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Liberalism and the Question of "The Proud": Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss as Readers of Hobbes

Liisi Keedus

"[T]he voyce of a man is in the noyse of the day."
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 2

Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, two among the most influential political thinkers of the twentieth century, made no secret of the fact that they were "not liberals."[1] As their argumentation was often convoluted, it has sometimes remained unclear when and where their accounts of modern political thought in the broader sense entailed a critique of liberalism in a more specific sense. As a result, some of Arendt and Strauss's readers have deemed their interrogations of political modernity too general for a constructive political critique.[2]

In what follows, I will seek to challenge this impression by arguing that in contrast to other contemporary critics, who highlighted the cultural, economic, or ethical ramifications of liberal modernity, Arendt and Strauss contested precisely what they believed was the misconstruction of the problem of the *political* in liberalism. Even if neither Arendt nor Strauss wrote a systematic normative assessment of liberalism in today's sense, they pre-

[1] Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding* (New York: Hartcourt, 1994), 404.
[2] For criticism, see Rober Pippin, "The Unavailability of the Ordinary. Strauss on the Philosophical Fate of Modernity," *Political Theory* 31 (2003): 335–58.

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sented their critiques through asking what was the change that liberalism had brought about in the understanding of politics. It is worthwhile noting, first, that when tracing the "origins" of liberal political vision, both emphasized less its intellectual debt to such "classic" liberal thinkers as John Stuart Mill, John Locke, Adam Smith, or Alexis de Tocqueville. Instead, they turned to Thomas Hobbes—rather unconventionally at the time—as the paradigmatic liberal. Secondly, their readings of Hobbes—of which Strauss's reading is admittedly more nuanced and continues to be widely appreciated as a serious contribution to Hobbes-scholarship, even if Arendt's, although quite ignored,[3] is equally telling about her judgment of liberalism—display striking parallels. These parallels not only allow us to qualify the all too familiar opposition between the two authors as each other's intellectual and political antipodes,[4] but also bring to light the distinctly political core of their philosophical approaches to liberal modernity.

It is precisely this political thrust that makes it necessary to place their contentions back into their contemporary settings. No matter how frequently their legacies are evoked in today's debates, their own pursuits speak of involvement with the problems of their time. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the fears of liberals and non-liberals alike ranged from the perceived weakness of liberalism against its foes in winning the hearts of the voters, to doubts regarding the possibility of any kind of long-term order, be it social, civil, or international. At the time when experience seemed to have taught that all certainties collapsed in the face of the first serious challenges, it was anything but clear that the kind of liberalism that many regarded as part of Europe's political failures would now hold the answers. Just as important, systematic debates on "liberalism" as conducted today were largely absent from mid-century political theory. The term "liberalism" itself seldom appeared, while "democracy" instead was

[3] Cf. however Reinhardt Koselleck: "Hannah Arendt has masterfully drawn the radical conclusions from Hobbes's individualistic first steps," in *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), note 7, 24.

[4] The few comparative discussions include Dana Villa, "Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: Citizenship versus Philosophy" in *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German émigrés and American Political Thought After World War II*, ed. Peter Graf Kielmansegg, Horst Mewes, and Elizabeth Glaser-Schmidt (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995); Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: The Uncommenced Dialogue" *Political Theory* 18 (1990): 238–54; Harald Bluhm, "Variationen des Höhlengleichnisses: Kritik und Restitution politischer Philosophie bei Hannah Arendt und Leo Strauss," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47 (1999): 911–33.

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a much more commonly used concept.[5] Last but not least, the concept of liberalism entailed a range of different meanings, only partly dependent on the author's individual intentions—and at least to some extent, as we will see, on the broader intellectual tradition.

"LIBERALISM (IN THE CONTINENTAL SENSE)": HOBBES IN WEIMAR READINGS

In 1934, John Laird, a British historian of philosophy, wrote in a footnote in his book on Thomas Hobbes that a "recent and very competent writer, L. Strauss has said that Hobbes was the true founder of liberalism (in the continental sense), that Hobbes's absolutism was liberalism in the making, and that [. . .] the critics [. . .] of liberalism should go back to Hobbes."[6] This remark is more telling than its modest placing suggests. First, Strauss's thesis that we should trace liberalism back to Hobbes struck Laird as curious because at the time it had no parallels in the historical self-understanding of liberal Anglo-Saxon political thought. There were only a few recent studies of the thinker and the conventional Hobbes appeared as a contestant rather than an advocate of the liberal political outlook.[7] Yet Laird's comment is also expressive of the diverse, sometimes contradictory evaluations, uses, and meanings of "liberalism" in different intellectual and political traditions.

German liberal political thought never simply followed the ideas of the French or Anglo-Saxon traditions. German liberals, far from formulating individual liberties in opposition to the ambitions of the state, often held that only when the state's higher interests were secure could individuals pursue their ethical aims and freedom. Individual freedom, unless deemed an abstract and meaningless concept, appeared inseparable from concrete social and political institutions. Although in the first half of the nineteenth century liberalism was largely associated with progressivism and political freedom, throughout the following decades, it became linked with the

[5] See esp. John Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity. Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), esp. ch. 5.

[6] John Laird, *Hobbes* (London: Benn, 1934), 312.

[7] See Peter Collier and Bernard Willms, "Hobbes en Allemagne," *Archives de Philosophie, Bulletin Hobbes* 1 (1988): 240–53; and *Leviathan between the Wars*, ed. Luc Foisneau (Frankfurt am Main, 2005). For reception of Hobbes, see also Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 142–68.

