

Arendt, the Body and the Loss of the Political

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After more than two thousand years of metaphysical neglect, the body enjoys an unprecedented renaissance in contemporary thought. From a post-Nietzschean undermining of metaphysical oppositions to the various Marxisms, feminisms, and Darwinian-inspired scientisms, the body registers widely as a significant source of interest. However, despite the best efforts by prominent Arendt scholars to rehabilitate the body in her work as well, there remains an irreconcilable tension between the particularity of bodily existence and the universality of political judgment. Although Arendt never simply demonizes or dismisses the body, it is possible to identify the rise of the body as a major contributing factor towards depoliticization, the rise of the social and the demise of politics proper.

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The body never had it so good.¹ After more than two thousand years of disembodiment as an abiding ideal in Western metaphysics, contemporary philosophy bears witness to an unprecedented commitment towards undermining the binary oppositions characteristic of canonical thought. From Nietzsche's affirmation of the body, to Freud's intertwining of mind and body in the practice of psychoanalysis to Marx's unmasking of the physical roots of class ideology, the body has been steadily reclaiming philosophical ground. Aside from post-structuralist thought in general, the explosion of feminist thought on the gendered body in particular has had a decisive effect on the rehabilitation of the body in contemporary philosophy. The analytical tradition has likewise seen a shift towards a more favourable attitude with respect to the body with its renewed appreciation for Darwin and the biological. While still perhaps falling short of a 'revolution', there would be little point in denying that the body has morphed into a major intellectual concern.² The rediscovery of the body is not limited to academia either: interest in the body exploded along with late capitalism. Few would disagree with Roger Cooter that in the post-WWII West, 'people were becoming increasingly obsessed with their bodies. Narcissistic concerns over health and fitness, dieting, weight loss, obesity, personal grooming, drugs for sexual and mental "enhancement", tattoos, body piercing, cosmetic surgery, gender reassignment, organ transplantation, and so on, had left the socio-political preoccupations of the 1960s and 1970s far behind' (Cooter 2010, p.393).

The rise of consumer capitalism and information technology have made desire a topic of discourse on a hitherto unprecedented level. The internet, for example, could be described as a 'database of intentions': it is for all practical purposes the aggregate of every search ever done on it – a record of the dreams, hopes, fears, and desires of humankind. But as the fortunes of the intimate have soared, so has those of politics as an autonomous domain declined. Theorists like Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Bonnie Honig, Luc de Middelaar, William Connolly and Charles Taylor in some or other way all tend to ascribe the withdrawal of the political to the triumph of the liberal ideal of overcoming difference and consolidating identity upon a stable and universal moral subjectivity. As a result, politics has become less of a stage for action than a juridical or administrative task. The most prominent defender of politics as an autonomous realm in the late modern era is, of course, Hannah Arendt. The article proposes first, to give an exposition of the role of the body, the private and the intimate in Arendt, and secondly, to defend the legitimacy of her 'hostility' towards the said realm. While far from immune to criticism, her identification of the body as a primary element in the demise of a political world is valid, and her Aristotelian defence of a separation between *oikos* and *polis* both tenable and politically necessary.

To make sense of the distinctly modern 'loss of the world', Arendt revived Aristotle's adversarial relationship between the private and public spheres as an enabling theme of her critique of contemporary society. In the process of doing so, she tends to follow Aristotle in relegating the body to a secondary existence, tied to the world of necessity and at the very best largely irrelevant to politics. This dismissal has generated its fair share of opposition, notably from feminist and deconstructive perspectives. Richard Bernstein, for example, holds that 'Arendt's categorical distinction between the social and the political is unstable' and that political inattention to matters concerning human vulnerability is not desirable. (Bernstein 1986, p.238).

