THE DYNAMISM OF VITA ACTIVA

Hannah Arendt is interested in the dynamism of man's action, but she understands this dynamism more broadly than Wojtyła. Apart from action, she also analyzes labor and work, focusing on the characteristics and the interactions between them.[18] In her opinion, work and labor belong among "the most elementary articulations of the human condition"[19] and—because of their specificity and interdependence—it is them that make this condition dynamic and historical at the same time.

Each of the aspects of the dynamism of man has its own specificity and is a response to specific challenges posed by the human condition. Labor is a result of the biological conditions of human existence and, at the same time, a response to them. Labor serves the needs of the human body as a living organism. As such, labor is oriented towards human life in general and therefore it is marked by the fragility of human existence. Work, conceived as man's activity, goes beyond both his biological dimension and the cyclical process of sustaining the survival of the human species. Work results in a world of cultural artefacts which constitutes the space of life that is proper to man: this world differs from the things that exist in nature and, as such, manifests the "unnaturalness"[20] and "worldliness"[21] of human existence. The most important among the practical activities analyzed by Arendt is action, which is a response to human existence being ingrained between birth and death. Action occurs directly between people and finds expression in the public sphere, in particular in

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[18] Wojtyła was also interested in the issues of labor and art and he reflected on them more extensively—albeit only to a limited extent from a philosophical perspective—as Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* of 1981 and in his Letter to Artists of 1999. See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html; "Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists," The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.

[19] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5. As Roy T. Tsao explains, Arendt's point is that "labor, work, and action derive from what she takes to be the fundamental (and numerically finite) ways in which we are able to comprehend the basic kinds of continuity and change that human beings are able to effect through their own activity." Roy T. Tsao, "Arendt against Athens: Rereading *The Human Condition*," *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002): 102.

[20] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

[21] Ibidem.

politics.[22] Relationships which are specific for action are intermediated neither by things nor by matter, which distinguishes them from those characteristic of work. "Action" denotes a unique way in which individuals initiate something new, enter the human world, and manifest their freedom. The relationality inherent in action makes human existence manifest and actualize itself in the world in a network of interactions with other people. Because of this, the human condition is marked by plurality both quantitatively (the concrete human being exists among other human subjects) and qualitatively (these subjects exist in singular and unique a way). "We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who has ever lived, lives or will live,"[23] writes Arendt. As Tsao observes, for an activity to be considered action, it must meet the most important and necessary condition: when it enters the network of social relations as a new event, story, or narrative, it must express the readiness of the person who acts to reveal who he is and what he is doing or intends to do. Otherwise, it is not possible to treat such activity as action. At the same time, other subjects involved in action must be willing and able to recognize an activity as action.[24]

According to Arendt, in addition to its social character, human action as a process is characterized by unpredictability and irreversibility. The unpredictability of action does not mean that it is impossible to predict all logical consequences of activities undertaken by man but that it is impossible to capture the meaning of action before it is completed. Unlike work, whose results can be assessed as it progresses by referring to a given model, the meaning of action is more apparent to those who describe it than to those who participate in it.[25] The German philosopher links the irreversibility of action to "being unable to undo what one has done."[26] As Conovan observes, the social nature, unpredictability, and irreversibility of action make it impossible for anyone to ever be in control of the events of his life.[27] Because of the unpredictability and irreversibility of action, which for Arendt, as for Wojtyła, is a manifestation of human freedom, a paradox arises: "Nowhere ... neither in labor, subject to the necessity of life,

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[22] Margaret Conovan points to Arendt's distinction between the ""world' of civilisation" and the "public realm" of which the former is merely a part. Margaret C o n o v a n, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 111. "The public realm is a place of discourse and action," writes Conovan. Ibidem. It is there that human beings exercise their freedom and can act spontaneously. See ibidem.

[23] A r e n d t, *The Human Condition*, 8.

[24] See T s a o, "Arendt against Athens: Rereading *The Human Condition*": 104–5. See also Mark B u t t o n, "Arendt, Rawls, and Public Reason," in "Religion and Politics," special issue, *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 2 (2005): 265.

[25] See A r e n d t, *The Human Condition*, 192.

[26] Ibidem, 237.

[27] See C o n o v a n, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, 132.

nor in fabrication, dependent upon given material, does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom and in that realm which owes its existence to nobody and nothing but man."[28]

Arendt and Wojtyła share the conviction that human action is a way of manifesting who the subject that emanates it is and, at the same time, a way of the subject's communication with other people and the world. For Arendt, action is "the one miracle-working faculty of man," through which he initiates something new and enters the human world, while for Wojtyła, action is the ability to perform acts (agency). Arendt sees action as the individual's readiness to manifest his individuality and uniqueness in the human world, while Wojtyła considers action as the manifestation of man's personal status and dignity. They both see not only the positive aspects of action, but also the challenges that accompany it. According to Wojtyła, action requires man to integrate what happens in him into his personal life and to respect the axiological order in his acts. According to Arendt in turn, action requires coping with the irreversibility and unpredictability of its results. Both Arendt and Wojtyła are also aware of the paradoxes occurring in human action. Wojtyła holds that although human freedom is manifested through action, self-determination as the fulfilment of freedom consists in auto-determination. Arendt, on the other hand, points out that the unpredictability and irreversibility of action makes it more limited than work or labor.

Thus Arendt and Wojtyła direct their analyses of the human dynamism towards its two complementary aspects in an attempt to grasp, on the one hand, the permanent elements that constitute its foundation and, on the other, the dynamic and changeable elements that are its consequence. One might say that, as a result, an analysis of the dynamism of action from the individual perspective is complemented by an analysis of the same dynamism from the social or public perspective, and the quest to better understand the nature of the human subject corresponds to the quest to reveal his condition.