

Fox Traps : Heidegger, Arendt, and the An-archy of Political Beginnings

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*I have set up the burrow and it seems to have turned out well.*¹

Franz Kafka

After not speaking to each other for seventeen years following a very public falling out, Hannah Arendt and Martin 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: “the 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 better than one who sits in a trap his whole life long.”²

Looking to Arendt’s parable, this presentation may be read as a new version of the saga of the fox and the obsessive and endless construction of a burrow³—one that, because of the fox’s dogged determination to perfect it, ends up becoming a dead-end. The story gets even more dramatic if this particular fox can, thanks to his sophisticated cleverness, entrap future generations of thinkers. The evil nature of this animal, the most recent and lugubrious version of the tale suggests, means that everything the fox touches gives into his charms and agrees to effect a “*destruction de la pensée*.”⁴ The corollary of this terrifying tale is troubling, to say the least: Arendt is, shockingly, associated with the “*extermination nazie*” intellectually fostered by her former professor, the fox Heidegger.

An attempt to reply to such an extreme version of the tale of the fox could take the form of a belligerent diatribe. I will try to avoid that here,⁵ though, and seek to address the kernel of the tale without falling into a conventional narrative of personal intrigue between the two protagonists. More precisely, what I will do is analyze one aspect of Arendt’s *Auseinandersetzung* with the author of *Sein und Zeit*, the one regarding “political beginnings.” I will argue that the Heideggerian trap has precise contours and that Arendt, both “faithful and not faithful” to Heidegger,⁶ was aware of those limits while working on the question of political foundation.

My presentation will proceed in three parts. First, I will show how the political implications of the Heideggerian burrow are perfectly exhibited in his exceptionalist account of “new beginnings” as extraordinary moments. Second, I will briefly examine Arendt’s dispute with Heidegger’s work from 1946 to 1958, mostly due to the latter’s commitment to German totalitarianism. My aim in this case will be to bring to the fore how, according to

¹ “Ich habe den Bau eingerichtet und er scheint wohl gelungen” (Kafka, 1976: 132). See, also: (Coetzee, 1981: 556-579).

² “Der Fallen-bewohnende Fuchs aber sagte stolz: So viele gehen in meine Falle, ich bin der beste aller Füchse geworden. Und auch daran war etwas Wahres: Niemand kennt das Fallenwesen besser, als wer zeitlebens in einer Falle sitzt” (Arendt, 2002: 404; 2005a: 362).

³ Kafka, 1976: 132-165; 1946: 325-359; Arendt, 2002: 403-404; 2005a: 361-362.

⁴ Faye, 2016.

⁵ For a rebuttal of Emmanuel Faye’s positions on Heidegger’s thinking, see: Sheehan, 2015: 367-400.

⁶ 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: / Die Widmung dieses Buches ist ausgespart. / Wie sollte ich es Dir widmen, / dem Vertrauten, / dem ich die Treue gehalten / und nicht gehalten habe, / Und beides in Liebe” [“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, / And in both cases with love”] (Arendt in Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 319; 2004: 261). Italics mine. Translation modified.

Arendt, *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 diametrically opposed ways of conceiving “beginnings.” In Heidegger, the “beginning” expresses—either politically or philosophically—a radical event imbued with an ontological dignity that surpasses any plurality. In 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 *Auseinandersetzung* 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 is 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 “beginning” as the disruptive matter that animates political foundations. And I claim that this disruptive matter cannot be captured by the “history of Being” if it is understood as an exceptionalist mantra.

The Scream of the Fox and the Fascination with the New Beginning

The serious accusation of the fox’s despicable behavior implied as well a diatribe against the thinker who was perhaps his most influential student, namely, Hannah Arendt. According to this interpretation, Arendt was, in short, largely responsible for keeping the Heideggerian project alive. To put it bombastically, “Arendt took the intellectual responsibility for elevating Heidegger’s writings, which she knows contain lively praise of the National Socialist movement, to the rank of a paradigm of thinking.”⁸

In a theoretical maneuver riddled with unfair implications like that one, the lack of real effort to draw analytical distinctions is conspicuous. It is true that Heidegger’s thought is where Arendt found the basis from which to challenge the failures of the philosophical tradition. But she also saw her former professor’s work as the prime example of intellectual hubris that utterly failed to heed life-in-common. Arendt herself expressed her doubt about the Heideggerian endeavor, saying she was both “faithful and not faithful” to it. Indeed, for Arendt the post-totalitarian political crisis could not be understood if the crisis of philosophy was not tackled, and Heidegger, “a philosopher’s philosopher,”⁹ blatantly manifested that theoretical and political quandary.