Confirming Derrida's reading of hierarchical binaries present at the inception of philosophy, Aristotle maintains a strict hierarchical distinction between the *oikia*, the private domain of the household, and the public, political life of the polis, which he regarded as the 'good life.' The good life is one of good and just actions, of ethical and intellectual endeavor. Although a pre-condition of the free life led in the polis, life in the *oikos* is nevertheless occupies a lesser status as it is concerned with the mundane tasks tied to the preservation of the body. The activities of this domain are unfree in two senses. First, because it concerns the inescapable material necessities over which man has limited control and no option but to engage in, such as matters of food, drink, and sleep, as well as the less aesthetically pleasing matters of sex and death. With respect to the daily struggle for physical survival, Arendt writes: '[t]here is no lasting happiness outside the prescribed cycle of painful exhaustion and pleasurable regeneration' (Arendt 1958, p.108). In the second instance, because it is largely organized to meet the demands of continued physical existence, the *oikos* is characterized by relations of inequality: husband over wife, master over slaves, parents over children. According to Aristotle these relationships are natural and unavoidable.

Following Aristotle, Arendt stresses the all-important difference between private and public. For her, this distinction is unavoidable: the private world is driven by necessity, and true freedom is only to be found in the public realm. She makes a by now famous phenomenological distinction between three activities that form the sum of the 'human condition'. At their most basic level, they designate the fundamental human activities to be found in the active life, the *vita activa*, and each of them corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which, Arendt says, 'life has been given to man.' The human condition of labour is life itself. Quintessentially the activity of the *oikos*, labour concerns the bodily processes of production and re-production. It is necessary and unavoidable, but as Dr. Johnson had so famously said about notes to Shakespeare, a 'necessary evil.' It involves the production of consumer goods of ephemeral value such as food, that is consumed as soon as it is produced, and then the process, by necessity, repeats itself, leaving nothing of a more permanent nature behind. Labour sees man at his most animal-like, because as the young Marx said, labour is the metabolism man shares with nature. That Marx elevated *animal laborans* to the highest category of human possibilities is something for which Arendt could never forgive him. Although labour is seldom performed alone, it is the one activity that does not need the presence of others to be practiced. Not that the importance of *animal laborans* can be denied: As Bertold Brecht remarks in *Der Dreigroschenoper*: 'Erst kommt das Fressen und dann die Moral'. First food and then morality. One has to eat first before one can begin to moralize. Or do virtually anything else.

As soon as man began to erect permanent structures between himself and nature however, he became *homo faber*, fabricating man. While labour conforms to the unceasing natural rhythms of growth and decay, the activity of *work* offers a limited degree of mastership over the world and a measure of stability over nature's ceaseless flux. Work may be regarded as artificial: by surrounding himself with a significant number of goods he made himself, man can create a world if not exactly immortal, at least less mortal than himself. In other words, labour allows man to survive, but the products of work survive man. The typical representatives of *homo faber* are the artist, the lawgiver, and the architect. Without them, no space for the unfolding of the drama that is human life would be available. Politics demands a degree of permanence.

Although making or manufacturing man is involved in creating a stabilized unity of potentially immortal objects (or objects at least less mortal than himself), he is still not entirely free in the fully political sense of the word. Whereas the Sisyphusian futility of labor robs it of meaning, the hegemony of the *telos* of work denies this activity of independent value: 'is only a means to produce this end'. Note that Arendt is not saying that works of art themselves are without meaning, but that its value lies in the *object*, not the *activity*, making it strictly speaking irrelevant for the political realm.

The privilege of complete freedom is only to be found in *action*. In Heideggerian spirit, she does not simply recover the Aristotelian notion of action but pushes it to its hermeneutical limits.

