

ARENDT AND MACINTYRE ON THE ENLIGHTENMENT'S FAILURE*

Andrew Janiak
Hampshire College

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

—Walter Benjamin,
Theses on the Philosophy of History

Speaking far outside the realm of political theory, Donald Davidson once claimed that it is only upon some basic agreement that true disagreement can be founded (Davidson). Though they represent divergent strains—the continental and the analytic—within contemporary philosophy, the interpretations of the Age of Enlightenment offered by Hannah Arendt and Alasdair MacIntyre parallel one another in surprising ways. Each characterizes the “Rights of Man” proclaimed by Robespierre and Jefferson as empty, ungrounded and insufficiently protected to found the new moral and political order devised in Europe’s 18th century revolutions. With this parallel as a backdrop, I will develop a brief MacIntyrean critique of Arendt to bring her work into better focus. This critique claims Arendt is insensitive to some of the fantastic philosophical upheavals from Aristotle, St. Augustine and Aquinas to Kant, Diderot and Hume that led to the Enlightenment’s ultimate demise. I then propose a quick Arendtian response to this criticism: with an addition of some philosophical work, with a *quantitative* change, Arendt’s Enlightenment work would satisfy the MacIntyrean argument I employ. It then becomes clear that though Arendt can respond to this argument through such quantitative changes, the MacIntyrean might lack such a response to the Arendtian criticisms I propose. To satisfy Arendt, MacIntyre would be required to transform his work, to make not simply *quantitative* but *qualitative*, even fundamental, changes in

Janiak is completing his last year of study at Hampshire College, where he concentrated in philosophy and politics. Andrew is currently Editor of the Five College Journal of Law and Society. He plans on pursuing a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Michigan this fall.

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After Virtue. Though MacIntyre sees the Enlightenment project's failure as *philosophical* in nature, Arendt characterizes the emptiness of rights rhetoric born from the American and French revolutions as *political* in character. This Arendtian response to MacIntyre facilitates a deeper presentation of some of the more subtle points in Arendt's interpretation of the Enlightenment. From an Arendtian standpoint, MacIntyre mischaracterizes the very nature of the failure embodied in the Age of Enlightenment, the failure that she thought led to the rise of fascism, such as the Nazism she fled and fought throughout the early years of her life.

I. Arendt's Critique of Rights

Hunchback: "You know Marshall, I used to be a Jew."

Marshall: "Oh really? ... I used to be a hunchback."

—Groucho Marx, *Groucho at Carnegie Hall*

The European revolutions of the 18th century brought the proclamation of a series of rights, such as the rights of man and the citizen in France and rights endowed in every human by their Creator in America. These were extensively explicated and critiqued by Arendt, particularly in the book that made her famous in America, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. There, Arendt argues that though the newly established American and French nation-states introduced and claimed to foster *human* rights, historically they have protected only citizen's or national rights, such that the "loss of national rights in all instances entail[ed] the loss of human rights," and, in turn, that human rights could be guaranteed only through "national emancipation" (OT, pp. 299, 291).¹ As these citizenship rights were extended to increasingly large sections of European and American populations, assimilationist-minded Jews on the Continent gladly accepted the banner of civil rights, as for them it represented the best bulwark against an ever-present European anti-semitism. By the close of the 18th century, bourgeois Jewry often exhibited a great faith, somewhat naive in Arendt's view, in their respective states and a willingness to assimilate themselves into French or German culture to demonstrate their allegiance to the nations that had recently eman-

¹ Cf. also Benhabib, S. "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative," *Social Research* Vol. 57 Spring 1990; pp. 167-68.

cipated them.² Jews were willing to “adjust in principle to everything and everybody,” a sentiment that meant, in the Europe of the early 19th century, a willingness to accept emancipation and the newly established civil rights as assimilated members of European nation-states (*JP*, p. 63).

