

On Hannah Arendt as Political Actor Some Findings and a Proposition

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Politics in our century is almost a business of despair
and I have always been tempted to run away from it.

Hannah Arendt to Judah L. Magnes, October 3, 1948

Arendt's account of action in politics contains very con-
siderable complexities.

Margaret Canovan

Introduction

On Sunday, May 21, 1972, Hannah Arendt and Dorothy Day met at Notre Dame University, when Dorothy Day, after receiving the 1972 Laetare Medal, spoke at commencement exercises and Hannah Arendt was honoured with a Doctor of Law degree. It was a memorable event not only for the two prominent women but also for other people present. One of them was Robert Coles, author, activist, and research psychiatrist for the Harvard University Health Services, who also received an honorary doctoral degree. In 2000, almost thirty years later, Coles remembered: The two ladies “were like old friends.” They “were just totally absorbed in one another. It was so moving! [...] I looked at the two of them, and I thought this is like seeing Mary and Martha, the two of them—huddled, leaning into each other, talking, remembering. And so affectionate. [...] It was so beautiful. It was shaking. [...] Mary and Martha on the stage at Notre Dame ...”¹ Another eye-witness was the German theologian Dorothee Sölle, who was lecturing at Notre Dame at the same

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¹ Robert Coles, interviewed by Rosalie G. Riegler, 20 July 2000; transcribed excerpts of the audio interview (at Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries, Dorothy Day-Catholic Worker Collection, Series W 9.4, Box 10, Folder 3) were provided by archivist Philip Runkel in an email dated July 9, 2012.

time. She wrote about the meeting of those “two extraordinary women of the 20th century:” “Both beautiful in the wisdom of advanced age, both engaged for the rights of all human beings, they met in a lively and at the same time personal exchange. [...] Listening to them, a priest whispered into a friend’s ear: ‘They are the incarnations of intelligent goodness and generous intelligence, Mary and Martha, the sisters of Bethany.’”²

After unearthing these facts and commentaries—some, more or less by accident, we asked ourselves how close Hannah Arendt and Dorothy Day actually were. Since there was no secondary literature on their relationship (no mention even of it in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s biography on Arendt³) we started our own research, some results of which are presented in this paper. We will begin by documenting some sketchy details about Arendt’s and Day’s personal relationship. Then our focus shifts to Hannah Arendt as seen in the light of Dorothy Day’s primary social and political concerns. Generally speaking, Day was a political activist, Arendt a political theorist. But to leave things at that would mean making a long story short. One conclusion of our research is that Arendt turns out to have been more active politically than usually given credit for. We discovered several correspondences between Arendt’s actions and Day’s political activism, three of which we pay particular attention to – charitable and/or social work for the persecuted; anti-war

2 Dorothee Soelle [Sölle], *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, translated [from the German original *Mystik und Widerstand*] by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 247. The priest quoted by Sölle is probably Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., then president of Notre Dame University. – The biblical sisters Mary and Martha lived with their brother Lazarus at Bethany, a village not far from Jerusalem. They are mentioned in several episodes in the Gospels. On one occasion, when Jesus and his disciples were their guests (Luke 10:38-42), Mary sat at Jesus’s feet and listened to him while her sister Martha busied herself with preparing food and waiting on the guests, and when Martha complained, Jesus said that Mary had chosen the better part. When Lazarus, the brother, had died, Jesus came to Bethany. Martha, upon being told that he was approaching, went out to meet him, while Mary sat still in the house until he sent for her. It was to Martha that Jesus said: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” See “Biographical Sketches of Memorable Christians of the Past” at the website: <http://www.justus.anglican.org>.

3 In fact, knowledge about Dorothy Day is so limited among Arendt readers and scholars that it seems appropriate to provide a short biographical sketch: Dorothy Day (1897 – 1980) was an American social activist, journalist, convert to Catholicism, and with Peter Maurin (in 1932) founded the Catholic Worker Movement, a social welfare organization devoted to legal, political and social justice for persecuted minorities and the poor. It continues to this day. A believing Catholic during a time when many of the social and political movements she supported had abandoned religion, a pacifist, during a time of violent political upheavals, revolutions, and wars; Day charted her own course early and stuck firmly to a set of core beliefs and values. She spent decades supporting what many conservative social commentators both within and outside the established church believed were lost causes: suffrage and equality for women; civil rights and the right to a life of social and economic dignity for minorities, workers, migrants, and the poor. In one of the most iconic images of the 1970s, a frail yet determined Dorothy Day is seen standing her ground as a group of California Highway Patrol officers are about to arrest her for demonstrating on behalf of Caesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union. Two excellent articles can be found on the Catholic Worker Website (www.catholicworker.org): “Servant of God Dorothy Day” by Jim Forest, and “An Introduction to the Life and Spirituality of Dorothy Day” by James Allaire and Rosemary Broughton. Treated for decades by many in her own Church as an outcast, because of her outspoken social, political, and religious views, she accepted both vitriol and praise with an almost elegant grace and indifference. Wikipedia offers further information: “In 2012 the Catholic Bishops of the United States recommended her canonization and on February 13, 2013, Pope Benedict in the closing days of his papacy, cited Day as an example of conversion. He quoted from her writings and said: ‘The journey towards faith in such a secularized environment was particularly difficult, but Grace acts nonetheless.’ On September 24, 2015, Pope Francis became the first pope to address a joint meeting of the United States Congress. Day was one of four Americans mentioned by the Pope in his speech to the joint session that included Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Merton. He said of Day: ‘Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith, and the example of the saints.’”

actions; and the fight against totalitarian tendencies or manifestations however they may appear. The more we investigated those topics the more we found ourselves reflecting on Hannah Arendt's self-perception as a political theorist and political actor. Thus we decided to devote a section of our paper to that very subject, followed by a section that deals with a topic not normally associated with Hannah Arendt; namely her decades long surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). However she may have perceived herself as a political theorist uncomfortable with taking action herself, the FBI certainly saw her as a political actor and one whose activities and writings were threatening enough to warrant a very high level of scrutiny. We end with a proposition attempting to reconcile Arendt's often seemingly contradictory statements on acting politically, thereby hoping to stimulate further research and debate.

