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THE ARENDTIAN PROBLEM OF NEW BEGINNINGS: BEGINNINGS
AND FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM IN REVOLUTION

Master's Thesis in Philosophy

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This thesis is finally complete. Although it cannot claim to have made any kind of remarkable innovation, it has indeed gone through the honest labor of thinking. Even in ten years, I will be happy to introduce it as the manifestation of my passion for political philosophy. It has been a shining signpost in my life.

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Introduction

The core concern of this thesis is the problem of beginning and foundation, as well as the relationship between them in Arendt's political philosophy. This problem is summarized by Arendt as the "perplexity of the beginning" (Arendt 1990, 212; 1978, 208). It is the wonder and awe at how beginnings break historical continuity and create new temporal sequences. Thus, the beginning is at the center of this problem. At the same time, since "revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of the beginning" (Arendt 1990, 21), Arendt's book *On Revolution* is the main literature used in this thesis. The theoretical framework constructed for this thesis in response to the perplexity of the beginning also comes largely from a reinterpretation of the book *On Revolution*.

In revolutions, the perplexity of the beginning manifests itself in the many difficulties encountered in establishing a new order and a new government. A revolution is a new beginning in history that must destroy the old order, but not all revolutions establish a new order. A successful revolution must not only establish a stable, lasting new order but also a good, desirable new order. This is the foundation of freedom, which manifests itself in the making of an effective constitution. Arendt sees this as the purpose and mission of a revolution. This means that a successful revolution aims at freedom and unites the beginning and the foundation through the activity of constitution-making. This thesis argues that the significance of beginnings can only be understood in the context of this unifying relationship created by historical events and political experience, which is revealed by Arendt's analysis. Only based on this understanding is it possible to respond to the perplexity of the beginning in Arendt's theory of political philosophy. This thesis is thus both an interpretive reconstruction of Arendt's reflections on beginnings in her analysis of revolutionary events and a response to the perplexity of the beginning based on this reconstruction.

Therefore, this thesis is organized into four chapters:

Chapter 1 discusses Arendt's analysis and critique of the French Revolution and its

contribution to the concept of popular power, especially the constructive understanding of power. In the French Revolution's surging wave of popular uprisings that overthrew the old system, Arendt recognizes how popular power created a new beginning and a new political space. However, the course of the French Revolution led popular power ultimately to destructive revolutionary violence. By discussing Arendt's limited acceptance of Sieyès's theory of constituent power and her analysis of the roots of revolutionary violence, I will propose that the ideal understanding of power is a constructive one, which takes the separation of popular power from the absolute as its premise. The problem of the absolute goes hand in hand with the problem of the beginning.

Chapter 2 discusses Arendt's analysis of the American Revolution and his theorization of its achievements. Within Arendt's theoretical framework, the achievements of the American Revolution include the realization of the political freedom of the colonists to participate in politics with self-governing town-hall councils, which exemplified the constructive nature of popular power. It also includes laying down a firm foundation for the construction of power by establishing constitutional authority. I will describe how the concept of foundation is associated with beginnings through the limitation of the absolute in the establishment of authority by the American Revolutionists. This association takes the constructive nature of power as its intrinsically consistent explanation. It equates to building a foundation of freedom. However, Arendt also criticizes the American Revolution's betrayal of the Revolution's purpose by progressively crowding out positive political freedom with negative civil rights after the enactment of the Federal Constitution. I will use this critique as a starting point and discuss how that betrayal put freedom and order in tension, leading to arguments in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3 I compare the differences between the French and American revolutions. First, I explain the reasons for the tension between freedom and order by comparing the two different contract theory frameworks adopted by the two revolutions. This is based on Arendt's distinction between two contract theories. At the same time, I argue that freedom and order only formed a mutually reinforcing relationship under the mutual contract framework. I argue that it was the mutually reinforcing relationship between freedom and

order based on the framework of the mutual contract that demonstrated to revolutionists the possibility that the beginning and the foundation could be unified in revolutionary action. The constructive understanding of power that I detail will be the fundamental concept for describing this mutually reinforcing relationship. Then, by presenting two different understandings of the concept of the beginning, I show that only one of them, the concept of relative beginnings, is desirable and works. Only by understanding beginnings as relative beginnings, is it possible to construct a unified relationship between the beginning and the foundation and to realize the foundation of freedom. Finally, I further discuss how this unification leads to the duality of the beginning, i.e., the assertion that the beginning is the return to a beginning. I will work through Arendt's conceptualization of the council system, combining it with the many real-world experiences that the council system contributed to the twentieth-century revolutions with its tragic and repeated failures, to propose the schema that represents the beginning: a ray that bends toward itself. With the schema, I will show in what sense beginnings and foundations are the same things.

Finally, I will ultimately respond to the perplexity of the beginning in the conclusion.

Chapter 1: The Tragedy of the French Revolution: Popular Power in Crisis

1.1. Introduction

Overall, Arendt judges the French Revolution to be a “tragic failure” (Arendt 1990, 66). This is because the revolution, which was originally intended to establish a new regime and liberate the oppressed people, ended in a *revolutionary dictatorship*; in particular, the French Revolution underwent repeated regime changes, restoration, and anti-restoration producing more than a dozen constitutions. This reflects its fundamental characteristic of extreme political instability. The cause of this political instability is what Arendt calls “permanent revolution” (*ibid.*, 144). Its manifestation was summarized by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as the ascending of revolution:

In the first French Revolution, the rule of the Constitutionals is followed by the rule of the *Girondists* and the rule of the *Girondists* by the rule of the *Jacobins*. Each of these parties relies on the more progressive party for support. As soon as it has brought the revolution far enough to be unable to follow it further, still, less to go ahead of it, it is thrust aside by the bolder ally that stands behind it and sent to the guillotine. The revolution thus moves along an ascending line. (Marx 1972, 33)

Marx assessed revolution in a positive attitude because it pushed the more advanced parties to the center of the political arena. Arendt, however, argues that this illustrates precisely what is at stake in basing the new body politic on the quicksand of the will of the masses: revolution can never arrive at its endpoint, which is the establishment of a stable republican government that is dependent on a credible constitution for its creation and functioning. (Arendt 1990, 163)

To understand why the French Revolution led to a permanent revolution, Arendt analyzed Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès’s theory of constituent power (*ibid.*, 162-163), and developed her theory that the French Revolution was concerned with the “social question” (*ibid.*, 59). Sieyès’ theoretical logic and the historical situation of the French Revolution’s focus on the “social problem” combined as a cooperated force. The objective effect of this force was to turn the popular power born in the revolution into an unlimited absolute. As a result, the new beginnings created by the revolution have permanently destabilized and even

destroyed the political order. Therefore, I will critically consider Arendt's overarching assessment of the French Revolution: that it created a new form of power, popular power, and then allowed it to degenerate into violent riots (*ibid.*, 91). Key to this is the failure to distinguish between power and violence. And that distinction is essentially the process of separating popular power from the absolute and moving it towards the constructive rather than the destructive.