Several recently-published seminars delivered by Heidegger in the 1930s and the *Schwarzen Hefte*—intellectual diaries he wrote for more than forty years and requested be used as the final volumes of his *Gesamtausgabe*¹⁰—however, challenge Arendt’s ambivalent stance toward him. Heidegger, *malgré* Arendt, can no longer be envisioned as the “hidden king” [*heimlicher König*] of thought who took a brief detour around Syracuse due to a

⁷ See, among others: Marchart, 2007; 2010; Bedorf and Röttgers, 2010.

⁸ “Arendt aura-t-elle pris la responsabilité intellectuelle d’élever les écrits de Heidegger, dont elle sait qu’ils comportent un vibrant éloge du mouvement national-socialiste, au rang de paradigme du penser” (Faye, 2016: 520).

⁹ Arendt, 1951.

¹⁰ (Heidegger, 1998; Heidegger, 2001; Heidegger, 2011: 55-184, 549-655; Heidegger, 2014a; Heidegger, 2014b; Heidegger, 2014c; Heidegger, 2015; Heidegger in Denker and Zaborowski, 2009a: 53-88; Heidegger in Homolka and Heidegger, 2016).

déformation professionnelle.¹¹ After all, he explicitly links his ontological thought and his politics through the notion of “beginning.” Strikingly, Heidegger’s position on the “history of Being” takes a narrative bent since 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*].¹² 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, in fact, his own “onto-historical” [*seinsgeschichtliche*] reflection on the *Anfang*. “The history of Being,” then, 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.” 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, 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 of the struggle, and the guardian of its new truths.”¹⁵ In “Hegel ‘Rechtsphilosophie,’” the seminar that Heidegger gave during the *Wintersemester* of 1934/1935, in particular, he 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 [*Anfang*].”¹⁶ The German “revolution,” as Heidegger conceived it, laid the foundation for more than the mere seizure of power.¹⁷

Crucial, in this sense, is the distinction the author of *Sein und Zeit* draws between the notions of “starting point” [*Beginn*], “beginning” [*Anfang*], and “origin” [*Ur-sprung*] of the state.¹⁸ For Heidegger, the “starting point” is futile and disappears as the “occurrence” [*Geschehen*] unfolds. The “beginning,” meanwhile, irradiates unparalleled energy in its own “occurrence.”¹⁹ 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

¹¹ (Arendt in Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 180, 181, 190-192; Arendt in Neske and Kettering, 1988: 233, 243-245). This gesture’s critical counterpart is evident in a letter that Arendt sent Jaspers on September 29, 1949. See: (Arendt in Arendt and Jaspers, 1985: 178). New archival evidence, however, casts doubt on the idea that “[Heidegger’s] enthusiasm for the Third Reich was matched only by his glaring ignorance of what he was talking about.” See: (Arendt, 2005a: 202). At the same time, Arendt might have been mistaken when she asserted that Heidegger did not read books like *Mein Kampf*. See: (Arendt, 11/18/1969; Heidegger in Homolka and Heidegger, 2016: 20-25). This position does not necessarily imply acceptance of the theoretical maneuver effected by Emmanuel Faye in his book on Arendt and Heidegger. See: (Faye, 2016: 19-48).

¹² See: (Trawny, 2014; 2015).

¹³ See: (Heidegger, 2014a: 115, 116, 124).

¹⁴ (Heidegger in Denker and Zaborowski, 2009a: 77).

¹⁵ “Bereiter der Gefahr und Entscheider des Kampfes und Wahrer seiner neuen Wahrheiten” (Heidegger, 2011: 170).

¹⁶ “Die Vereinigung der Gewalten in dem Dasein des Führers ist nicht eine bloße Verkoppelung und Anhäufung (quantitativ), sondern in sich schon der Beginn der Entfaltung eines ursprünglich neuen - aber noch unentfalteten Anfangs” (Heidegger, 2011: 73).

¹⁷ (Heidegger, 2014a: 39). See, also: (Trawny, 2016: 79; Grosser, 2011).