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materialist-industrialist worldview and the problem of social atomization.[8] Later, during and after the Great War, liberalism came to represent bourgeois progressivism—that is, the very values that the war had utterly discredited not only in Germany, but also in most parts of devastated Europe. No less importantly, liberal political practices came to represent the inability to take decisions, lack of commitment to any cause, and egoistic political conduct—woes summarized as "parliamentarianism" and perceived to be the underlying reasons for Weimar's political chaos.[9]

This was certainly the view of Carl Schmitt, one of the most compelling critics of Weimar liberalism. Liberalism's "ideal of political life," wrote Schmitt, "consists in discussion, not only in the legislative body but also among the entire population," and it rests on the belief that "truth will emerge automatically through voting."[10] Evasion of political decisions remained for Schmitt one of the most distinct traits of liberalism. As is well known, Strauss's interest in the liberalism-Hobbes connection dated back to his "Notes on Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*," a review published in 1932. In this treatise, Schmitt argued that liberalism lacked a positive concept of politics and sought to replace it or rather obscure it by means of moral or economic categories. Against the "depolitization of politics" Schmitt asserted politics as an irreducible human dimension where decisions are made on neither moral, nor economic nor even religious grounds, but "existentially."[11] At the center of a political decision stands the distinction between one's friends and one's enemies—and this decision is the matter of the state. Politics is not to be understood as party-politics, which always contains a risk for civil war, claimed Schmitt in contempt of Weimar parliamentarianism, but as a matter between sovereign states. Here Schmitt appealed to Hobbes as the ultimate political thinker: in contrast to liberals, Hobbes had captured the ineradicability of the political moment in

[8] Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History, The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 104ff; Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft* (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag), 114–60. For an introduction to the history of the concept in different national contexts, see Rudolf Vierhaus, "Liberalismus" in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1972–1989), 3: 741–85.

[9] As an example of contemporary criticism, see Goetz Briefs, "Der klassische Liberalismus," *Archiv für Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie* 24 (1930–31): 90–124.

[10] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 63.

[11] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 27.

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human existence by making fear of death—the earnest consciousness of man's potential for conflict or of his "dangerousness"—man's fundamental passion. No less importantly, Hobbes had in Schmitt's view correctly argued that it is only the sovereign, by virtue of its absolute power, who can warrant internal unity and thereby can alleviate this fear in the form of concrete dominion.[12]

Although largely sympathetic with Schmitt's diagnosis of liberalism, Strauss expressed reservations about his response to liberal thought or his "position of the political." He did so by focusing precisely on Schmitt's interpretation of Hobbes as it emerged from his *Concept of the Political.* According to Strauss, Schmitt downplayed Hobbes's usage of the "state of nature" as itself a polemical concept, one devised with the purpose of laying down the foundation of a new moral order. Building on Schmitt's idea that all political concepts are polemical, Strauss pointed out that this is rather the presupposition of liberalism as an anti-political manner of thought. Accordingly, Schmitt's own "affirmation of the political as such proves to be a liberalism with the opposite polarity."[13] Read in this key, Hobbes becomes "the anti-political thinker" ("political" understood in Schmitt's sense)[14]; indeed, he is rather to be considered the founder of the new liberal order.

However, the idea of presenting liberalism through a reading of Hobbes was not Strauss's alone. In fact, nowhere in inter-war Europe was Hobbes as intensely discussed as in Germany, and nowhere were these discussions as relevant for the evaluation of liberalism.[15] The most notable source of this revival of interest in Hobbes was Ferdinand Tönnies, for whom Hobbes was the founder of the historical epoch "in which we still live."[16] Against the prevailing view at the time, Tönnies argued that Hobbes had not been a teacher of despotism but of natural rights. However, in his doctrine of civil rights, Hobbes considered only the private rights of citizens that would allow them to further their private affairs undisturbed by state interference. Tönnies underlined that freedom for Hobbes was liberty *from* the state and that citizens have neither the permission nor the duty to act beyond the boundaries of the private sphere.[17] This gives rise to the "moral-

[12] Ibid., 52ff, 65ff.
[13] Ibid., 105.
[14] Ibid., 92 at footnote.
[15] Foisneau, *Leviathan between the Wars*, esp. 11–14.
[16] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Thomas Hobbes. Leben und Lehre* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1971), preface to the 1st edition (1896), VII.
[17] Ibid., 222–23, and 257.

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ity of egoists" and ultimately leads to "the isolation of individuals against each other, and of the state against the individuals."[18] Hobbes's doctrine of the state necessarily lapses into the dismantling of all communal relations, explained Tönnies, because he had thematized "society" only as an instrumental association of self-interested individuals, and mistakenly disregarded the sense of belonging inherent in a "community" of co-nationals.[19]

Friedrich Meinecke, in his investigations of the history of the idea of *raison d'état*, similarly objected to the individualistic basis of Hobbes's doctrine of the state. Meinecke believed that Hobbes was the first thinker in the Western tradition who had undermined the political spirit altogether. Hobbes had not only confined citizens to the private realm, but he had also undermined the state's authority—his *Leviathan*'s reign is absolute only in appearance. Whenever the political powers of the sovereign are justified on purely utilitarian grounds, argued Meinecke, these become subservient to *commoda vitae*, the simple pleasures. For Meinecke, there was no Hobbesian doctrine of the *raison d'état* properly speaking, but only a defense of the primacy of the "merely useful and the merely egoistic."[20]

Ernst Cassirer, who was Strauss's *Doktorvater* and a *Vernunftrepublikaner* like Meinecke, was equally reserved towards Hobbes's "egoistically driven politics." There is no political community properly speaking for Hobbes, as there is nothing originally social in Hobbesian man, and his social contract is an agreement between different interest groups. Cassirer argued that Hobbes based his political doctrine on his novel conception of man and reason. It was in no small part Hobbes who had given impetus to the modern replacement of philosophy as knowledge of "what" with philosophy that looked at the world through the question of "how." Hobbes turned "all thinking" into "reckoning" and consequently gave his political teaching a "merely utilitarian grounding."[21]

While the German readers for whom Hobbes represented the rise of individualism remained critical of his legacy, the young sociologist Helmut Schelsky followed Schmitt in both his appreciation and the direction of his interpretation of the thinker. For Schelsky, as for Schmitt, constitutive of Hobbes's political doctrine were its anthropological foundations. The

[18] Ibid., 221, 267.
[19] Ibid., 204.
[20] Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1924), chapter on Grotius, Hobbes, and Spinoza.
[21] Cassirer, Ernst, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), the chapter "Law, State and Society." Cf. Max Horkheimer *Anfänge der bürgerlichen Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1930), 37–76.