Hannah Arendt and Dorothy Day: Documentation

Arendt and Day knew each other before their meeting in 1972. Among Dorothy Day's papers at Marquette University a short letter from Hannah Arendt dated December 26, 1965, is preserved:

Dear Dorothy Day:

Thank you for your note. This only to tell you that I followed your work for many years full of admiration and affectionate sympathy.

With all best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Yours,

[Signed] Hannah Arendt⁴

Aside from this, over the years Day and the Catholic Worker Movement had received much public attention for their pacifist stands and the social and political programs they organized. Thus Arendt could have known about Day just by reading the daily papers. But she also was familiar with Day's activities through her relationship with two personal friends, Dwight Macdonald and Wystan H. Auden,⁵ if not Mary McCarthy. With regard to the latter, Dorothy Day was a "sponsoring member" of Spanish Refugee Aide, an organization McCarthy and later Hannah Arendt chaired. Macdonald was in active contact with Day over many decades and their letters are kept in his archives at Yale University. He wrote two well-informed, appreciative articles on Day, and in Nancy L. Roberts's history of the *Catholic Worker* he is mentioned repeatedly as someone whose politics was

4 Transcription and reproduction by Philip Runkel in an email dated July 11, 2012. Unfortunately, as of this writing we have not been able to recover the referenced "note."

5 Robert Coles speaking of Dorothy Day's "secular friends and, ultimately, admirers," names Macdonald, Auden, and Arendt, see his book *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Radcliffe Biography Series, A Merloyd Lawrence Book, 1987), pp. 66, 165 (note 1, chapter 4).

deeply influenced by Dorothy Day.⁶ Taking into account how close Arendt and Macdonald were in politics (e.g., Macdonald once wrote that Arendt was someone more on his “wave-length” than anyone living he could think of⁷), there seems little doubt that the two shared views about Dorothy Day. Also, Dorothy Day’s name appears over and over as a sponsor of organizations or causes⁸ that Hannah Arendt and Dwight Macdonald were often asked to, and in many cases did, support. Therefore Arendt could have been familiar with Day’s political and social work from people active in those organizations.

Regarding W.H. Auden, Arendt may have known the story of Auden bailing Day out of jail with a \$250.00 check after she had been imprisoned for participating in protests against New York City housing discrimination.⁹ Auden attended Catholic Worker meetings and participated in Catholic Worker discussion groups. So, there existed a close relationship between W.H. Auden and Dorothy Day, while Arendt’s and Auden’s personal relationship developed only late in life.¹⁰

We found further details on Arendt and Day that were suggestive of a relationship between at least two kindred spirits. They include:

[1] After Heinrich Blücher’s death (October, 1970), Hannah Arendt donated his cloths to the Catholic Worker settlement house in New York City.¹¹

[2] In 1972/3, after meeting with Dorothy Day at Notre Dame, she donated \$ 1,000.00 to the Catholic Worker organization.¹²

[3] During 1973, Arendt gave one or two lectures at St. Joseph’s House, i.e., the home of the Catholic Worker in New York City. The topic was “Revolution” (handwritten note from Dorothy Day on the invitation letter: “we want you to talk about Revolution”). One lecture was announced in *The Catholic Worker* newspaper with a date of March 9, 1973.

6 Dwight Macdonald, „Profiles: The Foolish Things of the World,“ *The New Yorker*, October 4 & 11, 1952; idem, “Revisiting Dorothy Day,” *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 16, no. 1, Jan. 28, 1971. – Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (SUNY Press, 1984), pp. 4-5.

7 Letter to Arendt, August 30, 1967; Yale University Library, Dwight Macdonald Papers MS 730, Box 6, Folder 98.

8 Examples include Spanish Refugee Aid, The Fellowship of Reconciliation, and The Resistance; all discussed in this paper.

9 Cf. *The New York Times*, March 2, 1956.

10 On Auden and Dorothy Day see Ursula Niebuhr, “Memories of the 1940s,” in *W.H.Auden: A Tribute*, ed. by Stephen Spender (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), pp. 104-118, pp. 114f.; see also Auden in a 1972 conversation with Michael Newman published in *The Paris Review* (no. 57, Spring 1974). – On Auden and Arendt, Hannah Arendt, “Remembering Wystan H. Auden, Who Died in the Night of the Twenty-Eighth of September, 1973,” *The New Yorker*, vol. 50, No. 48, January 20, 1975, pp. 39-40, 45-46; Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow: Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W. H. Auden* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2003). See also the tribute to Auden written by Dorothy Day’s close friend Helen Iswolsky in *The Catholic Worker*, January, 1974: “W. H. Auden: Faith and the Ironic Hero,” and Day’s own tribute in her editorial “On Pilgrimage,” *The Catholic Worker*, November, 1973.

11 Kathleen Desutter (Catholic Worker) to Hannah Arendt, Sept. 29, 1971: “I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting you last year with Mickey Kraft when you donated clothing to the Worker.” The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress (hereafter quoted as LOC Arendt Papers) / Publishers / Folder “C-Cl, miscellaneous, 1953-1974, n.d.,” images 18 and 19 (not displayed offsite); see also Coles, *Dorothy Day*, p. 165, n. 1 to Ch. 4.