As Arendt demonstrates in her biography, *Rahel Varnhagen*, the assimilationists, or *parvenus*, attempted both social and cultural integration into the European bourgeoisie on individual bases: each denied his or her Jewish identity and became faceless members of civil society (*RV*, pp. 26, 30, 85; cf. *JP*, p. 85). In this way, of course, assimilated Jews exemplified the condition of modernity: though they suffered *communally* at the hands of anti-semitism—that is, it was *as Jews* that they suffered—they chose to fight this oppression *individually*, apolitically, as atomized individuals.³ At first, Arendt’s Rahel first embraces this tactic of assimilation into German culture by attempting to renounce and to deny, even in the privateness of her diary, her Jewish identity. This attempt ultimately brings her face to face with a paradoxical and deeply disturbing reality: Rahel realizes that to truly assimilate into anti-semitic German or European culture, she must become an anti-semite. At this prospect, Rahel recoils and chooses instead to maintain her Jewishness in the face of both the anti-semitism of German culture and the many *parvenus* who frequent her salon (*RV*, pp. 216, 224). This was, in Arendt’s view, an admirable and conscious choice on Rahel’s part. In contrast to Rahel’s perseverance, many Jews gave in to assimilation, but this very assimilation, if taken to mean a complete integration into bourgeois Christian culture, and the loss of all Jewish characteristics, ended in failure. European Jews could not, despite their best efforts, relinquish their Jewishness.⁴ Kurt Blumenfeld called this the “objective Jewish question,” the inescapability of Judaism for European Jews (Blumenfeld in Young-Bruehl, p. 72).

On a broader historical scale, Arendt’s work demonstrates the

² For the Jewish “faith” in European nation states, see Ron Feldman’s introduction to *JP*, p. 27; for Arendt’s comments, see *JP*, pp. 63–64.

³ For Arendt’s view of the atomization prevalent in modernity, see *HC* p. 58ff, p. 210ff.

⁴ Arendt writes of “the history of a hundred and fifty years of assimilated Jewry who performed an unprecedented feat: though proving all the time their non-Jewishness, they succeeded in remaining Jews all the same” (*JP*, p. 64).

truly dialectical dilemma of modern Jewry and its relation to the failure of the Enlightenment to establish a moral foundation for politics and a bulwark against recurrent bouts of anti-semitic violence throughout Europe. Under modernity, Jews joined and were swept up in a dialectical movement of great proportions: those Jews who rejected their given *pariah* status opted to become the assimilated *parvenus* Rahel knew so well. The pariah Jews rejected the *parvenu* tactic of assimilation into European bourgeois culture as fervently as their assimilationist cousins defined themselves over and against the masses of Europe's poor Jewry, especially its *Ostjuden*. Hence, an antithesis of identities and of social roles grew historically within the Jewish community, particularly for the Jews in Germany that remain Arendt's focus. These antithetical poles of Jewish history and identity were synthesized under Nazism, where all Jews, regardless of social status, were rendered Jews *per se* and *en masse*, and murdered as such (*JP*, p. 90). In the concentration camp, we see the final proof that the very *pariah/parvenu* distinction Jews struggled for two centuries to maintain proved, in the last analysis, irrelevant.⁵

This history forms a centerpiece of the Enlightenment and its rights legacy as Arendt saw it, for the only rights available in Europe were *national* rights, and Jews, even the *parvenus*, never fully emerged as accepted national citizens. Here we reach the terrifying possibility that, if stripped of their newly-found and still tenuous civil rights, the Jews would sit naked, rightless, vulnerable. On Arendt's view, the Nazis understood and exploited this peculiar situation of European Jewry, a result of the Enlightenment's limited protection of the peoples under its tutelage. Indeed, long before the Final Solution, Hitler's *régime* moved in the early 1930s to strip Jews of their civil rights as German citizens, which they knew would remove their "legal status" altogether, rendering Jews *de facto* and *de jure* rightless (*OT*, p. 296).⁶ In Arendt's estimation, the anti-Jewish Nuremberg Laws of 1935 violated not *human* but *national* rights (*EJ*, p. 268). These political moves of the 30s paved the way, of course, for the rapid expulsion, forced concentration and final extermination of Germany's

⁵ As Arendt writes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, for the Nazis, "a Jew is a Jew."