¹⁸ (Heidegger, 2011: 74-75). Richard Polt approaches Heidegger’s position when he 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” (Polt in Heidegger, 2014: 74).

¹⁹ See, for instance: (Heidegger, 1989: 3-4).

truth embodied in danger and πόλεμος.²⁰ It is important to add, then, that 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,”²¹ he now uses the notion of “another beginning” [*anderer Anfang*] to refer to that same phenomenon.²² 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*].²³ For Heidegger, not only the statesman, but—strikingly—also the poet and the thinker are the 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.” Heidegger assumes that philosophy—or rather, *his philosophy*—in conjunction with the creation of the new leader is what drives the “new beginning.”²⁴

Looking into the Exceptionalist Trap: The Philosophico-Political as Problem

The most catastrophic version 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.’”²⁵ Arendt, 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.”²⁶ Needless to say, an intellectual operation of this sort makes Arendt a collaborator of Heidegger’s “*destruction de la pensée*.” Rather than accept this thorny elaboration wholesale, we must try to establish analytical distinctions within it. To grasp Arendt’s *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger’s thought requires first addressing another problem, specifically the links between Heidegger’s work and politics. In particular, because even today, in the wake of a new episode of *der Fall Heidegger* with the recent publication of the *Schwarzen Hefte*, interpretations tend either to denounce or to exculpate.

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*],²⁷ are envisioned as part of a dispute that can, under no circumstances, be allowed to

²⁰ (Heidegger, 2011: 177).

²¹ “Kann nur verglichen werden mit dem Wandel am Anfang der geistigen Geschichte des abendländischen Menschen überhaupt” (Heidegger, 1998: 132).

²² (Heidegger, 1983: 42). See, also: (Trawny, 2016: 78-79).

²³ (Heidegger, 1983: 41).

²⁴ With this new inflection in his thinking, Heidegger suggests that there is a gap between “history” and “philosophy,” and that the latter “*eröffnet die Erfahrung*” (Heidegger, 1994: 37). Italics in the original. This tendency culminates when Heidegger asserts that “Unser Staat wird in sechzig Jahren bestimmt nicht mehr vom Führer getragen, was *dann* aber wird, steht bei *uns*. *Deshalb* müssen wir philosophieren” [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] (Heidegger, 2011: 560). Italics in the original.

²⁵ (Heidegger in Denker and Zaborowski, 2009a: 53-88; Heidegger, 2011: 55-184, 549-655).

²⁶ “La conduit à préconiser une forme de salut, fondée sur une vision superficiellement séduisante, mais heideggerienne également, de l’être en commun (*Mitsein*). Cette vision l’entraîne à concevoir un paradigme de la *polis* qui exclut la majeure partie de l’humanité : jadis l’esclave, l’étranger, le barbare, aujourd’hui le travailleur, l’employé, bref, la multitude de ceux que n’immortalise pas la grandeur héroïque de l’agir politique” (Faye, 2016: 512).

²⁷ (Heidegger, 2014a: 115, 124).

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.²⁸ Although one of Heidegger's postwar 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 endeavor voiced in, for instance, "Philosophie und Soziologie,"²⁹ Arendt challenges what she terms "Heideggerian functionalism"³⁰ in "What is Existenz Philosophy?" Center stage in her argument is the inability of the author of *Sein und Zeit* 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.³¹ 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. She adds that "a being of this highest order is conceivable only as single and unique and knowing no equals."³² In sum, "the essential character of the Self is its absolute Self-ness, its radical separation from all its fellows."³³ The climax of this "invective" is the brief tale in Arendt's *Denktagebuch*—the inspiration for this paper—where, as noted, she compares Heidegger to a fox.³⁴

If, as I just urged, we are to establish theoretical distinctions, though, we cannot see the Arendtian tale of the fox simply as a tragedy to which she succumbed or just list the differences between Arendt and Heidegger. For Arendt, the figure of Heidegger represents an enigma at the core of the irresolvable dispute between "philosophy" and "politics."³⁵ Arendt will never cease to theorize what is at stake in the "philosophico-political problem"—a crucial aspect of her *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger in later essays.³⁶ To fully understand this "problem," however, we must bear in mind the series of works she wrote starting after the War and through the publication of *The Human Condition* in 1958.³⁷

²⁸ The paradigmatic cases of this dyad, which ultimately safeguards the immaculate site of philosophy are: (von Herrmann and Alfieri, 2016; and Faye, 2005). Exceptions to the aforementioned impasse are, among others: (Trawny, 2014; Trawny, 2015; Trawny and Mitchell, 2015; Mitchell and Trawny, 2017; Di Cesare, 2014; Fabris, 2014).

