BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

HANNAH ARENDT'S CONCEPT OF ACTION[1]

In my thesis, I used Arendt's concept of *action* as a theoretical tool to help make sense of Auden's complex political-religious ideas, shaped by the rise of Hitler and the outbreak of the second world war, and expressed in his essays and poetry throughout the 1940s. The concept of the *time being* played a central role within Auden's framework of ideas, and Arendt's understanding of action provided both a parallel and a (secular) contrast to Auden's increasingly religiously informed convictions. I hope this excerpt might shed some light on certain key concepts in Arendt's philosophy, serving as an entry point to her main work, *The Human Condition (Vita Activa).*

By Hedda Lingaas Fossum

The moments we call crises are ends and beginnings.
Frank Kermode (1967:96).

Short background

Hannah Arendt was one of the earliest and most influential philosophers of totalitarianism. She became famous for her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951),[2] and is usually credited for coining the term "totalitarianism" itself. Arendt's biography is, of course, of some relevance for her philosophy: She grew up in Germany and studied under Heidegger, Husserl and Jaspers, but fled the country in 1933 after Hitler's *Machtergreifung* as her Jewish identity and political activism put her at risk of persecution. She moved to Paris, where she worked to support Jewish refugees. In 1937 she lost her German citizenship, and in 1940, following the German conquest of northern France, she was placed in an internment camp for "enemy aliens" from which Jewish prisoners were to be deported to concentration camps. She managed to escape the camp, and in 1941 fled to the U.S., where she lived for the rest of her life (Young-Ah Gottlieb 2003:2).
[…]

The Origins of Totalitarianism

Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* consists of three parts titled "Anti-Semitism," "Imperialism" and "Totalitarianism." The aspects of her theory [discussed here] derive from the third volume, particularly its discussion of "Ideology and Terror."[3]

Totalitarianism, as Arendt saw it, constituted an entirely novel form of political organization, not to be confused with "traditional" forms of authoritarian government such as tyranny, despotism and dictatorships. She considered the essence of totalitarianism to be found in terror and ideology. Totalitarian movements claim to have access to a law, truth or authority above and beyond the realm of human law, such as History, Nature or the Divine. They pretend to have found a way to establish the rule of justice on earth – something which "the legality of positive law […] could never attain" (Arendt 1968:160). The law in question, whether History or Nature, is interpreted deterministically, in other words as inevitable. The totalitarian movement or party, in this scheme, considers itself something like Nature or History's helping hand: Its role is to *execute* the higher law on earth, to *accelerate* its realization, in Arendt's words by making "mankind itself the embodiment of the law" (Arendt 1968:160). Totalitarianism's chief characteristics, related to this mission of reshaping mankind into an embodiment of the Law, were therefore *terror* and *ideology*. Under conditions of tyranny terror is used to quench opposition and instill fear of the ruler in the population. Under totalitarianism, Arendt argues, terror became something more: Not only arbitrary, but *total*. This had to do with the internal logic of totalitarian governments' interpretation of that Law they tried to execute. Whereas the sources of ultimate truth (say, Nature

or Divinity) have traditionally been conceived of as *permanent* and *eternal*, in totalitarian ideologies they have become "laws of movement," according to Arendt, revealing themselves in a process of constant *development* (Arendt 1968:161). The danger was that the principle of "movement" would come to justify perpetual terror, because the "end" of development would mean the end of the Law itself:

> If it is the law of nature to eliminate everything that is harmful and unfit to live, it would mean the end of nature itself if new categories of the harmful and unfit-to-live could not be found; if it is the law of history that in a class struggle certain classes "wither away," it would mean the end of human history itself if rudimentary new classes did not form, so that they in turn could "wither away" under the hands of totalitarian rulers. In other words, the law of killing by which totalitarian movements seize and exercise power would remain a law of the movement even if they ever succeeded in making all of humanity subject to their rule. (Arendt 1968:162)

Terror, therefore, would not come to an end even if all internal and external enemies could be eliminated. In fact, she writes, terror in totalitarian regimes is indifferent to the guilt or innocence of its targets; it chooses its victims "without reference to individual actions or thoughts, exclusively in accordance with the objective necessity of the natural or historical process" (Arendt 1968:165). Terror was more than an *instrument* of totalitarianism; it was its very essence. Its consequence and function was to eliminate the "space" required for freedom of action, in an attempt to eliminate the very capacity for freedom in men. Because totalitarian regimes aim to realize the higher Law in mankind, the outcome of which has been preconceived by its theorists, it must oppose, and ultimately try to abolish, the human ability to act out of accordance with the "script": The capacity for free or spontaneous action. The chief aim of totalitarian terror, Arendt therefore concludes, is to "make it possible for the force of nature or history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action" (Arendt 1968:163).

