of speechifying that dominated the ancient polis is usually (and rightly) found to be lacking substance when judged from the perspective of contemporary political ambitions and goals. From the perspective of the political categories of ancient Greece, modern politics has been overrun by the interests of the private realm of the household, issues that are therefore not supposed to be the stuff of political discourse and action. Because this interpretation of Arendt locates her squarely in the Greek camp, it is argued that by extension she too is hostile to social interests, to questions of social and economic justice–a claim that is made of Arendt by a variety of commentators, not just those who locate her in the Greek tradition. The result is therefore a politics emptied of most

substantive concerns, reduced to acts of war, revolution, or the founding of new states, or oratories about the same.[191] Hannah Arendt becomes a thinker who elucidated central aspects of the history of political thought, but also one who ultimately had little–if anything–to offer those who look to her work with the hope of enlightenment about contemporary political problems and strategies.

Such a charge, I think, ignores another aspect of her approach closely related to her appreciation for the depth of the Western political tradition. At the same time as she sought to learn as much as she could from the past, Arendt possessed a tireless determination to always be a "situated" political thinker. She believed in the need to avoid abstract philosophizing when approaching important political questions, a belief reflected in her many essays on the central controversies of her time, such as the student movement of the late 1960's, the Vietnam War, or the space race,[192] to name but a few. Her own methodology

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191. As Mary McCarthy once expressed the dilemma, "if all questions of economics, human welfare, busing, anything that touches the social sphere, are to be excluded from the political scene, then ... I am left with war and speeches. But the speeches can't be just speeches. They have to be about something." (In Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," p. 316) It must be noted that there are a range of opinions about Arendt's stance in this matter. For some, she is actively and purposefully seeking to exclude these concerns from the political realm (see, for example, Joseph M. Schwartz, "Arendt's Politics: The Elusive Search for Substance," *Praxis International* 9(1-2), 1989, 25-47); for others, this exclusion highlights an accidental shortcoming of Arendt's theoretical framework, as opposed to a purposeful act of exclusion. Interestingly, Arendt herself admits that the social and the political may not have been watertight categories for the Ancient Greeks, either, as in comments such as, "[f]reedom itself needed therefore a place where people could come together–the agora, the market-place, or the *polis*, the political space proper." (*On Revolution*, p. 31).

192. This final example was Arendt's topic in "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man," in *Between Past and Future*, pp. 265-280 The same theme also opens *The Human Condition*.

therefore revealed a recognition that any adequate conception of politics must allow for room beyond the relatively narrow concerns of war and revolution. However, the notion that she must draft a list of topics that should properly be labelled "political" surely would have seemed absurd to her, since, as she herself pointed out, "at all times people living together will have affairs that belong in the realm of the public–'are worthy to be talked about in public.' What these matters *are* at any historical *moment* is probably *utterly* different."[193] This realization is reflected in her own thought as well. Although she steadfastly maintained in her theory a rigid distinction between the social/economic and the political realms, so that much of what we would consider a vital matter for politics to address would be excluded, in actual practice this distinction was much less uncompromising. As Jeffrey C. Isaac puts it, "one could argue that in her more concrete discussions she does not allow her considered judgements to be constrained by unwieldy decisions."[194] This opens up the entire range of traditionally political questions for debate within Arendt's non-sovereign political spaces. Ultimately, therefore, what is of lasting relevance is not Arendt's formulations about what should be discussed in politics, but rather her focus on how the political realm should be constructed to open up that discussion (of whatever) to as many people as wish to participate.[195]

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193. Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," p. 316, emphasis in original.

194. Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*, p. 163.

195. An interesting perspective on this matter of the content of politics results from a consideration of the great technological progress Arendt was witness to, as evidenced by the opening of *The Human Condition*, which discusses the first artificial satellite to orbit the earth. Arendt noted the "uncomfortable military and political circumstances" attending the

(continued...)

Conclusion

The modern state, as typified by the Hobbesian account, arose in response to the danger of temporal accelerations and dislocations epitomized by the state of nature. The nature of this response was brilliant in its simplicity: the disciplining of time through space, the sovereign space of the state. Hobbes's brilliance is apparent in the degree to which his theory of the state remains a focal point for contemporary political theorists of the state. Hannah Arendt is not typically considered one of these. This thesis has demonstrated the problems associated with such a reading of her position. Primary among these is the danger of seeing Arendt as a thinker out of touch with the global political environment in which she was caught up. Arendt accepted the Hobbesian principle of the state as an instrument of stability in the face of temporal flux, or as she expressed it, "the ever-changing movements of men." However, her critique reveals the state as a spatial body designed to contain and discipline time, but, ironically, also one outpaced by a range of temporal flows. Ultimately, these flows accelerated beyond the capacity of the sovereign state to deal with them.