²⁹ (Arendt, 1930: 163-176).

³⁰ (Arendt, 2005a: 178). See, among others: (Benhabib, 2003: 47-50).

³¹ In a sentence that illustrates her criticism, Arendt indicates that: "In his political behavior, in any case, Heidegger has provided us with more than ample warning that we should take him seriously" (Arendt, 2005a: 187). See, also: (Arendt and Jaspers, 1985: 79, 84; Arendt, 2005b: 5-39; Canovan, 1990: 135-165; Young-Bruhl, 1982: 216-222; 2006: 7, 8, 24, 25).

³² (Arendt, 2005a: 180). (Benhabib, 2003: 104-106).

³³ Arendt would later object to the fact that when Heidegger addresses the notion of "beginning," he succumbs to a sort of mythologizing, referring to the concepts of "people" and "earth" that provide isolated Selves with a common ground. For Arendt, "it is obvious that concepts of that kind can only lead us out of philosophy and into some kind of nature-oriented superstition" (Arendt, 2005a: 181).

³⁴ (Arendt, 2002: 403-404). A fox, I shall argue, disturbed by its perception of ineradicable dangers. *Der Bau* is illustrative in this respect: "Und es sind nicht nur die äußeren Feinde, die mich bedrohen. Es gibt auch solche im Innern der Erde. Ich habe sie noch nie gesehen, aber die Sagen erzählen von ihnen und ich glaube fest an sie" [And it is not only by external enemies that I am threatened. There are also enemies in the bowels of the earth. I have never seen them, but legend tells of them and I firmly believe in them] (Kafka 1976: 133; 1946: 326).

³⁵ See: (Villa in May and Kohn, 1997: 179-196; Barash in May and Kohn, 1997: 251-268).

³⁶ See: (Arendt, 1993; Arendt, 2002; Arendt, 1978a; Arendt 1978b). See, also: (Taminiaux, 1992; Mehring, 2001: 256-273; Volpi, 2007: 78-91).

³⁷ In reference to that last work, Arendt lets Heidegger know that it "ist unmittelbar aus den ersten Freiburger Tagen entstanden und schuldet Dir in jeder Hinsicht so ziemlich alles" [came directly out of the first Freiburg days and hence owes practically everything to you in every respect] (Arendt in Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 149; 2004: 124). Remarkably, Arendt mistakenly writes "Freiburger" instead of "Marburger."

Of those writings, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought,” an essay presented at the American Political Science Association Conference in 1954, deserves special attention.³⁸ In it, Arendt discusses Heidegger’s emphasis on “historicity” [*Geschichtlichkeit*] to show that, for him, human history coincides with the history of Being.³⁹ Expressing a new critical approach⁴⁰—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 him- or herself as a wise man 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.”⁴¹ Heidegger, then, is envisioned as an author who reads the old texts with new eyes. In response to a patent expression of the “philosophico-political problem”—mainly, the observation that philosophy mostly deals with man in the singular, whereas politics deals with men in the plural—Heidegger’s notion of “world” [*Welt*] is, for Arendt, insightful. She adds that, insofar as Heidegger “defines human existence as being-in-the-world, 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.”⁴²

With this extended prolegomenon, I attempt to explicitly release Arendt’s argument from any possible subordination in 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.⁴³ Indeed, many theorists have considered how Arendt thinks both *with and against* Heidegger.⁴⁴ The path they have opened up becomes precise in this intervention through the examination of the Arendtian notion of “political beginning” as key to understanding the meaning of the “anarchic principle” of politics, a term to which I will return in the third part of this presentation.

Beyond any personal impulse that might have animated Arendt’s work,⁴⁵ her discussion of the concept of “beginning” can only be properly understood if her persistent confrontation with the philosophical tradition is taken into account. While Arendt’s engagement with the

³⁸ See: (Arendt, 2005a: 428-447; Arendt in Grunenberg, Meints, Bruns, and Harckensee, 2008: 11-31).

³⁹ See: (Arendt and Blücher, 1996: 285, 286, 288, 295, 296).