12 On a mimeographed letter from the Catholic Worker farm at Tivoli to supporters dated January, 1973, and beginning “Dearly Beloved,” Dorothy Day added a handwritten note: “Dear Hannah Arendt – What a dear you are! And imagine writing a ‘Thank you’ on a mimeographed letter! So many exclamation points usually indicate a silly woman but really \$ 1000 is going to repair a lot of plumbing, buy two new showers for our so many young people. Love and gratitude, Dorothy.” See LOC Arendt Papers / General Correspondence / Folder “Unidentified, 1938, 1968-1975,” image 12 (displayed offsite).

Also, in Arendt's appointments book, she indicates a visit to the Catholic Worker March 16, 1973.¹³ Unfortunately, there is no text or publicized report on Arendt's lecture(s), only a letter of thanks from Patrick Jordan, a staff writer for the Catholic Worker newspaper, to Hannah Arendt praising her lecture and offering as a gift a book of poetry.¹⁴

At this point it is unknown whether Hannah Arendt ever read *The Catholic Worker* or subscribed to it, and there seems to be no way of telling whether she read any of Day's publications. The catalogue of her personal library at Bard College lists two books by Day: *The Long Loneliness* (1952) and *On Pilgrimage* (1972), the first one inscribed by Day.¹⁵ Both have no reading marks and/or marginalia. Also, we found no evidence that Arendt ever commented on Day's political activities and social work and/or took issue with her over her ideas. But there is one suggestive clue indicating Dorothy Day held Hannah Arendt in great esteem. In a diary entry from March 30, 1973, around the time she would have lectured at the Catholic Worker, Dorothy Day includes Hannah Arendt among a list of women, most of whom were her close friends, as one of the "brilliant and noble women these days."¹⁶

Arendt and Day: Correspondences

With respect to Arendt, among the innumerable areas Dorothy Day's political activism encompassed, at least two deserve to be discussed. The first is charitable or social work on behalf of the politically persecuted everywhere and more specifically, of those who had either been denied their political rights or the exercise of those rights. In this respect Arendt's work for Youth Aliyah in France, 1933-1937, may be referred to, but shall be skipped here since knowledge about these years in Arendt's life is rather limited.¹⁷ We

13 Personal memories of A. Bazelow who had an appointment with Hannah Arendt on March 16, 1973, during which Arendt mentioned she had lectured at the Catholic Worker and had known Dorothy Day for quite some time, cf. Hannah Arendt's appointments book, March 16, 1973, LOC Arendt Papers / Subject File / Appointment Books 1971-1972 ff. (displayed offsite).

14 Patrick Jordan's handwritten and undated letter begins "Since the time you spoke here at the Catholic Worker several months ago, I have thought often of you, and with gratitude". He then goes on to tell Arendt what an honour her visit to St. Josephs House was for all its residents, and as a memory, he wants her to have "this little book of poetry" he was given by a friend that introduced him to her book, *Men In Dark Times*. He does not mention either the name of the friend, or the title of the poetry book. He concludes *Men In Dark Times* is "a book that has repeatedly given me hope and renewal in life and in this work," therefore, "I hope the book of poetry will also bring you a bit of that as well". LOC Arendt Papers / Organizations / Folder "C, miscellaneous, 1954-1975," image 15 (not displayed offsite).

15 The inscription reads: "To Hannah Arendt, with gratitude and respect, Dorothy Day." Neither date nor occasion are added.

16 Cf. *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, edited by Robert Ellsberg (Marquette University Press, 2008), p. 526.

17 In a rather general way, Hannah Arendt reported about her work for Youth Aliyah in the televised interview she gave Günter Gaus in 1964, while Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, in her Arendt biography, provides some factual evidence. However, a detailed study about Arendt's activities when she was heading the "Office de l'alijah de la jeunesse – section française" is still missing. Cf. Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in idem, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York etc.: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), pp. 1-23, p. 10; Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 120, 137f., 143f., 148.

Recently, Jerome Kohn republished a moving article Hannah Arendt wrote and published in 1935 in France: "Des Jeunes s'en vont chez eu" (Some young people are going home), which testifies to the fact that Arendt was highly enthusiastic about the idea of Youth Aliyah: "Several weeks of preparatory camp, with work and

rather want to draw attention to another of Arendt's social activities which is even less known and documented, i.e., her work for the Spanish Refugee Aid organization (SRA), founded in 1953 by Nancy Macdonald (then married to Dwight Macdonald). In 1960 Arendt, replacing Mary McCarthy, became chairperson of that organization which supported men, women, and their children who had fled Franco's Spain and were living as refugees in France. Together with Nancy Macdonald and Francine Faure, wife of Albert Camus, who headed SRA's Paris office, Hannah Arendt "literally transformed that organization" by raising considerable amounts of funds and distributing them.¹⁸ As far as we know, Hannah Arendt never referred to these activities in public. To be sure in accordance with her political theory, she would not have counted them under the rubrum "political," but may have used the word "administrative" or "social" to describe them. In general, she entertained a certain restraint concerning charitable activities or simply concerning good deeds. As she writes in *The Human Condition*: "[...] the bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world [...]."¹⁹ Besides restraint however, we find again, as in the case of Dorothy Day, "admiration" – an admiration that can also be detected when she speaks of Auden's becoming a believing Christian and being protected by the "shield of orthodoxy."²⁰ But the line she draws is clear: what is being admired is not political activity in the proper sense, and this seems to be the reason why in that famous letter to Auden dealing with "forgiving," she made herself admit: "Of course I am prejudiced, namely against charity."²¹

study, games and singing, reading and free discussion on all the issues they [the young] are interested in, restore their freedom and joy. Yes, it restores their lost youth." Hannah Arendt, "Some Young People Are Going Home", in idem, *The Jewish Writings*, edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, New York: Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 34-37, p. 37. In a private communication, Kohn described what motivated Arendt to take part in Youth Aliyah. It stems from the Bible (Isaiah 11:12): "He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth." It is in this spirit that Arendt devoted herself to help save the lives of Jewish children and young people.