Whereas Aristotle, the thinker from antiquity, saw a unified hierarchy between the polis and the *oikos*, Arendt sees a radical discontinuity. Furthermore, where Aristotle saw politics as the final realization of the good life and an end in itself, Arendt takes it a step further: the political community is the arena for the realization of freedom, the very reason for the existence of political life. 'Freedom, moreover, is not only one among the many problems and phenomena of the political realm properly speaking, such as justice, or power, or equality; freedom is actually the reason that men live in political organization at all. Without it, political life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action' (Arendt 1978c, p.146). Politics, as a deliberative and common activity, is ultimately the realization of the potential contained in human plurality, 'the fact that *men* and not *Man* live on earth and inhabit the world'. It makes possible a freedom that is at once worldly, limited and non-sovereign (Villa 1992,p.227). Worldly, because it is the domain of a plural 'We' engaging in changing a common world through an agonistic interplay of viewpoints. It is, Arendt remarks, the very opposite of inner freedom, a freedom into which 'men can escape from external coercion and *feel free*' (Arendt 1978c,p.57). Limited, because action of the self is restricted by the actions of others and the limits of the political stage. Non-sovereign, because like her 'postmodern' contemporaries, she opposes the unity and self-sufficiency of the Cartesian conception of self, claiming instead that the ego's experience of itself is frail and that self-certainty is ultimately dependent on 'fellow creatures to assure us that what was perceived by us was perceived by them too', without which 'we would not even be able to put faith in the way we appear to each other' (Arendt 1978a, p.46). The existence of not only the world, but the very self is thus at stake where there is no politics. It is this common sense that emerges between people, the 'space of appearance', that saves the data that feed the other five senses from merely being the nerve stimuli of a solipsist.

Under conditions of plurality, one always acts in a pre-established network of human relationships, with the accompanying contingencies that cannot be mastered by the *sujet-maître*. This is why entry into the public realm inevitably opens up possibilities for tragedy. Arendt writes: 'It requires courage even to leave the protective security of our four walls and enter the public realm, not because of particular dangers which may lie in wait for us, but because we have arrived in a realm where the concern for life has lost its validity'. (Arendt 1978c, p156).³ Aside from the danger involved in stepping into the limelight, engaging in action has the distinct feature of bringing something new into the world, something that did not exist before. Arendt locates freedom in the feature of natality, the fact that man is born into an already existing web of relationships, but is capable of saving it from a state of reification by enacting change upon it, initializing something new.⁴

Finally, she also differs from Aristotle in firmly associating action with its performative dimension. There is a distinctly Platonic strain left in Aristotle's concern with distinguishing *genuine* political action with those only *appearing* to be virtuous. He therefore insists that every good action must be rooted in good character; otherwise, it would be 'false' and no longer qualify as good. This is a concern that would haunt Rousseau and the Romantics, and have, as will become clear, a debilitating effect upon late modern political life. By framing freedom in terms of virtuosity, Arendt locates freedom firmly in the realm of appearance. She grants freedom an autonomy from morality unknown even to the Greeks. Villa describes Arendt's political theory as the '*sustained attempt to think of praxis outside the teleological framework.*'

She does this by insisting upon a 'second self' beyond the control of the intending or willing 'I' and constituted through the complex, intersubjective medium of discourse. For Arendt, it is important to distinguish between the 'who' of a person – the impersonal persona that appears in public, and the 'what' of a person – generic, biological and psychological trait that make up the private 'personality'. The 'who' of a person is not an essential self but rather a 'revealed' self - a 'who' revealed through a lifetime of deeds and action, and a 'who' who is known better by others than through itself. In Julius Caesar, Shakespeare's most political play, Cassius reminds Brutus: 'Since you cannot see yourself/ I, your glass, will modestly discover to yourself/that of yourself you know not of' (I.ii.50). For this reason, the Greeks regarded friendship as indispensable to the good life. This friendship, however, was a very particular political friendship, a concept completely alien to an age of intimacy. Arendt writes: 'For the Greeks, the essence of friendship consisted of discourse, and since the talk among citizens unified the polis, *philia* or friendship had a political relevance that we as moderns, who are wont to see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, find hard to understand' (Arendt 1968a,p.24). For the Greeks, the capacity for political life (*bios politikos*) allowed for the existence of a nobler, *second* life beyond the restrictions of necessity. The emergence of the *polis* as political unit was preceded by the disintegration of units based on familial kinship, favoring the larger, impersonal space of freedom.