⁶ Cf. also *EJ*, p. 138: "In nearly all countries, anti-Jewish action started with stateless persons."

and Europe's Jewish populations.⁷ It was always *stateless* Jews, and other so-called enemies of the Reich with refugee status, who met with their death first, for they lacked the only political protection available in Europe at that time, indeed the only protection available since the Enlightenment erupted (*EJ*, p. 191 *passim*). It is, of course, with great irony that Arendt notes how Adolf Eichmann could only be tried before the Jerusalem court because he too was stateless, a mere foreign national in Argentina, a man unclaimed and unprotected by the Federal Republic of Germany and left to face Israel's judgment (*EJ*, p. 240).

Here Arendt's critique of the Enlightenment and of the rights rhetoric it generated becomes clear: because of the solely *national* protection of rights, Jews and other refugees stripped of their citizenship "had lost those rights which had been thought of and even defined as inalienable, namely the Rights of Man" (*OT*, p. 268). With respect to the masses of new refugees roaming Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s, Arendt demonstrates how the condition of modern Jewry became the condition of modernity for many Europeans, how the two were suddenly united in their stateless and rightless predicament (*JP*, p. 20, 66). Arendt emphasizes unequivocally that the Enlightenment's failure to establish and protect human rights set the precedent for this catastrophe. The holocaust brought an end to the cultural distinctions Jews had fostered among themselves, an end to Jewish hope for the future promised under civil emancipation in Europe, indeed the "end of the world" for European Jewry (*EJ*, p. 153). And perhaps most radically, it meant the end of the Age of Enlightenment and its legacy.

II. MacIntyre's Interpretation of the Enlightenment

With the publication of *After Virtue* in 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre emerged as a strong critic of the contemporary scene in analytic moral philosophy, particularly of the moral precepts he thought we have inherited from the Aristotelian project of grounding morality in rationality and human nature. We see a close affinity between the Enlightenment critiques of MacIntyre and Arendt: both demonstrate

⁷ For these three stages in the Nazi program against European Jewry, cf. *EJ*, chapters 4, 5 & 6.

the emptiness of contemporary rights rhetoric in relation to the Enlightenment project of extending inalienable or natural Rights to humanity. Though Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant or Jefferson took Rights to be inextinguishable, as the foundational moments of morality and politics, Arendt and MacIntyre both contend that such rights do not exist inherently and that they are dependent on political communities and the social institutions that support them.⁸ On a grand scale, Arendt and MacIntyre characterize the late-20th century as a "post" era: for MacIntyre "post-Enlightenment," for Arendt "post-traditional," an era that is witness to the sinking of Europe and the Americas into moral and intellectual chaos,⁹ into an age without authority, tradition (Arendt), or the necessary grounding in coherent views of human nature (MacIntyre). Because of these parallels, I want to construct a criticism of Arendt's analysis from within MacIntyre's project, a critique centered on Arendt's view of the Enlightenment, pushing that analysis into greater focus and giving it greater clarity against the background of *After Virtue*. First, I will briefly outline MacIntyre's narrative of the Enlightenment.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre delineates precisely how moral discourse fell into its present predicament of emptily asserting rights and moral precepts—largely inherited from Aristotelianism and Christianity—without properly grounding them in coherent conceptions of human nature and rationality. MacIntyre the Aristotelian travels, not surprisingly, to fourth century B.C. Athens to unearth the roots of our current condition. In Aristotelian ethics, *phronesis*, translatable perhaps as practical reason (or wisdom),¹⁰ is posited as the ability to distinguish good ends from imposters, to discern the proper aim of action (*praxis*) within a moral framework. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that intelligence [*phronesis*] is a state of grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being (*NE*, p. 154; 1140b).