1.2. The Logic of Permanent Revolution: Sieyès's Theory of Constituent Power

According to Arendt, Sieyès specifically proposes a theory of constitutional power because the French Revolution poses the problem of the new beginning (Arendt 1990, 162-163). In other words, where does the legitimacy of the new power begin, amid the nothingness that follows the abolition of the legitimacy of the old power? The question leads one into a vicious circle: if the legitimacy of new power begins with a new Constitution, which derives from the legitimacy of any Constituent Assembly, then, since the Constituent Assembly must be constituted by authorized representatives of the people, and there is no legitimacy at this point, neither the representation of the people nor the authorization of the constitution-making is justified. As Arendt puts it, "Those who get together to constitute a new government are themselves unconstitutional, that is, they have no authority to do what they have set out to achieve" (*ibid.*, 183). Constitution-making thus becomes a paradox: if a Constituent Assembly is to be given legitimacy, a process of authorization must first be designed; but if this process of authorization is to be given legitimacy, the fundamental law, the constitution, which constitutes the set of rules for this process, must first be designed. Constitutional activity is thus caught in a vicious circle of infinite regress.

Sieyès's theory of constituent power was thus developed to address this vicious circle. Sieyès' scheme, as summarized by Arendt distinguishes between two types of constitutional power.

First, by making the famous demarcation between *pouvoir constituant* (constituent power) and *pouvoir constitué* (constituted power), and second, by advancing the constituent power, i.e., the nation, into a lasting "state of nature". (*ibid.*, 163)

These two steps are explained in detail in *On Revolution*. First, Sieyès distinguishes between constituent power and constituted power:

In each of its parts a constitution is not the work of a constituted power but a constituent power. No type of delegated power can modify the conditions of its delegation. It is in this sense, and in no other, that constitutional laws are fundamental. The first of these, those that establish the legislature, are founded by the national will prior to any constitution. They form its first level. (Sieyès 2003, 136)

Sieyès makes a clear distinction between *legitimacy* and *legality* and places legitimacy above legality as the source of legality. Constituent power is the original power to make a constitution, which gives the constitution the power to produce all legality; constituted power is thus the legal power that is generated by the Constitution. As Sieyès later summarized:

Government can exercise real power only insofar as it is constitutional. It is legal only insofar as it is faithful to the laws imposed upon it. The national will, on the other hand, simply needs the reality of its existence to be legal. It is the origin of all legality. (*ibid.*, 137)

Sieyès thus gives an order of powers: the existence of the will of the people is legitimacy itself, which creates the constitution and produces legitimate authority, and the government gains legality by obeying the constitution. The will of the people thus becomes not only the source of all legality but also the eternal subject of constituent power. This subject of constitutional power is not subject to the Constitution, either in theory or in practice, and thus exists outside the realm of law: “Not only is a nation not subject to a constitution, it cannot and should not be—which amounts to repeating the point that it is not subject to a constitution” (*ibid.*). As argued in this way by Sieyès, the problem of the *vicious circle* is automatically lifted. This problem is based on the notion of constitutional authority as an object separate from the people (and their representatives) and accessible only through some intermediary. However, once Sieyès has made the people and the constitutional authority into one entity, this oneness creates a serious problem because the will of the people becomes *absolute* and transcends all laws and governments. Sieyès argued that the common will and the nation in the constitution-making epoch should be replaced by a system of representative government and separation of powers composed of another group of elected representatives (*ibid.*, 143). This is his key difference with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau rejected sovereignty being represented (Rousseau 1999, 126-129). Rousseau also argued that

sovereignty cannot be divided (*ibid.*, 64-65). However, on the topic of constitutional power as a solution to the vicious circle, Arendt considers Sieyès's theory of constituent power in *What is the Third Estate?* very similar to Rousseau's theory of sovereignty:

Theoretically, Rousseau's problem closely resembles Sieyès's vicious circle: those who get together to constitute a new government are themselves unconstitutional, that is, they have no authority to do what they have set out to achieve. (Arendt 1990,183-184)

Thus, in Arendt's understanding, even if Sieyès did not intend to justify the dictatorship of the sovereignty, he supported Rousseau's theory of sovereignty by introducing an absolute that undermines the political sphere. Because these characteristics of the absolute will of the people cause Arendt to argue that the will of the people is the new *absolute* that replaces the monarch (Arendt 1990, 161). Sieyès solved the vicious circle created by the problem of beginnings by making popular power into an absolute, making it "a higher law" in order "to be the origin of all legality" (*ibid.*, 162-163). However, the absolute introduced in solving the problem of beginnings became the greatest obstacle to the revolution's establishment of a new order.

1.3. The Root of Permanent Revolution: The Social Question

If, as Arendt argues, Sieyès's theory provides a theoretical clue for the revolution to move toward dictatorship, then the *social question* is the historical impetus. As she wrote: "it was necessity, the urgent needs of the people, that unleashed the terror and sent the Revolution to its doom" (*ibid.*, 60). Arendt draws three main contents of the social question in the French Revolution: First, the social question seeks to solve the existence of poverty, which makes the revolutionary masses a collective driven by the necessity of life. Second, the revolutionary masses constituted the main driving force behind the development of the French Revolution; third, the needs of the revolutionary masses were the cause of the revolutionary terror.

Arendt's analysis of "the social question" can be traced back to Arendt's analysis of *labor* in *The Human Condition*. Labor produces consumer goods that are constantly consumed by the life process and take place in the private sphere centered on the household

(Arendt 1998, 31). There is a double authoritarian element: firstly, the life process that labor serves has “inexorable necessities”, i.e., one must satisfy one’s needs or die; secondly, the sphere in which labor takes place, i.e., the household, is “the domain of the household” is “a place of subjection...the patriarch habitually uses violence to rule his women, children and slaves” (Canovan 1995, 117). The *social*, on the other hand, is an emergent field that “moves from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere” (Arendt 1998, 39). In other words, the *activity of labor* invaded the public sphere and became *social*. Thus, authoritarian elements are thereby introduced into the question of the social.

