



Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry*, 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 227–43

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On Bad Weather

Heidegger, Arendt, and Political Beginnings

CITE AS:

Facundo Vega, 'On Bad Weather: Heidegger, Arendt, and Political Beginnings', in *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry*, 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 227–43 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17_11>

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ABSTRACT: This essay restages Arendt's *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger regarding 'political beginnings'. Sketching Heidegger's exceptionalist account of 'new beginnings' and Arendt's dispute with him in relation to the tension between the spheres of 'philosophy' and 'politics', I trace her position about 'political founding'. I claim that Arendt invites us to recognize the 'principle of an-archy' innate to 'political beginnings', which cannot be absorbed by exceptionalist invocations of the 'history of Being'.

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The great trouble is that human nature, which might otherwise develop smoothly, is as dependent upon luck as seed is upon good weather.

Hannah Arendt

If ‘datability’ made any sense, 2020 will hand down a particular term: virus. In the domain of thinking, the magnitude of this new crisis in life-in-common made visible an invariant: the shortcomings in philosophy to deal with *the unexpected*.¹ The point is, of course, not to suggest that philosophy should have predicted and offered keys to theoretically apprehend what could not be fully perceived in advance. Rather, what is happening — the current events that we are experiencing — invites theorists to be attentive to the ordinary world they are confronted by. But this invitation is pending.

Though the extent of the crisis we are traversing is not known, the contours of the problem I try to illustrate are not brand new. In

1 See, among others, Giorgio Agamben, *A che punto siamo? L'epidemia come politica* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020) and Alain Badiou, ‘Sur la situation épidémique’, *Quartier général. Le Média libre* <<https://qg.media/2020/03/26/sur-la-situation-epidemiologique-par-alain-badiou/>> [accessed 30 March 2020].

fact, the consequences of the love of philosophy for ‘the extraordinary’ are as old as the laughter of the Thracian girl.² Enamoured by their own ‘radicality’, philosophers have purportedly abandoned the world even for the sake of discovering and scrutinizing it. In dealing with this issue in an *Auseinandersetzung* with Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt returned to the promise of politics. For Arendt, the validity of this question about politics, of great importance in today’s milieu, is inextricably related to the matter of the ‘beginning’: a beginning, Arendt notes, which is animated ‘not by the strength of one architect but by the combined power of the many.’³ By dealing with Arendt’s ‘beginning’ and avoiding exceptionalist stridencies, I hope to open up a space to re-ask: How to begin anew? What can and should be learned during this *intermezzo*? What can and should be the promise of politics today?

In the current situation, when the very act of ‘beginning’ is confined, the temptation is to deal with the questions I posed by postulating the need of a magnificent event, breaking into and interrupting the normal course of history. Positing a hiatus in time to found a *new time* has, according to Arendt, political implications. In her rendition, in fact, ‘revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning.’⁴ But revolutions are not only foundationalist events that break history in two. When Arendt thematizes the revolutionary power to constitute life-in-common and refers to the Mayflower Compact, she strikingly wonders whether its signatories ‘had been prompted to “covenant” because of the *bad weather*.’⁵ Vis-à-vis the splendour and grandeur of a new beginning, the ‘bad weather’ appears as a vivid reminder that the ‘earliest

2 On the anecdote about the Thracian servant-girl ridiculing Thales for falling into a well while observing the motion of celestial bodies see, among others: Plato, *Theaetetus*, ed. by Bernard Williams, M. J. Levett, and Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), p. 44; Martin Heidegger, *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962), p. 2; Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, ed. by Mary McCarthy, 2 vols (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977–78), 1: *Thinking* (1977), pp. 82–83; Hans Blumenberg, *Das Lachen der Thrakerin. Eine Urgeschichte der Theorie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987); Jacques Taminiaux, *La Fille de Thrace et le penseur professionnel. Arendt et Heidegger* (Paris: Payot, 1992).

3 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 214.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 167; my emphasis. Arendt adds that ‘the bad-weather theory, which I find rather suggestive, is contained in the “Massachusetts” article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, vol. XVII’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 306).

written constitution in history' and its creative power also originated out of contingency and the ordinary variation of fortune.⁶