Arendt is perfectly willing to concede that there *are* moments where the political cannot be perfectly preserved from questions arising in the private realm. In 1972, to a question posed by Mary McCarthy as to the contents of Arendt's politics, she responded that '[a]t all times people living together will have affairs that belong in the public – are worthy of to be talked about in public. What these matters are at any particular historical moment is probably utterly different' (Bernstein 1986, p.238). What concerns Arendt is the loss of the ontological independence of the political realm, an event that she describes as the rise of the social. Social in this context does not simply indicate the 'opposite of the individual', the mode of 'living-with-others' as explored by Emanuel Levinas, but a distinctly late modern condition of existence generated by the collapse of the distinction between private and public. The social realm born out of this collapse witnessed the unconditional triumph of *animal laborans*. Arendt describes the social as the realm where 'the fact of mutual dependency for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public'. In other words, the activities understood under the rubric of 'labor'. Labor does not only refer to physical exertion: it includes all the activities related to the human *species* existence – the metabolism that we share with nature. It is no accident either, that the word 'labor' also refers to the act of giving birth, as we have seen, it includes all of the activities necessary for sustaining physical, biological existence, from food production and trade to procreation. Arendt writes that the private has undergone an entire reversal of fortune in the modern era. Not only is it no longer tinged with the ancient sense of deprivation, but it has also acquired an entirely new legitimacy. In a rudimentary sense it is still opposed to the political, but since the rise of the social it has largely become a shelter for the intimate, and the activities practiced therein – from sex to the most private of self-reflection – has acquired a new importance.

The birth of the intimate sphere is closely associated with the explosion of individualism in the eighteenth century, its emblematic figure being Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his search for authenticity. Robert C. Solomon describes the discovery thus:

Strolling in solitude through the lush forests of St Germain during the early adolescence of the modern age, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made a miraculous discovery. It was his self. This self was not, as his more scholastic predecessor Descartes had thought, that thin merely logical self, a pure formality that presented itself indubitably whenever he reflected, 'I think therefore I am'. Nor was his the frustrated skeptical search that led his friend Hume to declare paradoxically that 'whenever I look within myself, there is no self to be found'. What Rousseau discovered within the woods of France was a self so self-sufficient, so filled with good intentions and half-developed pleasantries, so universal, free from artifice and at peace with the entire world, that he recognized it as something much more than *his* individual self. It was rather the Self as such, the soul of humanity. Looking deeply within himself, Rousseau discovered that the self he shared with 'men and women the world over and declared that it was good – intrinsically good – despite all the artifices and superficialities of the social whirl' (Solomon 1988, i).

Rousseau, troubled by what he sees as the 'artifice' and 'falsity' of the public *moeurs* and theatricality of his time, is forever in search of 'the real', hidden beneath 'convention'. Unlike the Greeks, Rousseau is skeptical about public masks. 'Incessant politeness requires, propriety demands, incessant usage is followed, never one's own inclinations'. Arendt reminds us that the 'rebellion' of figures like Rousseau occurred before the formal equalization of the political sphere that occurred during the French Revolution. The turn towards the hyper-private world of emotion occurred as revolt against the anonymity of an already encroaching social sphere, the first appearance of what Heidegger would call 'das Man', and less against the inequality of the *ancient regime* as is commonly assumed. In fact, with respect to the 'social', inequality means very little, 'for society always demands that its members act as if they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and only one interest: physical well-being and the immediate satisfaction of bodily needs. Before the disintegration of the family this common interest and single interest was 'represented by the household head who ruled in accordance with it and prevented possible disunity'. (Arendt 1958, p.46). According to Arendt, late modernity sees the situation where agonal citizenship is replaced by the intimacy of familial relationships across the broad spectrum of society. And one should consider carefully before calling it a form of enrichment: '[t]he monolithic character of every type of society, its conformism which allows for only one interest and opinion, is ultimately rooted in the one-ness of man-kind' (Arendt 1958, p.46). Impersonal public discourse is replaced by emotion, and outrage replaces argument. The equality featured in society is not the equality among peers characteristic of the public sphere, but the equality of members of the household before the *paterfamilias*.