⁸ OT, "The Decline of the Nation-state and the End to the Rights of Man;" AV, pp. 66-7, 69, *passim*.

⁹ For MacIntyre, this chaos is exemplified, in part, in emotivism and its moral cousins: cf. AV, chapter 1, *passim*.

¹⁰ Terence Irwin's translation of *phronesis* as "intelligence" might, given the contemporary usage of this term and its correlates, be rather misleading. Irwin recognizes the possible problems with this rendering of the term in his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* at pp. 412-13.

This differs significantly from the contemporary notion of rationality, an ability that uncovers the best route to achieve presupposed ethical aims; for Aristotle, *phronesis* itself proposes these aims (AV, pp. 52-3).

Aristotle also held a teleological view of human development: to remain healthy on the moral, intellectual and spiritual levels, one must progress through particular stages of growth from childhood through old age. Hence Aristotle might argue that Susan ought to, through *phronesis*, pick those aims that we know contribute to the happiness of people at her stage of life-development. Though strenuous exercise may be seen as beneficial at one stage of human life, it might not help an exhausted 80-year old to realize her telos. That is, *phronesis* distinguishes moral from immoral, or improper, aims through human teleology, through the view of human nature that demonstrates the proper endpoint of human life and the necessary steps we must take toward reaching our life climax. Finally, Aristotle outlines, in MacIntyre's language, various "moral precepts" to guide one toward one's true end, precepts that enable one to develop a virtuous character to guide one in realizing one's telos (AV, pp. 52-3). In MacIntyre's view of Aristotelian ethics, then, the three components of morality *derive meaning from their interrelation*; separate one from the whole and all quickly lose their coherency and purpose (AV, pp. 54-5).

MacIntyre then demonstrates how western moral philosophy moved from this basic Aristotelianism, through the Christianity of Augustine and then Aquinas, into the 18th century and the Enlightenment, resting finally in its present form within contemporary analytic discourse and the wider Euro-American culture.¹¹ He characterizes contemporary culture as having retained only the moral precepts we inherited from the Greeks, as filtered through Christian moral doctrine and its revisions by Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume and Kant, as having lost the very support for those precepts: Aristotelian teleology and *phronesis* (AV, pp. 54-7). This current predicament stems, in MacIntyre's self-proclaimed "historicist" view, from trends already evident in France in 1640, the site of the fireplace

¹¹ For another broad, historically sensitive philosophical account of the relation of the Enlightenment to the rise of instrumental rationality, see Horkheimer M. and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum, 1991.

at which Descartes wrote his *Meditations*, and at the University of Padua, where Galileo fidgeted with his new telescopes and peered at the heavens in an astonishing new way. Here, of course, we find the birthplace of modern science. With it developed a purely instrumental view of human rationality, a view that replaced *phronesis* with the Reason that founded science, developed the calculus of Leibniz and Newton, led to the founding of the American and French republics, and brought to humanity the industrial revolution.¹² This new rationality presupposed as already established all human ends and goods, and found the most efficient method of obtaining them, *but itself could find no ends* (AV, p. 54-7).¹³ In this analysis, MacIntyre rightly points to Hume, whose *Treatise on Human Nature* appears a good century after this new view of reason takes shape, as a philosopher who took reason to exhibit *solely* an instrumental function, with science and mathematics as its obvious territory.¹⁴ Reason, for Hume, is "the slave of the passions,"¹⁵ a mere efficient calculator of the best means to already-determined moral ends (THN, §III, 3, 3, p. 415). Hence, Hume famously, or perhaps infamously, writes: "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (THN, §III, 3, 3, p. 416). This remained significant within western philosophy well into the 19th century, as Nietzsche testifies in 1886 in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when he claims that "reason is only an instrument" (BGE, §191).