18 Among the enormous collection of SRA files in Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress containing administrative, financial, legal, and other documents of the period 1960-1976, two letters stand out. In the first, from Nancy Macdonald to Hannah Arendt dated March 1, 1967, Macdonald thanks Arendt for everything she accomplished during her seven years as Chairman and mentions the deep regret everyone felt at her being unable to continue. The second, a joint letter from Hannah Arendt and Dwight Macdonald to *The New York Times* dated May 16, 1968, reviews the history and accomplishments of Spanish Refugee Aid during its (as of that point) fourteen-year history, much of which was achieved during the seven years Arendt chaired the organization. In particular, the letter notes SRA had raised \$1.5 million since its founding, (approximately two thirds of that during Arendt's tenure). To get an idea of the sums involved that would be over \$10 million in today's dollars. See also Alexander R. Bazelow, "Can the Political Judgment Hannah Arendt Exercised in Her Own Life Help Us to Address the Problem of Acting Politically Today?," *Revista Centro de Estudos Hannah Arendt*, Volume 1, June 2013, pp. 8-27, pp. 13ff. Cf. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 390.

19 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958] (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, Paperback edition, 1989), p. 53.

20 Hannah Arendt, "Remembering Wystan H. Auden," in Stephen Spender, ed., *W. H. Auden: A Tribute* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), pp. 181-187, p. 181.

21 Hannah Arendt to Wystan Auden, February 14, 1960, LOC Arendt Papers / General Correspondence / Folder: "Auden, W.H., 1960-1975, n.d.," image 1 (displayed offsite).

Law and the Right to Have Rights

Prejudiced as she may have been, on behalf of those people she attended to with her charitable work Hannah Arendt achieved effects through her writing probably never dreamt of by political activists. In 1955, attorney Stephen J. Pollak, at the time still a law student and not entitled to sign as author, published an encompassing critique (173 footnotes) of “The Expatriation Act of 1954.” Here he asserts invoking Hannah Arendt that “expatriation represents a loss of the right to have rights” and in footnote 139 quotes, in extenso, from Arendt’s book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.²² This is the beginning of a long story of Hannah Arendt’s influence on American law discussions. Pollak, in an interview with Stephen J. Whitfield, acknowledged Arendt as “a major source of original thinking concerning the problems of stateless people.”²³ Her views informed important Supreme Court cases and were cited by the justices adjudicating those cases; most notably, Chief Justice Earl Warren in the case *Trop v. Dulles* in (1958)²⁴, Justice Goldberg in the majority opinion for *Kennedy v. Mendoza-Martinez* in 1963, and Justice William O. Douglas in the case *W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America v. Clark - 389 U.S. 309* (1967) dealing with the right of citizens to hold and voice unpopular political opinions without fear of government retaliation²⁵.

It is important, at this point, to note that all of the above cases resonate deeply into today. It has been argued by a number of Constitutional scholars that Edward Snowden, exiled in Russia, and deprived of a passport has been made effectively stateless, some cit-

22 [Stephen J. Pollak], „The Expatriation Act of 1954,“ *The Yale Law Journal*, vol. 64, no. 8, July, 1955, pp. 1164-1200, p. 1190.

23 Stephen J. Whitfield, *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), pp. 110f. Reference also in Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 293, p. 517 (n. 58). See also A. R. Bazelow, “Can the Political Judgment [...],” pp. 18 ff.

24 Albert Trop was a natural born citizen of the United States who, while serving as a private in the United States Army in 1944, deserted from an Army stockade in Casablanca, Morocco. The next day, he willingly surrendered to an Army officer and was taken back to the base, where he was subsequently court-martialed, found guilty, and sentenced to three years at hard labor, forfeiture of pay, and a dishonorable discharge. He continued to live in the United States. In 1952, Trop applied for a passport and, after discovering his prior conviction for desertion, was stripped by the government of his citizenship. The government based its reasoning on a provision dating from the Civil War in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1940 (precursor to the McCarran Walters Act), giving the government the right to strip the citizenship of persons convicted of desertion. The American Civil Liberties Union, acting on Trop’s behalf filed a lawsuit demanding the reinstatement of his citizenship. His appeal was denied by the lower courts but upheld by the Supreme Court. See Wikipedia and “Trop vs. Dulles” (356 U.S. 86, 1958), Page 356, U.S. 101, 102. A transcript of the opinion, minus detailed legal case law can be obtained at U.S. Supreme Court Center <http://www.justia.com>. It should be noted that Hannah Arendt supported The American Civil Liberties Union and from 1972 – 1975 did work on their behalf (see LOC Arendt Papers / Organizations / Folder “American Civil Liberties Union 1972 – 1975”).

25 *Kennedy v. Mendoza-Martinez*, 372 US, 144 at 161 (1963), involved yet another attempt of the government to denaturalize a native born citizen. A transcript of the proceedings contains the following comments from Justice Goldberg pertaining to the calamity that results from denying someone the “right to have rights:” “The calamity is not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever [...] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), 294. The stateless person may end up shunted from nation to nation, there being no one obligated or willing to receive him.” See also *W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America v. Clark*, 389 U.S. 309 (1967) argued before the Supreme Court four years later; this case dealing with the Constitutional Right to Association. Justice William O. Douglas’s references to Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution* are in two footnotes at page 389. For an analysis of Justice Douglas’s written remarks see “The Strange Origins of the Constitutional Right of Association,” by John D. Inazu, Public Law Fellow and Senior Lecturing Fellow, Duke University School of Law, *Tennessee Law Review*, Vol. 77, 2010, p. 528.

ing *Trop v. Dulles* as a precedent.²⁶ As well, demonstrators supporting unpopular causes continually find their civil liberties restricted or denied for all kinds of illegitimate reasons. Finally, surveillance, by both private and governmental organizations, on a scale unimaginable in the past, now occurs routinely with few restraints, checks, or balances.

