

# **The "unreality" of the modern world: an exchange between E. Voegelin and H. Arendt**

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## **Abstract**

Arendt and Voegelin, in a brief exchange over the nature and origins of Totalitarianism, agree that the modern age is characterized by its lack of reality in political life. Modern existence is out of touch with human reality. They additionally agree that what is real about human action is the "essentially" human, or the essence of what it means to be human. They also are of one mind in their judgment that it is a rare accomplishment for any human, much less a community, to attain and sustain their essential state of being, and thus what *ought* to be most real. However, they fundamentally disagree about what constitutes the essentially human, or the nature of human reality, capable of serving as the measure by which one can judge human conduct. In fact, Arendt, in a "post-metaphysical" stance seems to reject entirely what Voegelin considers the very source of what is real. Despite their profoundly different views of basic human reality, they nevertheless in their writings express at least a "glimmer of hope" (Voegelin) that the American democratic republic will avoid the worst of the modern pathologies, be they individual or collective. Does this perhaps imply that the American republic embodies two diametrically opposed visions of reality, and can be successfully guided by both? The answer seems to hinge on the interpretation of the meaning of "common sense," and its role in Western democratic politics.

## 1. Introductory: the initial exchange<sup>1</sup> [1]

In 1953, two years after the publication of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and one year after his own work on *The New Science of Politics* was completed, Eric Voegelin wrote a short review of Arendt's *Origins* for *The Review of Politics*. Read in conjunction with Arendt's "Reply to Eric Voegelin," their brief exchange, although ostensibly concerned primarily with the nature of 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism, in fact raised some key issues of far wider range and significance. Not only did their differences touch upon their respective understandings of the "essence" of European modernity, or the modern age. In addition, and as the very core of their disagreement, they disclosed, albeit in highly abbreviated form, their disparate positions on what Arendt called "the problem of the relationship between essence and existence in Occidental thought."<sup>2</sup> [2] Somehow the event of totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is to clarify whether its very (horribly destructive) existence has touched what is essentially human, or whether that human essence has survived the massive attack upon humanity that is totalitarianism. As Arendt put it, to understand totalitarianism, and in fact all of politics, she proceeds "from facts and events instead of intellectual affinities and influences."<sup>3</sup> [3] Differences of "factuality," she maintains, are all-important for her understanding of politics, whereas Voegelin, in her view, treats them as "minor outgrowths of some "essential sameness" of a doctrinal nature."<sup>4</sup> [4] And indeed, Voegelin in his very brief *Concluding Remark* does agree that whereas Arendt treats historical "phenomena" as "ultimate, essential units," he, on the contrary, comprehends such historical phenomena or "historical materials" only after applying to them "principles furnished by philosophical anthropology."<sup>5</sup> [5] Individual historical facts or events can only be properly understood, and their wider meaning determined, Voegelin insisted, by viewing them in the light of such principles derived from the truly essential model of the human psyche.

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<sup>1</sup> [1] This draft does not yet address questions raised in the "secondary literature" on Arendt and Voegelin. However, regarding the latter, I was initially instructed by the very insightful books on Voegelin by Glenn Hughes, Barry Cooper, and Juergen Gebhardt's interpretation of the American founding. Jerome Kohn and especially Dana Villa have been of great help in forming my reading of Arendt's central ideas.

<sup>2</sup> [2] Reply to Eric Voegelin, in *Essays in Understanding*, p.408

<sup>3</sup> [3] Ibid., p.405

<sup>4</sup> [4] Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> [5] Voegelin, *Concluding Remarks*, p. 85

Unsurprisingly, Voegelin and Arendt immediately recognized that their main point of contention was a fundamental difference in their understanding of what constituted "human nature," or the "essence" of what it meant to be human. Most simply put, it appears that for Voegelin human essence is to be discovered in "ideological" orientations and their implied anthropology, the true version of which was once and for all discovered in Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy of the human psyche. For Arendt, on the other hand, human essence manifests itself, not as a theoretical insight into the real order of the human soul, but only in the actuality of individual human acts, together with the resulting stories of factual historical events. Thus, she argues, "what is unprecedented in totalitarianism is not primarily its ideological content, but the *event* of totalitarian domination itself."<sup>6 [6]</sup> Arendt pointedly replies to what she sees as Voegelin's "sharpest criticism" of her analysis of totalitarianism, one which shows their different conceptions of human nature. Voegelin had charged that while he agreed with Arendt about totalitarianism's aim to "transform human nature," he was shocked to see Arendt's apparent agreement that such a transformation was indeed *possible*. In his view, totalitarian movements were indeed "essentially" intent upon creating "a millennium in the eschatological sense through transformation of human nature."<sup>7 [7]</sup> But it was nonsense to accept the very possibility of such a transformation, since a "nature," as a philosophical concept, denoting the "identity" of a thing, cannot be changed without destroying such an identity. To change the nature of man, Voegelin insists, is thus a "contradiction of terms." More seriously, to conceive of the very idea of changing human nature is "a symptom of the intellectual breakdown of Western civilization." Insofar as Arendt accepts the totalitarian's claim that human nature is subject to change (whether or not their attempts were so far successful), Voegelin charges her with having, "in fact," adopted the "immanentist ideology" of modern totalitarians.<sup>8 [8]</sup> Arendt in her "derailment" shares a "typically liberal, progressive, pragmatist attitude" which reveals "how much ground liberals and totalitarians have in common," not in their "ethos," or actual conduct, but in their "essential" ideology of "immanentism..<sup>9 [9]</sup> Voegelin's critique culminates in the claim that "the author seems to be impressed by the "(Nazi and Communist-my addition) "imbecile and is ready to forget about the nature of man, as well as about all human civilization that has been built on its understanding."<sup>10 [10]</sup> It would indeed be a "nihilistic nightmare," Voegelin concludes, to "wish to discard," as Arendt apparently does, the "age-old knowledge about human nature and the life of the spirit," and to replace them with "new discoveries."<sup>11 [11]</sup>

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<sup>6 [6]</sup> Arendt, op.cit. P. 405

<sup>7 [7]</sup> Voegelin, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Review of Politics, p.21

<sup>8 [8]</sup> Ibid., p.21

<sup>9 [9]</sup> Ibid., p.22

<sup>10 [10]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11 [11]</sup> ibid., p.23

