Jean-Jacques Rousseau gives freedom a body when he opens the first chapter of *The Social Contract* with the famous sentence: “Man was/is born free [est né] and everywhere he is in chains.” His argument draws its force not only from a strong opposition between nature and culture but also from a multivalent temporality. Where English forces a decision, birth, in Rousseau’s French, assumes either a historical or an ontological cast depending on how one reads the verb *est*. A first reading transposes the biblical story of the fall into politics, recounting that man *was* born free but is *now* enslaved. A second reading sets freedom against slavery in a battle over the present: man is, *now and always*, born free though he finds himself in the contradictory situation of being subjugated. Read in Rousseau’s double valence, birth is both material (in the world and in time) and transcendental (not bound to material, above the world in a way that it can determine it, and outside of time).

“Natality” has become one of the most central concepts in contemporary work on Arendt and her unique renegotiation of ideas of freedom and possibility. Readers of the *Denktagebuch* might hope for more evidence of the concept’s development, but she uses the term only once in the years
leading up to her major deployment of it in *The Human Condition*. The puzzling, even obscure, presentation of the term in the *Denktagebuch* challenges interpretive protocols that depend on a linear development. Nonetheless, the entry deserves attention because it shows Arendt transforming a political metaphysics of the body through an alternative conception of corporeality. Maintaining Rousseau's attention to the clash of language and ontology, Arendt shows that the body bears a specifically earthly form of freedom.

The weight of Arendt's published works and their scholarly reception tempt the interpreter to approach the *Denktagebuch* from the tradition of Western philosophy broadly conceived. However, understanding what this early entry means for Arendt's concept of natality requires a focus on its specifically literary aspects, understood as the particular ways in which she constructs it through arrangements of language. Within an awareness of both literary form and the conceptual history of philosophy, my question arises from and contributes to the more developed discussion of natality in *The Human Condition*. There, Arendt changes the very definition of politics, describing it not merely as the negotiation of interests between different groups, but of the creation of groups that act together to start something new. Power, in turn, does not preexist but emerges from common endeavor and legitimately endures only as long as it has continuing support. This alternate conception of the political ultimately depends on Arendt's conception of natality: If there is to be the possibility of something truly, radically new, there must be a distinctive way for a person to be politically born. This idea allows her to gesture toward a new understanding of authority, tradition, and even temporality by engaging and challenging the notion of a transcendent guarantee of freedom.

Yet, while Arendt repeatedly emphasizes natality's importance, her specific formulations fall short of systematic explication. The introduction of *The Human Condition* offers a typically moving and deceptively lucid statement: “action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.” On the one hand, Arendt grants natality singular potency: “only” it grants the power of starting the new. It allows a specific kind of novelty that we need to break ties with the past. On the other hand, “because” marks a unidirectional relation. At one level, Arendt highlights birth as a physical event; it announces the emergence of a new distinct being. Beyond this, birth contains possibility; it holds a new start
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“inherent” in it. From here, it is difficult to discern whether birth in this sense really relates to the body at all, or instead just describes a transcendental principle, a higher power that always exists and makes action possible.

In a similar manner, Arendt later writes that “the faculty of action is ontologically rooted” in natality. However, she does not use natality as an anchor, but as a phenomenon, an event in the material world, that offers a spring of hope and forward motion. Backing away from the view that natality might be a purely transcendental or ontological principle, we are thus led to ask if Arendt insists on the body and the figural dimension of language as she works out a way of describing freedom that requires a specific sense of embodiment. In other words, what might seem to be a confusion of philosophical and literary modes of inquiry actually contributes to the hermeneutic richness of her thought. A careful reading of the explicit reference to natality in the Denktagebuch and nearby references to figures of birth can help understand how Arendt uses the narrative and poetic dimensions of the idea to expand the philosophical concepts of novelty and change. Natality, as a condition in Arendt’s sense, is related to, but different than, a concept, an anchor, and an ontological principle. Arendt’s natality needs to be shown and, though it will not present itself directly to the senses, it can be approached indirectly through narrative (time) and poetic layout (spacing).