In order to erode foundationalist narratives about political institution, I will re-stage Arendt's confrontation with Heidegger regarding 'political beginnings'. Keeping the reference to 'bad weather' in mind, this essay will proceed in three parts. Firstly, I will sketch Heidegger's exceptionalist account of 'new beginnings'. By fusing origin and rule in the will of a single person, I will claim that Heidegger conceives of beginnings as extraordinary, exceptional, and singular moments. Secondly, I will briefly examine Arendt's dispute with Heidegger's work from 1946 to 1958, from manifest enmity due to the latter's commitment to German totalitarianism, to recognition of intellectual gratitude. My aim in this case will be to foreground how, according to Arendt, 'the Heidegger case' (*der Fall Heidegger*) conveys the 'philosophico-political problem', that is to say, the ineradicable tension between the domains of 'philosophy' and 'politics'. Arendt's critical examination of the 'philosophico-political problem', in turn, offers new insights that reveal two distinctive ways of conceiving 'beginnings'. For Heidegger, the 'beginning' expresses — either politically or philosophically — a radical event imbued with an ontological dignity that surpasses any plurality. For Arendt, on the contrary, the 'beginning' seems to stage an an-archic display that is political insofar as it happens 'between' human beings. Finally, this theoretical trajectory will allow me to show how, after her confrontation with Heidegger's work — which, paradoxically, is both the epitome of the philosophical tradition *and* the way to overcome its deadlocks — Arendt provides an original answer to the question of the status of 'political beginnings'. Aware of the particular conditions of political modernity — which, for her, is

6 The article of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* quoted by Arendt emphasizes that 'in the early winter of 1620 [the passengers of the Mayflower] made the coast of Cape Cod; they had intended to make their landfall farther south, within the jurisdiction of the Virginia Company, which had granted them a patent; but *stress of weather* prevented their doing so. Finding themselves without warrant in a region beyond their patent, and threatened with the desertion of disaffected members of their company (probably all servants or men of the 'lesser' sort) unless concessions were made to these, they drew up and signed before landing a democratic compact of government which is accounted the earliest written constitution in history' (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, 11th edn, 29 vols (London: The Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, 1911), xvii, p. 858; my emphasis).

rooted in an ‘abyssal ground’ — Arendt seeks, time and again, coordinates with which to elucidate the act of political institution. In the face of current theoretical perspectives that advocate a return to ontology in order to account for the ‘exceptional’ origin of life-in-common,⁷ I propose that Arendt invites us to recognize the ‘principle of an-archy’ innate to ‘political beginnings’. And I claim that this an-archic matter that animates political foundations, always already exposed to ‘bad weather’, cannot be absorbed by exceptionalist invocations of the ‘history of Being.’

THE TALE OF THE FOX AND THE FASCINATION WITH THE NEW BEGINNING

After not speaking to each other for seventeen years following a grievous falling out, Arendt and Heidegger reconnect in 1950. Three years later, Arendt writes a bittersweet parable about Heidegger in her *Denktagebuch*, a story that hints at the fragility of their ‘friendship’. Seeking to capture ‘the true story of Heidegger the fox’ (*die wahre Geschichte von dem Fuchs Heidegger*), she claims:

[T]he fox who lived in the trap said proudly: ‘So many are visiting me in my trap that I have become the best of all foxes.’ And there is some truth in that, too: Nobody knows the nature of traps [*Fallenwesen*] better than one who sits in a trap his whole life long.⁸

Arendt’s tale of the fox conjures the endless construction of a burrow — one that, because of the fox’s determination to perfect it, ends up becoming a dead-end. But the story gets even more dramatic if this particular fox can, thanks to his cleverness, entrap future generations of thinkers. In the most lugubrious reading of the saga, everything the fox touches gives into his charms. The corollary of this terrifying version of the tale is troubling: even surpassing interpretations guided by

7 See, among others, Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Marchart, *Die politische Differenz. Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010).

8 Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950 bis 1973*, ed. by Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, 2 vols (Munich: Piper, 2002), 1, p. 404; English trans. as ‘Heidegger the Fox’, in *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1974. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2005), p. 362.

scandal and the ‘anxiety of influence’, Arendt is, shockingly, assimilated into the ‘destruction of thought’ (*destruction de la pensée*) supposedly fostered by her former professor, the fox Heidegger.⁹

Looking to Arendt’s parable without falling into a conventional narrative of personal intrigue between the two protagonists, however, will help us to observe that, by being both ‘faithful and not faithful’ to Heidegger,¹⁰ she offers important insights to delineate the contours of the Heideggerian trap as well as its implications within the domain of political foundation. Heidegger’s thought is certainly one of the main bases from which Arendt challenges the failures of the philosophical tradition. But she also sees her former professor’s work as the prime example of intellectual hubris that utterly failed to heed life-in-common. Put differently, for Arendt the post-totalitarian political crisis could not be understood if the crisis of philosophy was not tackled, and Heidegger blatantly manifested that theoretical and political quandary.

Several recently-published seminars delivered by Heidegger in the 1930s as well as the *Schwarzen Hefte*,¹¹ to be sure, complicate Arendt’s ambivalent stance toward him. Heidegger, *malgré* Arendt,

9 See Elzbieta Ettinger, *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Richard Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children. Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Emmanuel Faye, *Arendt et Heidegger. Extermination nazie et destruction de la pensée* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2016).

