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THAT THERE BE A BEGINNING": ARENDT AND NATALITY

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Abstract
Hannah Arendt's concept of natality is customarily read as a response to Heidegger's death-oriented philosophy, a vestige of Arendt's earlier occupation with Augustine, or a remnant of Arendt's brush with Jewish messianism by way of Walter Benjamin. This essay argues that the novelty of Arendt's concept of natality cannot simply be reduced to Heidegger's or any other philosophical influence. The essay urges the reader to take seriously the historical and political context within which Arendt deploys natality, i.e., the devastating experience of totalitarianism. For Arendt, natality is intertwined with the power to begin and initiate new in the world. The experience of political isolation, superfluousness, and loss of freedom under totalitarian regimes suggest to Arendt the exigency of theorizing a response. Arendt, therefore, formulates natality as a safeguard. Totalitarianism as a regime of oppression seeks to erase action and plurality, and Arendt as a response cements the possibility of human freedom in the irreducible human condition of natality.

Keywords: *Hannah Arendt, Natality, Totalitarianism, Action, Freedom*

BAŞLANGIÇ OLSUN DİYE": ARENDT VE DOĞUMLULUK

Özet

Hannah Arendt'in doğumluluk kavramı, geleneksel olarak Arendt'in Heidegger, Augustine, Benjamin gibi çeşitli düşünürlerle felsefi etkileşiminin sonucunda oluşmuş bir yanıt olarak okunur. Bu makale, Arendt'ın doğumluluk kavramının yeniliğini ve orjinalliğini vurgularken, kavramın basitçe bu felsefi etkilere karşı geliştirilmiş bir yanıta indirgenemeyeceğini savunuyor. Bunun yerine makalede yirminci yüzyılın siyasi deneyimlerinden esinlenen alternatif bir anlayış sunuluyor ve okuyucu Arendt'in doğumsallık deneyimini yerleştirdiği kavramsal çerçeveyi yani totalitarizmin yıkıcı tecrübesini ciddiye almaya teşvik ediliyor. Arendt'e göre doğumluluk başlama ve yeniyi başlatma gücüyle iç içedir. Totaliter rejimler altında yaşanan siyasi izolasyon ve özgürlüğün kaybedilmesi deneyimleri Arendt'e bir karşı teori oluşturmanın gerekliliğini düşündürür. Bir baskı rejimi olarak totalitarizm, eylemi ve çoğulluğu ortadan kaldırmaya çalışırken Arendt de yanıt olarak doğumluluk kavramını geliştirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Hannah Arendt, Doğumluluk, Totalitarizm, Eylem, Özgürlük*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Natality is a fundamental notion of Hannah Arendt's political thought. Some scholars even consider the concept of natality Arendt's most important philosophical contribution. Hauke Brunkhorst, for example, argues that "the essential innovation of Arendt's political anthropology in *The Human Condition* was her idea of *natality*" (2001, p. 188). Peg Birmingham's examination of Arendt's conception of rights reveals natality as human rights' ontological foundation (2006). Natality, for Arendt, links to the capacity to begin anew. Each human being born into this world is inherently capable of action, which in turn has the potential to make a real difference to the world. This connection is the essence of Arendt's political thought: the belief that new beginnings, enabled by natality, can lead to transformation and renewal.

How and why did Arendt formulate natality? Depending on how they assess Arendt's philosophical affinities, scholars have provided varying answers to this question, counting among Arendt's philosophical roots the influence of Martin Heidegger, St. Augustine, and Walter Benjamin. This essay argues that the novelty of Hannah Arendt's concept of natality cannot be reduced to any single philosophical influence. Instead, it is necessary to attend to the historical and political context within which Arendt deploys natality. This context is the devastating experience of totalitarianism that Arendt personally witnessed and then systematically analyzed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Arendt diagnoses totalitarianism as a system that overturned all the rules of ethics and morality. In order to totally control and mobilize its subjects, totalitarianism aimed at erasing every trace of individuality and spontaneity. It reduced political action to fully controllable and otherwise superfluous behavior; it completely denied human agency and potential. This essay demonstrates that Arendt conceptualizes natality as a response to this world-denying character of totalitarian government. Arendt recognizes the logic of totalitarianism and uses natality as a powerful tool to imagine the possibility of revitalizing political action and collectively rebuilding our common political world.