Then, using Robespierre as an example, Arendt describes that revolutions are dominated by the social question and masses: “He had abandoned his own ‘despotism of liberty’, his dictatorship for the sake of the foundation of freedom, to the ‘rights of the Sans-Culottes’” (Arendt 1990, 60). According to historian Albert Soboul in *A Short History of the French Revolution*, the revolutionary masses played a role in “forcing the unwilling Convention and its hesitant committees to promulgate vital revolutionary measures” (Soboul 1977,93), which consisted mainly of the revolutionary terror of enacting a “national maximum price” (*ibid*,94) for grain and fodder. When revolutionary terror is viewed as a political solution to a social or economic problem, revolution is dominated, as she writes, by the social question and politics becomes its instrument (Arendt 1990, 62-64). Whereas politics is supposed to be a purpose so that it can lead to freedom (*ibid.*, 11-12).

Finally, revolutionary terror originated from the needs of the revolutionary multitude who were suffering from social problems. Revolutionary terror was realized when revolutionists represented by Robespierre and their “sympathy” (*ibid.* 79-80), became one with the general will. Thereby, they exercised the constituent power as if it were a regular executive power in the position of sovereignty like the previous monarch. As a result, the state of emergency could never end and an effective constitution was delayed. France was also unable to make the transition from the revolutionary phase to a normal political order and was thus plunged into the turmoil of regime change, which Arendt calls “permanent revolution”. (*ibid.*,51;133-134).

1.4. Legacy of the French Revolution: The Distinction Between Power and Violence

Despite Arendt's critical attitude towards the French Revolution, she argued that it created a new form of power. I call it *popular power*. It can create a new beginning. It can constitute a new political order and is constructive, especially in the making of constitutions. Contrary to the constructive nature of power, violence is destructive. As a concentrated manifestation of revolutionary violence, revolutionary terror is a product of the revolutionary dictatorship of the absolute general will. Arendt's distinction between power and violence can thus be seen as a process of separating popular power from the absolute and making it a constructive power capable of building a stable republican political order. In my view, this led to such a result that in *On Revolution*, Arendt in fact did not reject Sieyès's theory of constitutional power, but only its element of *absolutism*. As she writes: "What else did even Sieyès do but simply put the sovereignty of the nation into the place which had been vacated by a sovereignty king?" (Arendt 1990, 156). As Elizabeth Frazer emphasizes: "Arendt dismisses the thought that power can proceed from abstractions or resources independent of people; people are the only source of power." (Arendt 1963, 157; 178. cited as in Frazer 2014, 156). In this way, both Sieyès's theory and the revolutionary multitude under the social question must be reassessed: It is Sieyès who establishes theoretically the supreme principle that all legitimate power must derive from the people. However, it is the social question that revolutionized the multitude and led them to violent riots instead of constructive subjects in the political sphere. Thus, Arendt argues, the problem is that while the French Revolution created a new beginning, it did not transform into a stable republican political order.

Theoretically, it is obvious that Sieyès's solution for the perplexities of foundation, the establishment of a new law and the foundation of a new body politic, had not resulted and could not result in the establishment of a republic in the sense of 'an empire of laws and not of men' (Harrington), but had replaced monarchy, or one of its members. but had replaced monarchy, or one-man rule, with democracy, or rule by the majority (*ibid.*,164).

Arendt criticized how Sieyès placed power in the seat of the *absolute* originally occupied by the monarch, without contemplating the abolition of that *absolute* itself. Constituent power was not the problem, but only "their almost automatic, uncritical belief

that power and law spring from the selfsame source” (*ibid.*).

Arendt would admit that it was the social question that drove people to take to the streets and develop their political demands. Moreover, the social question was the driving force of the French Revolution (Arendt 1990, 48). The people gathered in the social sphere were reduced to a single general will (Arendt 1990, 76-77). Mediated by the general will, the power that arose from the theory of constituent power became the supreme and indivisible sovereignty in Rousseau’s sense. That’s why there was a combination of popular power and absolutism, which produced revolutionary violence. However, the reason lies not in the fact that the social question provoked the appearance of popular power, but in the bond between the people and the social sphere.

In short, the distinction between power and violence separates popular power from absolute, the people from the social sphere. As a result, the distinction leads to a constructive understanding of power. Together with the earlier critique of permanent revolution, they constitute the legacy of the French Revolution that Arendt receives as the concept of popular power. In Arendt’s arguments, it was the American Revolution that succeeded in realizing the constructive nature of popular power and dealt appropriately with the problem of absolute that arose with the problem of beginnings, thus realizing the foundation of the political order which takes freedom as its purpose.

Chapter 2: The American Revolution: Authority Placed in the

Constitution

2.1 Introduction

In contrast to her critical attitude toward the French Revolution, Arendt demonstrates her appreciation of the American Revolution. The American Revolution “succeeded precisely where the French Revolution failed” (Arendt 1990, 134). In contrast to the permanent revolution of the French Revolution and many constitutions that followed, the American Revolution left behind a stable federal government and a constitution that could continually perpetuate and expand. Arendt sees the American Revolution as a desirable achievement for two reasons. The first is that the American Revolution demonstrated the constructive combining of power with politics, leading to freedom; and the second reason is that the American Revolution provided a new answer to the question of the absolute and the beginning by creating a new mode of authority.

The first achievement is expressed in Arendt’s discussion of “revolution before the revolution” (Arendt 1990, 170), i.e. the establishment of autonomous governments (council system) by the colonists in the thirteen colonies before the War of Independence. She argues that this was ‘the great good fortune of the American Revolution’ (*ibid.*, 165) because it was the council system showed the constructive potential from the combination of popular power and the political sphere (*ibid.*,35).

The second achievement is expressed in Arendt’s discussion of the manifestation of the problem of authority in the American Revolution, i.e., the authority of the Constitution (*ibid.*, 182). As Douglas B. Klusmeyer summarizes, Arendt formulates the problem of (American) constitutional authority as a problem of the interaction between political and legal authority (Klusmeyer 2014, 151). This means that political authority must be transformed into a legal authority to ensure the establishment of a republic “of law not of men” (Arendt 1990,182), while legal authority must gain its validity by maintaining a continuous link with political authority, i.e. the foundation act of state, also a foundation act in revolution. For Arendt, the council system formed the basis of the federal system (*ibid.*, 165). Because based on the

council system, the “general authority” of the Federal Constitution was constituted. Council systems are also the source of political freedom and the revolutionary spirit and the place where they were preserved (*ibid.*, 239). However, they were abandoned once the federal system was formally constituted and the Federal Constitution became valid: “Paradoxical as it may sound...it was the Constitution itself, this greatest achievement of the American people, which eventually cheated them of their proudest possession” (*ibid.*).