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Hobbesian man, however, "is of his nature neither good nor evil, but powerful: *power* is his nature."[22] Moreover, Schelsky objected to a naturalistic interpretation of Hobbesian anthropology. Men are acting beings, but through acting, they overcome their "first," or the beastly, nature that aims at little else but self-preservation, and achieve their "second" or artificial, that is, their "human" nature—the ultimate expression of which is politics. Schelsky, who was an outspoken Nazi sympathizer in the 1930s, agreed with Schmitt insofar as they both appreciated Hobbes as the most important modern theorist of the *state*. Yet Schelsky contested Schmitt's emphasis on fear as constitutive of the primacy of the state, and argued instead that the Hobbesian state—to be taken literally as the Immortal God—embodied the "highest reality" of human existence.[23]

POLITICS AND THE MIND: ARENDT'S AND STRAUSS'S PHENOMENOLOGIES OF LIBERALISM

Some of the above themes and reproaches were not altogether absent from Strauss's and Arendt's readings of Hobbes. Both wrote their interpretations at highly precarious times. Strauss had been working on the manuscript for *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* since the early 1930s, and Arendt had made Hobbes the protagonist of her article *Expansion and the Philosophy of Power*, published in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In the summer of 1933, while in exile in Paris, Strauss wrote to his friend Karl Löwith that despite the desperate situation of the Jews, he saw "no reason to crawl to the cross, neither to the cross of liberalism." "Rather than any cross"—the young Strauss announced in what has by now become an infamous letter—"I'll take the ghetto."[24] Instead, he soon took refuge in liberal England to study Hobbes as the founder of not only liberalism but also modern political thought more broadly understood. Arendt, for her part, despite having enjoyed the safe haven offered to her by liberal America during Europe's collapse, insisted that liberalism "has demonstrated its inability to resist totalitarianism so often that its failure

[22] Schelsky, Helmut, "Die Totalität des Staates bei Hobbes," *Archiv für Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie* 31 (1937–38): 186.
[23] Ibid., 190–91.
[24] Letter from Strauss to Löwith, May 19, 1933, *Gesammelte Schriften* III, ed. H. Meier (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1996–97), 624–25.

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may already be counted among the historical facts of our century."[25] In order to grasp the causes of this "failure," Arendt too turned to the "only great thinker" of liberalism—Hobbes—who in her view had "wanted nothing more or less than a justification of Tyranny."[26]

Admittedly, as interpreters Strauss and Arendt engaged with Hobbes's work on virtually incomparable levels. Strauss's book has remained one of the classic commentaries on the thinker even for those who disagree with it, while Arendt's relatively brief interest in Hobbes was above all instrumental and at times resulted in what may seem to be flagrantly contradictory statements. Therefore it is important to note that instead of evaluating the hermeneutic qualities of their interpretations, my main aim is to juxtapose their diagnoses of the liberalism of their own time as both expressed and concealed in their readings of the Malmesbury philosopher.

In this exercise Arendt and Strauss shared a number of presuppositions. They both believed, firstly, that in order to grasp what lies at the core of liberalism one has to go to its original intent, which has been obscured by the subsequent tradition.[27] Secondly, as we will see below, for neither Arendt nor Strauss was Hobbes merely a liberal. Precisely because of this he became appealing for both for uncovering the forgotten presuppositions, as it were, of liberal thinking. Thirdly, both regarded Hobbes to have thought in the time of a crisis that called for radically new visions not entirely different from their own situation. Both Arendt and Strauss often suggested that it was in such times that the problems presented themselves clearest to thinkers, a time when one could take few things for granted.[28] Here too Hobbes became relevant for both: he had attempted to approach the phenomenon of politics without the interference of external presuppositions, hence naturally, as it were.

In this context it is also interesting to note that despite what Arendt

[25] Arendt, *Essays*, 281–82. Cf. "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" (1945) in *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2008), 232–33.
[26] Arendt, "Expansion and Philosophy of Power," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 606–16. With only minor changes, Arendt included this essay in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Hartcourt, 1976).
[27] Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), esp. introduction. Especially valuable for understanding Hobbes's role in Strauss's narrative of modernity would be the publishing of his paper "The Origin of Modern Political Thought," Leo Strauss Papers, The Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Box 14, Folder 11.
[28] For Strauss, see Introduction to *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, and "Die religiöse Lage der Gegenwart," *Gesammelte Schriften* II, 389. For Arendt, see Preface in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1993), 9ff, and "What is Authority?" in *ibid.*, 141, 204.

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might have thought of Strauss "otherwise," she had a high regard for his book on Hobbes. She took extensive notes and used it as the only main commentary for preparing her course on the thinker.[29] One of Strauss's main contentions had been that Hobbes's new political science was less the result of applying a new "scientific" method than driven by his more "original" motive: his determination to challenge the political and moral conventions of his time. Like Strauss, Arendt attributed little significance to Hobbes's proto-positivist method and interpreted it as emerging from his political intentions instead. To make this point, Arendt and Strauss exposed what they believed were the more primary experiences underlying the new concept of reason.