The death of *phronesis* paralleled the equally significant philosophical loss of teleology. Aristotle might counsel, for instance, to eat in moderation, for it will prove difficult to remain in the *proper* physical state in old age if one eats voraciously in one's youth.

¹² Interestingly, Arendt chronicles the perhaps parallel development of *praxis* into modern *action*, a purely instrumental notion whereby the performance itself is irrelevant. Cf. HC, pp. 228-30.

¹³ Arendt's discussion of modern science and of the development of modern mathematics via instrumental rationality parallels in many ways MacIntyre's own presentation. Cf. HC, "The Discovery of the Archimedean Point," and also p. 268ff.

¹⁴ Paul Eidelberg suggests that Hobbes can be seen as Hume's historical predecessor in this respect. (For his view of Hobbes, he relies on the *Leviathan*.) He bemoans the implications of the view that reason is impotent in the face of emotion for 20th century psychology "The Malaise of Modern Psychology," *The Journal of Psychology* Vol. 126 1992; p. 109ff.

¹⁵ For more on Hume and his 18th century rivals and mentors among the Anglo philosophical community, cf. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*. New York: Macmillan, 1966; chapter 12.

Because we moderns have lost this perspective on the proper human end-state, and even of the successive stages through which human life ought to proceed, the mere injunction to eat in moderation lacks coherency: it requires rational argument if it is to be followed properly, and it is precisely this that it now must do without.

MacIntyre notes, however, that we are not left utterly stranded, that we have retained our inheritance from the Enlightenment, a bag of rights and of Reason supporting them, but in his view this represents a rather problematic inheritance, even a dangerous one (AV, pp. 66-7). MacIntyre argues that we have retained the notion of the Rights of Man developed in the 18th century, but now lack any coherent, rational arguments demonstrating both their existence and their necessary moral and social function in late-20th century western society (AV, 66ff). Yet here is the Enlightenment paradox: it simultaneously removed all authority, all foundation, from under the medieval moral and political order, *and* attempted, in part through the concept of "rights," to found a new social order without any of the old philosophical foundation. As Arendt writes in "What is Authority?":

the revolutions of the modern age appear like gigantic attempts to repair these foundations, to renew the broken thread of tradition, and to restore, through founding new political bodies, what for so many centuries had endowed the affairs of men with some measure of dignity and greatness (BPF, p. 140).

Put in crude terms, the predicament that Arendt would surely recognize¹⁶ is that we lack God, the Catholic Church and Aristotelian teleology and *phronesis* to ground our current moral views, to serve as the foundation and guarantor of what have become human rights: we have dismantled the foundation but somehow retained bits and pieces of the roof. Hence, *the Enlightenment failed to provide the necessary philosophical grounding for the new order.*¹⁷ Rights are, of

¹⁶ See, e.g., her discussion in "What is Authority" of the end to the Roman stabilizing trinity of religion, authority and tradition (BPF, p. 140).

¹⁷ In *On Revolution* Arendt characterizes modern revolutions as so fundamental, so different from other "mere changes" in political life, that they constitute for her "beginnings" of new orders (OR, p. 21).

course, protected by and developed from within legal orders, but MacIntyre notes that they lack coherent philosophical support, and therefore could not and cannot serve as the basis for the new moral and political order. Equally, they cannot save us today.¹⁸