The other essential instrument and characteristic of totalitarian movements and regimes was *ideology*. The term, as Arendt points out, literally means "the logic of an idea" (Arendt 1968:167). All ideologies have totalitarian aspects, she argues. They claim to explain everything, past and future, and insist on a "truer" reality behind observable reality. Ideologies order facts "into an absolutely logical procedure which starts from an axiomatically accepted premise, deducing everything else from it; that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality" (Arendt 1968:169). As such, ideology implies *emancipation* from reality. The device, she writes, by which Hitler and Stalin transformed their respective ideologies into weapons, was simple: They "took them dead seriously." By elevating ideologies to the status of absolute truths, they proceeded to "drive ideological implications into extremes of logical consistency […] a "dying class" consisted of people condemned to death; races that are "unfit to live" were to be exterminated" (Arendt 1968:169). This absurd and circular consistency demonstrated, for Arendt, the ability of ideology to eliminate the capacity for *thinking*. Once in power, totalitarian governments would attempt, instead, to change reality in accordance with their ideological claims.

If totalitarianism is *essentially* different from other historical forms of authoritarian government, and therefore novel, Arendt claims that it must also be based upon a new "basic experience" in the "living-together of men." To the question of what kind of basic experience "permeates a form of government whose essence is terror and whose principle of action is the logicality of ideological thinking," her answer is: loneliness (Arendt 1968:172). This loneliness is "closely connected with what she calls the "uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution" (Arendt 1968:173). In other words, Arendt locates this new basic experience of loneliness, which she sees as a precondition for totalitarianism, in modernity:

> What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century. The merciless process into which totalitarianism drives and organizes the masses looks like a suicidal escape from this reality. (Arendt 1968:176)

[…]

Arendt connects the experience of loneliness to what she understands as the three essential activities of human life: Fabrication, labor and action. Fabrication (from the Greek *poiesis*) refers to the "making of things," the efforts that go

Illustrasjon av Anders Hagen

into creating a *product* or an *artifice*. Whether the result is a piece of craftsmanship, a book, or a work of art, the act of fabrication as a rule leaves something behind, which might be shared with others. The second activity, "sheer labor," refers simply to the "effort to keep alive," for instance activities undertaken with the aim of securing nourishment. Finally action (*praxis*) in Arendt's philosophical sense refers to activities which take place between people, in other words in a social or political world; activities that produce nothing tangible, but are carried out for their own sake, for the sake of *acting together* (Arendt 1968:172-173). Now, when an individual is involved in *productive* activities, i.e. *fabrication*, she "tends to isolate [herself] with [her] work, that is to leave temporarily the realm of politics" (Arendt 1968:173). We see how isolation may be compatible with tyranny but not with totalitarianism: It requires a private sphere to which one may withdraw, which under totalitarian regimes is invaded by the threat of terror and subject to the demand of ideological orthodoxy. The realm of human *action*, as already stated, is similarly targeted by both totalitarian terror and ideology, attempting to control and orchestrate both deed and thought. Only *labor*, characterized by automatism and predictability, is compatible with totalitarian government, which consequently tries to transform all human activities into laboring. The same is true the other way around; totalitarianism is more likely to triumph in a world "whose chief values are dictated by labor," and where isolation has been replaced by loneliness (Arendt 1968:173).