10 By sending a copy of *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* to Heidegger via her publisher, Arendt made a confession to him: ‘Re Vita activa: The dedication of this book has been omitted. | How could I dedicate it to you | trusted one | to whom I was faithful | and not faithful [dem ich die Treue gehalten | und nicht gehalten habe] | And in both cases with love’. See Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger. Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1998), p. 319; English trans. as *Letters: 1925–1975*, ed. by Ursula Ludz (New York: Harcourt, 2004), p. 261; my emphasis, translation modified.

11 Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, 102 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1975–), xxxviii: *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, ed. by Günter Seubold (1998); xxxvi/xxxvii: *Sein und Wahrheit*, ed. by Hartmut Tietjen (2001); ‘Hegel, “Rechtsphilosophie”’, ‘Hegel, Rechtsphilosophie. WS 34/35. Mitschrift Wilhelm Hallwachs’, ‘Hegel, Rechtsphilosophie. WS 34/35. Protokolle’, lxxxvi: *Seminare. Hegel-Schelling*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2011), pp. 55–184, pp. 549–611, pp. 613–55; xciv: *Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2014); xcvi: *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/1939)*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2014); xcvi: *Überlegungen XII-XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2014); xcvi: *Anmerkungen I-V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2015); ‘Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat. Übung aus dem Wintersemester 1933/34’, in *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente*, ed. by Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski (Freiburg: Alber, 2009), pp. 53–88.

can no longer be envisioned as the ‘hidden king’ (*heimlicher König*) of thought, who took a brief detour around Syracuse due to a *déformation professionnelle*.¹² After all, he explicitly links ‘ontology’ and ‘politics’ through the notion of ‘beginning’. By conflating both realms, Heidegger’s position on the ‘history of Being’ takes a narrative bent: it is encompassed by a ‘beginning’ (*Anfang*) and an ‘end’ (*Ende*) or, more accurately, by two ‘beginnings’ — *erster* and *anderer* — and an ‘end’ embodied by what he terms machination (*Machenschaft*). This narrative, which of course has protagonists — namely, ‘the Greeks’ and ‘the Germans’ — is animated on a metapolitical level.¹³ What Heidegger’s metapolitics (*Metapolitik*) — understood as both rejection and constitution of the world — names is his own ‘onto-historical’ (*seinsgeschichtliche*) reflection on the *Anfang*. For Heidegger, then, ‘the history of Being’ invigorates political life; tuned into the implications of the Greek ‘first beginning’, Germany, understood as an ontological force, should effect a ‘second beginning’.

The essence of the German people, epitomized by the leader, is the groundwork for Heidegger’s preaching on the ‘foundation’ and the ‘new beginning’. This exceptionalist rendition of *Anfänge* cannot be weathered; it cannot be subjected to the action of the elements: it seems to be incorruptible. The absolute power of the *Führer* and the fusion of governmental command in one person were salient features of the new German reality. At the time, in *Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat* (Wintersemester 1933/34), Heidegger upheld the idea that the leader’s will knew no bounds since he was the ontological interpreter of the people and the state.¹⁴ The *Führerprinzip* praised by Heidegger, in turn, instantiates the ‘onto-historical’ and extra-political foundation of ‘the political’, as well as the political institution of the will of a *single* man. One man, or better, *this* man, is not the shepherd of Being; Being, rather, seems to be shepherd of the leader. The leader is the ‘preparer of the danger, the decider

12 Hannah Arendt, ‘Martin Heidegger ist achtzig Jahre alt’, in *Antwort. Martin Heidegger im Gespräch*, ed. by Günther Neske and Emil Kettering (Tübingen: Neske, 1988), pp. 232–46 (pp. 233 and 243–45).

13 See Heidegger, *Überlegungen II–VI*, pp. 115, 116, and 124.

14 Heidegger, ‘Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat’, p. 77.

of the struggle (*Kampfes*), and the guardian of its new truths'.¹⁵ In 'Hegel, "Rechtsphilosophie"' (*Wintersemester 1934/35*), in particular, Heidegger will assert:

The unification of powers in the Dasein of the leader is not a mere coupling and heaping up (quantitative), but rather in itself already the starting point [*Beginn*] of the development of an originally new [*ursprünglich neuen*] — but still undeveloped — beginning [*Anfangs*].¹⁶

The German 'revolution', as Heidegger conceived it, laid the foundation for more than the mere seizure of power.