III. A Quick MacIntyrean Response to Arendt

Now I can bring into focus a MacIntyrean criticism of Arendt's work on rights and the Enlightenment as a rhetorical device to better explicate that work. Both philosophers begin their critiques with the contention that human rights, since the Second World War, have failed to ground moral and political life, have proven unsuccessful in protecting vulnerable peoples, and perhaps even lack sufficient coherency and support to bode well for the future. Once we have seen this affinity between their work, the possibility of criticism arises, for while MacIntyre might find much in the theoretical sections of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that he concurs with, he might ultimately chide the historically-minded Arendt for failing to sufficiently explicate the deeply rooted philosophical forces within western culture that have led to the emptiness of current moral and political rhetoric. It is precisely because Arendt would be sympathetic to such an account that MacIntyre's disappointment and subsequent critique might arise. For MacIntyre, both Europe's philosophical and historical pasts must be understood if contemporary philosophers are to develop the necessary tools to critique, undermine and replace the current debates over rights with debates centered on virtues. Arendt is by no means ignorant of the history of philosophy, far from it; yet from MacIntyre's perspective, her historical work in (e.g.) *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is far too caught up in social and political details to notice the broad philosophical picture he implores us to consider. Though she is clearly aware of the death of *phronesis* and the demise of Aristotelian teleology, she fails to provide this philosophical background in her analysis of the Enlightenment's failure. This failure was made possible not simply by European *historical* events, but also by centuries of the slow erosion of our philosophical heritage,

¹⁸ Arendt argues that the Declaration of the Rights of Man was indeed intended to found a new political order for France, and perhaps even for Europe (OR, p. 109).

leaving only the foam of empty rights at the brim of our collective cup. Thus, I do not take MacIntyre-the-historicist to reject the political history Arendt provides as irrelevant, but as insufficient, requiring more philosophical analysis and more work in the history of philosophy.¹⁹ For MacIntyre, a historico-philosophical understanding of this event will secure us, on a communal level, from contemporary "barbarism," the very barbarism that Arendt spent her life chronicling and fighting (AV, p. 263).

This MacIntyrean response to Arendt's work is, I think, susceptible to what one might call a quantitative solution on Arendt's part. Precisely because the Arendt of *The Human Condition* is aware of the rise of instrumental rationality, the use of reason by Descartes and Galileo and the end to Aristotelian teleology and the Greek virtues, she might integrate more of these philosophical elements into her critique of the Enlightenment developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and elsewhere. As Arendt provides the sort of political history MacIntyre characterizes as important, even crucial, to an understanding of our present predicament, her work requires philosophical supplementation to satisfy MacIntyre's criticism. In fact, *On Revolution* looks similar to the sort of historico-philosophical work MacIntyre alludes to—here Arendt recognizes the very sort of "philosopher-influence" on political events MacIntyre chides social historians for down-playing in their scholarship:

By the same token, I am inclined to think that it was precisely the great amount of theoretical concern and conceptual thought lavished upon the French Revolution by Europe's thinkers and philosophers which contributed decisively to its world-wise success, despite its disastrous end (OR, pp. 219-20).

This MacIntyrean push on Arendt reveals that her work on the Enlightenment could be supplemented by more extensive philosophical exegesis on her part.

¹⁹ For MacIntyre, of course, unless we see our philosophical ills, we will not see a new Aristotelianism as the cure to these ills.

IV. Arendt's Counter-Critique

Deutschland, Deutschland Uber alles was, I fear, the end of German Philosophy.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Arendt is famous for resisting labels. Is she a Jew, existentialist, Zionist, Nietzschean, modernist, postmodernist, political theorist, Heideggerian, or historian?²⁰ In response to Gershom Scholem's question on how to place her, Arendt herself famously wrote: "If I can be said to 'have come from anywhere,' it is from the tradition of German philosophy" (*Encounter*, in Hinchman, p. 435). As might be expected, some recent commentators, such as Dana Villa, argue that her work has strong Heideggerian and Nietzschean elements, rejecting, for example, the claim that she represents a modern-day Aristotelian, a view apparently defended by Habermas in the past (Villa, 274ff). Jeffrey Isaac, in turn, chides Villa for ignoring Arendt's extensive work on "anti-Semitism, imperialism, the Holocaust, the Stalinist usurpation of revolutionary politics, the Cold War balance of terror, the 'crises of the republic,'" work he apparently considers far more important than the philosophical exegesis in *Between Past and Future* and *The Human Condition* that Villa must rely heavily on for his interpretation (Isaac, p. 535). Without attempting to settle this question—which, in part, seems interesting only in the context of the modern-day Arendt industry within academia—I think it fair to say that she had significant political and historical concerns throughout much of her mature life. I refer to this problem of placement only because part of MacIntyre's criticism above derives from my characterization, from what I think might be his perspective, of Arendt as an "historicist," or at least as an historically-minded philosopher. I will now generate an Arendtian response to MacIntyre. In doing so