Arendt's fundamentally different view on the relation between essence and existence decidedly determines her replies. First, she insists that "what is unprecedented in totalitarianism is not primarily its ideological content, but the *event* of totalitarian domination itself."<sup>12 [12]</sup> Thus, even if it were true that certain "elements" in liberalism or positivism "lend themselves" to totalitarian thinking, what matters essentially, and what is in need of "sharper distinction" in determining such essentials, is the sheer "fact" that liberals don't act like totalitarians. Moreover, its "deeds," she argues, have in fact "exploded our traditional categories of political thought... and the standards of our moral judgment."<sup>13 [13]</sup> In the light of such actual deeds, and the fact of the totalitarians' "radical liquidation" of human freedom as such, no "realm of eternal essences" will console us to the actual loss of man's "essential capabilities." No realm of such eternal essences, furthermore, can change the fact that "historically we know of man's nature only insofar as it has existence."<sup>14 [14]</sup> Hence, the very essence of totalitarianism "did not exist before it had come into being." Consequently, Arendt rejects entirely Voegelin's apparent central idea that "the rise of immanentist sectarianism" since the late Middle Ages eventually ended in totalitarianism."<sup>15 [15]</sup> Finally, Arendt resorts to one of Voegelin's own arguments to make her point about the changeability of human nature: when Voegelin wrote in *The New Science of Politics* that prior to the Platonic-Aristotelian theory of the psyche "one might almost say that before the discovery of psyche man had no soul," he tends to assume that the discovery did indeed change the realities of "human nature." Hence her fear could equally be warranted that totalitarian experiments might make man "lose his soul" in his real existence.<sup>16 [16]</sup>

### **The main point of contention: the nature of true "reality."**

In this early exchange between them, when the dangers of totalitarianism in its communist version still loomed large, and when neither Arendt nor Voegelin had published the more complete articulations of their respective political thoughts, the central elements of their profound differences were already visible. And their brief discussion is a veritable invitation or inducement to examine these differences and their possible ramifications. To summarize, the discussion focused on the differences of their understanding of human nature, or the essential distinguishing qualities of being human; the question of whether that nature was subject to change, or complete destruction, particularly by modern totalitarianism; their different views of the essential characteristics of totalitarianism and its specific historical "ideological" origins

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<sup>12 [12]</sup> Arendt, Reply, p.405

<sup>13 [13]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14 [14]</sup> *ibid.*408

<sup>15 [15]</sup> *ibid.*, p. 405-06

<sup>16 [16]</sup> *ibid.*, p.408

and affinities. However, their most substantive and allusive difference is to be found in their respective understanding of the very nature of reality, specifically the more comprehensive human reality defining political life.

Arendt was persuaded that reality as "traditionally" perceived had to be changed. In 1953 she was still convinced that totalitarianism had destroyed the "traditions of political thought and the standards of moral judgment." None of them had prepared the world for totalitarian regimes, or adequately explained them, and none of them had been able to politically and morally withstand them. In her response to Voegelin's critique, Arendt still wrote as if this was true for the entire "modern age," or the "modern world," including apparently those countries which had in effect militarily defeated and political withstood at least the Nazi variety of totalitarian regimes. Approximately ten years later, in the early 1960's, Arendt's entire perspective on modernity fundamentally shifted after her interpretation of the American Revolution of 1776 and subsequent American history. That revolution, culminating in the successful founding of a new constitutional order (the *novus ordo saeculorum*), based as it was on a partial revivification of the Roman elements of Western political tradition, had in effect escaped the total destruction of moral and political standards attributed earlier to totalitarianism. In the American revolution, moreover, political freedom had been resurrected. This change in perspective requires a critical reassessment of everything Arendt wrote earlier about the need to start thinking anew about both the moral and political foundations of human existence.

Similarly, although Voegelin initially maintained that "totalitarianism...is the end form of progressive civilization," and, since the "death of the spirit" is the "price of progress," totalitarianism would signify the end of the human spirit in Western civilization.<sup>17 [17]</sup> However, the modern political pathologies had not wrought total destruction: rather, "the classic and Christian tradition of Western society is rather alive," and the "reconstruction" of a true science of man might someday "appear as the most important event in our time."<sup>18 [18]</sup> Hence, there was to be seen a "glimmer of hope" especially in the American democracy, embodying elements of the "truth of the soul," manifested in its anti-ideological tradition of "common sense" public reasoning, supported by Christian faith.<sup>19 [19]</sup>

But totalitarianism as a political and ideological event was by no means the only, and perhaps finally not even the main reason, for Arendt's conviction that political (and philosophical) thinking had to start anew. At a deeper level, it was the modern "demise of metaphysics and

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<sup>17 [17]</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, p. 132

<sup>18 [18]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165

<sup>19 [19]</sup> *ibid.*, p.189; Voegelin, *The Nature of Political Reality*, in *Anamnesis*, p.405ff

philosophy□ which requires us to □look on the past with new eyes, unburdened and unguided by any traditions.□<sup>20 [20]</sup> (A quotes Heidegger□s □overcoming metaphysics□ p.9) Overcoming metaphysics does not mean that men have lost the capacity or desire to □think,□ or that the age-old questions about the mystery of human existence have become meaningless. It does mean that the traditional metaphysics of the □two-world hypothesis□ has been discarded by modern philosophical thinkers themselves, an event Arendt welcomed, and whose reversal Arendt finds □not very likely or even desirable.□<sup>21 [21]</sup> As she encapsulates it, metaphysics distinguished between the sensory and the □suprasensory□ worlds, and insisted that the latter, whether called □God or Being or the First Principles and Causes...or Ideas is more real, more truthful, more meaningful than what appears.□<sup>22 [22]</sup> This very distinction can no longer be maintained. For Arendt, the basic fact upon which everything else depends, and on which particularly our political life depends, is the fact that for humans □appearance is reality.□

At this most fundamental level, at the point of knowing what is real, and acting in accordance with what is real, Arendt seems to take a position in diametrically opposed to Voegelin. For the latter, all of human appearances, or what he prefers to call phenomena, including political actions, are ultimately infused, both with its meaning and its principles of order, by the very ground of human existence which is unknowable and lies beyond all perceived appearances and sense experience. This divine ground, unfathomable and beyond human appearances, but the ultimate source of the guiding and ordering principles of human existence, is the most real presence for men, and the most □real movements□ of the human soul are directed towards it. As Voegelin summarized it, this claim, that □the order of being□ can be known, first fully expressed by Plato and Aristotle, is based on □der tatsaechlichen Erkenntnis eines Seinsverhaltes.□<sup>23 [23]</sup> □The decisive, uniquely philosophical event, which founded the *politike episteme* (or political science) was the insight, that the different levels of being (Seinsstufen) discernible in the world are transcended (ueberhoeht) by a fount of being and its order beyond (jenseits).□<sup>24 [24]</sup> In the □real movements□ of the human □Geistseele□ or spiritual soul, in the □experience□ of love of the origins of being in □beyond the world,□ in the *philia of sophon*, the *eros of the agathon and kalon*, □man turned into philosopher□ and from this □experience grow the picture of the order of Being.□<sup>25 [25]</sup> This experience of the order of the whole of Being, with its origin in transcendent Being becomes the prerequisite for any genuine analysis of the order of society and politics, testing its attunement to this total order of being. And only the

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<sup>20 [20]</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p.12

<sup>21 [21]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

<sup>22 [22]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>23 [23]</sup> Voegelin, *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis*, p. 26