The Space of Power

Entry 21 in Notebook XIX (October 1953, p. 461) contains the Denktagebuch’s only reference to “natality.” In order to engage Arendt’s challenge to foundational thinking, I propose that we acknowledge that the entry gives us not one but two outlines and aligns them in a way that compels us to work out their relation. The Denktagebuch presents the opportunity to take the layout of thinking seriously and to read it as it comes to us, spread out on the page. If we look forward to the published works, we know that the two columns into which Arendt divides the entry will need to become one. Yet, the very way that she writes resists a simple binary, one-to-one relationship. Taking up the challenge of this entry allows a renewed appreciation of Arendt’s thought in its stylistic and conceptual creativity. In their spatial division, order of terms, and employment of symbols, these two columns offer a productive challenge to reading.

The basic features of the entry suggest a provisional intellectual orientation, and I propose describing them on their own terms before entering into
wider questions of Arendt scholarship. In the accompanying table, the left-hand column appears to be generally positive, containing the terms equality, assertion, thought, and action, while the right is broadly negative, including fear, loneliness, and loss of reality. The left proceeds from *Singularity* (*Singularity*) to *Mortality* (*Mortality*) and the right column begins with *Plurality* (*Plurality*) and ends with *Natality* (*Natality*). Each of these corner terms ends with what in English would be the suffix “–ity,” which grammatically implies that Arendt denotes a state of being. It may seem that the outline offers pure philosophy, pure concepts and terms. In their very purity however, the lists of terms raise the question of motion, relation, and connection.6

Editors Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann describe the entry as “keywords” (*Sichwörter*) to Arendt’s lectures at Notre Dame in 1954 (1046). Their description makes sense when one reviews how the third part of these lectures develops questions related to the “two-in-one” in a reading of Plato.7 A small addition should be made to this relation between notes and lectures by pointing out that the note to the right on “Labor”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pluralität</th>
<th>Singularität</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equality—distinction in the modus of speech:</td>
<td>⇝ Fear if related to plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= Assertion of human condition</td>
<td>= Faith ⇝ if in and by itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought: Solitude</td>
<td>⇝ Labor: metabolism with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= two-in-one = I with</td>
<td>= my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myself = with Humanity</td>
<td>Loneliness if related to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrication: isolation</td>
<td>plurality: One-ness without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= I with human artifice</td>
<td>confirmation by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= loss of reality or common sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action = together with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futility of action = need for permanence—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry or body politic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natality</td>
<td>Mortalität</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
has clear connections with the Gauss Lectures that Arendt delivered at Princeton University one year before.⁸

If one sees the Denktagebuch solely as a sourcebook for ideas to be developed later, it would be enough to be satisfied to explain it as an outline, a spine, or skeleton to be fleshed out in a final product. Those who know The Human Condition might see the opening and closing as parallel terms and assume that, beyond the immediate relation to the Notre Dame and Princeton lectures, the entry ultimately moves in a deliberate manner from plurality to natality and singularity to mortality. Arendt extensively develops her sense of plurality in The Human Condition, defining it clearly and programmatically as “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”⁹ Simply put, Arendt prioritizes multiplicity over conceptual unity. Arendt scholarship has also done a great deal of work on Arendt’s reworking of Heidegger’s approach to mortality as “being towards death.”

With the rich conceptual development the scholars and Arendt herself provide, it is easy to forget that The Human Condition itself never systematically explains the function of natality, insisting on the need for a basis for action in plurality but leaving open the question of how this relationship between action and natality works. It seems to be a kind of foundation, except that is more of a spring than a solid base. It refers to the body. Arendt uses it not as the appearance of the body in the merely natural sense, but instead as a mark of the distinctively human, which she consistently resists reducing to the simply biological.

This entry of The Thought Diary keeps keys terms of Arendt’s thought at a typographical distance. Indeed, its lack of clear transitions demands that we read the space between the terms. While tempting us to jump to connections and conclusions, it also inserts a mostly blank barrier between concepts. The history of philosophy, while rarely commenting on its own innovations of layout, does offer some guidance in this regard. Specifically, Arendt’s intimate familiarity with Kant’s three Critiques, and her particular training in the German philosophical tradition, suggest a provisional approach through the lens of the layout of early German editions of Kant’s antinomies in the Critique of Pure Reason. There, in side-by-side columns, he begins with premises beyond the scope of reason and shows that each necessarily leads to its opposite. For example, in one antinomy, Kant offers negative proofs of the proposition that the universe has a fixed area and beginning and the proposition that it does not have a fixed area and beginning. In Kant, the division of the columns signals a rift in thinking that cannot be bridged. The empty middle marks an abyss, a void for human thinking. Arendt’s text, by contrast seems to offer an apparently logical
development from one key term to another on each side. The equal signs even suggest mathematic progression and conclusion. Often they can be translated “I define as.” For example: “Action I define as together with.” Choosing one such interpretation, though, would be a strong step, since in this specific case there are so many locutions that could as easily be inserted there instead, such as: “relies upon,” “is contingent upon,” “has something to do with.” This is particularly true since Arendt also offers a different connection between the columns in two small arrows that she inserts in the middle pointing from the right to the left.

