

M. Bonazzi (Utrecht)  
*In esilio*  
Napoli, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici

**T1:** H. Arendt, *The Life of the mind*, 3.

I have neither claim nor ambition to be a “philosopher” or to be numbered among what Kant, not without irony, called *Denker von Gewerbe* (professional thinkers).

**T2:** H. Arendt, Letter to K. Jaspers, 4.3.1951.

I suspect that in all this mess philosophy is not innocent. Of course, not in the sense that Hitler has something to do with Plato. [...] But this Western philosophy has never had a pure concept of the political world and can never have one, since it spoken of man as forced by necessity, and he dealt with plurality only incidentally.

**T3:** H. Arendt, *Socrates*, 538.

Plato did not contest that the concern of the philosopher was with eternal, non-human matters, but he did not agree that this made him unfit to play political role.

**T4:** H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 222.

Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether.

**T5:** F. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality* § 25.

Plato gegen Homer: das ist der ganze, der echte Antagonismus – dort der >>Jenseitigen<< besten Willens, der große Verleumder des Lebens, hier dessen unfreiwilliger Vergöttlicher, die goldene Natur.

**T6:** H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 196-198.

The original, prephilosophic Greek remedy for this frailty had been the foundation of the *polis*. The *polis*, as it grew out of and remained rooted in the Greek pre-*polis* experience and estimate of what makes it worthwhile for men to live together (*syzen*), namely “the sharing of words and deeds”, has a twofold function. First ... the *polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win “immortal fame”, that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique distinctness. ... The second function of the *polis* ... was to offer a remedy for the futility of action and speech; for the chances that a deed deserving fame would not be forgotten, that it actually would become “immortal”, were not very good.

[...]

The *polis* – if we trust the famous words of Pericles in the Funeral Oration – gives a guarantee that those who forced every sea and land to become the scene of their daring will not remain without witness and will need neither Homer nor anyone else who knows how to turn words to praise them; without assistance from others, those who acted will be able to establish together the everlasting remembrance of their good and bad deeds, to inspire admiration in the present and in future ages. In other words, men’s life together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most futile of human activities, action and speech, and the less tangible and most ephemeral of

man-made “products”, the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable. The organization of the *polis* ... is a kind of organized remembrance.

**T7:** H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205-206.

The words of Pericles, as Thucydides reports them, are perhaps unique in their supreme confidence that men can enact *and* save their greatness at the same time and, as it were, by one and the same gesture, and that the performance as such will be enough to generate *dynamis* and not need the transforming reification of *homo faber* to keep it in reality. Pericles' speech, though it certainly corresponded to and articulated the innermost convictions of the people of Athens, has always been read with the sad wisdom of hindsight by men who knew that his words were spoken at the beginning of the end. Yet short-lived as this faith in *dynamis* (and consequently in politics) may have been [...] its bare existence has sufficed to elevate action to the highest rank in the hierarchy of the *vita activa*.

[...] What is outstandingly clear in Pericles' formulations – and, incidentally, no less transparent in Homer's poems – is that the innermost meaning of the acted deed and the spoken word is independent of meaning of victory and defeat. [...] Action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary [...] Thucydides, or Pericles, knew full well that he had broken with the normal standards for everyday behavior when he found the glory of Athens in having left behind 'everywhere everlasting remembrance of their good and evil deeds'.

**T8:** Thucydides, *Histories* II 41; transl. Mynott.

In summary, I say that the city as a whole is an education for Greece; and I believe every individual among us has the self-sufficiency to respond to every situation with the greatest versatility and grace. This is no mere boast designed just for present effect but the actual truth, as the very power of the city demonstrates, a power acquired through just these qualities. Athens alone of cities today outdoes her reputation when put to the test. She alone neither gives an aggressor cause for resentment at the calibre of opponent by whom he is beaten, nor gives a subject cause for complaint that his rulers are unworthy. The proof of our power is supported by the strongest evidence and by every possible witness. We shall be the wonder of this and of future generations. We need no Homer to sing our praises, nor any poet to gratify us for the moment with lines which may fail the test of history, for we have forced every land and sea to yield to our daring and we have established everywhere lasting memorials of our power for good and ill.

**T9:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X 6; transl. Kenny.

It remains to discuss in outline happiness, since this is what we state the end of human nature to be. Our discussion will be the more concise if we take up what we have said already. We said, then, that it is not a state; for if it were it might belong to someone who was asleep throughout his life, living the life of a plant, or, again, to someone who was suffering the greatest misfortunes. If these implications do not meet with approval, and we must rather class happiness as an activity, as we have said before, and if some activities are necessary and desirable for the sake of something else while others are so in themselves, plainly happiness must be placed among those desirable in themselves, not among those desirable for the sake of something else; for happiness does not lack anything but is self-sufficient. Now those activities are desirable in themselves from which nothing is looked for apart from the activity. And

virtuous actions are thought to be such; for to do noble and virtuous deeds is a thing desirable for its own sake. Pleasant amusements also are thought to be of this nature: we choose them not for the sake of other things; for we are harmed rather than benefited by them, since we are led to neglect our bodies and our possessions. But most of the people who are deemed happy resort to such pastimes.