Arendt would elaborate on labor, fabrication and action in *The Human Condition*, to which I shall turn shortly. It is important to note already here, however, that Arendt's understanding of *loneliness* and its connection (or rather, lack of connection) to the *public realm* is based on her approach to the most basic questions of human identity and being-in-the-world. For Arendt, the individual is dependent on the social world not only for the affirmation of his or her identity, but for the affirmation of the reality of his or her very perception of the world:

> Even the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our *common sense* which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous. Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth can we trust our immediate sense experience. (Arendt 1968:173-174)

This is why, in other words, the totalitarian bid to eliminate plurality – to make out of many, different, unpredictable individuals one homogenous mass that acts in accordance with the Law – and with it the shared space of spontaneous interaction, destroys not only the ability to *act* but to *think*: Our understanding of the world is developed in interaction and dialogue with other people. It also helps explain why Arendt sees loneliness, i.e. detachment from the common world, as a factor that makes people more susceptible to totalitarian ideology:

> The only capacity of the human mind which needs neither the self nor the other nor the world in order to function safely and which is as independent of experience as it is of thinking is the ability of logical reasoning whose premise is self-evident. (Arendt 1968:175)

The activity of *fabrication* is not entirely eliminated from totalitarian societies, however. It remains in the ambition, on behalf of totalitarian rulers, to *reshape* or *fabricate* mankind into an embodiment of their ideology. This ambition of total control would require the elimination of all spontaneity; it would be possible "only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other" (Arendt 1968:136). In practice, Arendt concludes, total control was achieved only in the concentration camps. The camps were not only aimed at the extermination and degradation of people; from this perspective, they constituted a giant experiment in reshaping human nature, aimed at the "utter elimination of spontaneity and freedom from human existence" (Villa 2001:130). It was there, under "scientifically controlled conditions," that the erasure of human individuality came furthest, as human beings were reduced by terror into "mere specimens of the human animal" (Villa 2001:130). The camps, Arendt concludes, are therefore "the true central institutions of totalitarian organizational power," (Arendt 1968:136) the *paradigm* for the perfect totalitarian society. They demonstrated how totalitarianism's aim of "eliminating the incalculable from human existence" requires not only the *impotence* of the ruled, but "their sheer *superfluousness*" (Villa 2001:126). In the camps, the inmates were indeed both "exchangeable" and superfluous.

Conversely, one of the biggest threats to totalitarianism was precisely the human capacity for spontaneity and new beginnings: Unpredictability remained an inherent potential in all human action. Arendt concludes *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with the following quote:

> [T]here remains also the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only "message" which the end can ever produce. Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identified with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creates est* – "that a beginning be made man was created" said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man. (Arendt 1968:177)

These lines in *Origins* point forwards to Arendt's major work of philosophy, *The Human Condition*, published in 1958. There, she would place the faculty of *action* at the very center of her investigation. In *Origins*, she wrote that "[f]reedom as an inner capacity of man is identical with the capacity to begin" (Arendt 1968:171), and to *act*, for Arendt, was to begin.

"The miracle that saves the world" – Work, labor and action in *The Human Condition*

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt returns to the distinction between fabrication (now called work), labor and action. The bulk of the work is devoted to these three categories, which are presented as the three essential types (ideal types) of human activity, together constituting the active life (*vita activa*).[4] Each of the activities corresponds to a "temporal structure" or experience of time, which again is related to a distinct form of "unease." Labor, in its continual (re)production of objects that are more or less immediately consumed, is marked by a simultaneous immediacy and eternality. The repetitive and seemingly endless process of laboring, Arendt argues, mirrors the cycle of nature. It does not allow for any individuality – one specimen, or laborer, cannot be distinguished from the next. *Work* (fabrication), in the same schema, *redeems* laboring man (*animal laborans*) from that immediacy and eternality: By constructing an "objective and durable" world in which "an individual life can first appear out of the life of the species," work *interrupts* the cycle of labor and therefore allows for the recognition of change and thus the comprehension of time itself (Gottlieb 2003:144). The activity of work is, however, entirely absorbed by its end: The meaning of work lies in its products. Arendt describes the general purpose of work as determined by the axiom "in-order-to," as a contrast to the expression "for-the-sake-of," in terms of which humans usually define meaningfulness. Here lies the particular "unease" of work: Man as a worker or producer (*homo faber*) "cannot overcome the meaninglessness of a world determined by the means-end schema" (Gottlieb 2003:144). The activity of work can, in Arendt's schema, only be redeemed by the possibility of *action*.