The chapter has three sections. The first outlines the council system, both the reasons for its formation and the role it plays as the basis of the federal system. It is the participation in politics realized by the town-hall council system that realizes the constructive nature of power. The second section discusses constitutional authority and the interaction between political and legal authority. I argue that the secret of the American Revolution’s success in establishing authority and keeping the Republic existing was in placing authority in the framework of the foundation and aligning the foundation with the beginnings created by revolutionary action. In other words, the American Revolution succeeded in laying the foundation of freedom. In Arendt’s term, it is *Constitutio Libertatis*. Finally, in the third section, I will discuss Arendt’s critique of the American Revolution. The Constitution indeed succeeded in creating a new mode of authority to maintain a stable republic. However, the revolutionary spirit gradually declined and was replaced by an elitist party system, and the people were once again marginalized from political life.

2.2.Council System and Pursuit of Public Happiness

The colonial council system, as the places where the colonists practiced self-government, were named by Jefferson as “elementary republics” (*ibid.*, 250). Arendt argues that it was due to the people’s pursuit of public happiness which manifested itself in the high rate of participation in politics (*ibid.*,118-119). Public happiness was not about economic fulfillment or personal pleasure, but about citizens autonomously negotiating and managing the public life in which they had a stake (Lang Jr 2014). Thus, for the colonists, public happiness was defined and measured by the degree of political freedom:

The point is that the Americans knew that public freedom consisted in having a share in public business and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else. (Arendt 1990, 119)

Thus, Arendt argues “...the American usage which...spoke of ‘public happiness’, where the French spoke of ‘public freedom’” (*ibid.*). For the colonists, happiness was the pleasure of enjoying political freedom, and freedom was the nature of happiness (*ibid.*, 128). The deep connection between popular power and the political sphere, which I suggested at the beginning, is expressed in the council system. The constructive potential of popular power in autonomies is realized through the principle of federalism: “These new bodies politic really were ‘political societies’, and their great importance for the future lay in the formation of a political realm that enjoyed power and was entitled to claim rights without possessing or claiming sovereignty” (Arendt 1990, 168).

The federal principle is “the principle of league and alliance among separate units”. Its purpose is “the foundation of a new body politic, a new type of republican government which would rest on ‘elementary republics’ in such a way that its central power did not deprive the constituent bodies of their original power to constitute” (*ibid.*, 267). In other words, federalism is achieved through the principle of the separation of powers, that is to say, through the use of power to limit power:

Power can be stopped and still be kept intact only by power, so that the principle of the separation of power not only provides a guarantee against the monopolization of power by one part of the government but actually provides a kind of mechanism, built into the very heart of government, through which new power is constantly generated, without, however, being able to overgrow and expand to the detriment of other centers or sources of power. (*ibid.*, 152)

The law cannot in any sense reduce local power based on the council system such as town halls (*ibid.*, 152; 303). The balance of power in the design of the US Constitution displays a certain limitation of power because it writes how power is organized and operates. The Constitution limits power, not in the sense of diminishing or weakening it, but in the sense that it is the rule by which power is organized and operates. It is not the multiplication of powers that it limits, but the arbitrariness of multiplication. Separate and independent powers can be self-sustaining and self-multiplying by being in specific positions, unifying, and functioning in the way prescribed by the Constitution. This is very different from the

logic that made power a single sovereignty in the French Revolution. The union of powers guided by the principle of separation and balance of powers becomes the structure that sustains political space.

2.3. Constitutional Authority: The Beginning of the Revolution Gained a Firm Foundation

As Arendt argues "...the chief problem of the American Revolution...turned out to be the establishment and foundation not of power but of authority" (Arendt 1990, 178). Arendt emphasizes how the American Revolution established authority by limiting the absolute. (*ibid.*,213). Under this limitation, the absolute is not a supreme existence outside the political community, but the key moment of the national republican tradition. Arendt defines the relationship between tradition and authority in the following way: "The past, to the extent that it is passed on as tradition, has authority; authority, to the extent that it presents itself as history, becomes tradition" (Arendt 2005, 73; cf Klausmeyer 2014, 142). Invoking the Roman experience, Arendt illustrates how the American revolutionists inherited the concept of foundation from the Roman political experience in the system of *Senatus*. By this inheritance, the American Revolutionists were able to establish a new form of authority in modern times under the constitutional framework. To explain this inheritance, it is necessary to distinguish between the legal authority created by the American Revolution and the political authority of the Roman senators.

Arendt compared the American Revolution with the Roman experience: "In Rome, the function of authority was political, and it consisted in giving advice, while in the American republic, the function of authority is legal, and it consists in interpretation" (Arendt 1990, 200). The reason for invoking the Roman experience is that Arendt, as Klusmeyer argues, "sees the Roman experience with foundations serving as the cornerstone to authority as an exemplar that can help guide our thinking about politics today" (Klusmeyer 2014, 150). The value of the Roman experience lies in its creative linking of authority to that of foundation. Arendt emphasizes how the word "foundation" possesses two meanings. In the Roman period, the foundation was close to the original meaning of its architectural metaphor, i.e.

the building of the new city: “For *auctoritas* [...] depended upon the vitality of the spirit of foundation, by which it was possible to augment, to increase and enlarge, the foundations as they had been laid down by the ancestors” (Arendt 1990, 201). This implies that authority derives from the act of laying down or the founding of a city. Those who built the new city existed as ancestors. They constituted the origin of the political authority which was the *Senatus*.

The second meaning of foundation is the result of the revolution adding modern political content to its first meaning. Hence, the act of building the city is abstracted into the act of founding a state, a new body politic. The foundation is also the establishment of a new beginning, laying down the basic framework of the body politic, the initial decisive political act of designing the constitution: “The perplexity consisted in the task of foundation, the setting of a new beginning... This task of foundation, moreover, was coupled with the task of lawgiving, of devising and imposing upon men a new authority” (*ibid.*, 38). Arendt later states: “Under modern conditions, the act of foundation is identical with the framing of a constitution” (Arendt 1963, 116; 136-9. cited as in Klusmeyer 2014, 150). It is for this reason that political authority, which could have functioned independently on its own in Roman times, must be transformed into legal authority to function under modern conditions.

This transformation is evident that the Founding Fathers not only succeeded in designing a constitution guided by the principles of federalism, but also took a page from the Roman experience and placed authority in a specific institution, the Supreme Court, as a judicial institution: “...the true seat of authority in the American Republic is the Supreme Court. This authority is exerted in a kind of continuous constitution-making in the Supreme Court. In Woodrow Wilson’s phrase, the Supreme Court is a kind of Constitutional Assembly in continuous session’.” (Arendt 1990, 200). What is most important to note is Arendt’s understanding of the Supreme Court as “a kind of Constitutional Assembly in continuous session”. It constructs a continuum from political to legal authority. The original Constitutional Assembly could be characterized at the outset as a political event, the result of the Founding Fathers using the “general authority” they drew from the council system to design the Constitution. However, when the Supreme Court continues to invoke the intent

or spirit of the Founding Fathers in designing the Constitution and to use their legal expertise to interpret and amend the Constitution for making decisions, they maintain a strong link with their ancestors, the Founding Fathers.