<sup>24 [24]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25 [25]</sup> *ibid.*, p.27

continuous □ loving openness of the soul to its ground of order in the beyond (jenseitigen Ordnungsgrund) □ will make such an analysis of political order a reality.<sup>26 [26]</sup> The experience of political order is part of the living □ participation □ in cosmic order: □ God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being. The community with its quaternarian structure is, and is not, a datum of human experience. It is a datum of experience in so far as it is know to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being. It is not a datum of experience in so far as it is not given in the manner of an object of the external world but is knowable only from the perspective of participation in it. □<sup>27 [27]</sup>

Contrast this with Arendt's basic insight into the □ phenomenal nature of the world, □ where for men, at birth □ appearing from nowhere, □ and with their death, disappearing into nowhere again, Being and Appearing □ coincide. □<sup>28 [28]</sup> For men, □ appearance □ something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves □ constitutes reality. □<sup>29 [29]</sup> Most visible in this sense are human activities, like labor, work, and most of all action, in which for Arendt human appearance reaches its zenith. Arendt emphasizes that □ mentally, □ and especially in thinking, men can □ transcend □ their human condition, □ but only mentally, never in reality or in cognition and knowledge. □ Men can □ think, that is, speculate meaningfully, about the unknown and the unknowable, □ but □ this can never directly change reality □ indeed in our world there is no clearer or more radical opposition than that between thinking and doing. □<sup>30 [30]</sup> Obviously, we are here witnessing two drastically different notions of possible human experiences and perceptions of what is □ real □ in terms of possible experiential knowledge. To clarify these differences further, I will first summarize Arendt's concept of □ appearance □ as being and human reality.

## **Arendt and the world of appearances**

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<sup>26 [26]</sup> Ibid., p. 21

<sup>27 [27]</sup> Voegelin, Order and History, Vol.1, Introduction, p.1

<sup>28 [28]</sup> Arendt, Life of the Mind, p.19

<sup>29 [29]</sup> Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 50

<sup>30 [30]</sup> However, Arendt confounds the issue by adding that the principles which guide our actions, as well as how we judge and conduct our lives, □ depend ultimately □ on □ the life of the mind. □ Life of the Mind, p. 71 Consequently, one of the key questions does become the nature of the relation between thought and action, or thinking and doing. I return to this point below.

Arendt first discusses reality as appearance in a political context. The new thinking about politics required by the utter destructiveness of all tradition by totalitarianism, leads her to see politics in terms of the human activity of action. Action, strictly speaking, is the spontaneous initiation of □something new□ among men, always started by an individual, but carried to fruition and completion by the initiator and the followers persuaded to share the purpose of his initiation. For Arendt, spontaneous initiation is the most essential definition of human freedom. Action becomes political, strictly speaking, when, as in the original Greek *polis*, it is allowed to take place in a public realm or space, organized by government and rules of law; a realm in which action and its actors are witnessed, as if on stage, by a public of spectators, giving action □the widest possible publicity.□<sup>31 [31]</sup> Hence, in action, appearing with □ the widest possible publicity,□ an actor attains his highest degree of reality or being. As appearance, action □can be judged only by the criterion of greatness,□ as □unique and *sui generis*.□<sup>32 [32]</sup> Obviously, by this definition of reality as appearance before a public, its reality is in fact entirely determined by the criteria, discernment and judgment of the spectators constituting that public. If indeed, as Arendt maintains, men □are roused to action in order to find their place in the society of their fellow men□ that place is determined by the quality of judgment of those men. That<sup>33 [33]</sup> determination reflects the experience, knowledge, moral insights, excellence and virtue, or its lack, of those men constituting Arendt's public realm. Moreover, in acting and speaking men reveal their □unique personal identities,□ or who they are.<sup>34 [34]</sup> In addition to what qualities they do or do not possess, they reveal, in other words, their □living essence of the person.□<sup>35 [35]</sup> If the very being and reality of an actor is found in his appearance in the eyes and ears of the beholders, the latter necessarily must share Arendt's experience of basic human reality. By Arendt's account, the men and women of modern society clearly do not: the modern age has been the age of the decline of the public realm. Briefly, modern societies are marked by a public life dominated not by □public business,□ or the freedom to participate in government, but by the □publication□ of what are essentially private activities and concerns. For Arendt, those originate in the biological □life process□ itself, and ultimately mean that the public today is concerned not only with eliminating life's agonies, like poverty, but pursuing individual affluence and comfort above all. The public society is preoccupied with issues of individual enjoyment and public economics. In addition, however, Arendt insists that all human activities themselves □point to its proper location in the world.□<sup>36 [36]</sup> Action points to its proper location in the public realm as described above, where it can fully reveal the reality of the act and its actor.

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<sup>31 [31]</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 50

<sup>32 [32]</sup> *ibid.*, p. 205

<sup>33 [33]</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, p. 70

<sup>34 [34]</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 179

<sup>35 [35]</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181

<sup>36 [36]</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 73



However, as modern society abundantly shows, what Arendt would consider properly private activities also seem to share this urge to appear before publics. As I shall show below, *it is thus inadequate to "define" the public as the realm of appearance, but it must be shown to be the realm of what "properly" ought to appear there. Hence, and despite what seems to be Arendt's argument, the political is not adequately or essentially defined as "that which has the urge to appear in public."* The political must also be defined as "all those matters which properly ought to concern a public," rather than individuals in private. Traditionally, and in various forms and fashions, the political, associated with the activity of governing, has been distinguished, in a common sense manner, as dealing with the public good, or what Arendt calls public business. It was described by James Madison as "the permanent and aggregate interests of the community," in the widest sense of the phrase, including the need for public virtue and the ability to determine "merit" of public character and performance.

## **Arendt on Human Nature**

In her 1958 analysis of the "human condition," Arendt not only differed with Voegelin as in their earlier exchange about the changeability of human nature. In addition, she seems to affirm his suspicion voiced in the 1953 review that Arendt was intent upon "discarding" our "age-old knowledge about human nature and the life of the spirit" and replace it with "new discoveries."<sup>37 [37]</sup> And indeed, Arendt does seem to deny that humans have a "nature or essence," at least not "in the same sense as other things."<sup>38 [38]</sup> Generally speaking, men are, in their basic activities of labor, work and action always "conditioned beings," always crucially influenced by nature and the human world they themselves create.<sup>39 [39]</sup> But these conditions of human life do not amount to their essence: since men are never conditioned "absolutely," the conditions of human existence can never explain human nature qua human essence.<sup>40 [40]</sup> That is to say, "the impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a

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<sup>37 [37]</sup> Voegelin, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.23

<sup>38 [38]</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.10

<sup>39 [39]</sup> Thought and reason are not considered here, until her last work *The Life of the Mind*, parts of which were delivered as lectures in the early 1970's before their posthumous publication.

<sup>40 [40]</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 11

conditioning force, but not perceived as human's essential nature. Apparently, then, and if identifiable at all, human nature or essence transcends human conditioning forces.