The meaning of *action*, for Arendt, is not to be found in material products or processes: *Action*, and the related faculty of *speech*, takes place between people, i.e. in the realm of social or political affairs. Together action and speech "constitute the fabric of human relationships and affairs" (Arendt 1958:95). They are the "outward manifestations of human life," how we "insert ourselves into the human world […] like a second birth," and how we reveal our identities, our "unique distinctness," to others (Arendt 1958:95, 176). The premise of action is the "human condition of plurality, [namely] the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (Arendt 1958:7). The world of human activity is a social world, inhabited by a plurality of unprecedented and unpredictable beings "who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow" (Arendt 1958:244). To *act*, moreover, to Arendt, means "to take an initiative, to begin […] to set something into motion" (Arendt 1958:177) Action is inherently *unpredictable*, because each human being is a unique specimen who is always potentially able to do something *new*; i.e. to *begin* something. Action is also inherently *irreversible*, again because it takes place *between* people, within a web of relations in which the ability of others to respond and act themselves is equal to our own. To act is to set into motion a chain of unforeseeable reactions – new actions in themselves, over which we have no control. It is the ability to act, the potential to do something entirely new, which Arendt sees as the most essential feature of human life or the human condition:

> Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action. [Initium] ergo ut esset, creates est homo, ante quem nullus fuit ("that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody"), said Augustine in his political philosophy. The beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of

> beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before. (Arendt 1958:177)

Arendt's principle of action has some interesting parallels in the poetry of W. H. Auden. In an elegy for Ernst Toller – the German left-wing playwright who was exiled from Germany after the Nazis came to power, and committed suicide in 1939 – we may pay particular attention to Auden' placement of verbs: the poem concludes with the lines "existence is believing / We know for whom we mourn and who is grieving" (Auden 2002:250). As Auden's biographer Edward Mendelson notes in his reading of the poem, existence is presented as something *active*: "To define the word "person" using nouns like "self" or "personality" is to deceive oneself. To define it through verbs like "believing," "mourning," and "grieving," so that a person is that which thinks, speaks and acts…is to come near the truth" (Mendelson 1999:29). In yet another elegy, "At the Grave of Henry James," Auden ends one of his stanzas by noting that, at each tombstone, "one more series of errors lost its uniqueness / And novelty came to an end." (Auden 2002: 311) One way to read this […] is in light of Arendt's definition of *beginnings* (actions) as the essential capacity of human life: only in death does one individual's capacity for *novelty* truly come an end.

Action: Beginning and being-in-time

By beginning something, introducing something unprecedented and unexpected into historical time, action interrupts the means-end logic of work. In Arendt's terms, while work was able to "save" the individual from the recurrence and anonymity of the life-process, action "saves" working man from the meaninglessness of strictly productive activity (Arendt 1958:7).[5] In the "redemptive schema" of *The Human Condition*, indicated by the frequent use and crucial function of the terms "save" and "redeem," each of the three main categories of human activities needs to be redeemed from its inherent (structural) frustrations. Arendt's description of the inherent frustrations of action – unpredictability and irreversibility – resembles Auden's portrayal of human "being in time" in his discussion of Kierkegaard. Auden there describes man as a "being who becomes," who at every moment "must choose of his own free will out of an infinite number of possibilities which he foresees," the combination of which with the irrevocability of choices – "he can neither guarantee nor undo the consequences of any choice he makes" – is the main reason for his "anxiety in time" (Auden 2002:214). Auden concludes that what finally enables individuals to choose, "without blinding [themselves] to [their] anxiety," is "religious faith" (Auden 2002:214).

Arendt sees it differently, despite the "redemptive schema" mentioned above. Arendt scholars have pointed out that it is not "man himself," in this scheme, who is in need of redemption, but rather the world itself, from the "inherent ruination" that characterizes the normal, natural "course of affairs" (Gottlieb 2003:137). The redemption in question in *The Human Condition*, in other words, has nothing to do with any "effort to transcend the conditions in which human beings find themselves" and is as such opposed to what Arendt perceives as the "worldlessness" of Christianity (Gottlieb 2003:137). Even so, the "redemptive schema" is crucial to Arendt's theory and worth our attention.