Despite these differences, contrasting Arendt’s columns with Kant’s raises the question of how each side develops, and it prepares us to watch for twists in what seems to be straightforward motion. Most important, it reminds us to take the distance between the two columns seriously and sets a high standard for attempts to bridge them. Indeed, the spacing warns us of the danger of hoping to find one answer to this equation rather than accepting the multiple challenges to thinking that the columns open.

Given such a multiplicity of ways to begin reading this entry, perhaps we can start with the most notably distinct feature, the arrows, small marks flying between terms, that imply that Arendt takes singularity as her starting point (following her teacher Heidegger) and tries to work her way out. Since they force us to read from right to left, though, we might have an uneasy sense that we are swimming upstream, working against a prejudice of tradition. The right hand column offers a series of pitfalls, of ways to go wrong, or at least apparent negatives. “Fear,” “loneliness,” and “loss of reality” stand out. In contrast, one might hope to find a smooth, positive development in the left-hand column. This is not the case, though. “Fabrication” poses a threat to “equality” that “action” does not just conquer. Instead, one slides, stumbles, and gets stuck in the “futility of action.”

Natality offers action its energy but cannot be linked to it in a clear way. The two terms stand apart. However, the specifics of the distance are significant. The development of the line of thought hangs up on poetry:

Futility of action = need
for permanence—
Poetry or body politic

The positive movement of the column hits “futility.” The interruption implies at least two directions. It might just be a blip in her run of thought, a speed bump, so to speak, built into the human condition itself. Alternatively and perhaps more interestingly, Arendt may be considering an objection, acknowledging the fact that the boldly announced “action” above remains
threatened by disappointment, and trying to come to terms with that objection by contending that practical failure leads to a metaphysical need for stability, and acknowledging the fact that the boldly announced “action” remains threatened by disappointment.

The history of political philosophy has long aligned the “need for permanence” with the “body politic,” not only since the early modern reinvention of sovereignty, but even much earlier in classical Greek and Roman thought. In her published work, Arendt uses the term “body politic” without inquiring into its conceptual history, but that history does offer a place to start for critical reflection. Traditionally, philosophers use the body to describe a principle of stable organization. This was already true for Aristotle, who insists on an analogy between mind and body and ruler and subject. In his view, such a hierarchy was prescribed by nature and extended in principle to the control of men over animals and free men over slaves.

As Ernst Kantorowicz famously demonstrated, medieval political theology argues for the continuity of the ruler with the idea of the two bodies of the king: a physical body that passes away in his death, and a spiritual body that does not change. The phrase often cited in connection with this idea, “The king is dead, long live the king,” employs a paradox that apparently resolves when one realizes the “king” is being uses in two different senses. However, the imperative hides the implicit group of people that project the still living concept of the king in speech. The French phrase “le roi est mort, vive le roi!” employs the subjunctive case, and a more literal translation would be “the king is dead, may the king live.” The need to add the marker of duration in English (“long”) testifies to an anxiety about the stability of this concept as the idea intersects with the body.

Most important for modern thought, Hobbes describes individuals in the state of nature who cede their individual power to the ruler, resulting in a single body that the famous front piece of Leviathan pictures as a giant composite of smaller people. Jonathan Hess highlights the move from Aristotle, who sees man as having an intrinsically political nature, to Hobbes’s insistence on the artificial body of the state. Hobbes needs to convert man from an antisocial animal into a political being. Hess argues, in effect, that when Hobbes combines the social contract with the body politic, the unity of the body wins, since the contract only operates at the moment of forming the leviathan as head of state, who then has the power to make all future decisions. In the terse phrase “poetry or body politic,” Arendt shifts our attention away from this rational moment of the contract and toward a different kind of moment altogether, a creative poetic moment.
Linguistically, “body politic” has a unique currency in Anglo-American thought that deserves comparative examination in light of Arendt’s multilingual background. In German discourse, the mechanistic *Staatsapparat* (state apparatus) predominates over *Staatskörper* (state body). Arendt’s choice to focus on the body rather than the machine marks a difference between her project and that of the structuralist thinkers of the post–World War II period. Most famously, Louis Althusser drew on Marx and structuralism in his elaboration of “ideology and ideological state apparatuses.”