Speaking through St. Augustine, Arendt affirms her assumption that "the problem of human nature...seems unanswerable in both its individual *psychological* sense and its general *philosophical* sense." (my emphasis)<sup>41 [41]</sup> That is to say, neither psychology nor philosophy can determine the reality of human nature. However unanswerable it may be, Arendt does emphatically recognize the existence of human nature as a *problem*. Moreover, when singling out Augustine as her sole source for the discussion of human nature, she does so because she agrees that the problem of human nature is ultimately a theological problem, that human nature, as created, can only be considered in conjunction with the "question about the nature of God, the creator, and that both can be settled only within the framework of a divinely revealed answer."<sup>42 [42]</sup> Consequently, one is led to assume that a "secular" political theory cannot rely upon a concept of human nature either in theory or practice.

As Arendt sees it in Augustinian terms, the problem of human nature is confounding by the fact that it consists of two aspects, expressed in the fundamentally different questions of "who" and "what" a human being essentially is. For Augustine, the question "who" someone is, is a question the individual addresses to himself, whereas "what" I am is asked of God, and specifically as the question "quid ergo sum...Quae natura sum," or "what is my nature."<sup>43 [43]</sup> Regardless of how Augustine asks and answers these questions, and despite the fact that Arendt agrees as to the theological nature of these questions, she nonetheless throughout her theory of political action consistently uses both terms in a strictly "secular" or more precisely, a phenomenological fashion. Hence, "who" someone is ultimately refers to an individual's unique identity as actualized in action, and "what" someone is can be answered by reference to characteristics, qualities and capabilities (like talents, skills, virtues, vices etc.), identifiable in terms of traits shared by human beings in general.<sup>44 [44]</sup> However, the latter, the main characteristics of *what* all men can be, do or make, decidedly do *not* constitute their "nature" or essential characteristics. Rather, if men have a clearly identifiable "essence" at all, which would suffice to answer the *problem* of human nature, Arendt insists that this essence would be neither knowable by means of "individual psychology," nor by "general philosophy." (See above). Instead, what makes Arendt's explanation of the problem of human nature unique in modern political theory is her argument that the essence of human being appears in individual

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<sup>41 [41]</sup> *ibid.*, p.10

<sup>42 [42]</sup> *ibid.*, p.10-11 footnote

<sup>43 [43]</sup> *ibid.* p. 10

<sup>44 [44]</sup> Both Arendt's teachers Heidegger and Jaspers in their own ways insist on the importance of the difference between who and what someone is.

political or public action.<sup>45 [45]</sup> That essence is revealed in a twofold manner: first, the process or story of an individual's action (or interaction with others) discloses "who" that actor is. Secondly, in addition to this disclosure of the identity, the "who" of a person in the complete story of his or her actions, which can also be called the actor's "essential personality," there is an indefinable essence "transcending" everything individuals do, create or produce. Or, aside from the various "roles" we play in life, there is in addition "something else (which) manifests itself, something entirely idiosyncratic and undefinable and still unmistakably identifiable."<sup>46 [46]</sup> This is the reason why Arendt once insists that the public realm, ordinarily identified with politics, has also a "deeper significance," in that it can be said to constitute also a "spiritual realm," in which humans disclose, or actualize themselves and their "essence" in action. In order to understand this more fully, we must briefly rehearse the gist of Arendt's theory of political action. To summarize the argument so far: Arendt's theory culminates in the claim that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom," and that in the freedom of political action men as actors disclose the meaning of freedom as they (unwittingly) reveal their essential identity in who they are as persons. However, it is essential to add that although identifiable, part of that essential identity remains "entirely idiosyncratic and undefinable," and transcends whatever men do, create or produce. Although Arendt doesn't use the term, there is an element of "mystery" attached to men's individual essence, similar perhaps or vaguely derived from Augustine, whose passage about the "great mystery, the *grande profundum* which man is" she cites.<sup>47 [47]</sup>

Arendt is best known for her defense of the "greatness and dignity" of politics, according to which political action is not a means to another end, however valued, but is viewed in terms of its own intrinsic meaning of freedom. Political action is undertaken for the sake of its intrinsic freedom. Hence, Arendt's political theory does not regard politics as primarily activities dealing with forms of government, or the creation of legal order and the determination of what constitutes "legitimate" rule of some men over others. Instead, governments (and associated administrative activities) are the formal organizations of a space or public realm in which free political action can take place. (Although frequently Arendt writes that of course political action has to do with "governing.") And, unlike in modern liberalism, governments and politics are not primarily "instituted amongst men to protect" individual non-political rights, but to guarantee political freedom, which is the "right to be a participator in government."<sup>48 [48]</sup>

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<sup>45 [45]</sup> In the broadest sense, humans "appear" at birth into the human world, and hence everything they do is in the mode of appearance. Arendt argues, however, that in political action "appearance" becomes the essence of its actions, rather than a side-effect of activities which "make" things or just are "labor" required to survive.

<sup>46 [46]</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, p. 13

<sup>47 [47]</sup> *The Human Condition*, p.10

<sup>48 [48]</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, p.22

Consequently, Arendt's theory of free action does in effect favor a form of government most fully based on the political freedom to participate in governing.

### **Arendt's reflections on the human soul**

Clearly, Arendt's theory of political action is not based on either the perpetuation or rejuvenation of the Platonic-Aristotelian model of the soul. This model, based on its tripartite division into reason, spiritedness and appetites or their equivalents, generally applicable to all men, could not possibly serve Arendt for the purpose of the guidance of political action, or for the identification of what is essentially human. For, as to the first point, political action is not generally guided by reason, and certainly not by appetites, but by "inspiring" principles actualized in free action. (Although "the principles by which we act and the criteria by which we judge and conduct our lives depend ultimately on the life of the mind.")<sup>49 [49]</sup> As to the second point, what is essentially human, it does not lie in a person living according to the virtues prescribed by the notion of the perfectly orderly soul. Instead, the essence of an individual person consists of the "unique" personality revealed in his actual performance of various deeds, and ultimately the story of his entire active life. Again, the "essence" of a person thus is what is publically revealed, and is not to be found in some "inner" self or being. Consequently, "our habitual standards of judgment, so firmly rooted in metaphysical assumptions and prejudices" according to which the essential lies beneath the surface...are wrong."<sup>50 [50]</sup> The notion of the inner soul being more important than outward appearances are false: "that our common conviction that what is inside ourselves, our "inner life" is more relevant to what we "are" than what appears on the outside is an illusion." *ibid.*

Moreover, Arendt routinely differentiates between the mind and the soul (reminiscent of Aristotle's suggestion that "nous" is a different kind of soul, independent of the body). The soul, "where our passions, our feelings and emotions arise, is a more or less chaotic welter of happenings which we do not enact but suffer..." whereas "the mind is sheer activity."<sup>51 [51]</sup> Arendt seems to reject the notion that the mind is the "soul's highest organ," or that it can

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<sup>49 [49]</sup> In fact, I cannot elaborate here a major omission or even weakness in Arendt's depiction of action's "inspiration" by principles. Here list of principles includes emotions, reasons, virtues, etc., without any attempt to differentiate as to quality and possible preferences. Hence the relation between principles and "thinking" is also left in the dark.

