

Aporias within Arendt's *The Human Condition*: Finding the light at the end of the tunnel

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Abstract: *We investigate, semantically and philosophically, the English language edition of Hannah Arendt's 'The human condition'. Our approach connects Arendt's focus on activity and action with occupational science. We suggest that an engagement with the human condition from a perspective of occupation may be of great value in facilitating an understanding of the place of human occupation in the rapidly changing modern world. Before such a project can be undertaken it is crucial that this work of Arendt be understood. Barriers to understanding this work have been glossed over by many of her interpreters. Our starting point is to clarify Arendt's use of the word 'condition' in various contexts in the English language edition of 'The human condition'. This can have a critical influence on meaning. By semantic analysis we show how Arendt has conflated the different types of conditions associated with doing and being, respectively (that is, conditions "of" and conditions "for"). We offer a solution to Arendt's aporetic formulations that occur in the opening pages of her text. The way we make sense of Arendt's thought is to distinguish between D-conditions relating to forms of activity and B-conditions that pertain to the being of human beings. Our semantic suggestions clear the way to conduct an interdisciplinary inquiry into the human condition which draws on Arendt, but is broader in scope than Arendt's project, which was primarily an historical inquiry into the vita activa in the predominantly Western world.*

Keywords: Arendt, human condition, *vita activa*, aporias, world alienation

'aporia'

The term 'aporia' as we use it here relates to the Socratic *Stop and Think* about which Hannah Arendt wrote so eloquently in *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt, 1978). An aporia occurs when, faced with a contradiction, thinking is unable to go forward or backwards. It must seek another path.

Introduction

First, we will provide some background to explain why it is important to re-examine, semantically and philosophically, Arendt's use of the term 'condition' and its cognates in her 1958 book. The phrase 'the human condition' occurs in innumerable books and articles.



However it is rarely (if ever) explained. Arendt herself offers some kind of explanation where she states that humans ‘are always conditioned beings’ (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). For us, that explanation does not remove the conceptual confusion that results from quite different uses of the word ‘condition’ that appear in the book. Specifically, Arendt uses the term *condition of*, when what actually makes sense is *condition for*. That is the semantic issue. The philosophical issue appears in the explanation Arendt offers (that humans ‘are always conditioned beings’), which appears holistic, insofar as it implicates all humans in all places and at all times. But whose holism is it? Does the idea of holism or universality help us to understand the specific problem she addresses, which is ‘world alienation’? Whose alienation is it? Is ‘alienation’ holistic?

The phrase ‘the human condition’ also occurs in Ann Wilcock’s (2007) article entitled: *Occupation and health: Are they one and the same?* That article makes an important ‘holistic’ contribution to an emerging field of inquiry called occupational science (Yerxa, 1990; Hocking, 2020). But once again, whose holism is it? Is it just a Western philosophical view? What is Wilcock’s understanding of the term ‘human condition’? Answers to such questions demand a preliminary clarification of Arendt’s terminology, in order to bring her perspective into a dialogue with Wilcock. In this article we can only deal with the preliminary clarification.

Our interest in Arendt’s *The human condition* overlaps with an interdisciplinary interest in occupational science (Turnbull & Barnard, 2023). Occupational science began ambitiously just over 30 years ago (Yerxa, 1990), challenging the hegemony of biomedicine in matters to do with health (Wilcock, 2007) and seeking the fulfilment of a ‘holistic’ vision contained in Dewey’s political philosophy (Aldrich, 2018). It seeks to address issues of justice (Hocking, 2017) and is prepared to address the concept of occupation from a decolonial perspective (Block, Kasnitz, Nishida, & Pollard, 2016; Frank, 2016; Ramugondo, 2015). Our view is that Arendt, whose focus is on activity and action, is not only congruent with occupational science’s focus on ‘doing, being, becoming and belonging’ (Wilcock, 2007) but is entirely relevant to that discipline. This is particularly so, since Arendt offers a penetrating analysis of the origins of ‘what we are doing’ (Arendt, 1958, p.5) in the colonial empires of Greece and Rome. Our aim is to further enable occupational science in what we consider to be its worthwhile goals, by integrating our understanding of what Arendt offers into that account. The aim of this article is to facilitate the understanding of Arendt’s text by reinterpreting her use of language in relation to the term ‘condition’ in order to simply improve its intelligibility.