Genealogies of modern philosophical and scientific thought often emphasize doubt as the basis of the emerging scientific mind. Arendt argued that the theoretical stance of doubt had emerged from the more primary experience of "mistrust" towards the world:

> Not doubt, but mistrust is the beginning of modern philosophy and science. [. . .] "De omnibus dubitandum" is based on mistrust regarding the very possibility of knowledge. The Cartesian "doubt" is best expressed in the suspicion that a devil might be pulling the wool over our eyes [. . .]. This is a mistrust that is closely related to the mistrust of the senses, and hence the possibility to know the merely given.[30]

The problem is no longer the possibility that men misinterpret the facts about the world as it is mediated to them by their senses, but that the senses are fundamentally deceptive about the real character of the world, complicating rather than facilitating reason's way towards truthful understanding.[31] Both Arendt and Strauss argued that there is a phenomenological

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[29] Arendt believed that Strauss was giving his students a good background for philosophical reading, "regardless of what one might think of him otherwise." Letters from Arendt to Blumenfeld, April 26, 1956, 141, and July 31, 1956, 150 *". . . in keinem Besitz verwurzelt . . ." Die Korrespondenz*, ed. I. Normann (Hamburg: publisher?, 1995). Arendt also wrote to Jaspers that Strauss's book on Hobbes was "good," and as her extensive notes in her copy suggest, she had carefully read it. Her library is kept at Bard College, Hannah Arendt Collection. For her written notes online, see Washington D.C., Library of Congress, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Subject File, 1949–75, Courses, "History of Political Theory, Hobbes."

[30] Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, vol. 1, ed. U. Ludz and I. Nordmann (Munich: Piper, 2002), 393 (translation mine). Cf. notes "History of Political Theory," 024047–51.

[31] For Arendt, see *Between Past and Future*, 54–57; *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 299; *Essays*, 370. For Strauss, see *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 94ff and 183–85.

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similarity between Descartes's fear that the truth is masked and Hobbes's suspicion that the common human experience gives us merely a distorted picture and idea of reality.[32] Strauss insisted that Hobbes had given political thrust to the implications of Cartesian thought:

> Hobbes's own system of morals corresponds better to Descartes's deepest intention than does the morality of *Les passions de l'âme*. Radical doubt, whose moral correlate is distrust and fear, comes earlier than the self-confidence of the ego grown conscious of its independence and freedom, whose moral correlate is *générosité*. Descartes begins [. . .] with distrust of his own prejudices, with distrust above all of the potential *deus deceptor*, just as Hobbes begins interpreting the State and therewith all morality by starting from men's natural distrust. It is, however, not Descartes's morals, but Hobbes's, which explains the concrete meaning and the concrete implications of fundamental distrust.[33]

The maxim *de omnibus dubitandum est* soon transformed itself into a distrust towards reason. Disappointment in reason's externally extending powers—its ability to grasp and make meaningful claims about the "world" (more important for Arendt) or the "order of things" (for Strauss)—turned the focus of the mind towards the workings of the mind itself. It is only the "self" (Arendt) and the self-consciousness (Strauss) to which one still has trustworthy access. The shift towards the internal as a source of all reliable knowledge of human things marked for both Arendt and Strauss the beginning of the "modern flight from the world into the self."[34]

AGAINST THE POLITICS OF FEAR: ARENDT ON FEELINGS AND POLITICS

As noted, Arendt's and Strauss's concern with Hobbes can also be traced back to their shared attraction to the thinker. For Arendt, Hobbes was both a quintessentially political and an anti-political thinker. While consistency

[32] Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 280–84.
[33] Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 56–57, 125; and "The Origin of Modern Political Thought," 42. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 299–305, and *Between Past and Future*, 54–57.
[34] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 6. Cf. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 158–59.

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was never the first priority of her own work or the quality she valued highest in her intellectual interlocutors, her characterization of Hobbes in the above terms is only seemingly contradictory. On the one hand, Hobbes was the only political philosopher who based his whole philosophy on the grounds of political problems and identified what for Arendt constituted the central problem of politics, the problem of plurality:

> *Man* is a-political. Politics stems from the in-between of men, that is, from somewhere *outside* of *men*. There is no proper political substance. Politics emerges in between and establishes itself as a relation. Hobbes understood this.[35]

On the other hand—and here Arendt was in full agreement with Strauss—Hobbes had purposefully used his political insight to curtail the political edge of human aspirations. For Arendt, Hobbes had achieved this by making the cornerstone of his normative claims not the sphere of human interaction, but the inspection of the self. Among the mistrusted senses is also the "common sense," which in the new political knowledge needed to be replaced by insight into psychological experience. Only the new credo "I just need to examine myself to find out how everyone is" allowed Hobbes to replace the classical focus on the city with a focus on private feelings, such as the fear of death, as the starting point for political reflection.[36]

Yet for Arendt such feelings as pleasure, and even more so pain, were the purest instances of privacy: they can never be shared with others. The sensation of pain is always mine only, and if someone else can have any idea of it at all, it is only by a vague recalling of one's own past private experiences. Therefore making fear of pain into a political principle, as Hobbes had done, meant nothing less for Arendt than intentionally and knowingly eliminating the political realm proper:

> Only pain expels one from the common world, it is the great individualizer. Even pleasure, no matter how internal its meaning, is [. . .] still bound to others. It is like love a world-less relation. Pleasure as a political principle is like onanism. Pain as a political principle, above all Hobbes's "violent death"! is mere impotence, the powerlessness of the one who is through pain—or from fear of it—thrown back upon himself.[37]

[35] *Denktagebuch*, 17, 81 (translation mine).
[36] *The Human Condition*, 229.
[37] *Denktagebuch*, 510 (translation mine). Cf. *The Human Condition*, 50–51, 310.