<sup>50 [50]</sup> *Life of the Mind*, p.30

<sup>51 [51]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72

□rule the soul□s passions.□ However, there is such a thing as the traditional virtue of □self-control,□ and it appears in the outward presentation of passions.<sup>52 [52]</sup>

This is indeed the central phenomenon concerning the soul: the outward presentation of the passions and moods reigning in our □inner life.□ We recall that all living beings are possessed by the □urge to self-display,□ and that its uniquely human form of the urge to appear is □self-presentation..□ Unlike self-display, self-presentation results from an □active and conscious choice□ of how one wants to appear to the public. It is an act of deliberate choice, necessarily accompanied by a □degree□ of reflexive self-awareness involving more than mere consciousness. Out of these deliberate choices, determined by the □various potentialities of conduct with which the world has presented me,□ and which might include □culture,□ or simply the □wish to please others,□ arises, over time, a □comprehensible and reliably identifiable whole,□ which we can call □character or personality.□<sup>53 [53]</sup> In these and similar passages, Arendt implies that the substance of our deliberate choices as to what kind of character or personality we want to be is entirely determined by □the world□ we live in. She does not, as one might have expected, prescribe or favor choices which would in effect result in a free personality or character. Her ontological reflections on a purported □urge□ to self-display or □desire□ for self-presentation does not issue, as it does, for example, in Aristotle and his successors, in a picture of the virtuous character or □psyche.□ Contrast Arendt□s notion of character with Voegelin□s understanding: □the true order of man, thus, is ca constitution of the soul, to be defined in terms of certain experiences which have become predominant to the point of forming a character.□<sup>54 [54]</sup>

In another essay, Arendt equates character or personality with one□s □moral□ identity. Looked at from that vantage point, it appears that individual□s deliberate and aware choices are neither prescribed, generally, by some order of the true soul, or other moral standards, but by all the various choices offered by □the world□ in which we find ourselves. However, this phenomenological description of □deliberate□ choices is rendered inadequate, perhaps even confused, by Arendt□s claim that, speaking of appearances generally, we do have a criterion by which to judge them. Each □individual life,□ she writes, as it is urged on by the desire to self-display, is seen as what it □essentially□ is, in its □full appearance, or epiphany,□ judged by □the sole criteria of completeness and perfection in appearance.□<sup>55 [55]</sup> Is this to be understood as a *general* and *universal* standard for judging all deliberate choices of how an individual wants to appear to his *particular* group of spectators and his *particular* choices? And if true, would one

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<sup>52 [52]</sup> Ibid., p. 73,72

<sup>53 [53]</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>54 [54]</sup> Voegelin, The New Science of Politics, p. 63

<sup>55 [55]</sup> Life of the Mind, p.22

have to devise a notion of the completeness and perfection, the epiphany of any one appearance, of all the particular choices available to a choosing individual? These questions are neither asked nor answered in Arendt's deliberations. The standards by which we judge the quality of our deliberate choices which ultimately constitute our character and personality are left entirely undetermined.<sup>56 [56]</sup> Whatever they are, however, and regardless of whether or not Arendt's various introduction of diverse criteria are compatible and coherent, they all are intended to be for human "outward," i.e. publically visible, appearances. The contrast with Voegelin's reliance upon the permanent truth about the right order of the human soul is blatant.<sup>57 [57]</sup>

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<sup>56 [56]</sup> In yet another essay, "The Crisis in Culture," any type of public appearance, be it political action or an object of art, can be judged by the criterion of "beauty," measured in terms of qualities assessing an object's permanence and durability in time. Beauty in turn depends upon the faculty of "taste," determinative of "quality," whose standards are objective and impersonal, not subject to debate or change. The standards of quality informing taste might be related to the criterion of "completeness and perfection in appearance" mentioned above.

<sup>57 [57]</sup> To fully appreciate Arendt's reflections on appearance as reality, one should also consider the way human appearance has been treated by most past political thought (and practice). As Arendt has it, life itself is appearance, beginning with birth (appearance "from nowhere") and ending with death (disappearance into nowhere). For her, this already implies that humans do not "appear" due to being "created" in a larger context of divine order. Leaving aside this issue, if life itself is the basic mode of appearing, one can claim that, generally, past thought has made various modes of appearing in life the function of, or means to, serve the various necessities, purposes, aims and problems constituting human life. Government and political activity would of course play a central role in life. Those necessities and purposes, including politics, would in turn be understood (either by individual prophets or philosophers, or communities) in terms of a broad, all-encompassing vision of the totality of human existence. Orchestrating public appearances would could serve a variety of purposes, like symbolizing divinities, or the divine nature of human potentates; celebrating the magnificence of monarch and emperors, or the greatness and glory of city-states or empires; simple dress as signaling the status of individuals, professions and rank in various hierarchies; showing the simple nobility and virtue of republics and their leaders, or symbolizing the freedom and equality of modern democracies. In short, the conscious arrangement of significant and remarkable public appearances could serve a host of purposes, to manifest what Arendt called "the shining brightness we once called glory." HC 180 Hence Arendt focused on a central phenomenon of human existence when making appearance into an ontological fact. However, her treatment is unprecedented insofar as it tends to argue, not that the orchestration of appearance is used for a host of life's various purposes, but, on the contrary, that the ontological urge for self-display and self-presentation is itself the organizing principle for all other human activities and purposes. Consequently, the "greatness and dignity" of human beings is measured by the fullness and perfection of human appearance, which is public political action. By this measure, action is "elevated to the highest rank in the hierarchy" of human activities HC 205 In a sense, appearance, as the actualization of human essence in singular, extraordinary deeds, becomes almost an "end in itself."

## **Arendt: "Reality" as perceived by the public audience, the spectators of action**

If the appearance of an action, including the actor revealed in its actualization, is that actor's personality or character, then the latter's reality is entirely dependent upon the perceptions of its witnesses, its audience. And here a problem arises in Arendt's view of such witnesses. All appearances of an actor and act of necessity are what they "seem" to individual spectators. Every appearance is, first of all, a "semblance," inasmuch as it hides some actor's "interior" as its ground or source. (We cannot witness the acts of "deliberate choices," any more than we can determine inner motives). Secondly, and more relevant, each individual witness with his own perspective and "location" in the world has the world appear in "the mode of it-seems-to-me."<sup>58 [58]</sup> In other words, all appearances are perceived, understood and judged individually (unless a community can agree on some shared perspectives). What is decisive for the reality of appearances is that "nothing that appears manifests itself to a single viewer capable of perceiving it under all its inherent aspects."<sup>59 [59]</sup> Arendt distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic semblances, the latter of which are subject to correcting faulty perceptions, whereas the authentic variety is attached to our permanent and unalterable position in the world and within nature on earth. Hence "natural and inevitable semblances are inherent in a world of appearance," the best argument against the validity of modern theories of "positivism," insisting on the existence of the "sheer facts" of our sense perceptions.<sup>60 [60]</sup>