Arendt argues that the Founding Fathers are like the Romans because they constantly return to the founding of the republic. Because judicial decision is a legal event, the result is not the reduction of legal authority into political authority, but rather the continuity and expansion of legal authority through political authority. The judicial decision also keeps the validity of the foundation action at the beginning (Klusmeyer 2014,150). It also produces “constitution-worship” in the United States (Arendt 1990, 204). That is, while the object of worship and obedience is the Constitution, the reason for obeying it lies in the political authority of the foundation action. The Constitution becomes “a binding source of stability, guidance, precedents and standards for future generations” (Klusmeyer 2014, 151), i.e. the very thing that the French Revolution sought but could not achieve: the stability of a new beginning.

The question about absolutes can now be answered positively. Arendt succinctly states: “From this it follows that it is futile to search for an absolute to break the vicious circle in which all beginning is inevitably caught because this ‘absolute’ lies in the very act of beginning itself” (Arendt 1990, 204). Here Arendt introduces a new way of thinking about the absolute: not understanding the absolute as something external to the beginning, but to regard the absolute as the nature of the beginning, that is, to regard the beginning itself as an absolute.

The fundamental difference between these two ways of thinking is that first, the absolute is placed in a purely static spatial imaginary. It implies the absolute is at the top and eternally dominates everything below it. This understanding constitutes the structure of sovereignty (*ibid.*) that Arendt calls “tyranny”. The structure is a traditional top-down mode of command and obedience (Klusmeyer 2014, 151); whereas in the second way of thinking, when the absolute becomes the nature of the beginning, which in turn “inevitably develops its stability and permanence” (Arendt 1990, 153), that is, expands itself in history. Then, the

absolute involved in and evolved with history along with the beginning. Thus, it is placed in an imaginary of the temporal sequence of history. In this sense, the absolute becomes a binding resource as described above: although people also need to constantly invoke this absolute beginning. Because history is changing, they are forced to interpret it according to their own needs to adapt it to the present condition. This prevents the absolute from being decisive but merely serves as a guide. The need for the absolute no longer manifests itself in a permanent revolution for *a priori* supreme place but in a continuous tracing of ancestral acts of founding a state. As a result, a new body politic and its Constitution are continued by the ties created by this repeated tracing of the law back to the Founding Fathers.

The boundaries of the absolute can then be properly expressed as it must be embedded in the continuity of the body politic in the form of the beginning. Thus, it becomes a resource that can be constantly invoked, which expands and enriches itself in the process of constant invocation and interpretation. Thus, the appropriate absolute I proposed is the absolute of the tradition that is the beginning of the foundation act and the result of its development. This tradition finally is what Arendt refers to as the *Constitutio Libertatis*.

2.4. A Revolution Betrayed?

The American Revolution was successful in establishing authority and providing a modern interpretation of the concept of authority from the Roman experience. However, it immediately departed from the roots of its general authority when it moved away from the town-hall meetings and placed authority in the Constitution:

...the fateful failure of the Constitution to incorporate and duly constitute, found anew, the original sources of their power and public happiness. It was precisely because of the enormous weight of the Constitution and of the experiences in founding a new body politic that the failure to incorporate the townships and the town-hall meetings, the original springs of all political activity in the country, amounted to a death sentence for them (Arendt 1990, 239).

The council system not only carries the substantive popular power but also the public sphere in which citizens participate in public affairs. But it is excluded from the Federal Constitution. As Lisa Disch puts it, "...as Arendt herself acknowledges, the Americans used

the representative principle to constrain popular power” (Disch 2011, 353). This representative principle first excludes the people from real political participation by way of the party system (Arendt 1990, 271-272). Then, it makes the people satisfied with being free from governmental interference by making them retain a series of negative rights. They voluntarily distanced themselves from political freedom. In the United States, the manifestation of the result in legislation is the Bill of Rights. For Arendt, the move from the Federal Constitution to the Bill of Rights meant that “it shifted, in other words, from public freedom to civil liberty, or from a share in public affairs for the sake of public happiness to a guarantee that the pursuit of private happiness would be protected and furthered by public power” (Arendt 1990, 135). Thus, as Lang summarizes, “In seeking to create national institutions through a constitutional assembly, the pluralistic spirit of political action that had motivated the revolution in the first place was lost” (Lang 2014, 206).

Although the American Revolution succeeded in solving the problem of the foundation of authority and established a stable political order, it turned its back on the very beginning of the revolution. In other words, the kind of political freedom that existed in the township council system, where citizens participated in politics and self-governance, was instead marginalized from the political order by the representative, party systems, and professional bureaucracy. Freedom and order, which should have promoted each other in the unification of the beginning and the foundation, entered into an antagonistic relationship. The stifling of political freedom by order and the marginalization of the self-governing people by professional politicians were incompatible with the purpose of the revolution in establishing a constitutional government, which was the foundation of freedom. The next chapter will begin with a discussion of freedom and order to explore the authentic relationship between the beginning and the foundation of revolutionary action.

Chapter 3: The Political Philosophy of Beginnings and Foundations

3.1. Introduction

Building on Arendt's framework for the analysis of revolution in the previous two chapters, I take her historical analysis of revolution as the basis of her philosophical reflections on beginnings and foundations. This chapter develops the theme of the perplexity of the beginning as a possible tension between freedom of action and political order. A further comparison of the French and American revolutions is based on analyzing this tension. The comparison relies on a discussion of two contract theories, which will allow this tension to dissolve into the foundation of freedom. The foundation of freedom is the ultimate purpose of revolution in Arendt's theory of revolution. It is also the creation of a new order, containing the potential to provide an understanding of the beginning itself, and ultimately help to answer the perplexity of the beginning.

I will begin by discussing two different forms of social contract frameworks adopted by the two revolutions, namely, the sovereignty contract framework adopted by the French Revolution and the mutual contract framework adopted by the American Revolution. I argue that the reason why the two key political themes, freedom and order, exhibited dramatically opposed relationships in the two revolutions is rooted in the inherent differences between the two contractual frameworks. It is only in the mutual contract framework that freedom and order can exhibit a mutually reinforcing relationship. It is only the mutual contract framework that realizes the purpose of the revolution that Arendt writes about the foundation of freedom. At the same time, three levels of understanding of power will become clear during this discussion: the functional understanding, the spatial understanding, and their combination: the constructive understanding. I will show that a constructive understanding of power will be central to the realization of the foundation of freedom. The realization of the foundation of freedom will eliminate the tension that might arise between freedom and order.