This essay proceeds as follows: In the following section, an overview of different approaches to interpreting natality in Arendt scholarship is presented. The third section reconstructs the main elements of Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism. The fourth section examines Arendt's *The Human Condition* to evaluate how Arendt employs the concept of natality as a guarantee of our common world against the threat of totalitarianism. The final section offers some concluding thoughts.

2. UNDERSTANDING NATALITY

Hannah Arendt's concept of natality has been the subject of much scholarly analysis. How scholars respond to natality depends on how they assess the philosophical roots of Arendt's work. Arendt's concept of natality is customarily read as a response to Martin Heidegger's death-oriented philosophy, a vestige of Arendt's earlier occupation with Augustine, or a remnant of Arendt's brush with Jewish messianism by way of Walter Benjamin. This section presents an overview of these different approaches to Arendt's concept of natality and demonstrates how they fail to account for the concept of natality with respect to the totalitarian experience of the twentieth century.

One approach to understanding natality is by way of Arendt's philosophical connection to Martin Heidegger. Arendt's interest in philosophy was cultivated under the tutelage of Heidegger when she attended the University of Marburg in 1924. Heidegger was a young, popular, and captivating lecturer. Even though the publication of his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, was still a few years away, he had a dedicated following among the students (Arendt, 1971).

Published in the spring of 1927 and instantly acknowledged for its originality and novelty by his contemporaries, Heidegger's *Being and Time* begins with a diagnosis: The question of Being is forgotten in our historical time (Heidegger, 1962, p. 21). Moreover, this forgottenness of the Being is also no longer noticed, we have become immune to realizing that we are in fact always moved to ask the question of Being. With this diagnosis, Heidegger sets the task of his masterpiece: to question, recover and formulate the meaning

of Being, the *Dasein* (1962, p. 24). In Heidegger's understanding of Dasein, death takes the center stage. Death is not only an attribute that human beings share with the rest of the natural world but an ontological condition. Being-towards-death is present from the very beginning, and as such determines human existence: "The "end of being-in-the-word is death. This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being - that is to say, to existence - limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein […]. [A]s something of the character of Dasein, death is only in an existentiell *Being towards death* [*Sein zum Tode*]"(Heidegger, 1962, pp. 276–277).

But if death is constitutive of human experience, then so is birth. Death is the end of human existence while birth or natality corresponds to the beginning. Heidegger notes birth as a mode of Dasein's existence: "But death is only the "end" of Dasein […] The other "end," however, is the "beginning," the "birth." Only that entity which is "between" birth and death presents the whole which we have been seeking" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 425). Yet, while he acknowledges birth as the act that marks the beginning of Dasein's existence, Heidegger fails to attribute the same ontological status or philosophical importance to natality. In fact, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's references to birth are many times coupled with death, as he uses these two events for bookending Dasein: Dasein is "described as "the connectedness" between birth;" it "*stretches along between* birth and death" (1962, p. 425). Birth never achieves the same existential significance as death, and is always secondary: "Factical Dasein exists as born; and, as born, it is already dying, in the sense of Being-towards-death" (1962, p. 426).

If Heidegger's main concern is with death and mortality, how can Arendt's emphasis on natality be interpreted in regard to Heidegger's philosophy? The claim here is based on the observation that Heidegger's focus on death is not unique, but instead even loyal to the Western philosophical tradition's interest in mortality. In that sense, scholars read Arendt as not only a direct response to Heidegger but also "a long-needed balance to the tradition's apparent prejudice" (Bowen-Moore, 1989, p. 5).

According to Samuel Moyn, for example, Arendt's dissertation on Augustine is an implicit critique of Heidegger (Moyn, 2005, p. 79). In her analysis of the concept of neighborly love in Augustine, Arendt focuses on the condition of "being-with-others." Arendt's attention to the commonly shared nature of our social world is sorely lacking in Heidegger's understanding of the Dasein. Pointing out this opposition, Moyn places Arendt's work in direct contrast to Heidegger's. Dana Villa also reads Arendt as adopting and politicizing the philosophical concerns raised by Heidegger, specifically in *Being and Time*. Villa argues that Heidegger starts to think about freedom "existentially and ontologically." "This," Villa continues "is a necessary, albeit, insufficient, step toward the elucidation of freedom as a mode of being-of-the world, which Arendt's political theory undertakes" (Villa, 1996, p. 119). In other words, Villa sees a direct continuation of Heidegger's concerns about freedom in Arendt.