Within this context of Arendt influencing American law discussions, it may also be mentioned that Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas admired Hannah Arendt and in 1963 took the then remarkable step of reviewing her book *On Revolution* for *The Washington Post*; a review that was syndicated nationally.²⁷

Anti-War Actions

Anti-war actions and actions for peace constitute the second area of Dorothy Day's political activism to which correspondences may be found in Arendt's personal decisions concerning political action. Here too the pattern displays "very considerable complexities" (see motto 2), even more so than in the case of charitable work.

Among Arendt's papers in the Library of Congress there are letters pertaining to a group called "The Resistance," written by Dwight Macdonald and whose approximately hundred contributors included Dorothy Day, Mircea Eliade, Erich Fromm, Viktor Frankl, and Daniel and Philip Berrigan, two Catholic priests associated with the Catholic Worker, who later were tried and sent to prison for anti-war protests. Members of "The Resistance" protested the Vietnam War by returning their draft cards. Arendt contributed a \$ 100.00 donation to their political efforts;²⁸ an act at the time which can only be interpreted as civil disobedience, because in August 1965 the United States Congress made destroying or in other ways mutilating or turning in draft cards a crime. It should be noted that the law extended to those who provided help or material support for such efforts. Therefore by providing financial aid and signing a petition on the protestors' behalf, signatories also risked prosecution.

However, to Mary McCarthy's question (in her letter of December 19, 1967, from Paris): "Are you involved in any of our friends' Resistance activity?" – Arendt replies: "I have not taken part in resistance activities." As kind of an explanation she adds: "The 'activists' are in a mood of violence, [...]"²⁹ By resistance Arendt and McCarthy were referring to

²⁶ For more details, see "Edward Snowden's Father Writes Open Letter to NSA" which was drafted by the Constitutional Lawyer Bruce Fein, *The Guardian Newspaper*, June 2, 2013, and Patrick Weil, "Citizenship, Passports, and the Legal Identity of Americans: Edward Snowden and Others Have a Case in the Courts," *The Yale Law Journal Forum*, Volume 123, April 23, 2014.

²⁷ William O. Douglas, "The Guts of Freedom," *The Washington Post*, Sunday, March 17, 1963. At the end of his review, Douglas has this to say: "We as a Nation start and end with 'the pursuit of happiness,' but with us that pursuit has become largely materialistic. We seem largely oblivious of the fact that 'it was ... the space of man's free deeds and living words which could endow life with splendor.' That is why this book is so timely, why it needs to be known by all who shape public opinion or who educate youngsters."

²⁸ See Dwight Macdonald's October 1968 cover letter to Hannah Arendt with Arendt's handwritten designation in the lower left-hand corner "by traveler's check," LOC Arendt Papers / General Correspondence / Folder: "Macdonald Dwight, 1946-74, n.d.," image 12 (not displayed offsite). For a history of the draft card burning law (50 U.S.C. § 462(b) (3)) see Wikipedia, "Draft-card burning," footnotes 3, 4, and 5.

²⁹ Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, *Between Friends: The Correspondence, 1949-1975*, edited and with an introduction by Carol Brightman (New York et al.: Harcourt Brace & Comp., 1995), p. 206 (McCarthy), p. 212 (Arendt on February 9, 1968).

active demonstrations which at the time were more likely than not to end in violence and mass arrests.

Whenever Arendt suspects that “violence” and / or “ideology” are involved, her answer to requests of participation in activities is likely to be no. A case in point is her attitude towards SDS, “Students for a Democratic Society,” an activist organization involved in the student protests at Columbia University in 1968 and then throughout the sixties on college campuses nationally. Arendt had concerns about their violent rhetoric and tactics. In particular their belief that violence was a legitimate means for achieving social change, was a viewpoint with which she was in total disagreement.³⁰ In a May 25, 1968 letter to Macdonald she stated: “I received your appeal for SDS. I think that we agree by and large on these issues, and I too think that the occupation of buildings can to a certain extent be justified against the accusation of trespassing by stressing that a university belongs at least as much as to its students as to its trustees. But this doesn’t mean that one supports the SDS”. She then adds “I have a little experience with some of their spokesmen, and while many of the rebellious students belong to the very best of the student generation, the same cannot be said for the members of SDS.” Arendt concludes with “although I do not want to make a general condemnation,” in my opinion the members of SDS “are people who it is difficult to take seriously” and while “I too think the establishment may need ‘shoving,’ I don’t think SDS does the right kind nor do I believe there wouldn’t be any shoving without them.”³¹

However, when it came to the question of whether or not to support any specific war, Arendt reserves the right to qualify her views. In 1973 Dwight Macdonald invited her to join the War Resisters League—an international pacifist organization to which he belonged as a member and which had bestowed their Peace Award on Dorothy Day in 1963. Here is what Arendt wrote to her friend from Aberdeen in Scotland, where she was delivering her first “Life of the Mind” lectures:

I hate to say ‘no’ to you but I feel I cannot join the War Resisters League. I am not a Pacifist either in the ‘relative’ or the ‘absolute’ sense and I am not sure that I would ‘refuse to support any kind of war,’ as you put it. You know of course that I supported the war against Hitler rather enthusiastically.^[32] Today, evidently, one could not support any war between the great powers because of nuclear weapons [...] Pacifism, at any rate, is not likely to save us.³³

³⁰ Elisabeth Young Bruehl describes a famous confrontation between Hannah Arendt and Tom Hayden, a lead spokesman for SDS, on December 15, 1967, in New York City where Arendt appeared as a panelist at a discussion pertaining to the topic “The Legitimacy of Violence as a Political Act?,” chaired by Robert Silvers and held at the New York Review of Books; Hayden, speaking from the audience, defending violence as a legitimate political tactic, Arendt condemning it. Young Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, pp. 415–417. For Arendt’s introductory remarks and further contributions to that panel cf. *Dissent, Power, and Confrontation*, ed. by Alexander Klein (New York etc.: McGraw-Hill [Theatre for Ideas / Discussions No. 1], 1971), pp. 98ff.