Second, the foundation of freedom leads to the problem of what a new order is. In my view, this problem is essentially the manifestation of the perplexity of the beginning in the

political sphere. I will show that in Arendt's theoretical framework, revolution is not a new beginning but is always first and foremost a return to some past beginning, by distinguishing between two concepts of beginning: absolute beginnings and relative beginnings. The new order can only be properly accounted for based on this understanding. This is the duality that beginnings ultimately present, i.e., the beginning is the return to a beginning. It is rooted in the fact that human beings themselves, based on the fact of their birth, are both the new beginning and the one who makes the beginning. The success of the American Revolution lies in the framing of the revolution in terms of a mutual contract that puts it into the orbit of relative beginnings, and so realizes the compatibility of freedom and order in the union of beginnings and foundations. I call this Arendt's theory of the politics of foundations.

3.2. Freedom and Order: The Foundation of Freedom in the Mutual Contract

Margaret Canovan interprets Arendt's "perplexities of the beginning" as "the tension between the human capacity for action on the one hand and the need for a stable human order on the other" (Canovan 1995,133). This tension forces revolutionists and their future generations to face such a problem: do humans have the capacity to construct certain laws, "as fences to guard the stability of the human world against the anarchic capacity for initiative of each new person born into it" (*ibid.*)? In my view, this problem proposes another problem of the relationship between freedom and order. "The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action..." (Arendt 1961,146).

According to Canovan, there is a tension between political action taking freedom as its purpose and nature, and political order demanding stability and continuity. The creation of a republic is a new beginning that depends on the freedom of human action. But the continuity of a republic requires a stable political order, that is, a stable foundation. In this chapter, I argue that there are two opposed understandings of the relationship between freedom and order based on different theories of revolution, which leads to two different paths that republics may face. The different relationships between freedom and order correspond to the two models of revolution presented by the French and American revolutions, respectively.

Moreover, the two theories refer to two different theories of contract, which I have named *the sovereignty contract theory* of the French Revolution and *the mutual contract theory* of the American Revolution, respectively. This distinction comes from Arendt's review of social contract theory:

One was concluded between individual persons and supposedly gave birth to society; the other was concluded between a people and its ruler and supposedly resulted in legitimate government. However, the decisive differences between these two kinds (which have hardly more in common than a commonly shared and misleading name) were early neglected... (Arendt 1990,169).

The former type of contract is the mutual contract. The latter is the sovereignty contract. This passage gives a descriptive difference between them, but the decisive difference is their normative content. At the heart of the sovereignty contract is the individual's "consent" to give up all power and transfer it to a supreme being that will rule over all as a sovereignty with a monopoly of power. It thus contains two principles:

It is equally obvious that the social contract which demands the resignation of power to the government and the consent to its rule contains *in nuce* both the principle of absolute rulership, of an absolute monopoly of power 'to overawe them all (Hobbes) (which, incidentally, is liable to be construed in the image of divine power, since only God is omnipotent), and the national principle according to which there must be one representative of the nation as a whole, and where the government is understood to incorporate the will of all nationals. (*ibid.*,171)

As Arendt cites, it is Hobbes who proposed the classic form of this theory. But in France, it is Rousseau who pushed the relationship between the sovereignty and people to the limit with his concept of "general will": The principle of absolute rulership demonstrates that "the will if it is to function at all, must indeed be one and indivisible" (*ibid.*, 76). As a result, when the general will is constituted as the equivalent of people's will, the people will become "the nation as a body driven by one will, like an individual, which also can change direction at any time without losing its identity" (*ibid.*). From Sieyès, this individual body of general essentially will take the absolute place of the monarch and become the subject of constitute power: the Nation (*ibid.*,155). Under the framework of the sovereignty contract, the Nation becomes an abstract sovereignty. It lays down the foundation of the constitution-making exercise, which leads it to a supreme place above all laws in theory (*ibid.*).

The national principle demonstrates that sovereignty must rely on its representatives in

government. Thus, those representatives are above all laws and all people. That's the reason why Arendt bluntly equates sovereignty to tyranny and argues that it negates freedom (Arendt 1990,153; 1961,164). Arendt concludes: "Under human conditions...freedom and sovereignty are so little identical that they cannot even exist simultaneously" (Arendt 1961,164). So, if the political order is built on the framework of the sovereignty contract, the relationship between freedom and order will be mutually antagonistic or even incapable of coexistence. The representative of the former relationship is manifest in "limited government": Constitutional constraints on the power of government to safeguard the private well-being of citizens, thereby excluding them from political participation in the public sphere (Arendt 1990,143). The United States fell toward this kind of relationship, which is the departure from the spirit of revolution in the era following *The Bill of Rights* with the gradual formation of the party system. The revolutionary terror and dictatorship during the French Revolution, however, demonstrated the latter relationship.

As Arendt argues, in the case of the United States, political freedom will eventually become "a potential freedom from politics"; in the case of the French Revolution, political freedom will either be annihilated in actuality or degenerate into "freedom from fear" (Arendt 1961, 148-149), which becomes an excuse for sovereignty to deprive freedom. It is in this sense that the growth of any authentic freedom, i.e., the freedom to act actively in political affairs, implies the emergence of collective action that transcends the limitations drawn by the sovereignty. It is naturally seen as a potential or real threat to the political order.

In contrast to the sovereignty contract, I argue that if taking Arendt's mutual contract as a theoretical framework, the relationship between freedom and order is not one of tension and confrontation in the first place, but rather one of mutual reinforcement. The growth of freedom contributes to the stabilization of order, and the stabilization of order only serves to give freedom the space in which it can hold its continuity. The normative content of the mutual contract is, first, the creation and maintenance of power through a system of mutual promises to participate in politics together; second, the realization of a combination of power based on the separation and balance of powers, which ultimately leads to the growth and expansion of power. This is what Arendt calls the "republican principle" and the "federal

principle” (Arendt 1990, 171), respectively, and the American Constitution is the representative outcome of this mutual contract framework. It enabled the American revolutionists to realize the core purpose of the revolution, namely the foundation of freedom, or “*Constitutio Libertatis*” (*ibid.*, 153).