Seyla Benhabib (2003), on the other hand, presents a philosophical account of the differences between the approaches of the two thinkers. Benhabib starts by criticizing scholars who detect an unmistakable debt to Heidegger in Arendt's philosophy. Benhabib, too, defines natality first with reference to Heidegger: "that we are born or, in Heidegger's terms, "thrown" into a world that precedes our existence and within which alone we become who we are" (2003, p. 109). But she continues to observe that the philosophical significance that Arendt attributes to the world as a space of appearance is radically different from Heidegger's. According to Benhabib, by reformulating the world as a space of human interaction, Arendt has restored its dignity. For Heidegger, "despite all disclaimers, terms such as *fallenness, thrownness, inauthenticity, idle talk, the "they"* carry the unmistakable connotations of a Christian theology that view the world as the domain of fallen sinners…The Platonic-Christian denigration and devaluation of this world is betrayed by [Heidegger's] terminology" (Benhabib, 2003, p. 111). On the contrary, careful consideration of fundamental concepts employed by Arendt in *the Human Condition*, "such as natality, plurality, and action reveal how profoundly they are opposed to those of Heidegger's *Being and Time.*"(Benhabib, 2003, p. 107). In fact, Benhabib asserts that Heidegger was completely silent on the ground-breaking work of his former student Arendt because, in it, Arendt had completely undermined the fundamental assumptions of Heidegger's work (2003, p. 104). According to Benhabib, "with her work *The Human Condition*, Arendt found her own

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philosophical voice" (2003, p. 103).

How was Arendt's unique philosophical voice shaped? Arendt not only recognized the worldliness of the world but also recast the public as the realm of human action and interaction. This double recognition (of the world as a space of appearance, and action and speech as constitutive of human freedom) ultimately constitutes the distinct philosophical mark of Arendt as different from her teacher Heidegger. But an insightful reading of this mark necessitates attending to Arendt's views on totalitarianism and its devastating effects on the human world. This will be undertaken in part three.

While Benhabib problematizes the connection between Heidegger and Arendt from a philosophical point of view, Miguel Vatter (2014) presents us with a linguistic assessment. Vatter reminds us that Arendt begins to employ the term natality only in English and mostly from the 1950s on. She also translates the natality into German as "Natalität," which is far removed from the way Heidegger uses the term. Heidegger himself utilizes "only the adjective gebürtig (native), which he employs adverbially," and moreover "does not assign to birth the capacity or faculty (designated in German by -keit, in English by -ity) that Arendt assigns to it" (Vatter, 2014, p. 131). The linguistic analysis, in other words, seems to indicate that Arendt was operating under a separate set of concerns than responding to Heidegger's philosophy.

Arendt's engagement with Augustine constitutes the second interpretive context in the literature for the concept of natality. While according to Moyn, Arendt's interest in Augustine falls by the wayside due to "the demands of secular philosophy" (2005, pp. 84–85), others continue to trace the influence of Augustine on Arendt's work and argue that natality amounts to a "secularized theological value" (Biss, 2012, p. 763). Patricia Bowen-Moore is one such example. According to her, Arendt's concept of natality emerged directly from her work on Augustine (Bowen-Moore, 1989, pp. 9–12). The Augustine connection is strengthened by the fact that Arendt repeatedly quotes the Christian philosopher: "That there be a beginning, Man was created."*

Roberto Esposito (2017) reads Arendt's concept of natality in a similar vein. While he acknowledges the inventiveness of Arendt as she "does not abandon the reference to Saint Augustine but utilizes it partially against itself," he still argues that any completely secular reading of the concept would be overly simplistic, as Arendt's discourse is always intertwined with a theological terminology (2017, p. 14).

While these scholars are right to underline the Augustinian influence on Arendt's concept of natality, this view neglects to consider the context in which Arendt hearkens back to Augustine. Arendt's reiteration of Augustine's words appears in her work in the context of freedom. But this is not an abstract, intellectual exercise on the meaning of freedom. On the contrary, "To the question of politics," Arendt contends, "the problem of freedom is crucial" (1998, p. 145). The idea of freedom, with which natality as we shall see below is closely intertwined, cannot be considered apart from the experience of political life and political organization (Arendt, 1998, p. 146). Then the question becomes, what is the political context? What is the political experience that motivates Arendt to reach for the concept of natality? The answer, as will be discussed in part three, is totalitarianism.