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Thereby Arendt's Hobbes had turned the plurality of men into a mere multiplicity in number, wherein the sameness of all men characterized not only the pre-political state of nature, but also the political condition.[38] Arendt herself, by contrast, underlined the strictly artificial character of politics—as a relation among men, distinct from man's relation to nature. Arendtian politics emerges out of both the plurality of opinions and a shared concern for the polity. Equality in the politically relevant sense is not a given—unlike the Hobbesian sameness—but the result and expression of civic life. Private feelings such as fear can never be properly speaking common for us, she argued, but "throw us back" onto our lone selves.[39]

Hobbes's turn from the "world" to the "self" allowed him "to derive public good from private interest," while freedom lost its public meaning and came to denote activities outside the political realm.[40] Yet for Arendt, the security and the retreat to privacy that liberalism claimed to guarantee was aimed at the exclusion of individuals "from participation in the management of public affairs." On the one hand, thereby "the individual loses his rightful place in society and his natural connection with his fellow-men" and becomes an "isolated" subject, "powerless" in political matters. On the other hand, the retreat of the citizen into the private sphere turned politics into a sphere of "absolute obedience" and political matters "regulated by the state under the guise of necessity."[41] Thus while liberalism is most commonly associated with the intention to protect the individual against the state, Arendt's Hobbes, by excluding the citizen from politics, made the state more irresistible than ever. This may not yet, in Arendt's narrative, "be the beginning of terror," but it certainly is "its most fertile ground."[42]

COURAGE OR VANITY? STRAUSS'S HOBBES AS THE RE-MAKER OF MORALS

While Strauss too objected to the Hobbesian turn towards subjectivity, his interpretation diverged from Arendt's contention that Hobbes aimed thereby to isolate men from each other. Although Strauss's Hobbes also began with the examination of one's self, the foundation of his doctrine

[38] "History of Political Theory," 023970–024007.
[39] *Denktagebuch*, 17–18.
[40] See also Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 150.
[41] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 141.
[42] Ibid., 474; cf. "Organized Guilt," 129–30.

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rested on an analysis of man's self-consciousness in terms of his relation to other individuals:

> Right self-consciousness is, however, not right "self-knowledge" as knowledge of man's essential being, of the nobility and baseness which make up that being; it is, in other words, not knowledge of the place which is essentially due to man in the cosmos, but is a right consciousness in the human individual of himself in relation to other human individuals, and of the situation in which he finds himself face to face with other human individuals.[43]

This seminal turn becomes the basis of specifically modern political thought, argued Strauss, making Hobbes the philosophical predecessor of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, and giving him an importance reaching far beyond theories of state or natural right.[44]

Hence neither man's potential evil, his infinite appetite for power, nor its counterpart, man's fear of death, are to be understood naturalistically in Hobbes. The infinity of desire is not simply an expression of irrational, animal impulse. It becomes a desire for dominion, "a perpetuall and restless desire of Power after power"[45] because it is based on a specific human desire of precedence, i.e. the desire that the opinion of one's superiority be recognized by others.[46] In contrast to Arendt's account of fear of death as fear of physical pain in Hobbes, for Strauss's Hobbes, fear of death becomes politically relevant and can lead to a stable polity only when it becomes part of self-consciousness. Man has to admit to himself that above all he is afraid of having his life taken violently, that he may suffer a humiliating death at the hand of his kin, who can at best be regarded as his equals.[47] Instead of being ashamed of this fear on the basis of a natural yet indefinite

[43] *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 128.
[44] Ibid, Introduction.
[45] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), XI, 70.
[46] ". . . amongst other living creatures, there is no question of precedence in their own species, nor strife about honour, or acknowledgment of one another's wisdom, as there is amongst men, from whence arise envy and hatred of one towards another, and from thence sedition and war," Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6: 5; "For every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himself," *Leviathan*, XIII, 88.
[47] "To have received from one, to whom we think our selves equall, greater benefits than there is hope to Requite, disposeth to counterfeit love; but really secret hatred; and puts a man into the estate of desperate debtor, that in declining the sight of his creditor, tacitely wishes him there, where he might never see him more," *Leviathan*, XI, 71.

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sense of honor,[48] he has to recognize it as reasonable and as the right kind of self-awareness. Already Hobbes awarded, as did Hegel more famously later, the self-consciousness of the weaker person a higher, more advanced status than that of the master. This shift constituted, as Strauss emphasized, a substantial revision of the key concepts of moral or political discourses.[49]

Strauss was keen to point out that during Hobbes's "humanist period," when he translated and admired Thucydides, he had greatly appreciated the classical virtues of the political man, praising the virtues of courage, honor, and heroism. Yet these virtues as virtues were guaranteed by the objectively understood standards and once the objectivity of the world lost its self-evidence, Hobbes could re-conceptualize virtues relationally. Honor, when reinterpreted on the basis of the conclusion that the right self-consciousness is the foundation of all moral and political understanding, is no longer an objective quality of an agent, but the essentially unstable recognition of one's superiority by others.[50] Honor as an objective quality is substituted with the activity of striving for honor as an inter-subjectively affirmed *relation*. In other words, it loses its relation to objectively valid standards of excellence and becomes an attempt to create the impression of being honorable; it becomes the striving for recognition of one's superiority by others.[51] It was only on the basis of this novel understanding of self-consciousness that Strauss's Hobbes was able to show that honor was not a virtue, but a vice—pride, vanity, and a desire to assert oneself over others. For instance, as such, it was no longer the virtue in war,[52] but itself the cause of war. To make his case, Strauss pointed to the fact that Hobbes called Leviathan "the King of the Proud": "only the State is capable of keeping pride down in the long run, indeed it has no other *raison d'être* except that man's natural appetite is pride, ambition and vanity."[53]

[48] "Griefe, for the discovery of some defect of ability, is Shame [. . .] and consisteth in the apprehension of some thing dishonourable," *Leviathan*, 6: 43. Cf. *De Cive*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), I, 7.

[49] *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 8–25, and "On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy" in *What is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959), 195–96.

[50] "The manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called Honouring, and Dishonouring. To Value a man at a high rate, is to Honour him; at a low rate, is to Dishonour him. But high, and low, in this case, is to be understood by comparison to the rate that each man setteth on himselfe," *Leviathan*, X, 63.