³¹ See Dwight Macdonald Papers at Yale University Library, MS 730, Box 6, Folder 98; copy of the letter: LOC Arendt Papers / Universities / Columbia University / Miscellany (not displayed offsite).

³² For example, she advocated a Jewish Army to fight against Hitler’s Germany in her articles of 1941–44 for the New York German newspaper *Aufbau*, cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings* (see note 17), pp. 134–185.

³³ Hannah Arendt to Dwight Macdonald, May 1, 1973; quoted from the original letter kept among Dwight Macdonald Papers, MS 730, Box 6, Folder 98, at Yale University Library.

There are other wars that got Hannah Arendt's support, i.e., the 1967 Israeli Six Day War as well as the Yom Kippur War of 1973. It so happened that Arendt was interviewed by Roger Errera for French television when on October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. In the interview Arendt stated strongly: "The Jewish people today are really united behind Israel."³⁴

On the other hand, she was vehemently opposed to the Vietnam War. To that end, she supported "The Fellowship of Reconciliation," an offshoot of the Catholic Worker and a number of other pacifist groups.³⁵ To this group Arendt donated a copy of the first edition of Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795; Engl.: *Project for a Perpetual Peace*, 1796) from her personal library as well as a \$ 50.00 check to help with the cost of the fellowships "Congress End the War Ad."³⁶ But here again, she drew a line. As she argued in her essay "Reflections on Violence," she was not prepared to endorse violence to achieve the end of that war.³⁷

Arendt's Self-Perception

The examples we have referred to so far in this paper provide some indication of the fact that Hannah Arendt, although not a political activist, certainly was engaged politically. She herself confessed to such engagement in the well-known and often quoted statement at the Toronto Conference about her work in 1972:

I don't belong to any group. You know the only group I ever belonged to were the Zionists. This was only because of Hitler, of course. And this was from '33 to '43. And after that I broke. The only possibility to fight back as a Jew and not as a human being [...] there was no other possibility, so I went into Jewish politics—not really politics—I went into social work and was somehow also connected with politics.³⁸

Leaving aside the fact that Arendt got involved in Jewish politics again in 1948 with Judah L. Magnes and his Ihud group,³⁹ there is no doubt that Arendt spoke the truth. Apparently in her self-perception there existed a sharp line separating political activism and

34 Hannah Arendt, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn-London: Melville House, 2013), p. 125. At the time she made a contribution to the Jewish Defense League, as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl reports, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 456.

35 See the folder "Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1968-72," in LOC Arendt Papers / Organizations. Affiliated to this organization was, beginning in the early 1960s, the Catholic Peace Fellowship, which on its part was inspired by Catholic Worker activism. See *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker*, ed. by Patrick G. Coy (Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 108, 128.

36 For more details see Bazelow, „Can the Political Judgment [...]“ pp. 14f. Also Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 452.

37 Arendt, "On Violence," in idem, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), pp. 103-198; originally published as "Reflections on Violence," *The New York Review of Books*, February 27, 1969.

38 Hannah Arendt, „On Hannah Arendt,“ in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. by Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972, pp. 301-339), p. 334.

39 Cf. motto 1 of this paper; also Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, pp. 225 ff.; Iris Pilling, *Denken und Handeln als Jüdin: Hannah Arendts politische Theorie vor 1950* (Frankfurt am Main etc.: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 272 ff.; Dagmar Barnouw, *Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 96ff.

political engagement. Mary McCarthy seems to have perceived this as kind of a dilemma and dealt with it in her essay “Hannah Arendt and Politics.” There she starts with two strong assertions pointing to a contradictory state of affairs: “Politics was the engrossing occupation of Hannah’s life”—“Yet she was not very active politically.”⁴⁰ In other words, Arendt’s attitude towards politics is ambiguous, and this may be the reason why she has always been tempted “to run away from it” (see motto 1). However, we may attest that she struggled with the temptation. This lifelong struggle made her think and leave to posterity a collection of thoughts on how to cope with political action – thoughts that seem to be pertinent to the problems of acting politically also in 21st century post-totalitarian societies.

For Arendt, the major condition of acting is that men “can only act in concert,” and this is where her discomfort with political action begins. She conceives of herself as a thinker, who by definition can only think by herself, and she admits that she is “primarily interested in understanding.”⁴¹ Thus for her, doing something “in concert” becomes a problem—regardless of the fact that she idealized historical situations in which people acted in concert. At this point we may refer to two telling incidents in Arendt’s life. The first occurred in 1948 when she spoke on Magnes’s efforts to a hostile audience in Worcester (Massachusetts), which, as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl reports, shouted her down.⁴² After the event she wrote a long letter to Elliot Cohen, the editor of *Commentary*, explaining:

I am not qualified for any direct political work; I do not enjoy to be confronted with the mob, am much too easily disgusted, have not enough patience for maneuvering and not enough intelligence to retain a certain necessary aloofness.⁴³

This early formative experience – a situation in which she was confronted with a woman speaker from the audience who, having just returned from Palestine, “knew all the answers” and for her cracked views got enthusiastic applause from the audience – probably stayed with Hannah Arendt all through her life.

The second incident took place in the 1970’s and is reported by Jack Blum in an interview he gave to Roger Berkowitz. Blum, a student of Heinrich Blücher who became a lawyer, was called to New York by Arendt one day to represent Arendt at a meeting of the tenants of the Riverside Drive building in which she was living. The issue was how to get (and pay for) a lawyer who would handle the tenants’ interests in the case of their building being turned into a condominium. Blum, amazed at her request, asked her why she needed him as a representative and, according to his memory, she replied:

40 Mary McCarthy, „Hannah Arendt and Politics,” *Partisan Review* 1/1985, 729-738, p. 729.

41 The quotes are taken from her remarks to Richard Bernstein’s paper „Ambiguities of Theory and Practice“ at the above mentioned Toronto Conference on Arendt’s work. Cf. “On Hannah Arendt” (note 38), pp. 305, and 303.