⁴⁰ Significantly, during this period Arendt suggests to her interlocutor in a letter that “Ich muß Sie von meinem Aufsatz über den Existentialismus warnen, besonders vor dem Teil über Heidegger, der nicht nur völlig unangemessen, sondern teilweise einfach falsch ist” (Arendt, 12/31/1955).

⁴¹ (Arendt, 2005a: 432, 446). In the first draft of the text, however, Arendt does not overlook philosophers’ hostility to the polis, which is manifested in, for instance, Heidegger’s analyzes of *das Man*. See: (Heidegger, 1993).

⁴² (Arendt, 2005a: 443. See, also, Benhabib, 2003: 51-61).

⁴³ Works that emphasize the first alternative include: (Jay, 1985: 237-256; Ettinger, 1995; Jones, 1998: 164-192; Wolin, 2001; Faye, 2016). Those that dwell on the second vary in approach. See: (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1984: 183-211; Vollrath in Gethmann-Siefert and Pöggeler, 1988: 357-372; Heuer, 1992: 203-246; Canovan, 1990: 135-165; Taminaux, 1992; Taminaux, 2007: 16-30; Benhabib in Hinchman and Hinchman, 1994: 111-142; Benhabib, 2003: 35-61, 102-122; Villa, 1996; Villa, 1999: 61-86; Villa in Heuer, Heiter and Rosenmüller, 2011: 251-253; Grunenberg, 2006; 2007: 101-119; Grunenberg in Grunenberg, Meints, Bruns, and Harckensee, 2008: 49-69).

⁴⁴ See, notably: (Schürmann, 1982; Abensour, 1993: 225-241; Abensour, 2006; Abensour in Kupiec, Leibovici, Muhlmann, Tassin, 2007: 341-368; Birmingham in Raffoul and Pettigrew, 2002: 191-202; Forti, 1996: 43-87; Forti, 1999, I-XXXIII. See, also, Thomä in Thomä, 2013: 397-402).

⁴⁵ Strikingly, Arendt affirms that “Manchmal frage ich mich, was wohl schwieriger ist, den Deutschen einen Sinn für Politik oder den Amerikanern einen leichten Dunst auch nur von Philosophie beizubringen” [Sometimes I ask myself what is more difficult—to teach the Germans a sense of politics or to impart to the Americans a light dusting of philosophy] (Arendt in Arendt and Jaspers, 1985: 165). See, also: (Arendt in Gaus, 1964: 15-32; Arendt, 1990: 73-103).

question of the “beginning” is not systematic, it does run through 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,⁴⁶ the “beginning” is omnipresent in the Arendtian world. While many have examined this notion in her work,⁴⁷ 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*,⁴⁸ Arendt’s dictum that “against philosophy only philosophy helps” [*Gegen Philosophie hilft nur Philosophie*]⁴⁹ must not be disregarded. In other words, to interrogate the question of the politicality of the “beginning” in an Arendtian fashion requires, among other things, scrutinizing its philosophical vein in order to deactivate the anti-political impulses inherent to the act of beginning. Arendt acknowledges this important facet of the “philosophico-political problem” against the backdrop of unprecedented modern revolutionary experiences and of totalitarianism. She does not forget that context 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 “not by the strength of one architect but by the combined power of the many.”⁵⁰

Beyond the scandal sparked by a new and high-flown version of the tale of the fox, I have, in this section, attempted to bring to light a theoretical impasse: either scholarship has disregarded how Arendt’s notion of “beginning” is rooted in her *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger or it has 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 forge a conversation between those two Arendtian impulses. The intertwined nature of Arendt’s impulses is a theoretical facet of her thought that my work explores. Indeed, it is a sort of invitation to consider how Arendt’s confrontation with tradition evidences that both a “principle of an-archy” and the basic experience of its *common* institution animate “political beginnings.”

Politics of Beginnings or the An-Archic Promise

Time speeds on and—in some cases—the “beginning” requires an end. Moreover, the story of the “*Vogel aus dem schwarzen Wald*”⁵¹ and the “*Mädchen aus der Fremde*”⁵² was re-written more than once. During her first semester at the Philipps-Universität, Arendt attended Heidegger’s seminar on Plato’s *Sophist*, which included a reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. That first encounter between those thinkers had lasting theoretical consequences in Arendt’s work and, particularly, in her contention with the philosophical tradition. Indeed, her interest in the notion of “beginning” emerged precisely during the

⁴⁶ (Arendt, 2006b; Arendt, 1993b; Arendt, 1958; Arendt, 2005a: 328-360; Arendt, 1998; Arendt, 2006a; Arendt, 1993a; Arendt, 1978b; Arendt, 2002).