Our approach to this topic

Our current writing collaboration began in 2001 as an interdisciplinary dialogue concerning the incompatibility of the axioms of genetics and ethics (Barnard and Turnbull, 2006). We see dialogue, which combines the attributes of activity and receptivity, as well as individuality and sociality, as an exemplary case of human occupation. This fits well with Arendt’s political vision.



Our current article takes a preliminary step back from utilising Arendt as a resource for addressing current world issues (Barry, 2017). This step back is crucial for any subsequent interpretation or appropriation of her thought, because one needs to understand it first. In considering the opening pages of *The Human Condition*, we treat Arendt not only as a political theorist but also as a philosopher who in these pages was addressing both the political and philosophical context or *milieu* in which her thinking arose. In this respect our interpretation is largely in accord with Seyla Benhabib who writes, ‘A central thesis of my interpretation of Hannah Arendt is that the recovery of the public world of politics in her thought was not only a political project but a philosophical one as well’ (Benhabib, 2003, p.50).

We begin with the English language title of the book: *The Human Condition* (HC). We find that phrase scattered throughout the book. We would like to understand, first, what that phrase means. However there is a similar phrase that Arendt uses that confounds us the moment she introduces it, which she does in HC (p.7): ‘the human condition of’. At this point Arendt has not explained what she means by ‘the human condition’. Why introduce the phrase ‘the human condition of’ without having explained the phrase that comes antecedent to it? We think that finding an explanation of ‘the human condition’ is worthy of consideration in its own right. In order to rehabilitate that phrase we need to distinguish it from Arendt’s confusing formulations of ‘the human condition’ in which she simply adds a single preposition ‘of’ to introduce an entirely novel concept in the context of an inadequately explained one.

Our starting point is the following passage in the Prologue

What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness - the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of “truths” which have become trivial and empty - seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing (HC p.5).

In this passage, Arendt calls attention, without further description or detail, to the historical moment of the modern world in which she lived and wrote.¹ It seems reasonable to suppose the phrase ‘the human condition’ would provide the beginning of a description of what it is

¹That detail had been supplied in earlier works such as *The origins of totalitarianism*, and *Men in dark times*, to which further detail would be added in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. More detail would come to light later, as scholars unearthed more of her early work, in *The Jewish writings* (Arendt & Kohn, 2007). To this can be added the voluminous store of letters to Jaspers, Heidegger and Gershom Scholem. Hinchman & Hinchman (1984; 1991) provide interesting perspectives on the mutual influences between Arendt, Heidegger, and Jaspers.



like to be human under conditions of modernity, in other words, a social ontology.² Yet, as she also states, ‘I do not discuss this modern world, against whose background this book is written’ (HC p.6).

Her summons is ‘to think what we are doing’. But from whence is the summons? Arendt does not say. She does not present it as a categorical imperative grounded in rationality as does Kant. It is simply a task she takes upon herself. Benhabib comments, ‘As in morality so in historiography, Arendt refused to deal with these problems *via* foundationalist positions and insisted that this is what the cultivation of historical and moral judgement amounted to: the ability to draw fine distinctions and to represent the plural nature of the shared human world by re-creating the standpoint of others’ (Benhabib, 2003, p.89). It is entirely up to the reader, therefore, to decide whether and how to respond. An initiative is required from us, if we wish to enter into the mode of thinking she presents, in order to recreate Arendt’s own standpoint.

Therein lies the challenge we face. There is an anomaly to consider. On the one hand Arendt clearly wishes to criticise thoughtlessness, particularly as it relates to human activities, the carrying out of which clearly has consequences both good and bad. The people she has as her targets of criticism are those who do what they do without thinking and whose speech is an unreflective repetition of words that have become trivial and empty. Not many years later Arendt went on to describe what she termed ‘the banality of evil’ (Arendt, 1963) the origin of which she diagnosed as thoughtlessness. This is not to say mere thoughtlessness is itself evil. But for Arendt, the activity of thinking is closely associated with a moral form of life, of conditioning oneself against doing evil, as she wrote about it in *The life of the mind* (Arendt, 1978,).