42 Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 233.

43 Hannah Arendt to Elliot E. Cohen, November 24, 1948; LOC Arendt Papers / Publishers / Folder: “Commentary, 1945-1975” (not displayed offsite).

You have to understand there is an enormous difference between knowing what should be done and actually doing it. And this is something I can't do [...] and I don't want to be part of that kind of political process.⁴⁴

At the end of her life, in her acceptance speech of the Copenhagen Sonning Prize, when reflecting on herself as a private face in public spaces, Arendt resumed her position:

In matters of theory and understanding it is not uncommon for outsiders and mere spectators to gain a sharper and deeper insight into the actual meaning of what happens to go on before or around them than would be possible for the actual actors and participants, who are entirely absorbed, as they must be, by the events themselves of which they are a part. It is indeed quite possible to understand and reflect about politics without being a so-called political animal.⁴⁵

Arendt, a “Subversive” Intellectual

Although, as she disclosed in Copenhagen, Arendt “by temperament and inclination” has tended “to shy away from the public realm,” there are variants of political acting which apparently she did not dislike, yes even may have enjoyed being part of. In her lifetime, she exposed herself in political matters on many occasions and concerning a great variety of issues when she took upon herself the “venture of the public realm” (*das Wagnis der Öffentlichkeit*). She did so by writing, by lecturing publicly, contributing to panels and public debates—and, in a special way, by teaching⁴⁶. She tackled Jewish matters, occurrences and developments in the United States, in Germany and other European countries as well as world-history events. Indeed, “politics was the engrossing occupation of her life.” Very often she displayed great courage and an independent mind. For example, when she published her thoughts on the “Ex-Communists”⁴⁷ in 1953, during the McCarthy witch hunts, she felt the need to speak her mind, not just about Joseph McCarthy himself, but also about those who supported his cause or were instrumentalized by him. In particular, she attacked Whittaker Chambers. Chambers, a member of the underground Communist Party in the US, was a spy for the Soviet Union till he quit the Party in 1939 (allegedly because of the Hitler-Stalin Pact). As writer and editor he then started a career as ex-Communist, informing State Department officials and testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In 1952 he published his autobiography *Witness*, which may have triggered Arendt to choose him as her “model” of an ex-Commun-

44 „Remembering Hannah: An Interview with Jack Blum,” in *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, ed. by Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz, and Thomas Keenan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, pp. 261-266), p. 265.

45 Hannah Arendt's speech in Copenhagen on April 18, 1975, is reprinted as “Prologue” to idem, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited and with an Introduction by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003, pp. 3-14), p. 8.

46 This is the argument Mary McCarthy brings out in her essay on “Hannah Arendt and Politics” (see note 40). She writes (p. 731): “In a sense one could say that her [Arendt's] truest political engagement was her teaching [...] certainly she had a deep vocation for teaching, which, like the call heard by Socrates, was in essence political. She was an educator.”

47 Hannah Arendt, „The Ex-Communists,” *The Commonweal* 57, 20 March 1953, pp. 595-599; idem, “Ex-Communists' Remain Totalitarian at Heart,” *The Washington Post*, 3 May 1953.

ist. To the ex-Communists à la Chambers who “arrogated to themselves the role of the police,” Hannah Arendt sent this message:

America, this republic, the democracy in which we live, is a living thing which cannot be contemplated and categorized, like the image of a thing which I can make; it cannot be fabricated. It is not and never will be perfect because the standard of perfection does not apply here. Dissent belongs to this living matter as much as consent does. The limitations of dissent lie in the Constitution and in the Bill of Rights and nowhere else. If you try to ‘make America more American’ or a model of democracy according to any preconceived idea, you can only destroy it.⁴⁸

No wonder that such writing put her in the eye of the FBI.⁴⁹ Herbert Mitgang, in his study of FBI surveillance of American writers and intellectuals, extensively reviewed Hannah Arendt’s FBI files and suggests, for a period of time, Arendt was in considerable danger. Among the documents Mitgang found was a copy of the abbreviated version of Arendt’s essay on the ex-Communists published by the *Washington Post* and a biographical statement taken from her immigration and naturalization application. Initially designated an “Internal Security Threat Category R – Russia”, according to Mitgang the FBI watched what she said and wrote and she became the subject of reports filed by informants, some of which were sent directly to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. In Haines and Langbart’s book on FBI classification codes, Hannah Arendt is referenced twice. The first, under a category that includes “immigration, false identity and passport claims;” the second, under a category that includes “foreign counterintelligence and internal security threats involving foreign espionage.” Mitgang was especially puzzled by the accusations that Arendt was an internal security threat. He could not understand what she could conceivably have done to have warranted that designation. He then goes on to observe (referencing a long FBI document that has since been obtained and made public under the Freedom of Information Act):

In a censored response by the FBI New York office to Hoover, [a] complaint by an apparent informer in Los Angeles about Miss Arendt was said not to warrant an active investigation. It was stamped both *Confidential*, and *Subv. Control*.⁵⁰

48 Quoted from the reprint of „The Ex-Communists“ in Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York etc.: Harcourt Brace & Comp., 1994, pp. 391-400), p. 400.

49 See Herbert Mitgang *Dangerous Dossiers: Exposing the Secret War Against America’s Greatest Authors* (New York: Donald J. Fine, 1988), p. 189; Gerald K. Haines and David A. Langbart, *Unlocking the Files of the FBI: A Guide to Its Records and Classification System* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), p. 283: “V. FBI Records released under the Freedom of Information Act,” where Arendt is listed with the classifications 40 and 105 defined on pp. 36 and 105. FBI surveillance of Hannah Arendt went all the way back to at least 1946. Organizations she was associated with such as Spanish Refugee Aid and Dwight Macdonald’s journal *Politics* as well as individuals she knew such as the writer Albert Camus, and many others were also investigated.