Crucial, in this sense, is the distinction that Heidegger draws between the notions of 'starting point' (*Beginn*), 'beginning' (*Anfang*), and 'origin' (*Ur-sprung*) of the state.¹⁷ For Heidegger, the 'starting point' is left behind as the 'occurrence' (*Geschehen*) unfolds. The 'beginning', meanwhile, irradiates unparalleled energy in its own 'occurrence'. The radicalism of the Heideggerian 'beginning' is evidenced in a foundational act that rests on the figure of the leader. According to Heidegger, the leader does not contemplate the political reality but shapes it. His intervention is historical and reveals a truth embodied in danger and *pólemos*.¹⁸ If Heidegger once spoke of an event that 'can only be compared to the change at the beginning [*Anfang*] of the intellectual history of the Western human being in general',¹⁹ he now uses the notion of 'another beginning' (*anderer Anfang*) to refer to that same phenomenon. Heidegger's thinking takes this new turn in the context of a discussion of what he envisions as 'our people' (*unser Volk*), which is at once the 'most endangered people' (*gefährdetstes Volk*) and the 'metaphysical people' (*metaphysisches Volk*).²⁰ Later, for Heidegger, not only the statesman, but also the poet and the thinker will be the

15 Heidegger, 'Hegel, "Rechtsphilosophie"', p. 170.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75. Richard Polt states that 'the main point here is that the chronological beginning of a process, its "starting point", is not necessarily an "inception" in the Heideggerian sense'. See Richard Polt, 'Self-Assertion as Founding', in Martin Heidegger, *On Hegel's Philosophy of Right: The 1934–35 Seminar and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Peter Trawny, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, and Michael Marder (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 67–81 (p. 74).

18 Heidegger, 'Hegel, "Rechtsphilosophie"', p. 177.

19 Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, p. 132.

20 Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, 102 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1975–), XI: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, ed. by Petra Jaeger (1983), p. 41.

ones who express the radical self-affirmation and self-foundation of the people: all of them must grapple with the question of who can initiate the ‘beginning.’ But, beyond any good or bad weather, in the previous and foundationalist instance that we examined, Heidegger assumes that philosophy — or rather, *his philosophy* — in conjunction with the creation of the new leader is what drives the ‘new beginning.’²¹

LOOKING INTO THE EXCEPTIONALIST TRAP: THE PHILOSOPHICO-POLITICAL AS PROBLEM

Centred on the ‘anxiety of influence’ and personal intrigue, the most catastrophic interpretation of the tale of the fox lets out a deafening cry in response to Heidegger’s exceptionalist description of the ‘beginning’ of a ‘we’ evident in *Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat*, and ‘Hegel, “Rechtsphilosophie”’. The cleverness of this animal, combined with its evil nature, is adduced to entrap everyone wandering around under its spell. Heidegger’s trap, the philosophical positing of a political beginning as ontologically exceptional, appears in this rendition as a totalitarian realization imbued with unavoidable magnetism. Arendt, considered merely under Heidegger’s shadow, cannot but accentuate the predicament. Subjugated to her former professor’s enchantment, she, according to this version, ‘advocate[s] a form of salvation, based on a superficially seductive — though equally Heideggerian — vision of being-with (*Mitsein*). This vision leads her to conceive a paradigm of the *polis* that excludes most of humanity: long ago, the slave, the foreigner, the barbarian; today, the worker, the employee — in short, the multitude of those not immortalized by the heroic grandeur of political action [*la grandeur héroïque de l’agir politique*].’²² Conflating Heidegger’s and Arendt’s theoretical impulses, this interpretation disregards her *Auseinandersetzung* with *der Fall Heidegger* — which is symptomatic since, even today, in the wake of a new episode of it due to the recent publication of the *Schwarzen Hefte*, interpretations tend either to denounce or to exculpate.

21 This tendency culminates when he asserts that ‘in sixty years, our state will certainly not be led by the *Führer* anymore; but what happens *then* is up to *us*. This is why we must philosophize [*Deshalb* müssen wir philosophieren]’ (Heidegger, ‘Hegel, Rechtsphilosophie. WS 34/35. Mitschrift Wilhelm Hallwachs’, p. 560; emphasis in original).

22 Faye, *Arendt et Heidegger*, p. 512.

Even notions like ‘metapolitics’, which Heidegger ties to the ‘end of “philosophy”’ (*Ende der ‘Philosophie’*), the ‘metaphysics of Dasein’ (*Metaphysik des Daseins*), the ‘historical people’ (*geschichtliches Volk*) and, of course, the ‘new beginning’ (*neuer Anfang*),²³ are envisioned as part of a dispute that can, under no circumstances, be allowed to sully philosophy. Heidegger’s defenders assert time and again that the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century never scrutinized political issues explicitly — which is simply false. Heidegger’s accusers contend that his work can in no way be conceived as philosophy, since the author was an enthusiastic supporter of German totalitarianism.²⁴ Although one of Heidegger’s post-war aspirations was to protect his philosophical project from readings that emphasize its political implications, Arendt herself had, by 1946, started to examine this issue.