If this were the extent of Arendt's understanding of the reality of appearances, reality would amount to complete and unmitigated subjectivism, even solipsism. However, the "subjectivity of the it-seems-to-me" is, according to Arendt, "remedied" by the fact that an "indication of realness," a sensation of reality accompanies each appearance. This reality is constituted of a kind of "sixth sense," combining the working of the other five senses into a "common sense. More importantly, it is the result of my knowledge that many others, although each perceiving subjectively, nevertheless all perceive the same "object" as I do. The intersubjectivity of reality is thus guaranteed of a commonness of perception, despite each living in their own world of semblance, due to the agreement of the "identity" of the "object" perceived by all despite their plurality of perspectives. We must conclude that the reality inherent in appearances consists of the abstract "identity" of an "object," i.e. an actor and his action, which cannot "appear," since in that case it would immediately turn into a "semblance" or what it would seem to me. My reality as a public actor, then, would consist of what I appear to seem to countless others, without being able to identify one real concrete personality or character as

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<sup>58 [58]</sup> The Life of the Mind, p.38

<sup>59 [59]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60 [60]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39

myself, except for myself as a non-identifiable, because non-appearing, identity of an object.<sup>61</sup>  
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## Voegelin

Voegelin makes it quite clear, especially in his monumental study of *Order and History*, that his knowledge of basic human reality is one which was discovered, in many steps and stages, in the form of various symbolizations, and most fully articulated by the philosophers Plato and Aristotle, in essence precursors of its Christian manifestation. But what makes Voegelin unique in the history of the recognition of the nature of human order, in my judgment, is his insistence on the ambiguity of men's existence in that order. On the one hand, "man's partnership in being is the essence of his existence," but it is, despite the certainty and participation in a partnership of the "community of being," nevertheless an existence marked by anxiety and profound disturbance caused by "ultimate, essential ignorance" of its meaning.<sup>62</sup> [62] Man, as active participant in "the drama of being," does not know what the play is, and thus is an actor who "does not know with certainty who he is himself."<sup>63</sup> [63] Or, "at the center of his existence man is unknown to himself and must remain so."<sup>64</sup> [64] Of course, man's "essential" ignorance does not prevent "considerable knowledge about the order of being," especially man's social and political order. Ibid. Nonetheless, and in the final analysis, Voegelin's entire thought revolves around maintaining the "tension" in human existence, one stemming from man enacting "an adventure of decision on the edge of freedom and necessity."<sup>65</sup> [65] Man's active existence thus is endangered by two extreme possibilities: for one, the hybris of claiming to be in full possession of the mystery of human existence, and the ability to realize in this life and world the perfection and salvation of man; for another, the inability of the "mass" of humanity to sustain the tension of existence emanating from its mysterious and unknowable divine transcendent ground, and their subsequent need for objectified myths satisfying their needs for certainty.

## Voegelin's reading of Aristotle's phronesis as "existential virtue."

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<sup>61</sup> [61] Life of the Mind, p. 46

<sup>62</sup> [62] Voegelin, Order and History, vol.1, Intro 1-3

<sup>63</sup> [63] Ibid., p.2

<sup>64</sup> [64] Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> [65] Ibid., p.1



The differences between Voegelin's and Arendt's view of the nature of political reality is strikingly revealed in one of Voegelin's many penetrating and trenchant interpretations of Aristotle. I only want to single out one particular aspect of Voegelin's treatment of Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* and its relation to *physei dikaion* or natural justice.

In his understanding of the "ontology" of *phronesis*, Voegelin at first seems to read Aristotle in a manner supportive of Arendt's understanding of action. That is to say, the truth about human being and ethics is not so much found in general statements or concepts about the quality of actions, as it is to be found in the actuality of human acts itself. As Voegelin puts it, "the truth of existence fulfills itself where it becomes concrete, namely in action," and action "is the place, where man reaches his truth."<sup>66 [66]</sup> *Phronesis* as "the virtue of right action" is thus called an "existential virtue," *Existenzialtugend*.<sup>67 [67]</sup> But if up to this point Voegelin discourse seems to verify Arendt's emphasis on man's *essential* being as actualized in free action, further reflections on Aristotle's position far transcend Arendt's identification of human reality in actualized self-disclosure. For Voegelin immediately puts *phronesis* in the more comprehensive context of knowledge of the totality of being, the divine origins of which even pervade the existential truth of individual human acts. For, ultimately *phronesis* is expression of a tension within a larger order, "the explanation (*Begründung*) of concrete action is part of a motion in Being, which emanates from God and ends in the actions of man."<sup>68 [68]</sup> Man's openness to the divine, and not his abstract knowledge of certain permanent and unchangeable sentences of natural law, are the ultimate source of right human order. Hence, not such sentences, but the testimony of the "spoudaios," the virtuous man, in whom right action was actualized, attest to the divine origins of the principles of human order.<sup>69 [69]</sup> Voegelin interprets even Aristotle's concept of *philia* in this broader existential light: *philia* does not just take its various human forms, all of which involving some notion of self-love. Instead, it stands under the influence of the Platonic inheritance of a transcendental experience, where *philia* includes the "noetic love as well as the love of God, plus the love of the divine in oneself and in one's fellow men (*Nebemmenschen*)."<sup>70 [70]</sup> Action, as well as actor, thus revealed in actuality of practical life, far from being moved by an urge to self-display, are instead infused by the existential motions originating in the divine.

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<sup>66 [66]</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, German version, p. 125-126

<sup>67 [67]</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

<sup>68 [68]</sup> *Ibid.*, 126

<sup>69 [69]</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

<sup>70 [70]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129

## **Concluding Remarks: the nature of common sense and the realities of American democracy**

In their remarkable exchange about totalitarianism's "meaning" in modernity, Arendt and Voegelin reveal the profound range of judgment which to a great degree has been made possible by the paradoxes and ambiguities of the "modern age" itself. But despite their vast differences in envisioning true reality, they agree that American democracy has (still) avoided the most politically debilitating of those ambiguities.

Both Arendt and Voegelin condemn the modern age, Arendt because modernity has meant the decline of the political public realm and its transformation into privatized society, Voegelin because "the death of the spirit is the price of progress."<sup>71 [71]</sup> For Arendt, the modern age has increasingly undermined the potential greatness and dignity of political action and substituted the "automatic functioning" of a laboring consumer society: the "modern age...which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity" may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known.<sup>72 [72]</sup>

Voegelin notes that the more energy modern civilization devotes to the "great enterprise of salvation through world-immanent action," the more remote will be the life of the spirit.<sup>73 [73]</sup> A new modern psychology, instigated by Hobbes, produced the concept of a psyche appropriate for a reality without divine transcendence, the psyche of modern man entirely motivated by his individual passions.<sup>74 [74]</sup> Modern man is possessed either with individually enjoying the world, or collectively conquering it. For Arendt, on the contrary, modernity is characterized by increasing "worldliness," withdrawal from the common public world into the diversity and eccentricities of the private realms.