Rousseau, in line with his preference for figures of nature and the organic, employs “*corps politique*” in *The Social Contract*, but it never took a central place in French debate. In comparison with these thinkers, Arendt’s use of the English “body politic” in connection with “natality” assumes the organic figure of the body, but does not associate it with the teleology that it would assume in Rousseau. Likewise, the arrow markers in the two columns of the entry from the *Thought Diary* suggest a logical, perhaps even machine-like functioning. She does not explicitly clarify the meaning of those operators, though, which prevents the system from assuming a sense of closed circulation.

Arendt’s revision of the body politic operates through a plasticity of the concept innately related to its figural aspect. Expanding on one of Arendt’s notes on Hans Blumenberg, Sigrid Weigel writes, “The same words can be understood as concepts or metaphors, yet their designation as metaphor reflects the moment of transmission that is always inscribed in them—at least when it is a question of the designation of the invisible.” Weigel connects the moment of categorizing a word as a metaphor with a release of sense and movement of meaning. She is not saying that new meaning arises from nowhere that finally illuminates a previously unseen idea. Instead, an old word, the same word, marks out a new terrain. Beyond Weigel’s insight though, Arendt compels us to think of the words “body politic” not just as a concept or metaphor, but concept and metaphor. In doing so, concepts also become vehicles of transmission that do not just offer new categorization but also bring forth unseen knowledge.

From the medieval period to the twentieth century, theories of the body politic shared a common emphasis on unity and an organic principle of stability that points to a metaphysical “need for permanence.” In the “or” of Arendt’s “poetry or body politic,” she compels us to consider an alternative to the necessity of assuming that structure. Considering nearby entries of the *Denktagebuch* within the general horizon of the *Human Condition*
shows that she does not merely reject the body or its order, but, by demanding continual participation, instead employs the body to talk about political connections in a way that opens political form rather than closing it.

Perhaps surprisingly, given Arendt’s emphasis on natality as the basis of radical newness, other figures of birth in the Denktagebuch relate not to change, sudden or otherwise, but to consistency and integration. However, the way Arendt describes this maintenance of the world provides a basis that cannot be circumvented for the radical energy that she ultimately grants action. Reading a few key entries around the same time in the Denktagebuch shows that the world (i.e., the common realm of living together) needs to be sustained; it does not just exist by itself. In this regard, the phrase “poetry or body politic” indicates that the political body needs to be continually renewed, either through the poetic, or in poetry itself. This renewal has both a conservative aspect and a potential for radical change in action. Each new body does not just fit the higher state-body, but continually maintains the social structure. Without presupposing that higher principle of stability, the common world can then change its entire political structure because it brings with it the possibility of starting something wholly new.

Jürgen Habermas’s critique of Arendt’s conception of power helps sharpen her challenge to permanence in the political realm in the other entries I wish to examine. Habermas reads her as usefully placing emphasis on the origin of power as opposed to its means of employment. In contrast to Max Weber, who understands power in terms of particular individuals seeking to realize a fixed goal, Arendt separates power from the necessity of a telos (end). Habermas names plurality as the condition for communication and then quickly moves from distinctness to connection. The world has a “spatial dimension” in which “multiple perspectives of perception and action of those present” are unified.17 Insightfully—and provocatively—he complements this description of the spatial dimension of the world with a temporal one: “The temporal dimension of the life-world is determined by the ‘fact of human natality’: the birth of every individual means the possibility of a new beginning; to act means to be able to seize the initiative and to do the unanticipated.”18 In this description, Habermas references the past in the singular (“the birth of every individual”) but allows for action between people. So, in natality, as he describes it, we go from the past to the future and the individual to the group.

The very emphasis on the origin of power, however, raises the question of how it can endure over time. The phrase “temporal dimension of the life-world” points to this problem: How could it be said to “use” power in
the future when, as Arendt writes in the *Human Condition*, “power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies”? For Arendt, the specter of the Weberian conception of power cannot quite be so neatly side-stepped as Habermas desires. Power should not be seen as capital that can be deployed at the time that a ruler or executive wishes. Arendt suggests instead that it cannot be virtualized, that it in its purest state it exists only in a one-to-one relation with its supporters.