Far from the praise of Heidegger’s philosophical endeavour voiced in, for instance, her 1930 essay ‘Philosophie und Soziologie’, Arendt challenges what she terms ‘Heideggerian functionalism’ in her 1946 text ‘What Is Existenz Philosophy?’.²⁵ Central in her argument is the inability of Heidegger and, *mutatis mutandis*, of philosophy, to rigorously interrogate the status of plurality and life-in-common. Heidegger is, according to Arendt, the last German Romantic and, as such, he is completely irresponsible politically. The most patent expression of this ‘oblivion of politics’ is the fact that Heidegger’s thinking focuses on the question of the ‘Self’. ‘This ideal of the Self follows as a consequence of Heidegger’s making of man what God was in earlier ontology’, Arendt argues. And she adds that ‘a being of this highest order is conceivable only as single and unique and knowing no equals’. In sum, ‘the essential character of the Self is its absolute Self-ness, its radical separation from

23 Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI*, pp. 115 and 124.

24 The paradigmatic cases of this dyad, which ultimately safeguards the immaculate site of philosophy are: Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann and Francesco Alfieri, *Martin Heidegger. La verità sui Quaderni Neri* (Brescia: Morcelliana Editrice, 2016) and Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger, l’introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie. Autour des séminaires inédits de 1933–1935* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005). Exceptions to the aforementioned impasse are, among others: Peter Trawny and Andrew Mitchell, eds, *Heidegger, die Juden, noch einmal* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2015); Andrew Mitchell and Peter Trawny, eds, *Heidegger’s Black Notebooks. Responses to Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

25 Hannah Arendt, ‘Philosophie und Soziologie. Anlässlich Karl Mannheims *Ideologie und Utopie*’, *Die Gesellschaft*, 7.1 (1930), pp. 163–76; ‘What Is Existenz Philosophy?’, in her *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 163–87 (p. 178).

all its fellows.²⁶ The climax of this invective is the brief tale in Arendt's *Denktagebuch* where, as noted, she compares Heidegger to a fox.

The Arendtian tale of the fox, nonetheless, is not her last word about Heidegger nor is it a fate she was condemned to. For Arendt, the figure of Heidegger represents an enigma at the core of the irresolvable dispute between 'philosophy' and 'politics'. Arendt will never cease to theorize what is at stake in the 'philosophico-political problem' — a crucial aspect of her critical interpretation of Heidegger's project in later essays.²⁷ To fully understand this 'problem', we must bear in mind the series of works she wrote starting after the war and through the publication of *The Human Condition* in 1958.²⁸

Of those writings, 'Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought' deserves special attention.²⁹ In it, Arendt discusses Heidegger's emphasis on 'historicity' (*Geschichtlichkeit*) to show that, for him, human history coincides with the history of Being. Expressing a new critical approach — one at odds with her vision in 'What Is Existenz Philosophy?' — Arendt argues that neither a transcendent spirit nor an absolute are revealed in Heidegger's ontology. A philosopher informed by the Heideggerian lesson would not attempt to institute a vision of herself as a wise being who searches for eternal patterns to understand human affairs that are, by definition, perishable. For Arendt, this new understanding 'opens the way to a reexamination of the whole realm of politics in light of elementary human experiences [and the discarding of] traditional concepts and judgments'. Heidegger, then, is envisioned as an author who reads the old texts

26 Ibid., pp. 180 and 181.

27 See Arendt, *On Revolution; Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993); *The Life of the Mind*.

28 In reference to that last work, Arendt lets Heidegger know that it 'came directly out of the first Freiburg days [*Freiburger Tagen*] and hence owes practically everything to you in every respect [*schuldet Dir in jeder Hinsicht so ziemlich alles*]' (Arendt in *Hannah Arendt / Martin Heidegger*, p. 149; *Letters*, p. 124). Remarkably, Arendt mistakenly writes 'Freiburger' instead of 'Marburger'.

29 See Arendt, 'Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought', in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 428–47. See also 'Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought', in *Perspektiven politischen Denkens. Beiträge anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags von Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Antonia Grunenberg, Waltraud Meints, Oliver Bruns, and Christine Harckensee (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang Verlag, 2008), pp. 11–31; 'Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought', in *The Modern Challenge to Tradition: Fragmente eines Buchs*, ed. by Barbara Hahn and James McFarland (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018), pp. 560–92.

with new eyes. In response to a patent expression of the ‘philosophico-political problem’ — mainly, the observation that philosophy mostly deals with human being in the singular, whereas politics deals with human beings in the plural — Heidegger’s notion of ‘world’ (*Welt*) is, for Arendt, insightful. Insofar as Heidegger ‘defines human existence as being-in-the-world’, Arendt claims that ‘he insists on giving philosophic significance to structures of everyday life that are completely incomprehensible if man is not primarily understood as being together with others.’³⁰

With this extended prolegomenon, I attempt to explicitly release Arendt’s argument from any possible subordination to the process of coming to terms with Heidegger’s totalitarian commitment. Arendt’s work should function neither as mere repercussion of Heidegger’s nor as protection against its most inadmissible tendencies. Indeed, many theorists have considered how Arendt thinks both *with and against* Heidegger.³¹ Stressing her critical stance, my examination of the Arendtian notion of ‘political beginning’ shows its intertwinement with the ‘an-archic principle’ of politics, a term to which I will return in the third part of this essay.