A third context for interpreting Arendt's work is Jewish messianism. Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb (2003) claims that *The Human Condition* belongs unequivocally to the tradition of Jewish messianic thought. In his later reflections, Walter Benjamin muses about a "weak messianic force," with which every generation is endowed (2007, p. 254). According to Gottlieb, Arendt adopts Benjamin's messianism and even goes one step further than her friend, when she "replaces Benjamin's vague word *generation (Geschlecht),* with the technical term *natality*"(Gottlieb, 2003, p. 139). Gottlieb argues that, unlike Benjamin, Arendt has an inconspicuous strain of messianic tradition in her thinking, but the messianic force which can save the world

* *[Initium] ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit.* "that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody." Arendt's own translation (Arendt, 1998, p. 177). In the footnote to this reference, Arendt also remarks that Agustine uses two different words to indicate begining. According to her, the word *principium,* which corresponds to the beginning of the world has a less radical meaning than, *initium*, which corresponds to the beginning of man. A slightly differently worded version of the quotation also appears in Arendt's essay, *What is Freedom?* (1977, p. 167).

from ruin is, nevertheless, articulated.**

This essay argues that for Arendt, natality is intertwined with the power to begin and initiate new in the world. Why do we need the new? What is wrong with the old? The next section demonstrates that the experience of totalitarianism suggests to Arendt the exigency of theorizing a way out – out of isolation and superfluousness. In this regard, this article shares a similar starting point with Vatter (2014), who traces the origin of Arendt's concept of natality to the totalitarian experience. His argument, however, reduces totalitarianism to an instance of modern biopolitics in which death is implicit, and Arendt's natality to a form of "affirmative biopolitics" (Vatter, 2014, p. 141). However, as Esposito, whose writings on biopolitics informed Vatter's essay claims, "The truth is that Arendt didn't think the category of life thoroughly enough and therefore was unable to interpret life's relationship with politics philosophically" (2008, p. 150). So instead of subsuming Arendt's originality under a philosophical concept, which Foucault invented and employed much later than Arendt, this essay seeks to underline the explicitly political connection of natality to action. Natality is the backbone of not only Arendt's anti-totalitarian politics but also a promising political theory of action and freedom. The next section turns to Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism.

3. THE LOGIC OF TOTALITARIANISM

Arendt's most poignant insights on totalitarianism are distilled to their essence in the final chapter of the third volume.*** Arendt's analysis begins with the following reflection: Is totalitarianism essentially a completely novel, unprecedented system of oppression (1973, p. 460)? Arendt wonders if "there is such a thing as the nature of totalitarian government, whether it has its own essence" (1973, p. 460). Or is totalitarianism a "makeshift arrangement," that borrows its methods and instruments from the storehouse of history, i.e. those regimes that we already are familiar with namely; tyranny, despotism, and dictatorship? Arendt's answer to this question is that ultimately totalitarianism has a *sui generis* nature.

In terms of both its ideological conviction and its political organization, totalitarianism appears to be an unprecedented phenomenon. As far as ideology is concerned, employing terror as its instrument, totalitarianism created a parallel world immune to reality. In this ideological universe, totalitarian regimes blurred the line between good and evil, crime and punishment. In this totalitarian world, neither law nor morality nor common sense could supply individuals with a reliable yardstick for political action. In terms of its political organization, totalitarian regimes altered ordinary mechanisms of politics, which served to integrate specific interests of the citizens into the decision-making processes under normal circumstances: from classes to masses, from party politics to mass movement, and from the army to police. The basic human experience underlying totalitarianism, according to Arendt, is isolation in the political realm and loneliness in the private sphere. This, according to Arendt, is the essence (or spirit à la Montesquieu) of totalitarianism as a political regime.

How do we understand this claim? The first question to ask is who is the subject of totalitarian government? Totalitarianism does not concern itself with specific individuals or their actions. It does not pertain to human beings as specific bodies here and in the now. Rather it concerns itself with humanity as a whole, the totality of the human species. But of course, this totality does not exist; totalitarian regimes need to actively fabricate it. This fabrication "eliminates individuals for the sake of species, sacrifices the "parts" for the sake of the whole" (Arendt, 1973, p. 465). In other words, specific individuals here and now become completely superfluous, a "necessary sacrifice" in the service of totality. Totalitarianism destroys the plurality of humankind and as Arendt puts it, reduces it to "one Man of gigantic dimensions"(1973, p. 466).

