

Arendt and the Human Condition

Work and the Human Condition: Fall 2008

I. Vocabulary

II. Labor, Work and Action

III. “Conditioned Existence”

IV. The Human Condition and Human Nature

Vocabulary

Labor

plurality

Work

the Earth

Action

mortality

Vita Activa

natality

Vita Contemplativa

bios politikos

biological life

eternity

the world

immortality

Labor, Work and Action

Three fundamental activities

Each corresponds to a fundamental given condition of human life on Earth.

Activity

Labor

Work

Action

All Three Together

Condition

Biological Life

Worldiness

Unnaturalness

Artifice — the Made
World

Plurality

Nativity and Mortality

“Correspond” (co-respond)

(1) A response to (intelligent reaction; effect)

(2) A shaping of (cause)

“Given” Conditions — Yet Shaped

Conditioned Existence

page 9:

“Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence.”

“In addition to the conditions under which life is given to man on earth, ... men constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which ... possess the same conditioning power as natural things.”

“The objectivity of the world — its object- or thing-character — and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.”

Human Condition and Human Nature

“To avoid misunderstanding: the human condition is not the same as human nature, and the sum total of human activities and capabilities which correspond to the human condition does not constitute anything like human nature. For neither those we discuss here nor those we leave out, like thought and reason, and not even the most meticulous enumeration of them all, constitute essential characteristics of human existence in the sense that without them this existence would no longer be human” (9-10).

~~To avoid misunderstanding:~~ the human condition is not the same as human nature, and (B) the sum total of human activities and capabilities which correspond to the human condition does not constitute ~~anything like~~ human nature. (For) (A) neither those we discuss here nor those we leave out, like thought and reason, and not even ~~the most meticulous enumeration of them~~ all, constitute (C) essential characteristics of human existence in the sense that without them this existence would no longer be human.

A Side Note:

(A) “*neither those we discuss here nor those we leave out, like thought and reason*”

Important information to note:

(1) Arendt will discuss **some** of the human activities and capabilities that correspond to the human condition.

(2) She will not discuss others.

Among those activities and capabilities she will not discuss are thought and reason.

(B) *“the sum total of human activities and capabilities which correspond to the human condition”*

Labor, work, action, thought, reason — all those activities and capabilities that are responses to and that shape the character of the human condition.

The human condition corresponds to a collection of human activities and capabilities.

(C) *“essential characteristics of human existence in the sense that without them this existence would no longer be human”*

Definition:

C is an essential human characteristic
=df anything that does not have C is not a human being.

Could there be other senses of “essential characteristics of human existence”? Maybe. But this is the sense that Arendt intends.

Back to the argument!

The human condition is not the same as human nature (C1). {The human condition corresponds to a collection of human activities and capabilities. But this collection does not make up } human nature(C2). (For) {none of these human activities and capabilities} and not even {all of them together}, constitute {essential human characteristics}.

Towards A Formal Argument...

1. The human condition corresponds to a collection of human activities and capabilities.
 2. None of these human activities and capabilities, individually or as a whole, are essential characteristics of a human being.
 3. [_____]
-
4. Therefore, human nature is not composed of any of the activities and capabilities, individually or as a whole, that correspond to the human condition. (C2)

Filling in the Gap...

1. The human condition corresponds to a collection of human activities and capabilities.
2. None of these human activities and capabilities, individually or as a whole, are essential characteristics of a human being.
3. [Human nature is composed of those characteristics that are essential to a human being]

-
4. Therefore, human nature is not composed of any of the activities and capabilities, individually or as a whole, that correspond to the human condition. (C2)

Why accept premise (2)?

Read on: “The most radical change... now self-made to a considerable extent” (10).

- 2.1. Suppose people emigrate from Earth to another planet.
- 2.2. The emigrants from Earth would live under radically different conditions from those of life on Earth.
- 2.3. [If the conditions of life are radically changed, then the corresponding activities would also radically change.]

-
- 2.4. Therefore, the emigrants from Earth would live without labor, work, action or thought.
 - 2.5. The emigrants from Earth would still be human.

-
- 2. Therefore, these human activities, individually or as a whole, are not essential characteristics of a human being.

What About the First Conclusion?

5. The emigrants from Earth would live under radically different conditions from those of life on Earth. (2.2 again)

6. [The conditions of life on Earth are the human condition.]

7. Therefore, the emigrants from Earth would live under conditions different from the human condition.

8. The emigrants from Earth would still be human. (2.5 again)

9. Therefore, human beings can exist without the human condition.

10. Anything that is an essential human characteristic is something that human beings must have in order to exist. (Definition)

11. Therefore, the human condition is not an essential characteristic of human beings.

12. [Human nature is composed of those characteristics essential to human beings.]

13. Therefore, the human condition is not the same as human nature. (C1)

***“OH, MAN! I CAN’T
POSSIBLY READ THE
WHOLE BOOK THIS
WAY!”***

True.

But, you can read

***some* (small**

parts) this way!