In the framework of the mutual contract, both freedom and order are associated with power. Freedom is associated with the creation and expansion of power, while order is associated with the maintenance and combination of power. It is easy to see how the mutual contract establishes a mutually reinforcing relationship between freedom and order, where expanding freedom contributes to the stabilization of order. Power is understood as a capacity. The use of power sustains the space in which power exists, and stabilizing order contributes to the growth of freedom. The stable combination of power further reinforces its expansion. But power alone cannot establish such relations. As Arendt points out in *The Human Condition*, power itself is fragile:

Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. (Arendt 1998, 200).

The key to the mutual contract framework, therefore, is the clarity of the fact that the only way power can establish this self-sustaining and self-expanding relationship is based on mutual promises. As she argued in *On Revolution*: “...power came into being when and where people would get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges...” (Arendt 1990,181). Arendt proposes the concept of “a web of relationships” in *The Human Condition*. She argues that it constitutes “the realm of human affairs” (Arendt 1998, 182), and “is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common” (*ibid.*, 183). The web of relationships makes power “remain with them” instead of disappearing immediately with the disappearance of a chance gathering together (*ibid.*, 201). It thus “keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed” (*ibid.*). Any reliable web of relationships is the result of the mutual contract.

Jeremy Waldron insightfully distinguishes between the two parts of a promise, “What counts in promising of course is not the making of a promise but the keeping of it” (Waldron

2006: 212). In this case, the making of promises leads to the creation of a web of relationships in which people act collectively following the content of their promises. The promises allow power to emerge and to be continued along the structure of the web, thus maintaining the existence of power. Only the power that can be held as capacity in the space set by mutual promises makes the community formed by this mutual contract capable of keeping and practicing its promises in the long run. How promises are kept is through the separation and then the combination of powers according to a set of fundamental rules, a constitutional arrangement. It allows for the orderly functioning and growth of power. Order is nothing but this state of orderly operation and growth of power.

3.3. Constructive Power Begins with a New Order

From the above discussion, it can be found that there are two different understandings of power, which I call *functional* and *spatial*. The so-called functional understanding is to regard power as a capacity that can be utilized to influence reality to achieve certain effects. The connection between freedom and power described earlier is essentially based on a *functional understanding of power*: "...conceptually speaking, political freedom did not reside in the I-will but in the I-can..." (Arendt 1990,150). The "I-can" is *be-capable-to*, which is also the significant meaning of political freedom in Arendt's sense: "For political freedom, generally speaking, means the right 'to be a participator in government', or it means nothing" (*ibid.*,218).

A *spatial understanding*, on the other hand, understands power not as a space in itself but always as a "space of appearance" that can only be sustained in association with political space. This term is used because Arendt describes the public sphere as a "space of appearance" in *The Human Condition* and specifies that the space of appearance "comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action" (Arendt 1998,199). In the light of previous passages, it is natural to understand power as something that emerges from the space of appearance: "If we equate these spaces of freedom -which, following the gist, though not the terminology, of John Adams, we could also call spaces of appearances - with

the political realm itself...” (Arendt 1990,275). I argue that a spatial understanding of power is a condition for a functional understanding. Power must first be manifested before it can become a capacity that can be used or operated. It can also be said that power, as appearance is potentiality, and power as capacity, is the realization of that potentiality. The condition for actualization is that power can operate and grow in an orderly way in space. This is why Arendt argues that freedom is not an inherent human right but must be dependent on the existence of the body politic. It must be situated within a limited space: “Freedom, wherever it existed as a tangible reality, has always been spatially limited...the elementary coincidence of freedom and a limited space remains manifest” (*ibid.*). This is where the difference in theoretical outcomes between the sovereignty contract and the mutual contract ultimately leads to the difference in revolutionary purpose between the French and American revolutions:

The American version actually proclaims no more than the necessity of civilized government for all mankind; the French version, however, proclaims the existence of rights independent of and outside the body politic, and then goes on to equate these so-called rights, namely the rights of man qua man, with the rights of citizens. (*ibid.*,149)

That is to say, the spatial understanding of power within the framework of the mutual contract should be more rigorously termed an *intrinsic understanding*. It means both freedom and power, by their dependence on the political space, are situated within the political community, which is based on a web of relationships constituted by the mutual promises of plural individuals who make up the community. This is opposed to an *extrinsic understanding* that places a supreme sovereignty outside the political community. The intrinsic understanding requires revolutionists to succeed in the affair of creating the political space in which freedom can be carried, as well as in the affair of constitutional government if they wish to realize freedom. This becomes Arendt’s stipulation of the purpose of revolution: “...the aim of revolution was freedom, it indeed came to be what Bracton had called *Constitutio Libertatis*, the foundation of freedom” (*ibid.*,154). It means the revolution must create a stable political space for freedom, which is the foundation of freedom. It equates to constitution-making under modern conditions (*ibid.*,125). This is the ultimate motive of this section of discussing the mutual reinforcement relationship between freedom

and order under the framework of the mutual contract. In Waldron's words: "That politics needs *housing*, and that building such housing can be equated with the framing of a *constitution* – this is an image that recurs throughout Arendt's writings" (Waldron 2006,203). This relies on the power of the most decisive of all actions, the revolutionary action.

Therefore, the mutually reinforcing relationship between freedom and order is essentially two different understandings of the same power describing the process of self-multiplication of power based on a contract of mutual promise. This process of self-multiplication will rise to its zenith in a decisive event, the revolution. In revolutionary or constitutional action, the functional and spatial understanding of power combines into a *constructive understanding of power*. This is to say that the power generated by revolutionary action is the capacity to construct political space and to establish freedom: it constructs or founding an order for freedom, and this order is a "new order" because it emerges at the beginning of the old order after the revolution has ended it. A constitution is, in its literal sense, a "constituting activity". Its effect is to lay the foundation for the political life of the political community or the new republic.

3.4. Beginning and Foundation: Two Concepts of Beginning

Within the theoretical framework of the mutual contract, the web of relationships constituted by mutual promises becomes the true foundation of the political community. Within this web of relations, freedom, and order form a mutually reinforcing relationship around the concept of power. Two different understandings of power emerge from this relationship: a functional and a spatial one. The combination of these two understandings leads to a constructive understanding of power, in which the functioning of the power created by revolution is tantamount to a constitutional activity whose purpose and significance is the construction of a new order of freedom. The term "new order" invokes a rupture in the continuity of time triggered by the revolutionary action, a distinction between the distinct but often confused concepts of liberation and freedom:

With respect to revolution, these tales seem to contain an important lesson; in a strange coincidence, they both insist on a hiatus between the end of the old order and the beginning of the new...If these legends could

teach anything at all, their lesson indicated that freedom is no more the automatic result of liberation than the new beginning is the automatic consequence of the end. The revolution - so at least it must have appeared to these men - was precisely the legendary hiatus between end and beginning, between a no-longer and a not-yet". (Arendt 1990, 204)

The "end" and "hiatus" obviously demonstrate that liberation and freedom are two different things. Liberation means certainly freeing from tyranny and preparing the ground for freedom. But it does not automatically lead to freedom (*ibid.*, 28). Freedom is a different problem to worry about. This means that what revolutionists must worry about is not whether they will succeed in ending the old order, but whether they will succeed in establishing the new republic or political community: "...a revolution did not end with the abolition of state and government but, on the contrary, aimed at the foundation of a new state and the establishment of a new form of government" (*ibid.*, 261).