Habermas ultimately accuses Arendt of a sleight of hand in taking refuge in the idea of the contract to solve the problem of her radical conception of action. His quick assertion that Arendt falls back on the “contract theory of natural law” rings false, though. He leaves us little else to support his accusation, and it seems to be a sort of stopgap approach to closing the important questions raised by his description of Arendt’s conception of power. He clearly describes both the spatial and temporal aspect of Arendt’s concept of power, but saying that she relies on the contract suggests that, as in Hobbes, political agreement exists in order to close off political form. Even before Habermas’s challenge, Arendt had already provided a language to understand the stakes of this problem: her distinction between a promise and a contract. The *Denktagebuch* offers other options, though, particularly around the figures of birth that she explores in philosophical notes as well as those that experiment with the narrative genre. An entry from 1955 draws our attention to the difference between animal and human birth: “Heidegger is wrong: man is not ‘thrown in the world’; if we are thrown, then—no differently from animals—onto the earth. Man is precisely guided, not thrown, precisely for that reason his continuity arises and the way he belongs appears. Poor us, if we are thrown into the world!”

Despite the stark tone of her objection, Arendt’s critique of metaphysics begins with Heidegger, who already writes about existential spatiality instead of the independent existence of subjects who are cut off from the world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s idea of “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) offers a conceptual hinge between a limitation and expansion of freedom. On the one hand, the thrown *Dasein* (Heidegger’s displacement of the subject through spatial “being-there”) cannot choose to come into the world, much less into a particular world. Indeed, Heidegger describes Dasein’s usual state of thrownness as “fallen,” which of course suggests a range of negative connotations starting with the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis. Heidegger claims that he does not intend a negative value judgment of this starting state, though, which he associates not with a hierarchical shift, but rather a horizontal dislocation. As thrown, Dasein first exists in a confused
disorientation among the mix of everyday opinions of other people. Yet, this type of thrownness does not only describe a past or current condition, but it also enables an openness to the future in that Dasein remains “in the throw” (in Wurf bleibt). Dasein’s thrownness causes original disorientation, but this state at the same time keeps it in play for future development.

On the other hand, once situated in a field of relations, possibilities open that allow Dasein to fashion a sense of the future and self-knowledge. In contrast to Arendt, Heidegger emphasizes individual development at this point. He repeatedly speaks of authentically “being able to be oneself” in a manner that contrasts with the publicity of the inferior social epistemology of idle talk.

Arendt asks how exactly we are to recognize the original condition of being thrown in such a way that new possibilities open up. Her objection to Heidegger takes a subtle linguistic path that shows how her method of reading inflects her philosophical ideas. She actually combines philosophy and linguistics in a subtle terminological challenge rather than hold exclusively to the conceptual development of “thrownness.” She says that man is only thrown into the natural “earth,” not the humanly made “world.” Arendt broadly holds to this division in The Human Condition, though she also uses the terms interchangeably at times. In making the distinction in the Denktagebuch, she draws on Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” which he wrote in 1937 and published in 1950. There he distinguishes the world as a system of relations that creates meaning from the earth as the given, material aspect of nature. This latter dimension has a certain solidity, but it also resists understanding in its pure state.

By inserting this distinction between the earth and the world, Arendt reads geworfen not abstractly as “thrown,” but concretely. In doing so, she implies that she has in mind the second meaning of the German verb werfen, which one uses to speak of animals other than humans giving birth. Such a shift takes Heidegger down a notch and uses his own term in a nearly opposite sense. After all, Heidegger’s sense of “thrownness” relates to position, chance, and dislocation, along the lines of a throw of the dice. If he does not intend God to be his model, he at least suggests man as one who engages chance. When Arendt gestures instead to animal birth, she points to necessity rather than contingency.

From this point of view, it looks like Arendt wants to simply leave the merely animal behind after recognizing it. The German verb leiten, which I have translated here as “guided,” could also mean to “direct,” “to conduct,” “to lead,” “to govern.” Thinking ahead to Arendt’s writing on education, one can hear a connection to begleiten, which means “to accompany.”