The only significant difference is that power is exerted by the unanimous opinion of the masses, who no longer need the rule of a single 'leader', but enforce the 'right opinion' by sheer numbers. It leads to the curious and paradoxical situation where power is no less despotic for being dispersed throughout society. What is more, the equality of the ever-increasing zone of the intimate is not the equality based upon mutual respect that characterized life in the classical *agora*, which was sustained by 'fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*)' (Arendt 1958,p.41). By contrast, the social demands *uniformity*. Francis Fukuyama writes in *The End of History and the Last Man* that at the 'end' of History, that 'it becomes particularly difficult for people in democratic societies to take questions with real moral content seriously in public life. Morality involves a distinction between better and worse, good and bad, which seems to violate the democratic principle of tolerance.' (Fukuyama 2006, p.306). Like Nietzsche and Foucault, Arendt shows a profound skepticism about modern attempts to locate meaning within the depths of the self, as paradoxically, such attempts tend to reveal only the qualities that belong to all animal life, and nothing specifically *human*. 'In fact, all the traits that crowd psychology has meanwhile discovered in mass man: his loneliness – and loneliness is neither isolation nor solitude – regardless of his adaptability; his excitability and lack of standards; his capacity for consumption, accompanied by inability to judge, or even to distinguish; above all, his egocentricity and that fateful alienation from the world which since Rousseau is mistaken for self-alienation – all these traits first appeared in good society, where there was no question of masses, numerically speaking'. (Arendt 1978c,p.199). It should be emphasized again that Arendt not denigrating either the body or the private realm, but arguing that with the rise of the social, humanity loses not only the freedom of the political sphere, but also the *safety* of the private. While the public withers away, the private and intimate has become matters of mass consumption – the labourer has now become a *voyeur* as well.

If anything, modern society is but the expression of a universal life-interest – a collection of worldless subjects united only by their universal need for safety and survival. Unlike political friendship, the sociability of the body of *animalia laborans* exhibits a pathological closeness that is devoid of genuine fellow-feeling. Arendt was painfully aware that the cult of 'warmth' and 'human empathy' was insufficient to prevent the actions of the Nazis in WWII. Late modern society commits the error that by focusing on similitude, uncomfortable difference would be overcome. Rather than to stimulate the forging of the social bond, the body as a source of social unity has stripped man of his most human characteristics and reduced him to the anonymity of animal life.

The reduction of human life to its animal characteristics is a complex theme in late modern thought. On the one hand, the 'animal' often carries connotations of a Dionysian resource that offers possibilities out of an anemic Apollonian existence. Nietzsche often uses animal imagery to describe a healthier version of the human than the emasculated Christian, a form of humanity better integrated into the natural world, i.e. the 'noble and proud men in whom the *animal* in man felt deified', the pre-Christian aristocrats discussed in the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*. The notion of repressed libidinal energy is often associated with animal imagery in writers as diverse as Zola, Freud, Kafka, and Hesse, and also later thinkers like Marcuse, Lyotard and Deleuze. The animal is however by no means a purely positive image even in the Nietzschean *oeuvre*. He also describes the process of man becoming modern as the '*animalization* of man into the dwarf animal of equal rights and claims' (BGE 203), and laments the fact that this creature has become has become '*an animal*, literally and without reservation.' (GM III: 25).

For Arendt, the process of animalization is a wholesale negativity, a process that she associates with the triumph of the social. The social means the spreading of the mode of existence of *animal laborans*, an animal existence *sans reserve*, with the animal life of bare consumption as ultimate ideal. That this political ideal was largely discussed in materialist terms (capitalism and communism both depart from a position that defines politics in terms of the satisfaction of bodily needs) made Arendt see 'danger signs that man may be willing and, indeed, is on the point of developing into that animal species from which, since Darwin, he imagines he has come'. (Arendt 1958, p.233). As the boundaries that held the biological in check disintegrates, one encounters the paradoxical situation of the 'unnatural growth of the natural': The social realm,

where the life process has established its own public domain, has let loose an unnatural growth, so to speak, of the natural; and it is against this growth, not merely against society but against a constantly growing social realm, that the private and intimate, on the one hand, and the political (in the narrower sense of the word), have proved incapable of defending themselves (Arendt 1958, p.47).