The force of totalitarian ideology aims to bring every human action under control. Human beings are expected to submit to "historical necessity." Yet, this expectation is betrayed time and again by the very exis-

** The affinities between Arendt's political thought and Walter Benjamin's messianism is interesting albeit outside the confines of this paper. For a detailed analysis, see Ilhan Demiryol (2018).

*** This last chapter, entitled "Ideology and Terror: A New Form of Government" was published separately from the book in 1953, and starting with the German edition of 1955 incorporated into the actual volume. A detailed historical and theoretical account how the separate parts of *The Origins* fit together or fail to do so is presented by Roy T. Tsao (2002).

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tence of human beings, who are born free and with a will to action. Human freedom, in other words, is incompatible with the needs of a totalitarian movement. Therefore totalitarian regimes need terror in practical terms; "terror is the essence of totalitarian domination" (Arendt, 1973, p. 464). Terror ensures that whoever the movement deems to be "the objective enemy," the Jews, the Roma, the weak and disabled, the gay and lesbian, and the political opponent is done away with (Arendt, 1973, p. 465). Terror is the accelerator that allows the totalitarian regime to realize its historical or natural supposed destiny.

Totalitarianism, according to Arendt, has two fundamental characteristics. First, totalitarianism substitutes ideology for reason and independent thinking. Ideologies according to Arendt's definition are "systems of explanation of life and world that claim to explain everything, past, and future, without further concurrence with actual experience" (2005a, p. 349). This last point of "arrogant emancipation from reality and experience" is crucial (Arendt, 2005a, p. 350). "Ideological thinking," Arendt, continues "is independent of all reality, it looks upon all factuality as fabricated, therefore no longer knows any criteria for distinguishing truth from falsehood" (2005a, p. 350). In other words, totalitarianism provides individuals with an ironclad worldview. For the true believer, it is a promising prospect: the world around us can be safely explained away with cliches, nothing is unexpected, and nothing is unpredictable. Its allure lies in the promise of protection from the volatility of human affairs in general.

From the outside, though, it presents us with a problem and a political problem at that. The ideological conviction is immune to reality, the world of empirical facts. Our societies, on the other hand, are built on this world that we hold in common. The material world provides our thinking with objects of thought, and the very act of critical thinking depends on our connection to reality, this world of mutual existence. Totalitarianism, by severing the ties of their followers with reality and substituting it for ideology, also severs their connection to each other. They become isolated atoms in a totalitarian universe as opposed to engaged citizens of a vibrant political space. This political isolation is the underlying condition that totalitarianism both creates and in return feeds upon. It is the real threat that totalitarianism poses to our societies.

The second aspect of totalitarian regimes is that they destroy the public space, the space of freedom within which action can take place. According to Arendt, free human action takes place in the public, both as a sphere of appearance and physical environment. Totalitarianism effectively destroys the very foundations of this public sphere. The public sphere under totalitarianism, according to Arendt, can be compared neither to the Hobbesian state of nature, where all is at war against all nor to the despotic power of one person, who is at war with all. Sure, despotic leaders stifle the voice of their citizens and diminish their living space. The result would be a "desert," a barren field populated only by isolation, fear, and suspicion vis-à-vis your fellow citizens. But even this space would still leave room for action. Totalitarianism, on the other hand, destroys "also the lawless, fenceless, wilderness of fear and suspicion which tyranny leaves behind" (Arendt, 1973, p. 466). Totalitarianism annihilates the space between human beings, and along with it the capacity to move and the capacity to act: "It substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron," which squeezes them so tightly together that all difference, individuality, spontaneity disappears (Arendt, 1973, p. 465). The plurality of individual human beings gets fused into a predictable and controllable entity. The result is the total annihilation of humanity, agency, and spontaneity.

4. NATALITY AS A RESPONSE TO TOTALITARIANISM

Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism is certainly bleak. The concept of natality is born out of and as a response to this totalitarian experience. Arendt's empirical observations on both the history and political events of her day from the democratic experience of the council system during the short-lived Hungarian Revolution to anti-Vietnam war protests in the United States demonstrated that action is possible under even the most unlikely circumstances. In totalitarian regimes, which do everything in their power to annihilate human agency, plurality, and spontaneity, are there any guarantees for freedom? The answer, for Arendt, is natality.