All of the foregoing appears to presuppose that not only the activity of thinking, but also thinking about that activity, is an essential part of reflective normativity. Benhabib elucidates:

the normative core of the Arendtian conception of the political: the creation of a common world through the capacity to make and keep promises among a plurality of humans who mutually respect one another. Only when humans give the space of appearance in which all action and speech unfold a visible and stable form, and create institutions, do they create a public space. (Benhabib, 2003, p.166).

²We are open to the possibility of the recovery of a social ontology from Arendt’s work. Efforts to extract a social ontology from *The Human Condition* are not new. For example Ronny Miron (2009) attempted to ‘extricate the ontology that is imbued in Arendt’s conception of the human condition’ (p.41). There are many possibilities for integrating an analysis of Arendt with social ontology, using writers such as Harris (2021) who emphasised plurivocal approaches, which we think is consistent with Arendt’s emphasis on plurality. Also Zahavi’s (2021) work on collective intentionality and selfhood is particularly relevant to a study of Arendt’s relational pluralism.



On the other hand, in *The human condition*, the project of which is ‘to think what we are doing’, Arendt also maintains ‘the activity of thinking is left out of these present considerations’ (HC p.5). At this point, Arendt does not say what it is about ‘the activity of thinking’ that is left out, or why. Much later in her book, following a discussion of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, Arendt writes about the distinction between immortality and eternity, stating, ‘The latter, being the concern of the philosophers and the *vita contemplativa*, must be left outside our present considerations’ (HC pp.55,56). As she subsequently clarifies even further, her focus on ‘the activities of the *vita activa*’ is to ‘determine with some measure of assurance, their political significance’ which had been ‘curiously neglected by a tradition which considered it chiefly from the standpoint of the *vita contemplativa*’ (HC p.78). It would appear that, specifically, Arendt’s core distinction is between her own political theorising and philosophical thought (which she regards as purely contemplative) in relation to her project ‘to think what we are doing’ (HC p.5).

Even granted these distinctions, there remains a public task of *thinking about thinking*, one that Arendt has clearly left to her readers. The book is incomplete, a mere shell of ideas, unless readers bring them to life in their own political and moral-philosophical engagements.

As we stated at the beginning, we focus on the phrase she used as the title: ‘the human condition’. To what does this phrase refer? In order to gain some insight, we go to where Arendt summarises the content of her project as follows.

I confine myself, on the one hand, to an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed. The purpose of the historical analysis, on the other hand, is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins, in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of society as it had developed and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and yet unknown age. (HC p.6)

Here we find that the human condition is the source of some general human capacities that remain the same, so long as the human condition remains the same. We take this to imply that the human condition is not some unchanging essence³, a claim Arendt makes plain on page 10. We should not be surprised to find the human condition situated in a historical analysis, which as Arendt states, will be used to trace modern world alienation - in its ‘twofold’ forms - back to its origins. Indications of what the human condition may be, nevertheless remain cryptic, especially given the final phrase ‘a new and unknown age’,

³Nevertheless Arendt writes that ‘the earth is the very quintessence of the human condition’ (2) suggesting that there is an essential relationship between humans and the earth, and by implication with other beings that are also ontologically connected with it; a claim that is entirely resonant with Jewish thought. Arendt is noted for her investigations of Greek and Roman thinkers and historians with whom began the Western disengagement of thought from the earth.

which presumably is the space age signalled with the first sputnik in 1957. The only clue Arendt supplies is the phrase ‘modern world alienation’. But how does this phrase capture the meaning of ‘the human condition’?