[51] Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 44–58; and "The Origin of Modern Political Thought," esp. 39. Cf. Strauss, *On Tyranny: An Interpretation of Xenophon's Hiero* (New York: Political Science Classics), 89–90.

[52] Cf. *Elements of Law*, XIX, 2: "the only law of actions in war, is honour; and the right of war, providence" with *Leviathan*, XIII, 90: "To this warre of every man against every man, this is also consequent; that nothing can be Unjust."

[53] *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 14.

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It is honor, now interpreted as vainglory that induces man to act irrationally, whereas it is the admission of one's fear of death, to the contrary, that brings man to reason. "This devaluation of the political takes place when the political, either in disguise or openly, is deemed the domain of vanity, prestige, will to recognition, and opposed to the economical as the world of the reasonable, practical, moderate work." Any virtue, belief or aim that induces man to overcome his fear is thus counterproductive in the attempt to reach the civil state, and in this sense, keeps man in his barbarism, in an irrational, infantile stage:

> Vanity and fear characterize two opposite ways of human life. Vanity [. . .] corresponds to the natural ideal of human happiness: the dream of a triumph, of a conquest, of rule over all men and therewith over all things; fear—the business of the *homo adultus*—is in accordance with an orientation to self-defense, modest life, working in rank and file.[54]

It was only after Hobbes had discredited the earlier value-system that he could start erecting a new one, asserted Strauss in a Nietzschean mode. This became the basis of a new, fundamentally anti-political understanding of politics:

> When one wants to understand the ideal of liberalism or of socialism at its very roots, one has to go back all the way to this opposition that was never again developed as clearly, profoundly and frankly as by Hobbes. For all battles against the political in the name of the economical presume a previous devaluation of the political.[55]

WILL, SOVEREIGNTY, AND POWER—ILLIBERAL IDEAS?

Arendt's Hobbes was similarly a spokesman for the emerging bourgeois class, offering a moral justification for accumulation of wealth, as well as a

[54] Strauss, "Einige Anmerkungen," *Gesammelte Schriften* III, 259 (translation mine). Cf. "The Origin of Modern Political Thought," 26b.

[55] "Einige Anmerkungen," 259. For the limited worth of courage as a virtue, see *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), 146–47. For Strauss's rejection of any idealization of "warrior values," cf. "The Spirit of Sparta and the Taste of Xenophon," *Social Research* 6 (1939): 520–21.

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structure for its protection. In order to achieve this, Hobbes had turned the citizen into a property-owning and self-interested individual: he had to isolate man from his fellows and discredit all distinctly political virtues and aims. Again, although Arendt's Hobbes had understood the interactive character of power, he had failed to appreciate this dynamical moment of politics. Not only the polity or one's fellow men have no intrinsic goal or meaning for Hobbes, but also man himself is confined to seeking narrowly defined self-interest. Classical political virtues are turned into a mere *techne*, instrumentally conceived abilities in the service of acquisition of power over nature and other men.[56] The Hobbesian man, argued Arendt and Strauss, is caught in a never-ending process of passing from one object of desire to another, dissolving the world of shared activities and purposes by asserting an unconditional will to mastery. The human condition is now defined in terms of perpetual danger of war, and the meaning of politics is thus rethought in terms not only of peace, but elimination of all disagreement. When man's being is defined in terms of acquisition, the political-public sphere becomes more than a mere nuisance; always at least potentially tumultuous, it becomes the source of disorder. Nothing is more suitable for replacing the tumultuous public sphere than the administrative state, which will maintain order.[57]

Both Arendt and Strauss were keen to stress the connection between the disrepute of the public man and the novel empowerment of the state. For Hobbes, all political disorder is the work of the proud, the seekers of vainglory.[58] Yet these people represent rather the exception and thus the unnatural. They can be countered by a sovereign structure erected on the support of the unprotected, isolated individuals, for whom the passions of the vainglorious bring about the prospect of violent death. It is as rational for the latter to pay allegiance to the sovereign as it is for the sovereign to rely on their commitment. The new covenant emerging out of this predicament sanctions the elimination of the public-spirited as a source of tension from the political life. Yet according to the classical doctrine, the same spirited individuals are those potentially qualified for political virtue, i.e. those who can oppose tyranny.[59] In his interpretation of Xenophon's *Hiero*, *On*

[56] Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 194ff. with Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 138, 143, 145–46.
[57] *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 140–43, 146. Strauss, "The Origin of Modern Political Thought," 42. Cf. *Elements of Law*, XIII, 3; also *De Cive*, I, 5.
[58] Cf. *Leviathan*, XXIX, *De Cive*, XII, *Elements of Law*, XXVII, on the causes of civil disorder.
[59] Cf. "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon" in *Social Research* 6 (1939): 517–18.

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Tyranny (1949), Strauss noted that the Greek despot could count on keeping one's "subjects busy with their private concerns rather than with public affairs," and that this very trait revealed the "tyrannical" purposes of the ruler or the state. Asking whether freedom is necessary for being virtuous, Strauss contended that

> the brave and the just are not desirable as subjects of a tyrant. Only a qualified, or reduced, form of courage and justice befits the subjects of a tyrant. For prowess simply is closely akin to freedom, or love of freedom, and justice simply is obedience to laws. The justice befitting the subjects of a tyrant is the least political form of justice, or that form of justice which is most remote from public-spiritedness: the justice to be observed in contractual, private relations.[60]

The subjects of a tyrant always need to be prevented "from reaching the summit of virtue"—otherwise they become a threat to the rule. This contains, however, a paradoxical moment: a sovereign power relying exclusively on fearful individuals becomes politically unable to protect itself from itself, and morally unable to distinguish between just and unjust rulership. Strauss believed that Hobbes was aware of this tension, but chose to obscure it under the guise of a technical representation of power structures.