The unnatural growth of the natural amounts to a large extent to the abdication of the political. Judgment becomes superfluous, friendship is replaced by biological necessity, and agonistic play is replaced by the single viewpoint of the species, driven by immediate needs. And nothing is more natural than the body: the body is the ultra, or *über*-private dimension of the self. It exists by virtue of its *singularity*. Although we all possess a body, it is impossible to *share* it, or even to communicate much of what it experiences: '[T]he body . . . is the only thing one could not share even if one wanted to. Nothing is less common and less communicable, and therefore more securely shielded against the visibility and audibility of the public realm . . . Nothing . . . ejects one more radically from the world' (Arendt 1958,p.112). In pure material terms, the body is simply a collection of sensations – a 'what' and never a 'who'. At best, the 'happiness' achieved in the physical comfort of the private realm is but the famed utilitarian 'absence of pain'. One cannot but be reminded here of Nietzsche's claims against Christianity, that it is but a series of 'prohibitions' – defined more by the absence of vice than the presence of virtue. Similarly, life lived purely under labouring conditions may meet the criteria of the absence of pain, but it affirms nothing and therefore cannot be regarded as a fully human life.

A fully human life is a life open to contingency, the life led between others, the life of the *zōōn politikon*, and an important part of this life is informed by the capacity to judge. Arendt calls this 'the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly' (Arendt 1992,p.100) and importantly, the capacity to *communicate* these evaluations. Arendt passed away before she could fully develop her theory on judgment as the third part of *The Life of the Mind*, but her position on judgment can be derived from scattered remarks in the first two volumes on *Thinking and Willing*, an essay entitled *Thinking and Moral Considerations* written at approximately the same time, two articles in *Between Past and Future* ('The Crisis in Culture' and 'Truth and Politics') that relate judgment and opinion to matters of taste and culture. Of particular importance in this regard is her series of lectures on Kant given at the New School for Social Research in the 1970s. Arendt famously held that *the Critique of Judgment* contained Kant's 'unwritten' political philosophy. She credits Kant with stretching aesthetic judgment beyond the merely private, by linking it to a wider realm of thinking, what Kant called 'an enlarged mentality' – the ability to think beyond one's own particular situatedness and attempting to think from the position of 'everyone else'. For Kant, judgment is the activity of thinking the particular as contained in the universal. If the universal is given, as in the case of a law, rule, or even principle, then the judgment under which the particular is subsumed is determinant. In such cases, judgments are cognitive in nature. In cases where only the particular is given and the universal still has to be established, then we encounter a reflective judgment, the capacity to move from the particular to the universal without the aid of determinate concepts. In the case of aesthetic judgments, this occurs through the encounter of particular objects that exemplify beauty. Thus, a beautiful work of art, a flower or a landscape may be said to possess 'exemplary validity,' a particular instance of the concept of beauty. The freedom of reflective judgments lies in the fact that it allows the mind to 'go visiting' – to transcend the merely private and subjective and imagine an experience from the standpoint of somebody else. Arendt writes:

[J]udgment must liberate itself from the "subjective private conditions," that is, from the idiosyncrasies which naturally determine the outlook of each individual in his privacy and are legitimate as long as they are only privately held opinions, but which are not fit to enter the market place, and lack all validity in the public realm (Arendt 1978c,p.220).