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launch. Nevertheless, the positive side of technological development was compelling and Arendt foresaw a time when technology would release human beings from the fetters of necessity. The satisfaction of the species needs of humanity would one day be technologically possible, thereby reducing many contemporary political questions to a simple administrative matter. While one might say that Arendt was being slightly naive in making such a prediction, current discourses on technological change suggest that this theme has a powerful hold over a large segment of the population, and Arendt's only error was the time line she posited. Arendt stated that automation could achieve this liberation within a "few decades" as she expected (*The Human Condition*, p. 4). Many contemporary pundits on technological change would probably take issue not with Arendt's prediction, but with her ambivalence towards such a development. Indeed, open practically any issue of *Wired* magazine and herald the coming techno-utopia prophesied by futurists preaching at the alter of free enterprise and global information flows.

The problems faced by the state that revealed this contradiction were apparent from the very start. The nation-state, as we have seen, originated in response to the growth of the concept of equality. This equality was possible because of the national homogeneity of the population. Equality was considered to be possible only where this basic level of sameness was present. However, the nation-state required a non-national international element, the Jewish people, to provide the financial support it required to survive and function effectively. The principle of equality underlying the nation-state, while laudable in theory, proved inoperable in practice.

The homogeneity of the populations of nation-states is closely linked with the doctrine of sovereignty. This doctrine proclaimed the inalienable right of a nation to determine its own affairs as it saw fit. However, the sovereign status of the nation-state inevitably created a number of problems for the state. The Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaimed that all people possessed a number of inalienable rights, rights they possessed by virtue of their simple humanity. But once again, theory and practice diverged. The nation-state was charged with the responsibility of enforcing these rights, and the situation arose in which human rights were only enjoyed by citizens of some nation-state. Those people who could not claim citizenship were effectively denied their "human" rights. This meant exclusion from a public realm in which they could exercise their political capacities. But more importantly, the stateless were denied the most basic level of physical safety and security of being.

While borders exist between states as an expression of their sovereignty, there are also borders within states, separating the various spheres of activity within states. These

borders are as inherent a part of the nation-state as the borders between states. Both types, Arendt argues, broke down in the face of imperialist movements. Overseas imperialism, driven by the "political emancipation of the bourgeoisie," introduced the economic principles of expansion and unlimited growth into the political realm. These perverted the conception of politics at the heart of the nation-state as political power became disconnected from national conceptions of the political good. Continental imperialism, meanwhile, mobilized large numbers of people into political movements that existed entirely outside of the party system and other institutions of the nation-state. While it was manifestly unsuccessful in terms of the accumulation of land and wealth, continental imperialism was very effective at undermining these institutions.

Finally, this thesis has shown how Arendt continued her critique of the state in the texts she wrote after *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Her primary focus remained the problems inherent in the concept of sovereignty. While sovereignty is typically taken to be synonymous with freedom–specifically, a negative conception of freedom–Arendt in fact argues that sovereignty and freedom are incompatible ideas. Arendtian freedom is not something to be possessed, but emerges out of political action undertaken in concert with others. It is necessary, for this action to occur, that the actor relinquish the claim to an unchecked capacity of self-determination. Putting aside claims to sovereignty decentres the realm of representative democratic politics dominant in the nation-state, and opens up the possibility for the creation of multiple spaces for individuals to exercise their political capacities in concert with one another.

This thesis has demonstrated that for Arendt the notion of a sovereign state created a number of political problems that prevented it from fulfilling its primary goals, the maintenance of physical safety and the creation of a stable public realm. It has also argued forcefully on behalf of the continued relevance of Arendt's texts, not only for abstract debates in the history of political thought, but for the very real global political problems and conditions facing the world today. That this has been only a tentative first step, with many more avenues of inquiry available, speaks to the depth and originality of Hannah Arendt's political theory.