When freedom is negatively understood, argued Arendt, every actor appears to limit the freedom of another. Hence *political* freedom becomes identical with acting out the sovereign will—a shift that Arendt characterized as "perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will." It is on the ground of understanding politics in terms of anomic agents acting out their conflicting wills that the content of politics becomes power struggle and power becomes finally instituted as "the monopoly of legitimate violence." Set against Arendt's own concept of politics as the realm constituted by the "acting in concert" of a plurality of men—"if men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce"—her Hobbes, the paradigmatic liberal, becomes an anti-political thinker *par excellence*.[61]

Strauss was equally troubled by the modern concept of political freedom in terms of sovereignty. Tradition, argued Strauss, claimed that private

[60] *On Tyranny*, 70–71. Cf. *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 96–97.
[61] "What is Freedom?," 164–65. Cf. *Essays*, 336 and Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 39.

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men were in their political conduct guided by reason and that they themselves knew "what is good and evil." Yet such men, appealing to reason and possibly a standard in conflict with the law, became for Hobbes

> teachers of disobedience, promoters of anarchy, sophists who deceived men by the specious name of liberty. To the traditional political philosophy which was based on independent reflection of private men, which with necessary consequence led to a doctrine of rebellion, anarchy, *freedom*, Hobbes opposes a new political science which intends to establish by cogent reasons that man is obliged to unconditional *obedience*.[62]

By pronouncing human passions stronger than human reason, Strauss's Hobbes expelled the citizen from the political sphere. Once the reasonability of the citizens and the power of their reason to safeguard the order of the city were put into question, the authority of reason was finally overtaken by an impersonal legal mechanism.[63] The sovereign's command has gained the ultimate and unquestioned authority, which needs no other ground but his will: "will, and not deliberation or reasoning, is the core of sovereignty or that laws are laws by virtue, not of truth or reasonableness, but of authority alone."[64] Deliberation has been replaced by the supremacy of self-legitimizing will and an ultimately voluntaristic authority of the sovereign, possible in turn due to the "fundamental fiction" that the will of the sovereign is the will of all.[65] But even the "freedom" of the sovereign so understood is at best equivocal: *salus populis* as its further end, apart from creating peace or offering basic protection or preserving itself as the fundamental power-structure, means nothing more than helping individuals to satisfy their private needs, irrespective of their character.[66]

While it is characteristic of liberals to be wary of a substantively defined concept of liberty as containing the potential for justifying the misuse of power,[67] both Strauss and Arendt argued the opposite. The purely

[62] "The Origin of Modern Political Thought," emphasis in the original. For Arendt, see *The Jewish Writings*, 187.
[63] *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 158.
[64] Ibid., 160; *Natural Right and History*, 186.
[65] *Natural Right and History*, 190, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 159–61. Cf. Arendt, "History of Political Theory," 9.
[66] Cf. *Leviathan*, XXX; *Elements of Law*, XXVIII; *De cive*, XIII.
[67] For a classic statement of this position, see Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). For Strauss's reply to Berlin, see his essay "Relativism" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. T. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13–26.

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negatively articulated idea of freedom, they insisted, undermines the counterpoises to the ideal of an all-powerful state. Any questioning, any disagreement is viewed in principle as dangerous and unjustified; authority has become boundless. For Arendt, when "[l]ife becomes the highest good,"[68] we cannot talk of the emergence of new values, but witness a "negation of morality as such." This negation spills over into political judging between right and wrong, argued Arendt, when "the state is no longer based on any kind of constituting law" nor are laws established by man "according to human standards of right and wrong," but simply by a sovereign will.[69] Although liberalism posited as its primary task the protection of the individual against the state, by limiting the participation of citizens mainly to non-political forms, it had in fact made the individual vulnerable to the whims of the state. It claimed to offer a formal structure called the rule of law, yet it both refused to admit its foundation in politics and identified politics with the state—hence, with what was presented as the constant threat to civil liberties. Since the nineteenth century, the formal assertion of individual rights combined with the collapse of the normative frameworks that had once supported liberal beliefs, risked becoming a mere declaration unable to hold in times of crisis. The negative concept of liberty, instead of offering the basis for the doctrine of limited state power, entails a new, specifically modern justification for the state-centered concept of politics.

MODERNITY AND LIBERALISM: FROM PHILOSOPHICAL TO POLITICAL CRITIQUE

Among the most conspicuous moments in the philosophical legacy of the European émigré thinkers in the United States are their famously critical assessments of modernity. From the post-war American point of view, the German and European political catastrophe amounted to a deviation from the modern political project. Even if inter-war Europe had lapsed into the darkness of pre-modern powers, this momentary fall had been overcome and the right order restored. Hence the modern project, and its political embodiment in liberalism, could and should continue in its initial spirit.[70]

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[68] *Leviathan*, XI, 70.

[69] Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2005), 52, and "Expansion and Philosophy of Power," 613. Strauss, "The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy," 439; and *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 68.

[70] John Gunnell, "American Political Science, Liberalism, and the Invention of Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 71–87.

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For many European émigré scholars, by contrast, the interwar failures had been fully part, perhaps even the culmination of political modernity, bringing its dangerous undercurrents to the surface. Even if these failures were the darker side, they were a side of the same modern world, grown on modern soil, on its desires, ideas and experience. Only one specific malignancy, the Nazi version of the alarming side of modernity, had been subdued; the underlying problems were far from solved.[71]

While Arendt and Strauss's critiques were not singular in all their points, their frequently converging readings of Hobbes nevertheless highlight, I have argued, their distinctive focus on the political dimension of modernity. Already the very idea of tracing the liberal vision of politics back to Hobbes was highly provocative at the time. Linking what they presented as the Hobbesian devaluation of the civic man and promotion of individualism to an absolutist and voluntarist concept of sovereignty meant to challenge the self-confident opposition that liberalism had erected between itself and its political foes. However, it is telling that neither Strauss nor Arendt, once they concluded that Hobbes's theory culminated in an absolutist notion of state sovereignty, questioned their own contention that it is precisely Hobbes's work that brings the basic presumptions of liberalism most forcefully to the fore. This clearly indicates their doubts regarding liberalism in and of itself. At the same time, unlike Hobbes's Weimar critics, Strauss and Arendt rejected the state-centered conception of politics.