The redemptive faculties of action: promising and forgiveness

Action stands out from the other two activities in Arendt's scheme in that it possesses the means of its own redemption. Whereas labor must be redeemed by work and work redeemed by action the "remedy against the irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself" (Arendt 1958:236-237). The remedy for the irreversibility of action lies in the "faculty of forgiveness," and the remedy for unpredictability is to be found in the "faculty to make and keep promises" (Arendt 1958:237). A promise contains the possibility – though not the guarantee – of predicting future actions, simply because an individual can choose to fulfill his or her promise. But the stabilizing power of promising, as the scholar Susannah Gottlieb puts it, is "predicated on the interruptive faculty of forgiveness," precisely because no one can guarantee their future keeping of a promise ("… never guarantee today who they will be tomorrow"). The anxiety caused by the inability to ensure that one will keep one's promises, or indeed to predict whether any action will turn out to have been "right," can only be alleviated by the prospect of forgiveness: "Only if one trusts others to relieve one of one's trespasses can anyone – oneself or others – be entrusted again with the power to act" (Gottlieb 2003:153, 156). Without being bound to the fulfillment of promises, in Arendt's words,

> we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and

> without direction in the darkness of each man's lonely heart, caught in its contradictions and equivocalities – a darkness which only the light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfils, can dispel. (Arendt 1958:237)

Arendt refers to the covenant between Abraham and God in the Old Testament to illustrate how the promise "of fidelity to another […] is predicated on a prior promise of this other to release one from one's failure to keep this very promise" (Gottlieb 2003:153). The prospect of forgiveness, in other words, has to come first. Only in the act of forgiveness, in

> this constant mutual relief from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new. (Arendt 1958:240)[6]

Forgiveness has the potential to bring an otherwise endless chain of consequences, actions and re-actions, to an *end*; it is *interruptive* in the same sense that work interrupts the repetitive and automatic world of labor. At the same time, forgiveness is itself an *act* and as such a new beginning, initiating a new chain of actions in the web of human relationships. This implies that the act of forgiving itself needs to be forgiven; there is no "end" to action; it issues into an "abyss." The significance of forgiveness, in Arendt's scheme, as a (structural) response to action is perhaps not fully clear unless contrasted with another *re-action* to an act, namely revenge. Revenge is, in Arendt's terms the "natural, automatic reaction to transgression […] which because of the irreversibility of the action process can be expected and even calculated" (Arendt 1958:241). It can be calculated, measured or assessed *in proportion* to the foregoing act or grievance and therefore depends, to a certain extent, on that same act; it retains an element of the "automatism" of nature. Far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, Arendt writes, revenge ensures that "everybody remains bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course" (Arendt 1958:240). Forgiveness, on the other hand, cannot be expected or calculated. To forgive is, in Arendt's sense, truly an *act* in that it must be spontaneous to be real. By initiating a *new* series of acts forgiveness also preserves or contributes to the web of human relations.

Action as suffering, action as miracle: Arendt on Jesus

Forgiveness also serves to highlight what is described, in *The Human Condition*, as another characteristic of action: suffering.

> Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a "doer" but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings. (Arendt 1958:190)

One reason that forgiveness can never be predicted or expected is because, one must assume, it is so difficult, even unreasonable or irrational. I would like to suggest another parallel here between Arendt's idea of *action* and Auden's idea of "personal choice": Auden, too, wrote of choosing and suffering as two sides of the same coin, and his character Joseph, in the Christmas Oratorio written just after his conversion to Christianity, was told that "to do what is difficult all one's days / as if it were easy, that is faith" (Auden 2002:365). Auden, again similarly to Arendt, also saw the frustrations of doing or choosing as a consequence of the "indeterminacy" and "irrevocability" of action, or *being in time*. In a turn that makes the parallels between Auden and Arendt even more striking, Arendt refers, in her discussion of forgiveness, to what she calls the "discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs … Jesus of Nazareth" (Arendt 1958:238). It is perhaps worth noticing that the Jewish, secular Arendt should give such credit to the Christian Messiah at this crucial point in her investigation of "the human condition." It certainly lends credit to the idea that Auden and Arendt had more than a few things in common on their ideas about the "realm of human affairs," despite their diverging views on the role of religious *faith* (as distinct from religious *figures*). Arendt in fact claims that the fact that Jesus "made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense," (Arendt 1958:238) while Auden, of course, considered the faith itself indispensible. In her discussion of Jesus as the "discoverer" of the role of forgiveness, Arendt points out that he turns around the "ordering" of promise in the relationship between God and men: The point is not that men must forgive because God has promised to do so, but that if men forgive each other *God* shall do "likewise" (Arendt 1958:239-241). The power of promising "does not derive from God […] but

