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## Action in Hannah Arendt (1905–1975)

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In *The Human Condition*, Arendt undertook a project to “think what we are doing” (Arendt 1958: 5) by re-thinking *action*, or politics, public life, from which she had learned it can be deadly to retreat. She discerned its meanings from experience, reflection, etymology, and shards of tradition concerning the *vita activa*.

A sketch of that relation as in *The Human Condition*: All humans are born = the human condition of *natality*. Every human is unique = the human condition of *plurality*. Every birth, each new beginning, enters a pre-existing world necessary for both physical survival and achievement of a *humanized* life. We are, then, in a sense born twice, as human -- *what* we are, subject to necessity, and again when we emerge as a person into the light of the public where we can enact the freedom of becoming *who* we are, our unnecessary identity. Political words and deeds are also new beginnings, and so unnecessary. They have unpredictable effects: public life is uncertain – another way of saying it is free, or it is not really *public*, where we appear to and act with each other in our full plurality, our unruly differences.

To be unable to act is for Arendt to experience unfreedom. To be denied public life is to experience the oppression of being silenced, invisible, unreal/unrealized. Silence = death.

Grounding action in *natality* and *plurality*, Arendt had arrived at the view, which otherwise seems so startling, that, “The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action” (1968a: 146). Totalitarianism is not a form of politics: it is its utter destruction.

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