Natality makes its first appearance in *The Human Condition* as one of the conditions of human existence. Along with life, worldliness, plurality, and earth, Arendt considers natality and mortality as the conditioning forces under which life is given to human beings. The discussion of the human condition constitutes

Arendt's answer to the tradition of Western political thought. For Arendt, the problem of human nature, which has occupied the philosophers, is in fact "unanswerable in both its individual psychological sense and its general philosophical sense" (Arendt, 1998, p. 10). Instead of trying to answer the question of "who we are," Arendt chooses to focus on how human life is conditioned by the world around us, both given to human beings and of their own making. The weight of the world of things around is felt by human beings as a conditioning force.

What is natality? Etymologically, natality comes from "natus," the Latin word for born. It means that human beings enter this world through the event of "birth." It is the corollary to the event of death, by which human beings exit the world. But Arendt uses the concept of natality with a special, and arguably political significance. This is evident when we compare the instances in which she uses the concept of natality with the instances where she uses birth. One such use of the concept of "birth" comes up in the middle of Arendt's discussion on the distinction between private and public realms. Here, Arendt describes the household as "the realm of birth and death which must be hidden from the public realm because it harbors the things hidden from human eyes and impenetrable to human knowledge. It is hidden because man does not know where he comes from when he is born and where he goes when he dies" (Arendt, 1998, p. 63). Hence, birth is a private event even though it is common to all, and everybody participates in it. Birth is the "supreme event" of appearance into the world. Natality is its, one may call, political face – the insertion into the public sphere. Natality is the entry into the world we inhabit in common with others.

Margaret Canovan argues that "Hannah Arendt is preeminently the theorist of beginnings" (1998, p. vii). The uniquely human capacity of beginning something new is expressed by Arendt with reference to the concept of action. Action is uniquely human, "the exclusive prerogative of man;" because she adds "neither a beast nor a God is capable of it" (Arendt, 1998, pp. 22–23). Action (and speech, which for Arendt are closely connected), relate to the twofold character of human existence: equality and distinction. Human beings are each different and unique, and precisely because of that we need speech and action to explain ourselves to others. Yet, we are at the same time equal, because without this equality no understanding would be possible between human beings (Arendt, 1998, pp. 175–176). Nobody, according to Arendt, can refrain from action and continue to be human. Action, in this sense, is distinct from other kinds of activity. Take labor for example:

> "Men can very well live without laboring, they can force other to labor for them … the life of an exploiter or slave-holder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human. A life without speech and action, on the other hand - … - is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men" (Arendt, 1998, p. 176)

Action is the essential quality of life, without which human existence would be unthinkable.

While action is different from work and labor, it is also different from behavior. Arendt notes this when she talks about the "rise of the social." Society expects individuals to behave in a certain kind of fashion. Through imposing rules, the society tries to "'normalize' the members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action and outstanding achievement." (Arendt, 1998, p. 40) This tendency inherent in the idea of society to equalize individuals by making them conform to a pre-given standard of behavior has only worsened under the condition of modern mass society. This situation Arendt argues can be readily observed in the rise of economics as the social science par excellence (Arendt, 1998, p. 42). Arendt's point here is that while behavior implies following rules, customs, norms, and social practices, action implies the complete opposite: using one's imagination and judgment, taking charge, and initiating. Behavior is predictable, action is indeterminate.

What is the connection between beginning, action, and natality? Natality is the human condition that is most closely connected to action: each human being born into this world, for Arendt, is inherently capable of beginning something new. There is, then, an inherent connection between natality and the capacity to begin.

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What does this mean? Wolfhart Totschnig formulates this claim as follows: according to Arendt, "we possess the capacity to make a new beginning because we are, each of us, through birth, a new beginning"(-Totschnig, 2017, p. 333). So birth, not just any birth in nature but a human birth, brings into the world a new human beginning: "With each birth, something uniquely new comes into the world" (Arendt, 1998, p. 178). The importance that Arendt attributes to natality, action, and the connection between the two can be observed in the following quote: "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, … is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted" (Arendt, 1998, p. 247). The capacity for new beginnings that comes from natality, the birth of a new human being into the world is nothing short of a miracle.