⁴⁷ See, among others: (King, 1984: 235-251; Honig, 1991: 97-113; Canovan, 1992: 136-155; Hinchman and Hinchman, 1994: 161-162; Lefort, 1986: 59; Lefort, 1999: 208; Hammer, 2002: 124-149; Zerilli, 2002: 540-553; Keenan, 2003: 76-101; Kalyvas, 2004: 320-346; Kalyvas, 2008: 187-300; Markell, 2006: 1-14; Näsström, 2014: 543-568; Cane, 2015a: 242-248; Cane, 2015b: 55-75; Hilb, 2015: 67-102).

⁴⁸ See, in particular: (Heidegger, 2012; Heidegger, 1994; Heidegger, 1987; Heidegger, 2005; Heidegger, 2009b; Heidegger, 2013).

⁴⁹ See Arendt’s letter to Dolf Sternberger dated August 26, 1949: (Arendt in Nordmann, 2013: 86).

⁵⁰ (Arendt, 2006a, 214). See, also: (Howard in Benhabib, 2010: 283). Later, in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt turns to Heidegger’s “*Der Spruch des Anaximander*” and claims that it evidences a “changed mood [that] reflected Germany’s defeat, the ‘point zero’ [...] that for a few years seemed to promise a *new beginning*” (Arendt, 1978b: 188). Italics in the original.

⁵¹ (Arendt in Arendt and Blücher, 1996: 509).

⁵² (Arendt in Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 76).

“Marburger Tage.” As Arendt reminds us, though, intense engagement with this topic is not incidental: the question of “political beginnings” is as old as philosophical concern with politics in general.⁵³ Insofar as Arendt approaches the atavisms of tradition as a means to engage the abyssal character of political modernity, she undertakes a far-reaching theoretical investigation that releases “political beginnings” from the pure spontaneity of the great event and the given.

Even though Arendt did not have access to the recently published seminars and intellectual diaries where Heidegger advocates a fusion of “ontology” and “politics” as key to understanding the “new beginning,”⁵⁴ she refutes some of Heidegger’s basic assumptions on founding moments in politics. If, in the Heideggerian intellectual constellation, grasping an extraordinary beginning and the great mission of a “we” is based on repudiation of clumsy repetition and requires “*détruire la destruction*,”⁵⁵ 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*],⁵⁶ then, by contrast, the Arendtian endeavor focuses on what, in reference to the formulation of one of its most sophisticated collaborators, Reiner Schürmann, we might call the “an-archic principle”⁵⁷ inherent in every “beginning.” 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;⁵⁸ Arendt’s “political beginning,” in fact, can no longer be understood in terms of “*l’histoire comme drame de l’être*.”⁵⁹

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 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.” “Beginnings” undergo, rather, the an-archic pluralization at stake in any extra-ordinary act of political foundation. “An-archic” has a specific meaning in my intervention. To “begin” with, “*archē* means both origin and rule.”⁶⁰ And, consequently, “an-archy” implies “the impossibility of fully constituted (or once-and-for-all instituted) *archē*, both as point of origin and as point of governance.”⁶¹

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

⁵³ In one essay where she examines Heidegger’s thought, Arendt states: “Plato hat einmal gesagt: ἀρχὴ γὰρ καὶ θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἰδρυμένη σώζει πάντα [*arche gar kai theos en anthropois hidrymene sozei panta*] — “denn *der Anfang ist auch ein Gott*, solange er unter den Menschen weilt, rettet er alles” (Arendt in Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 179; Arendt in Neske and Kettering, 1988: 232). Italics mine.

⁵⁴ In a letter to J. Glenn Gray, Arendt states that, precisely because of her encounter and confrontation with Heidegger, she can interpret him like no one else (Arendt, 11/18/1969). See, also: (Heuer, 1992: 212).

⁵⁵ See: (Nancy, 2015: 42).