²⁰ For a discussion of Arendt and existentialism, see L. P. Hinchman and S. K. Hinchman, "Arendt's Debt to Jaspers," *Review of Politics* Vol. 53 1991; pp. 435-68. For a discussion of Arendt's Zionism, see Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*. For a discussion of the Nietzschean elements in Arendt's work, see "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action," *Political Theory* Vol. 20 1992; pp. 274 ff. Also, Bernhabib claims that at least with respect to certain issues, Arendt is a "political modernist," (p. 168).

I will forego the rather obvious move of having her reject the historicist label a MacIntyrean might pin on her in favor of a more detailed, critical response concerning philosophical methodology and, specifically, *the proper mode of analysis* for dealing with the Enlightenment's failure, an event that, in part, led to the barbarism both Arendt and MacIntyre identify as a principal component of contemporary intellectual and moral life.

As noted, MacIntyre explicitly adopts an historicist label: he considers philosophical arguments and developments within a broad historical context, remaining sensitive to significant cultural divergence among the British, French, German, Dutch and other philosophers whose work he represents. For an Arendtian, this approach is far more admirable than the ahistorical, and possibly more narrow, exegetical work of Anglo-American analytic philosophers, MacIntyre's colleagues. Hence the Arendtian criticism of MacIntyre concerns neither the relevance of history for philosophy, nor the success of the Enlightenment, but is deeper and more substantial than these, involving the *very nature* of the failure they both see in the 18th century articulation of Rights as the guarantors of a stable moral system, indeed as the very foundation of politics for Europeans and Americans. For MacIntyre, this is principally a *philosophical failure*, albeit an historically grounded one. This claim becomes the crux of my Arendtian critique of MacIntyre.

In Arendt's view, the divorce of philosophy from politics by Plato, a separation upheld by nearly every western philosopher in what she calls "the tradition," met swiftly with its demise in the mid-19th century with Marx's last thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx, p. 158).²¹ Though she may feel nostalgia for what we have lost of the philosophical legacy of Plato and Aristotle,²² Arendt does welcome a politically-minded, historically-specific philosophy, an enterprise combining masses of historical data with

²¹ In Arendt's view, serious difficulties and confusions have resulted from philosophers' ignorance of the political: for e.g., considering freedom to be a question of the relations among the will, thought, and action, a purely philosophical question divorced from political realities. Cf. *BPF*, "What is Freedom?" p. 145ff.

²² On Arendt's nostalgia for pieces of the philosophical tradition she chronicles that now lay dead, see Villa, D.R. "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 86, Issue 3 1992; p. 719.

broad philosophical insights, integrating critiques of individual members of the Nazi party with long exegeses of the basic underpinnings of Nazism. Arendt's critique of the Enlightenment must be placed within this framework, for she considers the failure of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the 20th century to be *political* in nature, and not philosophical, as in MacIntyre's work. In investigating totalitarianism, the climax of this moral collapse, Arendt writes that "the event illuminates its own past," for her a political past: her characters are not principally Hume, Diderot and Kant, Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, but Göring, Himmler and Eichmann, Dreyfus, Rhodes and Lazare (Young-Bruehl, p. 203).²³