Notably, both identify Christianity as having, whether directly or by indirection, contributed to the constitution of modernity and its problems. For Arendt, the politically most devastating belief of modernity is the assumption that individual life, and not the human world, is the highest good. This belief has its roots in Christian religion. Modernity arose "within the fabric of a Christian society" whose "fundamental belief in the sacredness of life" survived even the trend of secularization and the decline of Christian religion.<sup>75 [75]</sup> Arendt also suggests at one point that

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<sup>71 [71]</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 131

<sup>72 [72]</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.322

<sup>73 [73]</sup> *The New Science of Politics*, p.131

<sup>74 [74]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185

<sup>75 [75]</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 314

the modern □ freedom from politics, □ decried by ancient Athenians and Arendt alike, is □ politically perhaps the most relevant part of our Christian heritage. □<sup>76 [76]</sup> These modern consequences are of course the residues of the even more profound changes introduced by original Christianity in antiquity, when it substituted faith in the immortality of individual life for the political glory and □ worldly immortality □ of great deeds and persons. This reversal, Arendt reminds us, was □ disastrous for the esteem and the dignity of politics □ and its consequences are with us still.<sup>77 [77]</sup>

For Voegelin, Christianity's influences on modernity are equally pervasive, and perhaps even more complex. First, Christianity is said to have brought the philosophical understanding of the human soul to its □ fulfillment □ in the □ ultimate border of clarity □ in the experience of revelation.<sup>78 [78]</sup> But, and without going into the required details, Christianity also created political problems once, during the late Roman Empire, it could no longer fulfill the function of a □ civil theology. □ It in effect left the world □ a vacuum of a de-divinized natural sphere of political existence, □ in which a □ search for civil theology □ began, based on the attempts to transfer Christian salvation and perfection from the realm of the transcendent divine into the □ immanence □ of this world. This, Voegelin's famous notion of the modern □ gnostic search, □ by his account found its □ journey's end □ in modern totalitarianism. Hence, both the modern de-divinization of the world, as well as its gnostic □ re-divinization □ have its origins in Christianity, or at least its heresies. Perhaps an even deeper and far-reaching problem intrinsic to Christianity, or in fact any religious □ faith, □ Voegelin identifies in passages of particular force and beauty: the □ burden □ of substantive things hoped for, but to be found only □ in faith itself, □ is too □ heavy □ for □ men who lust for massively possessive experience. □<sup>79 [79]</sup> Such men, who are in effect without the □ spiritual stamina for the heroic adventure of the soul that is Christianity, □ will grow in number as more people are □ drawn or pressured □ in the Christian □ orbit, □ until the □ fall from faith □ will become a □ mass phenomenon. □<sup>80 [80]</sup> Under modern circumstances of increasing technological mastery of the natural world to the benefit of man, the □ lust for massively possessive experience □ will be accruing to the benefit of world-saving □ gnostic □ movements, or, alternatively, and less evenly considered by Voegelin, modern

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<sup>76 [76]</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 284

<sup>77 [77]</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 314

<sup>78 [78]</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, pp. 78-79

<sup>79 [79]</sup> The burden is unforgettably described as follows: □ The life of the soul in openness toward God, the waiting, the periods of aridity and dulness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope, the silent stirrings of love and grace, trembling on the verge of a certainty which if gained is loss... □ *The New Science of Politics*, p.122

<sup>80 [80]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123

economic systems of consumer oriented mass democracies, based on natural rights of the individual.

Finally, both Arendt and Voegelin saw "a glimmer of hope" (Voegelin)<sup>81 [81]</sup> in especially American democracy, which, from Voegelin's perspective, represents, "most solidly" in its institutions "... the truth of the soul" as it survived in its ancient philosophical and Christian form. The American Revolution, though already affected by the "psychology of enlightenment" and thus Hobbes, closed "within the institutional and Christian climate of the *ancien regime*."<sup>82 [82]</sup> Undoubtedly, Voegelin sees American democracy's true roots not in its Constitutional order as *novus ordo saeculorum*, but in its adherence to "common sense" reasoning, linked to Christian faith, immunizing it from most modern forms of ideology and vapid utopianism. Arendt, on the other hand, places her hope in the partial survival of the spirit of public, political freedom in modern American democracy, despite the large-scale transformation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century political citizens of the American Revolution into the private consumers of modern mass society. The American Revolution in part reestablished the Roman trinity of authority, tradition and religion in its constitutional "founding act," perpetuating a lawful order of freedom, even if representative government and the onslaught of the "forces of modernity" undermined it from the beginning.

In the final analysis, Voegelin, more clearly perhaps than Arendt, manages to incorporate and harmonize his defense of the pervasive divine (noetic) influence over practical political order, or the priority of political action over private (including religious) activities or thoughts, with the original American notion of popular self-government by individuals endowed with individual rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." than does Arendt's theory of the founders as "men of action" and lovers of public life and happiness.

We recall that the American constitutional order, without "parallel in the annals of human society," was marked by "numerous innovations" intended to favor both "private rights and public happiness," and support "virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith and of public and personal liberty."<sup>83 [83]</sup> Arendt's interpretation of the American revolutionaries as "men of action from beginning to end" is a brilliant rendition of the constitutional founding. Her critique of subsequent American history as the decline of the significance of political action and the rise of private society is largely accurate. However, her singular preference for public political action and concomitant revelation of the real human

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<sup>81 [81]</sup> Ibid. P. 189

<sup>82 [82]</sup> Ibid., p. 188-189

<sup>83 [83]</sup> James Madison, The Federalist Papers, 14,10

essence, leaves the meaningfulness of all other non-political, private or social freedoms and activities either in a state confusion or rejects it. It certainly does not succeed in explaining how private and public activities can somehow be harmonized, an accomplishment for which the Romans, the "most political people we know," receives her high praise. While she certainly recognizes the need for it, the private realm nonetheless provides nothing more than the preparatory ground for reentry into public life.

Nor, more importantly, does Arendt manage to satisfactorily link the urge and desire to act in public, on the one hand, with, on the other hand, the "fundamental republican principle" (A. Hamilton) of basic popular sovereignty and its adequate political representation. In one of Arendt's most radical (and least clarified) proposals, action is decoupled from "serving the good of the people" as they themselves determine it. She suggests that modern democracy ought to allow a "self-selecting" minority, "an elite" that is chosen by no one but constitutes itself, "the elite of those who truly love the freedom of action and public happiness to, and who have shown 'care,' 'concern,' and 'responsibility' for 'public business' to 'participate in public affairs.'"<sup>84 [84]</sup> Only such individuals would have "the right to be heard in the conduct of the business of the republic."<sup>85 [85]</sup> Politically, Arendt maintains, it is such individuals who are "the best," and it is "the task of good government and the sign of a well-ordered republic" to let them run the republic's affairs.<sup>86 [86]</sup> However, she points out that such an "aristocratic" form of government would spell the end of general suffrage as we understand it today.<sup>87 [87]</sup> I can only infer that it would prevent the present system of representative government, where elected office holders, sharing the mainly unpolitical, economic and social interests of the people, perpetuate the domination of political public life of primarily private interests. In this fashion, Arendt has managed to propose a complete severance of private and public liberties, and separated private freedoms and public happiness from each other, or, more accurately, has divided entirely what the original American constitution had attempted to fuse. She has thus, in the name of a more political republic, undermined its basic (American) principle, the political sovereignty of the people (not just the small number who prefer the life of political action). If, on the other hand, she assumes that the non-elected "elite" of activists will hold itself responsible to the people's business without the latter's influence by way of period elections, she has tossed aside all good common sense and the lessons of history.