⁵⁶ (Heidegger, 2014a, 160-162). This “vigor” wanes in the postwar. After mentioning “Das Ding” and “Dichterisch wohnt der Mensch,” Arendt conveys to Heinrich Blücher a conclusive dictum: “Weder Willkür noch Notwendigkeit des Anfangs, sondern wirkliche Freiheit” (Arendt in Arendt and Blücher, 1996: 275).

⁵⁷ See: (Schürmann, 1982). Significantly, Miguel Abensour defined the “principle of an-archy” as “*le déperissement des fondations qui a affecté l’agir*” (Abensour, 1993: 234).

⁵⁸ See: (Heidegger, 2014b, 99; Nancy, 2015: 41; Losurdo, 1991).

⁵⁹ This formulation is not related to Arendt but to Heidegger, though. See: (Badiou, 2015: 122).

⁶⁰ See: (Gourgouris, 1). “Any primordial notion of *archē* as singular authority or singular origin of power,” Gourgouris suggests, “is irreparably disrupted. This exposes the whole business of ruling as a veritably *an-archic* condition in the sense that rule, though not abolished, is provisionally constituted on no other ground than the equal sharing of power among a people who occasionally perform the position of ruler and occasionally performs the position of ruled but are in essence always, politically, acting in both positions simultaneously. *In this very sense, anarchy is the archē of democracy*” (Gourgouris, 2). Italics in the original. See, also: (Lambropoulos, 2007: 193-210; Castoriadis, 2004: 210-214).

⁶¹ See: (Gourgouris, 7). See, also: (Castoriadis, 2008: 201).

confusion regarding the domains of labor, work, and action, and to the traditional representation of the Platonic myth of the cave where the polis, grounded on the ἀγαθόν, is, ultimately, assumed to be the founding myth of every political theory.⁶² Arendt's critical assessment of 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” inherent to the “beginning” “can only exist against the provenance of the One (the singularity of *archē* as origin and rule).” As political position, an-archy is, in fact, “an investment in a specific signification of *archē*, whereby the business of ruling is a plural, shared, yet contentious affair.”⁶³ Detecting the limits and promises of an an-archic “beginning”—a “beginning” *ohne Geländer*—means, then, bringing to the fore the contours of the exceptionalist Heideggerian trap. And that is no mean feat. Arendt herself 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.”⁶⁴

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 its *common* institution.⁶⁵ Arendt contests in no uncertain terms narratives that enclose the “manyness of beginnings.”⁶⁶ The figure of the great founder understood as an ontological supplement of “the political” must give way to the idea of the “democratic heroism” of “ordinary glories.”⁶⁷ Arendt's commitment to a “politics of the ordinary”⁶⁸ does not mean suppressing that which erupts unpredictably or that which challenges the status quo.⁶⁹ 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.”⁷⁰ By recalling Kafka—a pioneer interpreter of the tale of the fox—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 emanating from above or from below.”⁷¹

But in returning to Arendt's *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger, to the *sotto voce* dispute between them over how to narrate the experience of the “beginning,”

⁶² Tellingly, Arendt suggests to Heidegger that his thinking was what incited her to pursue this line of thought. See: (Heidegger, 1976: 203-238; Arendt, 1993: 291). On her study of the distinction between labor, work, and action, Arendt confesses to Heidegger that “*Dies könnte ich nicht, wenn ich es kann, ohne das, was ich in der Jugend bei Dir gelernt habe*” (Arendt in Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 146).

⁶³ (Gourgouris, 7). See, also: (Vernant, 2008: 423-454; Vlastos, 1995: 57-88; Castoriadis, 2004: 185-224, 264-269).

⁶⁴ “Kommt alle her, hier ist eine Falle, die schönste Falle der Welt” (Arendt, 2002: 403; 2005a: 362). Or, to put it in Kafka's terms: “Das schönste an meinem Bau ist aber seine Stille. Freilich, sie ist trügerisch” [The most beautiful thing about my burrow is the stillness. Of course, that is deceptive] (Kafka, 1976: 134; 1946: 327).

⁶⁵ See: (Schürmann, 1982: 107). See, also: (Le Ny, 2013: 182-192).

⁶⁶ See: (Leibovici, 2007: 908). Narration is crucial in Arendt. She explains that “no matter how abstract our theories may sound or how consistent our arguments appear, there are incidents and stories behind them, which, at least for ourselves, contain as in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say” (Arendt, 1960: 1). See, also: (Disch, 1994: 1-19).