50 Mitgang, p. 192. The document under question is dated 7/11/56 and was in response to a complaint filed by an informant on April 5, 1956. Both the original complaint and the response were obtained by the “Muckrock” website (www.muckrock.com) under the Freedom of Information Act. They were published online January 13, 2014. Near the bottom of the FBI’s response to the complaint, after noting that files in their New York Office were “negative on Hannah Arendt” with one exception, there is text previously redacted in prior Freedom of Information Act releases of this report. The redacted phrase provides a clue as to how Hannah Arendt came under FBI surveillance to begin with. In 1946, as part of her duties as an editor at Schocken Books,

Hannah Arendt, the refugee from Nazi Germany and author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, ended up living much of her life, in her adopted homeland, a subversive intellectual.⁵¹

Concluding Proposition

For the purposes of this paper, the evidence displayed so far may suffice because the paper is not meant to provide a complete comparison of Arendt's and Day's intellectual and political profiles, nor a complete documentation of Arendt's political acting. We referred to Arendt's essay about the ex-Communists in order to suggest that in her case writing on specific political topics may well have been a kind of political action. Furthermore, via this example we can add an item to our list of areas of political action decisive for Arendt as well as Day and calling upon them to act. Besides charitable or social work for the persecuted and anti-war actions, it is the fight against totalitarian tendencies whenever they appear, regardless of the disguises in which they present themselves.⁵²

Hannah Arendt thought a great deal about acting politically. In a comment at the 1972 Toronto Conference she let her audience know: "I think I understood something of action precisely because I looked at it from the outside."⁵³ One component part of this look from the outside was mentioned earlier in our paper: acting in concert vs. thinking by oneself. But there is another equally important one which she exposes in her article on the ex-Communists: action cannot be conceived like work, acting is not like fabricating.⁵⁴ Actors need to know the difference. She herself was so much aware of this difference that she would rather not act.

I can very well live without doing anything. But I cannot live without trying at least to understand whatever happens. And this is somehow in the same sense in which you know it from Hegel, namely where I think the central word is reconciliation—reconciliation of man as a thinking and reasonable being. This is what actually happens in the world. And this need to be reconciled with the world [...]—I

Arendt apparently sent mail to someone whose name is blocked out. Unbeknownst to her, that individual had been targeted by the FBI based upon information supplied by an informant and prominent ex Communist, Elizabeth Bentley. Thus, applying guilt by association, the agency decided Hannah Arendt was also someone whose activities had to be monitored. Years later, in "The Ex-Communists," by using Whittaker Chambers as her model for people like Bentley, Arendt touched and exposed the raw nerve of that world of secrecy and police informants created by intelligence agencies everywhere.

51 We don't know how long this lasted or if Hannah Arendt suspected it or if it ever ended. What makes it so remarkable Mitgang notes, is that there is no evidence in Arendt's files of any subversive acts. "If anything, Hannah Arendt's 'subversiveness' was philosophical and practical: A strong defense of democratic ideals against totalitarianism and police-state methods—whoever espoused them—that could subvert democracy." Cf. Mitgang, *ibid*.

52 Another observation is noteworthy but could not be pursued in this paper: Hannah Arendt in her decisions on acting politically or not, to a great extent relied on personal friends, e.g., in the case of SRA, on Mary McCarthy, Dwight and Nancy Macdonald.

53 Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt" (see note 38), p. 303.

54 Cf. quote above (note 45), also: "The idea that I can do more than act for, and in, the present (i.e., that I can *make* the future) implies two fundamental errors. It implies that I know the end and therefore can decide freely about the means, and *that I know what I am doing in action the way I know what I am doing in making things*" (italics by authors). Arendt, "The Ex-Communists," p. 397. Later Arendt will elaborate on this component part in her book *The Human Condition*, see chapter 26 ("The Frailty of Human Affairs") in particular.

don't know any other reconciliation but thought (or telling the story or something like that)—this need is, of course, much stronger in me than it usually is in political theorists, with their need to unite action and thought. Because they want to act, you know.⁵⁵

At this point we propose to stop and think. The above statement is made by someone who, on the other hand, is well known to have said in an interview, regarding the revolutionary students of the 1960's: "acting is fun."⁵⁶ And she really meant it. But how do those two statements go together? In our view, there is a plausible answer: They can be interpreted as two sides of the same coin. Hannah Arendt, by her philosophical insights sceptical of action, can easily, consistent with her philosophical stand, turn around to admire and promote action, in certain cases even activism.

This of course brings us back to our story at the beginning of this paper—"Mary and Martha" at Notre Dame on May 21, 1972. Arendt liked, even admired those who she understood and judged to be men and women of action. Of John F. Kennedy, for example, she said when interviewed by Alfred Alvarez: "This was really somebody whose whole life was determined by a sense for action."⁵⁷ And she was fond of people who were active in causes she supported, whose personalities she trusted, and who did what she knew or meant to know she never could have done herself. Hence her affection for Dorothy Day, Dwight and Nancy Macdonald, Albert Camus and his wife Francine Faure, her husband Heinrich Blücher and all those political actors who she both admired from afar and at times joined and acted with in concert.

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55 Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," p. 303; wording restored from the original 1972 audio tape preserved by the Library of Congress.

56 Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution: A Commentary," Interview by Adalbert Reif, Summer 1970, in idem, *The Last Interview*, pp. 67-105, p. 71.

57 A. Alvarez, *Under Pressure, the Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the U.S.A.* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Pelican Book A 777, 1965), p. 104.