Beyond any personal impulse that might have animated Arendt’s endeavour,³² her discussion of the concept of ‘beginning’ can only be

30 Arendt, ‘Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought’, in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 432 and 443.

31 See, notably, Simona Forti, *Vita della mente e tempo della polis* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1996), pp. 43–87; Peg Birmingham, ‘Heidegger and Arendt: The Birth of Political Action and Speech’, in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 191–202; Miguel Abensour, *Hannah Arendt contre la philosophie politique?* (Paris: Sens & Tonka, 2006); Miguel Abensour, ‘Contre la souveraineté de la philosophie sur la politique. La Lecture arendtienne du mythe de la caverne’, in *Hannah Arendt. Crises de l’état-nation. Pensées alternatives*, ed. by Anne Kupiec, Martine Leibovici, Géraldine Muhlmann, and Etienne Tassin (Paris: Sens & Tonka), pp. 341–68. See also Margaret Canovan, ‘Socrates or Heidegger? Hannah Arendt’s Reflections on Philosophy and Politics’, *Social Research*, 57.1 (1990), pp. 135–65; Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Antonia Grunenberg, *Hannah Arendt und Martin Heidegger. Geschichte einer Liebe* (Munich: Piper, 2006); Taminiaux, *La Fille de Thrace et le penseur professionnel*; Jacques Taminiaux, ‘La Déconstruction arendtienne des vues politiques de Heidegger’, *Cahiers philosophiques*, 3.111 (2007), pp. 16–30; Dieter Thomä, ‘Hannah Arendt. Liebe zur Welt’, in *Heidegger Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, ed. by Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), pp. 397–402.

32 Strikingly, Arendt affirms that ‘sometimes I ask myself what is more difficult — to teach the Germans a sense of politics [*einen Sinn für Politik*] or to impart to the Americans a

properly understood if her persistent confrontation with the philosophical tradition is taken into account. While Arendt's engagement with the question of the 'beginning' is not systematic, it does run through all of her work, as does her interest in the related 'principle' or 'principles' of action. From *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* through *The Life of the Mind*, along with mentions in her key texts,³³ the 'beginning' is omnipresent in the Arendtian world. While many have examined this notion in her political theory,³⁴ one aspect of it — Arendt's dispute with Heidegger over the ways of narrating the 'beginning' — has been largely overlooked.

Considering her former professor's radical stance on the *Anfang*,³⁵ Arendt's dictum that 'against philosophy only philosophy helps' (*Ge-*

light dusting of philosophy [*einen leichten Dunst auch nur von Philosophie*]: See Hannah Arendt–Karl Jaspers *Briefwechsel. 1926–1969*, ed. by Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner (Munich: Piper, 1985), p. 165.

- 33 See, among others, Hannah Arendt, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin. Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2006); *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlaß*, ed. by Ursula Ludz and Kurt Sontheimer (Munich: Piper, 1993); *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1958); 'On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding', in her *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 328–60; *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); *On Revolution*; *Between Past and Future*, *The Life of the Mind*.
- 34 See, among others, Bonnie Honig, 'Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic', *The American Political Science Review*, 85.1 (1991), pp. 97–113; Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 136–55; Linda Zerilli, 'Castoriadis, Arendt, and the Problem of the New', *Constellations*, 9.4 (2002), pp. 540–53; Allan Keenan, 'Promises, Promises: The Abyss of Freedom and the Loss of the Political in the Work of Hannah Arendt', in his *Democracy in Question. Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 76–101; Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 187–300; Patchen Markell, 'The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archè, and Democracy', *The American Political Science Review*, 100.1 (2006), pp. 1–14; Lucy Cane, 'Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 14.1 (2015), pp. 55–75; Claudia Hilb, 'El principio del *initium*', in *Revolución y violencia en la filosofía de Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Marco Estrada Saavedra and María Teresa Muñoz (México D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2015), pp. 67–102.
- 35 See, in particular, Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, 102 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1975–), xxxv: *Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie. Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2012); lxv: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1994); lv: *Heraklit. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens. Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos*, ed. by Manfred Frings (1987); lxx: *Über den Anfang*, ed. by Paola-Ludovika Coriando (2005); lxxi: *Das Ereignis*, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (2009); lxxiii.1–2: *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, ed. by Peter Trawny (2013).

gen *Philosophie hilft nur Philosophie*) must not be disregarded:³⁶ to interrogate the question of the politicality of the ‘beginning’ in an Arendtian fashion requires scrutinizing its philosophical vein in order to deactivate the exceptionalist impulses inherent to the act of beginning. Arendt acknowledges this important facet of the ‘philosophico-political problem’ against the backdrop of modern revolutions and totalitarianism. She does not brush aside the pitfall of exceptionalism when she returns to Heidegger’s thinking only to go beyond it since, for her, the politicality of the ‘beginning’ lies in its plural character: beginnings are, in Arendt’s view, set off by the ‘endless variety of a multitude whose majesty resided in its very plurality.’³⁷