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IMAGE EVALUATION
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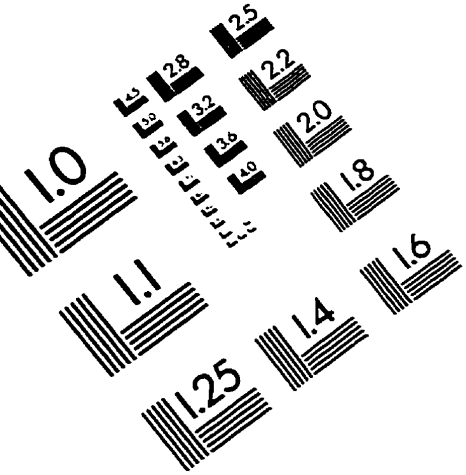

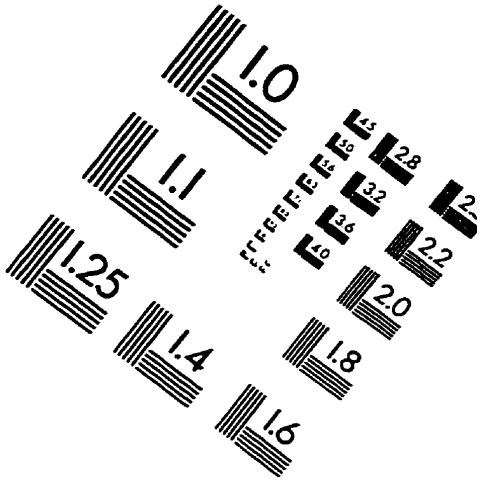

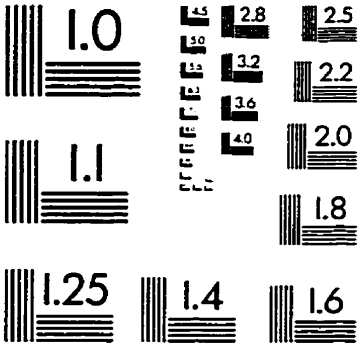

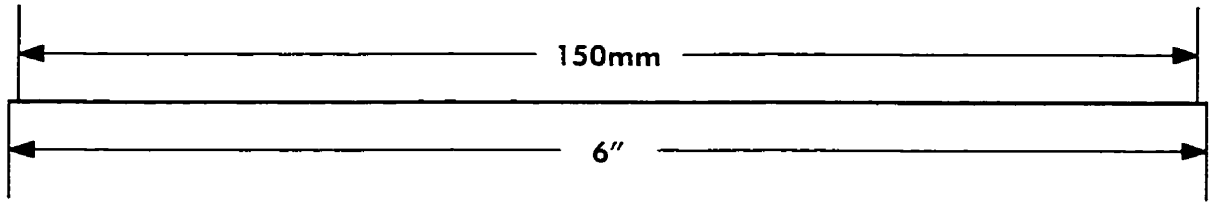

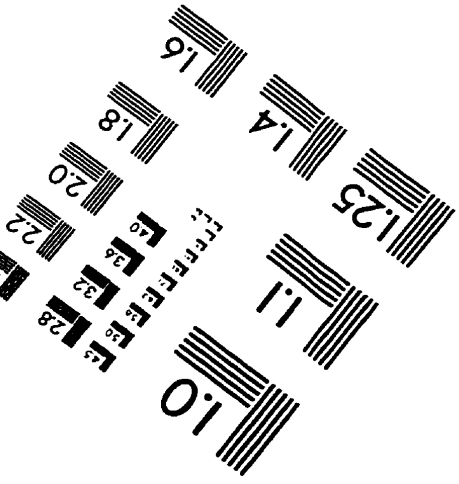

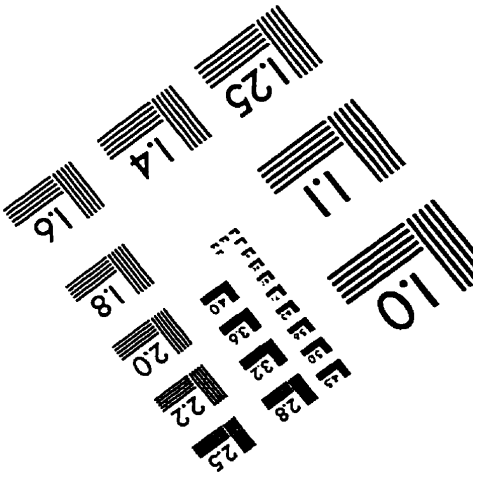

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