With her proposal (which, I grant, is advanced once only, and stands in contrast to some later essays praising America's system of citizen participation in independent, non-governmental

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<sup>84 [84]</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 283, 282

<sup>85 [85]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284

<sup>86 [86]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283

<sup>87 [87]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284

interest-groups, including civil disobedients), Arendt dismisses (or rejects?) the key assumption underlying the American constitutional order, namely the presence of sufficient □virtue among men for self-government.□ As James Madison put it at the end of Federalist 55: □As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. *Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.*□ (My emphasis) One could read Arendt's passages about the self-selecting features of an □elite□ of activists, and the voluntary self-elimination from politics of the many non-activists, as a process whereby the virtuous part of the populace does manifest the highest degree of qualification for republican government. But unless one eliminates the popular vote, one is left in the dark as to what political qualities the non-activists must possess despite their mainly unpolitical lives.

In contrast to Arendt, Voegelin with his emphasis on the signal function of reason in political life and human existence, seems to speak directly to Hamilton's claim that the Americans with their new system of constitutional government are to □decide...by their conduct and example,□ whether □good government from reflection and choice,□ rather than □accident and force,□ lies within men's capability. Fed.1 As he emphasizes in his essay on *What is political reality?*, the □Anglo-American social field□ has shown □remarkable power of resistance□ to the multiple onslaught of modern ideologies precisely because of its continuous adherence to □common sense□ reason. But this common sense in the handling of political problems is reliable precisely because it is a form of reason, and is ultimately a mode of the noetic reason pervading the entirety of human reality, if energized by the human soul's openness to its transcendent ground. Common sense as □a branch or degree of *ratio*□ becomes the mainstay of even a realistic political science. □Common sense is a civilizational habit that presupposes noetic experience, without the man of this habit himself possessing differentiated knowledge of noesis. The civilized *homo politicus* need not be a philosopher, but he must have common sense.□<sup>88 [88]</sup> Moreover, common sense □philosophy□ is also not just a □tradition,□ but □a genuine residue of noesis.□<sup>89 [89]</sup> However, it is not clear to what extent Voegelin's insistence on providing a link between common sense reason and noesis is vindicated by the American self-experience. In the same essay on political reality, Voegelin provides a list of common sense insights any political activist (or even observer) can garner from direct experience of political life.<sup>90 [90]</sup> His list is quite similar to those identified by the Americans in the Federalist papers, where Madison in particular points to the □manly spirit□ shown by those Americans who, rather than show □blind veneration for antiquity and custom,□ instead trusted their □own good sense,□ the □lessons of their own experience,□ and □knowledge of their own situation.□<sup>91 [91]</sup> One could

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<sup>88 [88]</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis, The Nature of Political Reality*, p. 411

<sup>89 [89]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.412

<sup>90 [90]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409

<sup>91 [91]</sup> James Madison, *The Federalist Papers* 14

argue that this type of practical knowledge, and its lessons extracted from direct experience by "good sense," is understood independently of any direct reliance upon Voegelin's "receptivity of the unseen measure." In other words, one cannot use the American founders as an example for clarifying the most difficult issue in Voegelin's political position, namely the precise relation between theoretical and practical reason.

Regardless, his common sense is quite obviously of a different nature than the one identified by Arendt: in political life, it provides for a more effective and meaningful shared commonality amongst, for example, the American type of citizen having sufficient virtue of self-government, than Arendt's abstract sharing of an "object" the "identity" of which can never *appear* to anyone except in subjective form.

In light of Voegelin's praise of America's reasonable common sense, its emphasis on political moderation and citizen virtues, one must infer that it, more than any "civic theology" or communal ideology, will prevent the victory of especially totalitarian ideologies. And despite the fact that Voegelin, reminiscent of Tocqueville, frequently also remarks upon the obvious Christian roots of original American democracy, underscored by praise of Lincoln's view of the religious basis of self-government, it is not clear whether Christianity can in effect be either the support of much less a substitute for the predominance of common sense reason. It is suspect because it is supposed to enable the modern mass of democratic men to be able to withstand *both* the temptation Christian heretical movements promising the fulfillment and perfection of human existence in this life, *and* also to be able to live with the "heavy burden" he identifies as the core of Christian faith. By Voegelin's his own account, these temptations as well as high demands are intrinsic to Christian religion itself, and, one presumes, shall remain so.

Arendt detailed critique of the multiple philosophical and ideological sources of modern society shows that *behind* the basic reversal of the proper relation between private and public human activities can be found profound changes in the basic European perception of the realities of human existence. The changes she emphasizes include the secularization of Christianity's valorizing of life as the highest good, the spread of Cartesian doubt, the rise of a laboring society, the spreading of modern subjectivism and introspection, leading to "world-alienation" and the loss of common sense. Her own analysis would seem to imply that, as Voegelin maintained, notions of what constitutes human essence determine events and actions, that generally, thinking precedes action, or at least informs it in patterns often seemingly inscrutable. Arendt herself hints at this when, as if in passing and without elaboration, she says that the principles which guide free action depend on our thinking. On the other hand, it also seems accurate to say that some actions of modern totalitarianism, marked not by principle but by sheer pathology, do destroy the continuity and effectiveness of philosophical traditions become habit.

Modern pathological politics may not be able to destroy human essence, but it can permanently wipe out its existence in political, thereby hindering our recognition of the really essential.

But the most serious omission in Arendt's new political theory of "public appearance" is the failure of ontologically rooting the meaning of "the public" other than as an arena for the self-presentation of individual or collective actors. While her ontology of appearance is highly innovative and suggestive of new ramifications, the lack of an equivalent "grounding" of what essentially distinguishes between personal and political appearance (besides inadequate references to gaining "the widest possible audience") is a seriously debilitating omission. In contrast, Voegelin's theory of man's living in the "existential tension toward the ground as the center of man's order," and in a state of "receptivity for the unseen measure, however many questions it leaves unanswered and details it fails to provide, allows for a far more common sense understanding of the order of politics, appropriate to the highly complex "synthetic nature" of man and its infusion with essential reality, ranging from the "human psychic" to inanimate being.<sup>92 [92]</sup>

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<sup>92 [92]</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (English), p. 406-7; *The New Science of Politics*, p. 69



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