on the contrary must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope to be forgiven by God also" (Arendt 1958:239). Forgiveness, then, becomes a *primarily* human faculty, and only *secondarily* a divine faculty. Still, as Susannah Gottlieb points out, Arendt's discussion of action in *The Human Condition*, and especially her writing on forgiveness, abounds with references to "miracles" and the "miraculous."

> Whereas work is principally determined with respect to its ends, action is defined in terms of beginnings. Every beginning worthy of the name is as unprecedented as it is unexpected, and Arendt therefore strongly associates action with one of the categories that Enlightenment discourse progressively disqualified: the miraculous. (Gottlieb 2003:148)

Towards the end of the chapter on action in *The Human Condition* Arendt writes that action, "seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of the world, looks like a miracle. In the language of natural science, it is the 'infinite improbability which occurs regularly'" (Arendt 1958:246). In the concluding paragraphs, she employs the image of birth – or rather "natality"[7] – as an analogue to action, in language that emphasizes its "miraculous" dimension:

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. (Arendt 1958:247)

Action is "ontologically rooted" in the miracle of birth because of its ability to initiate something new. Whenever an individual reveals herself through action as a unique individual, the miracle of birth is in a sense re-enacted. In a formulation that Auden later borrowed as an epigraph to one of his essays, she describes the faculty of beginning which is inherent in action an "ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin" (Arendt 1958:246). Gottlieb points out that Arendt by this phrase not only replaces the "dismal thought of inevitable death" with the idea of beginning, but "inverts the teleological order in which the concept of "in order to" operates" (Gottlieb 2003:141). *In order to* normally indicates an end which absorbs the means, either in the sense of achieving a purpose or coming to conclusion; here, on the other hand, the end is to begin.

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NOTES

[1] This article is a lightly edited excerpt from my Master's thesis "Wicked at all times. Original sin in W. H. Auden's anti-totalitarian political philosophy" (University of Oslo, 2014). As is evident in the title, the thesis was not primarily concerned with Hannah Arendt, but rather her contemporary friend and colleague, the poet W. H. Auden, born one year after herself. Though Auden and Arendt met late in life, both exiled in different ways by the second world war, they eventually became "very good friends", and were deeply enthusiastic about and mutually inspired by each other's work.

[2] Initially published in Great Britain, with the title *The Burden of Our Times* (1951).

[3] Arendt has sometimes been criticized for "political aestheticism" in her writing, an aestheticism which "fails to take account of historical fact and political reality." This chapter which I am about to present, "Ideology and Terror," has been described by critics as "excessively speculative or even mystical." The critic Michael Halberstam has argued that this critique mistakes the character of "Arendt's aesthetic approach to politics," expecting "descriptive empiricism" where Arendt's account should in fact be understood as a "model or an ideal type." See Michael Halberstam, "Hannah Arendt on the Totalitarian Sublime and Its Promise of Freedom," in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. Steven E. Ascheim (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 2001), 105. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, I will treat Arendt's theory as, precisely, an "ideal type," rather than attempting to assess its empirical accuracy. […]

[4] As opposed to the "life of contemplation" (*vita contemplativa*). *Vita Activa* is also the title of its original German publication.

[5] The terminology might cause some confusion here: By "working man" Arendt still refers to someone involved in the creation of works or artifices (*homo faber*), as distinguished from laboring man (*animal laborans*), involved in the repetitive and 'automatic' processes of labor.

[6] Involves a more complex discussion of the original wording (in New Testament Greek) of the phrase "And if he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Apparently, the word translated as "repent" (*metanoein*) could mean "change of mind", and the word translated as "forgive" could also mean to "dismiss" or "release."

[7] "The fact or condition of being subject to birth. Cf. "mortality." *Oxford English Dictionary*: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/125260?redirectedFrom=natality#eid. Accessed 05.02.14.