Alienation, the human condition, and semantics

The phrase ‘modern world alienation’ could refer to a *condition of* being human, for instance under alienating conditions prevalent within modernity, the antecedents for which came from the ancient world. If so it could also refer to *conditions for* being a peculiarly modern, world-alienated, human being. Both meanings of ‘condition’ are surely required to fill out a proper analysis of the human condition. The sheer ambiguity of the phrase requires that its precise meaning needs to be established in order for the book to be comprehended and its scholarly use to proceed on a sound basis. This Arendt fails to provide, consistently using the phrase ‘conditions of’ to cover all kinds of conditions. Only later in the book, there is *one* noteworthy instance, referring to ancient Greece, where Arendt uses the phrase ‘conditions for’: ‘the mastering of necessities in the household was the condition for freedom of the polis’ (HC pp.30,31). Why did she not introduce ‘conditions for’ right from the beginning?

It is this failure to use prepositions appropriately that leads to the aporias on the path to understanding Arendt’s text. Such considerations come to the fore where Arendt introduces her other key phrase: *vita activa* (the active life). Arendt seeks to correlate three basic activities, which she terms labor, work, and action, with three modes of being human: biological, social and political. It is at this point the aporetic structure of her text becomes evident, as will be demonstrated in the next section. We will seek (at least partly) to resolve the confusions with particular focus on the prepositions ‘of’ and ‘for’.

Aporias of doing and being

We commence our study of Arendt’s aporias in Chapter 1 of *The Human Condition*, which begins as follows:

With the term *vita activa*, I propose to designate three fundamental activities: labor, work, and action. They are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man (HC p.7).

With such a statement, Arendt’s text is aporetic.⁴ It revolves around the phrase ‘corresponds to’. Does the phrase indicate that each of the three fundamental activities are *the same as* one of the basic conditions? It would appear so.

⁴We acknowledge a scholarly debt to Kei Hiruta’s (2021) study of the reception of Arendt among Anglophone philosophers (most notably Sir Isaiah Berlin). We concede Berlin’s negative response to *The human condition* was justified to some degree. Berlin, quite rightly, had maintained that her definitions (of labor, work and action) ‘are found to lead, not to greater clarity, but to greater



Along with some descriptions of the fundamental activities, Arendt specifies that ‘The human condition of labor *is* life itself’ ... ‘The human condition of work *is* worldliness’ ... Action is ‘the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things of matter’ (HC p.7, emphases added). The ‘is’ denotes sameness. And *sameness*, throughout the entire history of Western metaphysical thought since Plato, is a defining characteristic of *being*. Nevertheless, Arendt is in no way introducing *being* as a Platonic essence. She is saying, if labor, work and action remain the same, so does the condition of *being* human. As a corollary, it would logically follow, if there is any significant alteration in labor, work and action, the condition of *being* human also changes.

This interpretation contradicts Arendt’s remark in the Prologue: ‘I confine myself, on the one hand, to an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed.’ (HC p.6). In these remarks, Arendt provides us with a concept of human capacities (for labor, work and action) remaining permanent so long as the human condition itself is not changed. But this surely reverses the process (outlined in the preceding paragraph) by which change happens. It is changes in the human condition that bring about changes in capacity for fulfilling various activities. Clearly, what is missing from Arendt’s account is an adequate concept of the direction of causation; what are the causes and what are the effects?

This aporia stops thought in its tracks. Thought can only proceed by way of rethinking her conceptual structure. The way we propose making sense of Arendt’s thought is to distinguish between D-conditions relating to forms of activity and B-conditions that pertain to the being of human beings. There is still a kind of correspondence between D and B conditions. But this correspondence is no longer *sameness*. It is a correspondence of causation based on a *difference* between D-conditions and B-conditions. In what follows we shall use this basic difference as our mode of interpretation of the remainder of Arendt’s text.

Arendt indicates that human life on earth (its being) is conditional (i.e. dependent) on three ‘fundamental’ activities: labor, work and action. We have called these activities ‘D-conditions’, signifying that sustaining human life on the earth is conditional on some form of doing (D). Arendt specifies what these activities either correspond to, or provide.

These correspondences or provisions are, in fact, relations between D and B conditions. Labor corresponds - by vital necessity - to the needs of an organism, ‘the biological process of the human body’ (HC p.7). Work - an activity characterised by utility rather than necessity - ‘provides an artificial world of things distinctly different from all natural surroundings’ (HC p.7). Action corresponds to ‘the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world’ (HC p.7). Later in the book

obscurity’ (Berlin 1958, as quoted in Hiruta, 209). Unlike Berlin, we have chosen to work with Arendt’s text to - as it were - find the light at the end of the tunnel.