The
guiding that one receives gives a sense of continuing and belonging to a greater world. Heidegger insists that Dasein does not choose to be thrown into a specific world, but is born without choice or input. For Arendt, this is our earthliness, and she emphasizes the difference between the human world and the given earth. With respect to the world, she highlights the connection to others from the start. Since others exist before the entrance of the newcomer, we also assume responsibility for their entry to the world. One must be educated into the world, which is not simply the earth, but the humanly constructed edifice that includes history and memory and the polis.

In “The Crisis of Education” (1954), Arendt writes, “Basically we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as home.” She draws powerfully on Shakespeare in her description of the world’s disjunction. Facing the command of the ghost, Hamlet laments his task of revealing that his uncle murdered his father to rule Denmark: “The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right.” As the heir to the throne, Hamlet’s personal situation is inherently political, and Shakespeare’s tragedy stages the premature death of the father as genealogical break that raises the question of succession. Arendt generalizes Hamlet’s words in a manner that might appear paradoxical at first: How can the world always be becoming out of joint? The Thought Diary suggests that the continual animal-like birth of people challenges the structures that are to assure their entrance into humanity in its fullest, politically empowered, sense. The body comes first because we cannot assume a moment of rest or cohesion from which the disjunction starts.

Arendt’s conception of finitude is key here: humans make a world (comprising structures and practices of living together) that lasts for only a set period. In this sense, “home” for Arendt does not offer the permanent refuge that philosophers and poets often long for. The crisis in education that she writes of in the late 1950s is in part one of a particular time and place. She does critique specific pedagogical trends such as an emphasis on play-like activities in the classroom over “the gradually acquired habit of work.” In a broader sense, however, the crisis of education actually responds to the crisis in authority that she sees occurring over a long historical arc. While she recognizes the declining power of the parent, teacher, and expert, Arendt does not merely advocate a harsh return to old models. Instead she advocates a “minimum of conservation” that allows the most basic operation of interpreting the past based on new conditions. The word “educa-
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tion” derives from the Latin root *educere*, meaning “to lead forth,” but for Arendt such a journey could have little confidence in its destination.

Peg Birmingham and Stephan Kampowski suggest that Arendt replaces Heidegger’s *geworfen* with *geboren* (born). The earlier passage from the *Denktagebuch* shows the complexity of this substitution and that it works only by changing the context to the world rather than earth. However, while the quote shows that Arendt relegates Heidegger’s thrownness to the realm of the earth and body, her own idea of “natality” brings the body back to her thinking of freedom. Being born will have not one but two important senses for Arendt from the *Denktagebuch* to *The Human Condition*. If *werfen* can refer to animals giving birth, Arendt works out a specific way in which *humans* are born, but her intervention in the conceptual history of the body politic emphasizes a first connection that already liberates humans from the earth, and then a mode of being born that changes the world rather than just adding to it. If Rousseau’s opening of *The Social Contract* says that man is both in time and transcends it, Arendt sees man as both in the body, as an animal, and guided, albeit in the disjunctive rather than organic manner, into the world.

*Birth and . . .*

Before moving on, or back, to natality, though, another entry must be reckoned with in which Arendt offers a smooth and touching narrative of welcome into the world that not only tells but also shows what she means by being guided into the world. She offers another form of writing, switching into the narrative mode in a way that performs the guidance articulated conceptually in the passage above. Almost a page long, this entry gets started with a drumbeat of the conjunction “and”: “We are born into this world of plurality where father and mother stand ready for us, ready to receive us and welcome us and guide us and prove that we are not strangers” (*D* XIX.39.469–470). Arendt homes in on the connection between newborn and world to establish a relation that at first appears surprisingly untroubled to readers of her later work. She describes the mother and father as being there for the child in four ways. In being “ready,” they have prepared for him in advance. They will “receive” him, bringing him to the place that they made. In “welcoming,” we might think of additional signs of acceptance that indicate a broader, social incorporation. Further, the parents do not just take in the child at that moment but also offer to “guide” him, accompanying him for a time in the world.
The parents do all of this to show that the child belongs, but Arendt’s repetitions reveal an awareness of the difficult kind and amount of work this requires. Moreover, in the “we,” the reader sees not just another reference to the child but to the parents as well. The repeated welcome affirms the place of the parents and child. Beyond the content, however, the passage compels a switch from a critical philosophical mode of analysis to an embrace of narrative. Arendt moves along with the story. Invited, welcomed by this switch in style, readers performatively enter the “we,” joining the story in the mode of the “and” that is also its central point of content.