Bypassing the scandal sparked by a catastrophic interpretation of the tale of the fox, I have attempted to bring to light a theoretical impasse: either interpreters have disregarded how Arendt’s notion of ‘beginning’ is rooted in her *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger or they have taken that dispute into account but overlooked the risks inherent to the Heideggerian understanding of the ‘beginning’ as an extraordinary event. In order to fully address the question of ‘beginning’, it is, I argue, vital to return to that impasse. Once it is disentangled, it becomes evident that both a ‘principle of an-archy’ and the basic experience of its *common* institution animate political foundation. It is at the core of ‘bad weather’, then, that a promise to withstand and multiply beginnings lies.

WEATHERING BEGINNINGS OR THE AN-ARCHIC PROMISE

The story of Heidegger and Arendt was re-written more than once. During her first semester at the Philipps-Universität Marburg, Arendt attended Heidegger’s seminar on Plato’s *Sophist*, which included a reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. This first encounter had lasting theoretical consequences in Arendt’s work and, particularly, in her contention with the philosophical tradition. Indeed, her interest in the

36 See Arendt’s letter to Dolf Sternberger dated 26 August 1949 in Hannah Arendt, *Wahrheit gibt es nur zu zweien. Briefe an die Freunde*, ed. by Ingeborg Nordmann (Munich: Piper, 2013), p. 86.

37 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 93. See also Hannah Arendt, ‘Philosophy and Politics’, *Social Research*, 57.1 (1990), pp. 73–103.

notion of ‘beginning’ emerged precisely during the ‘Marburg days’. As Arendt reminds us, though, intense engagement with this topic is not incidental: the question of ‘political beginnings’ is as old as philosophical concerns with politics in general.³⁸ Approaching the atavisms of tradition as a means to engage the abyssal character of political modernity, Arendt undertakes a far-reaching theoretical investigation that releases ‘political beginnings’ from the pure spontaneity of the great event and *the given*.

Despite not having access to the recently published seminars and notebooks in which Heidegger advocates a fusion of ‘ontology’ and ‘politics’ as a key to understanding the ‘new beginning’, Arendt refutes some of his basic assumptions on founding moments in politics. If, in the Heideggerian constellation, grasping an extraordinary beginning and the great mission of a ‘we’ is based on the repudiation of clumsy repetition and requires ‘destroying destruction’ (*détruire la destruction*),³⁹ if that *neuer Anfang* is inextricably related to a ‘fundamental experience’ (*Grunderfahrung*) expressed in the figures of ‘danger’ (*Gefahr*), ‘self-affirmation’ (*Selbstbehauptung*), and ‘destiny’ (*Schicksal*),⁴⁰ then, by contrast, the Arendtian endeavour focuses on what, in reference to the formulation of one of her most sophisticated collaborators, Reiner Schürmann, we might call the ‘an-archic principle’ inherent in every ‘beginning’.⁴¹ Arendt’s ‘political beginning’ lies beyond an exceptionalist scene that seeks to bring to a halt the decline of the West and, to that end, exacerbates the intimate fusion of ‘ontology’ and ‘politics’, of the *Dasein* and the German people.

In releasing ‘beginning’ from its ontological substratum, Arendt, *thinking with and against Heidegger*, returns to the question of ‘political inception’. She observes that the *Anfang* is *based on* the paradox of its self-institution. This realization, I argue, evidences that Arendt’s rendition of ‘political beginnings’ constitutes one of the highest points

38 In her 1969 birthday tribute to Heidegger, Arendt states: ‘Plato once remarked that “the beginning [Anfang] is also a god; so long as he dwells among human beings, he redeems all things” (*Laws* 775)’ (Arendt, ‘Martin Heidegger ist achtzig Jahre alt’, p. 232; my emphasis).

39 See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Banalité de Heidegger* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2015), p. 42.

40 Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI*, pp. 160–62.

41 See Reiner Schürmann, *Le Principe d’anarchie. Heidegger et la question de l’agir* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

in her examination of the ineradicable tension between ‘philosophy’ and ‘politics’. Without absolutes — which implies questioning philosophical intervention in the political domain — ‘beginnings’ cannot be grounded on the itineraries of an exceptionalist ‘history of Being’ or of ‘history as drama of being’ (*l’histoire comme drame de l’être*).⁴² ‘Beginnings’ undergo, rather, the an-archic pluralization at stake in any extra-ordinary act of political foundation. ‘An-archic’ has a specific meaning: to ‘begin’ with, the *archē* of a principle inheres the fusion of ‘its beginning (*commencement*) and its rule (*commandement*)’.⁴³ Conversely, the anarchic ‘lacks simple ultimacy’ and counteracts any *principial* reference by being a ‘force of dislocation, of plurification’ regarding fully constituted *archē* as point of origin and governance.⁴⁴