Arendt correlates action with the spontaneous freedom to begin ‘something new on our own initiative’ (HC p.177), which invariably involves relationships with others, for instance with those ‘whose company we may wish to join’ (HC p.177). The relations are (a) necessity, (b) utility, (c) freedom.

D-conditions and B-conditions can now be correlated in pairs according to their relations (Table 1).

Table 1. Relations between D-conditions and B-conditions

D-condition	Relation	B-condition
labor	necessity	organism
work	utility	artifice
action	freedom	political life

Spelled out in more detail, activities of necessity (labor) are required to satisfy the needs of the organism; activities of utility (work) are required to satisfy a need for an artificial world; activities of freedom (action) are required to satisfy the pluralistic relationships characteristic of political life. In other words, D-conditions are required to satisfy B-conditions. On the other hand, B-conditions are needed to provide an organising principle so that D-conditions can be carried out appropriately. B-conditions include the activity of thinking *about* thinking, which Arendt has left out in her 1958 text. B-conditions also include normative considerations concerning divisions of labor, workplace relations, and institutional conventions guaranteeing freedom, within an overarching framework of justice.

The foregoing analysis has helped resolve some of the aporetic formulations in the opening pages of Arendt’s text, without invoking any notion of the human condition. Yet, as we stated previously, the human condition is a topic worthy of consideration. Our analysis has also opened the text up for a critique from the perspective of asking: what is the human condition? How is it to be understood?

Now it is possible to turn to where Arendt writes about the human condition itself. Arendt writes,

The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life on the earth has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come into contact with turns immediately into a *condition of* their existence. ... the things that owe their existence exclusively to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers. ... men constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, ... possess the same *conditioning power* as natural things. Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a *condition of* human existence. ... This is why men, no matter what they do, are *always conditioned beings* (HC p.9).

In the quotation above, there are two instances of the phrase ‘conditions of’ relating to natural and man-made things that have ‘conditioning power’ over human beings. Arendt has not provided an account of what the human condition is, except that humans are ‘always conditioned beings’. How does this latter phrase explain the human condition? We are not told what the human condition is; rather we are told what it is not. Arendt is at pains to stress (on p.10) that the human condition is not anything resembling human nature. Furthermore, in *The Human Condition*:

...the conditions of human existence - life itself, natality and mortality, worldliness, plurality, and the earth - can never “explain” what we are or answer the question of who we are for the simple reason they do not condition us absolutely (HC p.11).

But how, or under what organising principle, are humans not conditioned absolutely? In Arendt’s version, there is no organising principle built into her account of the human condition that would prevent anyone being conditioned absolutely. The belief that there is no such a principle is a characteristic of totalitarian regimes that assume total control over the populations they set out to manage or exterminate (Arendt, 1973; Arendt & Kohn, 2007).

Arendt has repeatedly associated ‘the human condition’ with ‘conditions of’. We have argued that ‘conditions of’ (B-conditions) require ‘conditions for’ (D-conditions) as their conditions of possibility. However, without any capacity of B-conditions providing oversight of D-conditions, the human condition is threatened to be overwhelmed by any chaotic arrangement of forces that are ‘unleashed upon the world’ (TS Eliot). These *conditions of* chaos may (and do) pertain in many places across the world. Nevertheless such conditions do not explain what or who we are.

We suggest a further reason for why the *conditions of* human existence do not explain what or who we are. It is that such ‘*conditions of*’ (the ‘B conditions’) are *themselves* the very modes of being in which human life paradoxically exists as both a ‘what’ and a ‘who’. Since the *conditions of* human existence are the explanandum (the thing to be explained), they cannot be, at one and the same time, the explanans (whatever does the explaining; i.e. the *conditions for*). Lacking this explanatory power, the ‘human condition’ is a paltry thing; a conceptual artifice that seemingly can be applied *willy-nilly* by anyone with a penchant for vague generalities.