On both accounts, as we saw, their readings of Hobbes (or misreadings, as some intellectual historians would surely argue) and objections to liberalism were clearly polemical and intended to convey more than conceptual observations. It bears noting that if liberalism lacks a standard meaning today, Strauss's and Arendt's uses of the term were even more equivocal—and reflect the political experiences in the background of their critiques. As we saw, the young Strauss was clearly dismayed by liberalism in and of itself. However, in the post-war American context, he was careful not to relate the failure of Weimar liberalism to some intrinsic *political* weakness of liberalism. Instead, he discussed particular difficulties and noted that this failure would not have been inevitable, had not "at the crucial moment the victorious liberal democracies discredited liberal democracy in the eyes of Germany by the betrayal of their principles through the

[71] Steven Aschheim, *Beyond the Border. The German Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 81–118; and *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European culture, Germans and Jews* (University of Wisconsin Press), 24–43.

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Treaty of Versailles."[72] Also in an earlier lecture seeking to demystify the roots of the nihilist mindset of inter-war Germany, Strauss argued that the failure of its advocates to offer a positive vision responding to the needs of the time proved fatal to liberalism.[73]

Given the lack of direct confrontation with liberalism in Arendt's earlier work, she might have felt freer in her later criticism directed above all at what she believed were liberalism's practical inefficiencies. Indeed, it is from this practical perspective that Arendt's judgment upon liberalism was at times more outspokenly disdainful than Strauss's. The "good old clichés of liberalism," she argued, assume a continuity that no longer exists, and thereby "fail us" in the face of contemporary challenges.[74] She was particularly critical of a rights-based liberal conception of politics, which in her view had undermined the only warrant to all rights—political participation. Not unlike Strauss's, her perspective was undoubtedly influenced by her own experience as a German Jew. Immediately after the war, when Arendt wrote her article on Hobbes, she was publishing extensively on the fate and future of European Jewry. She had penned articles criticizing Jewish apolitical self-understanding and political inactivity already since the 1930s, and during the war she concentrated her journalism on the question, how to make Jewish politics a tangible reality. The rights that depend on the good will of others have failed as rights, Arendt argued, and the only way for Jews to gain even the most basic rights was to become equal as one nation among others, that is, to have a state and defend their "honor" along with the fighting allied forces. All dependence on the help and "pity" of other powers was delusive, perpetuating the defenselessness and powerlessness of Jewry. Arendt was convinced that once the war was over, only those who had fought on the battlefield could participate in the peace process. Hence for the sake of themselves and their role among nations, the Jews needed to summon their "courage" and "pride." "It is always better to defend yourself against your enemies than to run from them" qualifies best as the motto of her political journalism preceding her more philosophical work.[75] For

[72] Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's *Critique of Religion*" in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought by Leo Strauss*, ed. K. Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 138, 143–44.

[73] Lecture "German Nihilism" (1941), *Interpretation* 26 (1991): 355–78.

[74] *Essays*, 281–82; and "What is Authority?" Cf. "Organized Guilt," 232–33.

[75] *Jewish Writings*, 182. See also esp. 163, 121. For Arendt's criticism of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see Arendt, "The Rights of Man: What Are They?," *Modern Review* 3 (1949): 24–37.

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Arendt, it was only active exercise of citizenship, not given due emphasis in the liberal creed, which could counteract our vulnerability as individual holders of rights.

Strauss and Arendt's critiques of liberalism had, as we saw, notable points of convergences. Both deemed precarious what they characterized as the liberal attempt to transform the political problem into a technical-institutional issue. Both sought its roots in what they considered the first liberal formulations of politics, which they then reproached for making the political man and the specifically political virtues superfluous. Although Strauss was famously much more concerned with the problem of relativism in contemporary liberal thought, Arendt too thought that the self-confidence of liberal values after the collapse of the ontological-moral framework that had once supported it was reminiscent of a self-delusion.

Their critiques were not purely negative and served to pave the path for explorations of visions of politics that they believed were, if not "applicable," then at least illuminating regarding the existence of forms of political freedom outside the liberal framework. It is in particular here that their disagreements come clearest to the fore. Even if Strauss's criticism is far from being solely moral-philosophical and was much more concerned with the fate of the political dimension of human freedom than is usually purported, his statement of the meaning of politics differs sharply from Arendt's. For Strauss, man's fate as a political being cannot be separated from the question of the good life. This, moreover, has to presume "the actualization of a human possibility which, at least according to its own interpretation, is trans-historical, trans-social, trans-moral and trans-religious."[76] It is important to note that Strauss did not simply assert the need for a "transcendent" truth or source of truth, but addressed the human quest for ultimately human standards as well as the ideas of human good, human truth and human excellence. For Arendt, in contrast, the question as Strauss framed it, was already a lost cause. It is not, as we saw from her critique of Hobbes, that the basic distinction between right and wrong had therefore become irrelevant for her. Yet normativity is established in practice: if normative distinctions are backed by anything less transient than speech and action, it is through the reality of the shared human world and care for it. Only this interactively conceived world can give meaning to and safeguard human aims and ethical judgments. In this sense, normativity is surely not something subjective for Arendt, as this would be for her a contradiction in terms, but is

[76] *Natural Right and History*, 89.

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secured by a shared reality. And it was this reality, in its immediate, experienced and historical sense that the liberal distrust of politics had jeopardized.

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