⁶⁷ See: (Tassin, 2013: 23-36).

⁶⁸ (Honig, 2009: XVIII). Startlingly, in an earlier discussion of this issue, Honig states that Arendt's political speech act “privileges not the ordinary but the extraordinary, celebrating the latter's exceptional and rule-resistant character” (Honig, 1993: 94).

⁶⁹ Andreas Kalyvas suggests that “a new beginning emerges from within and against the ordinary.” In a sense, then, “extraordinary politics presupposes and depends upon ordinary politics, without which it would neither be possible nor make any sense at all” (Kalyvas, 2008: 224). 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” (Arendt, 1960: 2). Italics mine.

⁷⁰ See: (Markell, 2017: 77-99).

⁷¹ “Durch seine Gesetze regiert wird, nicht durch geheimnisvolle Kräfte, die von oben oder unten ausströmen” (Arendt, 1945/1946: 1058, 1062; 1976: 108, 115; 2005a: 76; 80). See also: (Arendt and Broch, 1996: 9, 10, 25, 26, 33, 34, 37, 41, 58; Honig, 2016: 307-336).

perplexities emerge. Among them, Heidegger's astonishing suggestion that *Der Bau* was the work by Kafka that most impressed him.⁷² Yet Heidegger, unlike Arendt, was not aware of the risks depicted in Kafka's story—a fact overlooked if we hastily assume that the tale of the fox is our nightmare and that the exiled Arendt was also responsible for the Heideggerian “*destruction de la pensée*.” When we accept that Arendt perfected Heidegger's trap, the theoretical quandaries with which my “beginning” ends seem to be resolved. Still, Heidegger, the fox, who was loathe to quote contemporary authors, copies in his *Schwarzen Heften* a passage written by Arendt. The fact that the paragraph selected deals with the notion of *Anfang*⁷³ reminds us that, as the voice of the poet indicates: “ES IST ALLES ANDERS, als du es dir denkst, als ich es mir denke, / die Fahne weht noch, / die kleinen Geheimnisse sind noch bei sich, / sie werfen noch Schatten, davon / lebst du, leb ich, leben wir” [IT IS ALL DIFFERENT from what you think, from what I think, / the flag still waves, / the little secrets are still intact, / they still cast shadows—on this / you live, I live, we live].⁷⁴

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⁷² “Ricordo che, nel 1966, mentre frequentavo a Le Thor il seminario su Eraclito, chiesi a Heidegger se avesse letto Kafka. Mi rispose che, del non molto che aveva letto, era rimasto soprattutto impressionato dal racconto *Der Bau*, La tana. L'innominato animale (talpa, volpe o essere umano) protagonista del racconto è ossessivamente occupato a costruire una tana inespugnabile, che si rivela a poco a poco essere, invece, una trappola senza uscita” (Agamben, 2013: 108). See: (Biemel, 1968: 66-140; 1989: 425-439; 2003: 23-38; Cavalcante Schuback, 2007: 56-69 and, particularly, Arendt and Heidegger, 1998: 112, 159, 160, 162, 163, 179, 294, 295, 323, 324).

⁷³ Heidegger quotes Arendt's book on Rahel Varnhagen: “Ist nicht stets am Ende, wenn man nicht mehr zerstreut und beteiligt am Einzelnen, Gegenwärtigen ist, an Glück und Unglück, wenn alles schon entschieden ist, der *Anfang* wieder eindringlich da, all das, was man vergessen mußte, um weiter zu können, überströmt von der Fülle und dem viel zu Vielen eines menschlichen Lebens? Und gebärdet sich nicht der *Anfang* stets als das Eigentliche, nicht Zerstörbare, als der Kern?” [After all, when one was no longer distracted and involved in specific present concerns, in happiness and unhappiness, when everything was already decided and done with, was not the end the same as the beginning? Was not the *beginning* present once more, with all that had had to be forgotten in order to get on, all that had been drowned out by the fullness, variety and multiplicity of human life? And did not the *beginning* then prove to have been, all along, the essential, indestructible core?] (Heidegger, 2014b: 265; and Arendt, 1959: 160-161; 1997: 213-214). Italics mine. See, also: (Benhabib, 1995: 5-24; Weissberg in Arendt, 1997: 3-69; Leibovici, 2007: 903-922).

⁷⁴ (Celan, 1986: 284).

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