Arendt’s critique of the human condition

Arendt’s project was to think ‘what we are doing’ (HC p.5) as she stated at the outset, from ‘the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears’ (HC p.5). Her thought was quite obviously also a ‘rethinking’ as a form of critique of the human condition itself.



What form would such a critique take? The form chosen by Arendt is aporetic. The following quotation (which we repeat here for clarity) is from the Prologue. ‘On the one hand’ her discussion of the human condition consists of:

an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed. The purpose of the historical analysis, on the other hand, is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins... (HC p.6).

Now, it is clear that the first part of the analysis depends on ‘general capacities that grow out of the human condition’ not changing. The second, historical part, depends on the human condition having changed as it underwent ‘modern world alienation’. A critique could take either of two forms. On the one hand it could present the human condition - in particular, those general capacities that grow out of it - as unchanging; and from that standpoint, critique modern world alienation. On this account modern world alienation would be an undesirable trait, which could be overcome by restoring (presumably through reforms in family life, education, workplace relations, and so forth) the underlying human condition to which we owe our existence as human beings. This seems to be what Arendt had in mind when she wrote concerning the industrial and atomic revolutions that these ‘will remain changes of the world, and not changes in the basic condition of human life on the earth’ (HC p.121).

On the other hand, the critique could adopt the standpoint of modern world alienation and challenge the notion that any part or aspect of the human condition is unchanging. Such a critique, we suspect, would be thoroughly postmodern, even nihilist. Arendt is seemingly caught in the aporetic middle ground, attempting to do both things at once. That is not conceptually feasible as a standpoint, since the standpoint shifts and hence does not stand. Furthermore, her distancing of the human condition from a ‘human nature or essence’ (HC p.10) seriously undermines any proposition that any aspect of the human condition ever was or ever could be unchanging. And yet Arendt’s account determinedly follows the trajectory of a critique of modern world alienation, which her subsequent analysis of the *vita activa* provides. This critique can only make complete sense from a standpoint of normativity, as an aspect of the human condition that is not subject to change at the whim of individuals and societies. As writers such as Seyla Benhabib have argued there is in fact a ‘normative core’ to Arendt’s political thought. Benhabib then raises what appears to be her (and our) main perplexity:

For readers of Arendt, like myself, who believe in this normative core of her conception of the political, the annoyance and the puzzles remain: is it obvious that this normative vision can be retained only if one defends, as Arendt attempted to do, the political against the floods of the economic, the social, and even the intimate? (Benhabib, 2003, p.166).



To delve into this challenging question is beyond the scope of the present article, which has remained focussed on exploring the conceptual framework that Arendt offers at the beginning of *The Human Condition*, in order to provide a solution to its aporias, and to open it to further investigation.

Conclusion

We stated in the introduction that finding an explanation of ‘the human condition’ is worthy of consideration in its own right. We had - prior to this analysis of her text - failed to make much sense of Arendt’s notion of the human condition, except insofar as she associated it with world alienation, a position pertaining to the *vita activa*. In our analysis we claimed that in order to rehabilitate ‘the human condition’ as a significant phrase, rather than a vaguely obscure expression, we needed to rescue it from Arendt’s confusing formulations in the English language edition. We proceeded to clarify them in order to make sense of her conceptual framework. We distinguished between ‘conditions for’ (D-conditions) and ‘conditions of’ (B-conditions) as well as - in brief - spelling out the relationships between them.

We believe that making these clarifications, distinctions and correlations opens the way for researchers, from a plurality of backgrounds and disciplines, to develop new inquiries into the human condition and to integrate it into the theoretical bases for such disciplines as Occupational science, where conditions for being, doing and becoming (in the words of Wilcock, 2007) are seminal. In our work in progress we are mindful of Australian First Nations perspectives. In this context our ongoing inquiries into the human condition will differ from Arendt’s own project which, in her 1958 text, was manifested primarily as an historical inquiry into the *vita activa* as it came about in the predominantly Western world. This article has provided a preliminary step on what is, for us, an undertaking with a much broader scope.

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