Although Arendt differs radically from the poststructuralist rehabilitators of the body, she too, is careful not fall back into the traditional metaphysical division of a divine transcendent and a 'lesser' ephemeral realm. Like Nietzsche, she rejects the Platonic appeal to Truth as an abstract, singular essence belonging to a transcendent realm in favour of seeing it as a multifarious, worldly phenomenon. In its search for eternal Truth, philosophy considers only proven knowledge to be a truly legitimate object of discourse. For Arendt, this means that the philosophical endeavour is unpolitical in essence. She writes: 'Since philosophical truth concerns man in his singularity, it is unpolitical by nature' (Arendt 1978, p.224). By contrast, Arendt identifies *doxa*, opinion, as 'the stuff of political life'. It is our plural existence 'the presence of others that see what we see and hear what we hear' that makes the experience of reality possible, and saves us from the prison of solipsism: 'only where things can be seen by many and in a variety of aspects without changing their identity . . . can worldly reality truly and reliably appear' (Arendt 1968b, pp.68–269; 1968a, p.26–27) That is not to say that Arendt is a relativist or apologist for subjectivism. Opinion in this instance does not signify arbitrariness, but rather the politically significant fact that the world appears differently to each individual, according to his or her position in it. Language allows for such differences to be communicated.

Aesthetic taste is subject to dispute precisely because it can be communicated. There are of course limits to this capacity: some differences in aesthetic taste cannot be overcome, but at least the reasons for holding these differences can be communicated. However, nothing is as resistant to communication as bodily experience. With respect to the private realm, Arendt writes: 'nothing is...less common and less communicable and therefore more securely shielded against the visibility and audibility of the public realm than what goes on within its confines'. (Arendt 1958, p.112). She also draws attention to one of the oldest problems of philosophy of mind, namely 'the veritable gulf that separates all bodily sensations pleasure and pain, desires and satisfaction – which are so 'private' that they cannot be adequately voiced, much less represented in the outside world, from mental images, which can be voiced and represented' (Arendt 1958, p.141). As a keen reader of Nietzsche, Arendt is fully aware that language itself forms as much of a barrier to communication as it makes it possible. But whereas ideas, which are products of the mind in the first instance, allow for some degree of communication, bodily sensations *per se* are by their very nature radically private and resist translation into common conceptual discourse.

For this reason, neither the hedonistic life, nor the experience of torture for example – life experiences that frequently crop up in contemporary political discussions is truly *political* in nature. Politics is ultimately about the play of difference and – ironies aside – nothing is as reductive as basic bodily needs. Phenomena like hunger and thirst does not call for judgment but requires only the simplest empirical enquiry possible. It is this homogeneity and undifferentiated character that renders the body by its very nature unpolitical. Arendt writes: 'no matter how different and individualized we appear and how deliberately we have chosen this "individuality", it always remains true that "inside" we're all alike (Arendt 1978a, p.112). The body unites us to such an extent that it robs us of our individuality.

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¹ After Harold McMillian's famous statement 'You never had it so good' at a Tory rally at Bedford, 20 July 1957 in which he refers to the British recovery from the effects of World War II. John F. Kennedy (then senator) made a similar remark in a speech delivered on 9 October 1960 in Youngstown, Ohio, but it had been in use as a Democratic Party slogan since 1952. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25745>.

² Roger Cooter writes that 'by the millennium's turn had bookshelves groaning under the weight of the body "at risk", "at work", "at war"; "in question", "in theory", "in language", "in shock", "in pain". The historicized body of "the artisan", "the disabled", "the mad", "the Jew", "the erotic", "the beautiful", and "the saintly", were among the many now to be "explored", "contested", "expressed", "invaded", "imagined", "emblazoned", "engendered", "experienced", "dissembled", "dismembered", and "reconstructed" – to draw only from some titles of recent Anglophone monographs'. (Cooter 2010, pp.393-394).

³ See also (Arendt, 1958, p.186). She illustrates the twofold character of action by an unorthodox usage of a quote from Dante's *De Monarchia*: 'In every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity, or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, insofar as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desired has its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows... Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self'. (Arendt 1958, p.175).

⁴ Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est*-'that a beginning be made man was created' said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man (Arendt 1973, p.478).