Through an understanding of ‘beginning’ as a conjunction of inaugural actions governed by an ‘an-archic principle’, Arendt can elaborate a response both to the widespread confusion regarding the domains of labour, work, and action, and to the traditional representation of the Platonic myth of the cave where the polis, grounded on the *agáthōn*, is, ultimately, assumed to be the founding myth of every political theory. Arendt’s critical assessment of the philosophical tradition — from Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes, Marx, and Heidegger — shows that, in elaborating the notion of ‘beginning’, she is trying to find ways of thematizing political groundings without upholding a principle that lies beyond human affairs. The ‘an-archic principle’ innate to the ‘beginning’ can only exist in confrontation with the provenance of the One as fusion of origin and rule. Politically, it implies that ‘power under the condition of human plurality can never amount to omnipotence, and laws residing on human power can never be absolute.’⁴⁵ Detecting the limits and promises of an an-archic ‘beginning’ — a ‘beginning’ *without banisters* — means, then, bringing to the fore the contours of the exceptionalist Heideggerian trap. And that is no mean feat. Arendt herself

42 For this formulation, see Alain Badiou, *Le Séminaire. Heidegger. L’Être 3 — Figure du retrait. 1986–1987* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), p. 122.

43 Schürmann, *Le Principe d’anarchie*, p. 42.

44 Schürmann, ‘Technicity, Topology, Tragedy: Heidegger on “That Which Saves” in the Global Reach’, in *Technology in the Western Political Tradition*, ed. by Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zimman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 190–213 (p. 199); *Le Principe d’anarchie*, p. 16.

45 Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 39.

pointed out the risks of her former professor's siren song: 'Come here, everyone; this is a trap, the most beautiful trap in the world [*die schönste Falle der Welt*].'⁴⁶

One way of circumventing the magnetism of a trap that offers the ecstasy of the extraordinary is to associate the 'an-archic principle' of 'beginning' with the basic experience of 'bad weather' — a weather that, expressing the force of contingency, ameliorates exceptionalist myths around the grandeur and singularity of political foundations. Arendt vehemently contests narratives that constrict the 'manyness of beginnings'. The figure of the great founder understood as an ontological supplement of 'the political' must give way to the idea of democratic 'ordinary glories'. Arendt's commitment to a 'politics of the ordinary', to be sure, does not mean suppressing that which erupts unpredictably or that which challenges the status quo.⁴⁷ At stake in the 'an-archic principle' of 'political beginnings' is not the contraposition of ordinary and extraordinary moments, but rather recognition of 'anonymous glory'. That is why Arendt appreciates the 'nameless heroes' (*namenlose Helden*), the 'common man' (*gewöhnlicher Mensch*), the 'anybody and everybody' (*irgendwer und jedermann*) who is 'ruled by his laws and not by mysterious forces [*geheimnisvolle Kräfte*] emanating from above or from below'.⁴⁸

Ultimately, my returning to Arendt's *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger, to the *sotto voce* dispute between them over how to narrate the experience of the 'beginning', was not merely an exegetic matter. It was

46 Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, p. 403; 'Heidegger the Fox', p. 362.

47 Arendt makes this point crystal clear by affirming that 'the *common* and the *ordinary* must remain our primary concern, the daily food of our thought — if only because it is from them that the *uncommon* and the *extraordinary* emerge'. Hannah Arendt, 'Action and the Pursuit of Happiness', Paper delivered at the Meeting of the American Political Science Association, The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress, MSS Box 61, 1960, pp. 1–21 (p. 2; my emphasis). See also Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, p. 224; Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. xviii.

48 Hannah Arendt, 'Franz Kafka, von neuem gewürdigt', *Die Wandlung*, 1.12 (1945/1946), pp. 1050–62 (pp. 1058 and 1062); 'Franz Kafka', in her *Die verborgene Tradition. Essays* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 95–116 (pp. 108 and 115); 'Franz Kafka: A Reevaluation. On the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of his Death', in her *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 69–80 (pp. 76 and 80). See also Étienne Tassin, 'Les Gloires ordinaires: Actualité du concept arendtien d'espace public', *Cahiers Sens Public*, 15–16 (2013), pp. 23–36; Patchen Markell, 'Anonymous Glory', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 16.1 (2017), pp. 77–99.

also an attempt to open up a space to re-ask what the promise of politics should be today. Current struggles against climate change, exploitation, neo-colonialism, extractivism, patriarchy, and racism, prove that a 'politics of the ordinary' cannot rely on redemptive figures that incarnate the myth of leadership. Beginning anew, thus, can only commence if we accept that, not anymore univocal, 'political beginnings' should stage and enact the plural 'power of the many'. The storms can only be weathered if beginnings appear as they are: common and mundane occurrences that hold in them the potential to interdigitate, proliferate, and to push towards a radicalization of the democratic adventure.

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