Up to this point, all the discussion of natality comes from *The Human Condition*. But consider the following two quotations:

> (1) "With each birth, a new beginning is born into the world, a new world has potentially come into being." (Arendt, 1973, p. 465)
>
> (2) "Men are being born and … therefore each of them is a new beginning, begins, in a sense, the world anew"(Arendt, 1973, p. 466).

These quotes reiterate the same arguments as above, yet they appear right in the middle of the final chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In these paragraphs, Arendt herself points out the link between natality as a beginning and totalitarian regimes. What exactly is the connection?

Arendt makes the connection most explicit in the following quote:

> "From the totalitarian point of view, the fact that men are born and die can only be regarded as an annoying interference with higher forces. Terror, therefore, as the obedient servant of natural or historical movement has to eliminate from the process not only freedom in any specific sense, but the very source of freedom which is given with the fact of birth of man and resides in his capacity to make a new beginning." (Arendt, 1973, p. 466)

Arendt's point is this: each human being is "unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable" (1998, p. 97). The newcomers do not fit into a predetermined mold or model. They have varied interests and viewpoints. Each newcomer brings to this world a new perspective. Their very insertion into the world has the potential to start a new chain of events or divert the previously organized ones set into motion. Each human beginning is the possibility of a new beginning. And this potentiality is exactly the nightmare of totalitarianism.

The good news for humanity is that this plurality cannot be indefinitely reduced, because natality is the very guarantee of it. As long as human beings are born, we can hold on to the hope that new actions will be set off, and new avenues will open up. Natality is therefore closely connected to action, initiative, spontaneity, and the ability to change the course of human events. The outcome is contingent, and unpredictable but can potentially overturn existing power configurations, and explode the existing life circumstances. Natality is our society's safeguard against totalitarianism.

Arendt brings all these suggestions together when she announces that the experience of natality and its connection to action is the only thing that is capable of bestowing upon human affairs faith and hope. She notes that the Greek antiquity, which inspired to a great extent her understanding of the public space, had no room for either of these human experiences, the first for being too uncommon and unimportant, and the second an illusion if not the last remaining evil in Pandora's box. Yet, with natality, our "faith in and hope for the world" is confirmed (Arendt, 1998, p. 247).

Before concluding, perhaps one remark on Heidegger might be warranted. In noting Arendt's concepts of action and public as the distinct philosophical mark of her political theory, the philosophical distance

of Arendt from her teacher Heidegger was also underlined. In light of the previous discussion, this claim is once again formulated. Natality, for Arendt, is the condition of freedom. As Hauke Brunkhorst puts it, the idea of natality links to the Heideggerian notion of *thrownness (Geworfenheit)* (2001, p. 188). Yet, the Heideggerian notion gives the natality a passive sense: "we can never choose the time, the place, of the circumstances of our birth and life" (2001, p. 188) There is a contingency to the time and place in which our life unfolds. But in Arendt's original and inventive formulation natality takes an active, in fact, thoroughly political significance. Through the power found in the new beginnings, human beings found their political community. Natality is the political mode of actively shaping one's life and one's community. As Jerome Kohn states, ""natality" is a far more politically relevant category than 'mortality'" (Kohn, 2001, p. 126). This active form of natality is what Arendt offers as the core of her political thought, that is, her theory of public and action.

5. CONCLUSION

As a uniquely Arendtian concept, natality is interpreted by scholars as a philosophical response to various influences on Arendt's work. Yet, Arendt herself disavowed the title of philosopher, opting instead for political theory embedded in political reality (Arendt, 2005b, p. 1). Taking this assertion seriously, this essay presented an alternative understanding that is attuned to the political experiences of the twentieth century.

Arendt had observed that totalitarianism was the most destructive political experience of the twentieth century, having serious implications for not only politics and political regimes but also the very possibility of autonomous and free political agency. The ease with which totalitarianism can destroy the public space and reduce spontaneous, unpredictable human action to controllable mass behavior was one of Arendt's most profound insights about this political system. This political experience prompted Arendt to think and formulate a political theory.

Arendt posits against totalitarianism the condition of natality, which grants the potential of every new human being to shape the world anew. Natality highlights the potential of human freedom and the hope that can be inspired by the surprise of the new and unexpected. Natality is thus a crucial reminder of the possibility of a better world, one created through the novelty, freedom, and renewal that only each newborn life can bring.

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