If there is an irresistible beauty to the passage, of the smooth flow that immerses us into a new world, then that flow makes all the more striking the moment when, later in the same entry, Arendt subtly disrupts the perfect, smooth plane of her story when “we” are no longer newcomers but must ourselves welcome “newcomers to whom we prove what we no longer quite believe, that they are not strangers” (D XIX.39.470). A split opens up in relation to the simple welcome of the start of the passage. A new perspective appears, so that over the course of the narrative the reader sees the same event is seen from two vantage points. This does not need to be read as a dissolution of the opening lines. On the contrary, Arendt needs both. We must feel welcome and retain a sense of the strangeness of the newcomer. The strangeness will be productive: It does not merely mean that the newcomer does not fit, but it is what allows that they can change the whole world while also having the sense that they have a place in it.26

The section ends: “We die in absolute singularity, strangers after all, who say farewell to a foreign place after a short stay. What goes on is the world of plurality” (D XIX.39.470). As the “we” dies, Arendt withdraws the narrative welcome she so elegantly extended. We, the readers, are returned to the key term “plurality.” The final passage to consider before returning to an explicit consideration of Entry 21 in Notebook XIX (October 1953) helps clarify the end of this story. The repetition of the “and” at the end of the passage offers a clear connection to the narrative just considered:

It is as if men since Plato have not been able to take the fact of having-been-born seriously, but rather only that of dying. In having-been-born the human establishes itself as an earthly kingdom, toward which one connects, in that it searches for and finds its place, without any thought that he will one day go away again.27

Arendt speaks of a way of thinking foreign to Plato in which the “eternity of the human species” was seen primordial, rather than the “mortality
of humanity.” She argues that we need to take the fact of being born seriously even though the period of history in which this was taken for granted is over. If, in that time one could count on linking “search and find” (sucht und findet) in a quick conjunction, Arendt looks deeper into the moment of the “and” in the modern period. She describes a strangely unreflective “kingdom” where one never thinks of death. In this respect she launches a pure attack on the higher world of metaphysical afterlife. At another level though, her own thought demands that we think the imminence of the political and its nonidentity, its ability to change from within.

Poetry and Body Politic

In the Human Condition, Arendt productively reformulates the double perspective that appears in the narrative death of the “we” in terms of a “second birth” that leads an individual beyond the welcome of the world. One takes one’s stance in relation to the world by reflecting on the distinction between actual birth and an idea of freedom that emerges from thinking about birth. In Chapter 5, she writes: “With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our physical appearance.” In the second birth, one realizes that the plurality of the world does not simply preexist but that our own arrival necessarily cosigns it (“confirms”), and thus implicitly contains the power of refiguring it.

Since the opening of the inquiry, it has become clear that although the logic of Entry 21 appears to hang up on the phrase “poetry or body politic,” Arendt does not actually reject the body as way of envisioning the world. Instead, she highlights an aspect of birth that displaces a higher conceptual body like the leviathan in the direction of a horizontal, narrative accretion of support. In addition to this new “body politic” that demands constant maintenance, however, the phrase gestures to what I would call a “poetry politic” that shows how action can radically change the common world. So, while Arendt does fight the abstractions of Heidegger’s thrownness and Hobbes’s leviathan, a mere shift to the horizontal is not sufficient to understand her thinking. The “or” can break in at any moment when a new generation whose bodies get ahead of the institutions demand new beginnings.

More than simply naming poetry, the lines “Futility of action = need / for permanence—/ Poetry or body politic” read like poetry, and this suggests another approach to the entry’s layout. If Kant’s antinomies provided a model for approaching the entry from the German philosophical tradition,
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thinking of the entry in the tradition of avant-garde poetry around 1900 offers another way to take its spacing seriously. Stéphane Mallarmé’s 1897 poem “A Throw of the Dice” provides the blueprint for twentieth-century spatial poetics and helps us read two columns of text in their exposure of language across facing pages. Critics have been fascinated by the multiple connections suggested by the poem’s font sizes, use of italics and capitalization, and the way it opens semantic links across facing pages. Mallarmé’s spacing operates on at least two levels: between the words on a page and across the spine, the hinge of a manuscript that physically holds it together. Reading the body politic poetically shows that plurality never really gives way to the unity of the body in the sense of a totality, because each person remains distinct, just as each word in the poem remains distinct. Further, the space between the two pages, like the space between the two columns, reveals a basic distance between the singular and plural that constitutes the world for Arendt, even if, for the purposes of her political thought plurality holds the foreground. At the same time, Mallarmé’s dice throw conserves the materiality of language in its specific fonts and careful layout, just as Arendt’s thrownness keeps the animal body. For Arendt, the body both keeps one “in the throw” (Heidegger) and enables the capacity of the new throw in action.