It is here that I can construct Arendt's principal critique of MacIntyre: he reads Kant but not Himmler, Hume but not Rhodes, a fact that blinds him to the fantastic political failure of the Enlightenment to protect, through rights, the Jews and other peoples that became the focal point of the Nazi genocidal program. For Arendt, MacIntyre does not venture sufficiently far from traditional philosophy into the tombs of modern history, into anti-semitism, imperialism, racism, into the volumes that chronicle the concentration camps, where the Judeo-Christian legacy of founding morality on rights was slowly but surely murdered. I must emphasize here "sufficiently far," for it is precisely MacIntyre's first steps into historically-based philosophy that open him to Arendt's criticism. It would surely be useless, if not comedic, to criticize, say, W.V.O. Quine for ignoring relevant political events in his investigations into set theory or symbolic logic. But MacIntyre takes seriously the notion of historicism,²⁴ he considers the Enlightenment's failure to be historically specific, and would presumably criticize his colleagues for ignoring relevant cultural differences among 18th century philosophers, for instance, or for missing the historical development of what is considered rational support for a philosophical position. It is precisely this

²³This is not to say, of course, that because the failure was political, philosophy is irrelevant for Arendt. She claimed, in fact, that philosophy too is not entirely free of guilt for the Holocaust: "Not of course, in the sense that Hitler somehow had something to do with Plato. . . . But in the sense that occidental philosophy never had a pure concept of politics and could not have such a concept because it always spoke of Man and never dealt with human plurality" (Arendt in Young-Bruehl, p. 255).

²⁴ See especially AV, chapter 18, where MacIntyre explicitly proclaims his historicism.

that makes Arendt's criticism of MacIntyre's work so powerful, for he largely ignores the historical movements to which he claims to be sensitive.

I do think I can develop a MacIntyrean response to this criticism, in part because he has been criticized along somewhat similar lines by Abraham Edel, of whom MacIntyre writes:

The gist of his criticism is ... that I focus too much attention upon the level of explicit theorizing, articulated concepts, and the stories told about their condition by various peoples and not enough on the actual social and institutional life of those peoples (AV, p. 271).

To Edel's sentiment MacIntyre first retorts that social history must be far more sensitive to theoretical development than it appears to be at present; his work is a step in this direction. Secondly, he admits that Edel is in part correct in his criticism, for the narrative of *After Virtue*, i.e. the story of western moral philosophy and its apparent downfall, would certainly benefit from more "social and institutional history," history that, MacIntyre admits, he largely presupposes in this project (AV, pp. 271-2). From MacIntyre's view, I suppose, he could have said far more of Hume's Scotland, Aristotle's Athens, the founding of the American and French republics, the industrial revolution, and perhaps even the rise of fascism. He thinks that *more* history would strengthen his narrative; hence he takes Edel's criticism to be principally *quantitative* in character.

This response to Edel allows me to sharpen what I think would be Arendt's critique of the methodology implicit in *After Virtue*. I take MacIntyre and Arendt to agree in principle that rights rhetoric, both that prevalent in the 18th century, and its contemporary form, to be lacking in validity, or to be what we might call *empty*. For MacIntyre, this emptiness is philosophical, owing its existence to the failure of moral philosophers to ground rights in human nature and human rationality, to make rights and the moral precepts they entail and presuppose *philosophically substantial*, strong enough to weather the coming storm. Arendt rejects this notion, for she unequivocally states that human rights never found sufficient grounding, *not* in

human nature and rationality, but in *politics*, for the era of the 1930s, that

period of political disintegration [that] suddenly and unexpectedly made hundreds of thousands of human beings homeless, stateless, outlawed, and unwanted ... could only have happened because the Rights of Man, which had never been philosophically established but merely formulated, which had never been politically secured but merely proclaimed, have, in their traditional form, lost all validity (O, p. 447).

From Arendt's viewpoint, in thinking the emptiness of rights is philosophical, MacIntyre commits a *qualitative*, indeed fundamental error, one not amenable to repair through the mere *quantitative* measures he proposes in response to Edel's attack.

For an Arendtian, *After Virtue* represents a deep mischaracterization, not only of the Enlightenment project, but of our present moral and political condition, of the post-tradition era we now inhabit. For it is not the present emotivist culture, as MacIntyre claims, that both signals and constitutes the Enlightenment's failure: it is Auschwitz.

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