If Rousseau grants the body a temporal force for liberation, Arendt not only brings time into the body politic but also keeps it open to the space of poetry. The “or” should not be seen as an alternative, as proposing two equally good choices. Instead, the phrase “poetry or body politic” splits up and becomes both “body politic” and “poetry politic.” Or, to put it another way, in the Thought Diary, Arendt offers a poetry of the body politic.

NOTES


2. Seeking to carry the insights of the Enlightenment directly into the political world, The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) keeps the “and” but profoundly stabilizes Rousseau’s temporality in its first article: “Men are born and remain free [naisent et demeurent] and equal in rights.” The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) can be accessed at www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/root/bank_mm/anglais/cst2.pdf.
4. Ibid., 247.
5. Portions of my readings of Arendt that follow have appeared in an earlier form on the blog of the Hannah Arendt Center website: www.hannaharendtcenter.org.
7. Arendt’s drafts of the 1954 lectures at Notre Dame are held by the Library of Congress. A revised version of the third lecture was published as “Philosophy and Politics” *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (spring, 1990). This essay is included (under the new heading “Socrates”), along with other related drafts of papers from the same time in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005). These posthumously published writings from the 1950s offer important insights into her reading of Marx.
8. The Gauss lectures are available online at the Library of Congress website: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/mharendtFolderP05.html.
14. While agreeing with the general direction of Hess’s reading, I see Hobbes as both affirming and denying the artificial nature of the state. Strictly speaking, the order and direction of the ruler dominates, but the


16. Sigrid Weigel, “Poetics as a Presupposition of Philosophy: Hannah Arendt’s *Denktagebuch*,” *Telos* 146 (2009): 97–110, at 105. Weigel describes the *Thought Diary* as an explicit decision on Arendt’s part to turn from the personal and literary reflections of her earlier diaries to explicit reflection on questions of political philosophy following the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951. However, in contrast to the earlier split in Arendt’s writing between the private diary and public work of the academic dissertation on Augustine, in the *Thought Diary* “poetics no longer designates the other of philosophy . . . but, rather, it now describes the path of or to thought” (102).


18. Ibid.


26. The double perspective in this passage contributes to recent work on Arendt’s engagement with the narrative conception of knowledge associated
with Hegel. Allen Speight points out that for Hegel the ultimate judge is institutionalized world history, while for Arendt the world is the space that reveals “the who” (which is already implicitly perceivable in the \textit{daimon}). See Allen Speight, “Arendt on Narrative Theory and Practice,” \textit{College Literature} 38, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 115–130.

27. Arendt, \textit{D XIX.24.469–70}: “Es ist, als haben die Menschen seit Plato das Faktum des Geboreneins nicht ernst nehmen können, sondern nur das des Sterbens. Im Geborensein etabliert sich das Menschliche als ein irdisches Reich, auf das bin sich ein jeder bezieht, in dem er seinen Platz sucht und findet, ohne jeden Gedanken daran, dass er selbst eines Tages wieder wegeht.”


29. A spoken performance of the text reveals other connections: reading the right-hand column aloud reveals that alliteration plays a key role (“Fear,” “Faith,” “Labor,” Loneliness”), while the left-hand column builds up a certain rhythm around single key terms before slowing down on the “Futility of action.”


31. Robert Greer Cohn writes in language that resonates, albeit difficulty, with Arendt, of the near tautology of Mallarmé’s “world in which . . . all terms are profoundly identical while yet being distinct.” Robert Greer Cohn, \textit{Mallarmé’s “Un coup de dés”: An Exegesis} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), 16.

32. Roger Berkowitz identifies a connection between Jacques Rancière and Arendt that suggests a connection between what I here call Arendt’s “poetry politic” and democracy; while “Rancière sees political action as manifesting ‘dissensus’ [Rancière’s alternative to the cohesion of consensus], Arendt insists that political action be spontaneous and capable of beginning something new into the world. Which is why Arendt argues that ‘the modern concept of revolution, inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known before, is about to unfold’ is at the very center of modern democratic politics.” www.hannaharendtc.org/?p=4705.