The above discussion demonstrates that revolution leads to the problem of the beginning of a new order. In short, revolution leads to what Arendt calls 'the *perplexity of the beginning*,' which was initially discussed in Chapter 2. However, the concept of beginning itself was not thoroughly examined but equated with the foundation to explain the source of authority in the new order. The concept of beginning was also linked to the boundaries that are set in response to the challenge of the absolute. Thus, the absolute was tentatively understood to be a historically binding resource existing within the moment of a new beginning. What the beginning itself is, however, remains a problem.

While the initial understandings of the beginning in Chapter 2 are useful frameworks, without a discussion directly focusing on the beginning, they will always remain only crude frameworks, which give rise to two new problems: the first is that although the beginning and the foundation can be united in the constitution-making of revolution, they are different. If the beginning and the foundation were identical, then French constitution-making would be indistinguishable from American constitution-making. After all, the French Revolution also created a beginning, but it would be difficult to regard that beginning as the foundation of a successful republic, or an effectively functioning, new political order. Secondly, can the absolute with boundaries still be included within the beginning of the final structure of the political community? It cannot. Hence one of the purposes of this section is to prevent the

absolute from the realm of human affairs. The way to respond to these two problems is through a discussion of Arendt's reflections on the nature of beginning.

The first is the most straightforward problem: the French and American revolutions were both beginnings, but one succeeded and the other failed to establish freedom and found a republic. I claim that the reason is that the French Revolution and the American Revolution demonstrated two different kinds of the beginning. The French Revolution sought an *absolute beginning*, while the American Revolution was committed to a *relative beginning*. This difference stems from the two different theoretical contract frameworks adopted by the two revolutions, as discussed in the previous section.

Although Arendt sometimes describes the American Revolution in terms such as “absolutely novelty” and “entirely new” (*ibid.*, 171), she does not really think that the American Revolution is an “absolutely new beginning”. Instead, she argues “according to Roman self-interpretation...to see constitution and foundation in terms of restoration and re-establishment” (*ibid.*,210):

In our context, however, it is more important to observe that in this self-interpretation even the foundation of Rome was not understood as an absolutely new beginning. Rome – that was the resurgence of Troy and the re-establishment of some city-state that had existed before and of which the thread of continuity and tradition never had broken. (*ibid.*)

According to Arendt, there is no true absolute beginning except for the creation of the world by God. Following St. Augustine, she distinguished “between the *principium* of the Heaven and the Earth and the *initium* of Man” (Arendt 1978,110). The former is the result of God's existence outside of time (eternity) and creation of the world from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*, cited in Arendt 1978, 132) in His omnipotence, while the latter is the creation of man, who can only be in time. The basis of this creation is *the birth of man or natality*:

His “faculty of spontaneously beginning a series in time,” which “occurring in the world have only a relatively first beginning” and still is “an absolutely first beginning not in time but in causality” must once again be invoked here (*ibid.*, 110).

The discussion about the human being as both “relatively first beginning” and “absolutely first beginning” at the same time is ambiguous in *The Life of the Mind: Willing*. Fortunately, in *On Revolution*, she clarifies the different types of beginning in her reflection

on Virgil's poetry:

...because they [human beings] themselves are new beginnings and hence beginners, that the very capacity for beginning is rooted in natality, in the fact that human beings appear in the world by virtue of birth.... not their [Roman culture] strangeness as such but the affinity of birth and foundation, that is, the emergence of a familiar thought in a strange and more intimate disguise, must have been fascinating for men of Roman culture and formation. (Arendt 1990, 211-212).

Thus, only a human being can only be the *initium* (relative beginning) instead of the *principium* (absolute beginning). Second, human beings, as the *initium*, are a *relative starting point* ("relatively first beginning") in terms of their emergence in the world, i.e. the fact of birth. This fact implies "they themselves are new beginnings." Third, based on the condition of being new beginnings, human beings have the "faculty of spontaneously beginning a series in time", i.e. the freedom of action. Or, as Arendt argues, it is "the freedom of a *relatively* absolute spontaneity" (Arendt 1978,110). This freedom means that human beings are "beginners". Human beings can only be called *an absolute starting point* ("absolutely first beginning") concerning "a series in time". Briefly speaking, the idea that human beings are an *initium* can be understood in two aspects: from the aspect of condition and source. The human being is a "new beginning" and a "relatively first beginning-" From the aspect of capacity and spontaneity, the human being is a "beginner" and "absolutely first beginning". But because human beings, as new beginnings, constitute the condition of being a beginner, and this condition binds human's capacity for beginning. Beginnings are first manifested in human beings as conditions for their action. Condition precedes action so that a human being's identity as a born member of the plural human beings takes precedence over his identity as a beginner who is capable of action. Therefore, fundamentally human beings are always a relative beginning, acting as the *initium*.

Based on this understanding, the French revolutionists' request for an absolute beginning is an emphasis on the absolute spontaneity of human action and an abandonment of the relativity that binds this absolute spontaneity as a condition. The result is that the "absolutely first beginning" was mistakenly taken as the basis for the absolute beginning of human beings, i.e., the *principium*. In this way, the French revolutionists placed themselves (or rather the general will, people's will, which they represented) in the position of the

Creator-God who created the world. But this was not the result of their own private motives, such as arrogance or selfishness, but a result of the historical conditions on which the course of the French Revolution was based (or rather its historical burden). The revolutionists had to face the fundamental problem of the *ancien régime*. On the one hand, the *ancien régime* victimized the revolutionists and the revolutionary people, who, as Tocqueville put it:

In 1789 the French tried harder than any other people has ever done to sever their past from their future, as it were, and hollow out an abyss between what they had been and what they wished to become. To that end, they took any number of precautions to ensure that they would carry over nothing from the past into their new condition. (Tocqueville 2011,1)

Hence, to follow Arendt's argument, because the French revolutionists were unwilling to accept the relative beginning, the dissolution of the *ancien régime* resulted.

The rupture between king and parliament indeed threw the whole French nation into a 'state of nature'; it dissolved automatically the political structure of the country as well as the bonds among its inhabitants, which had rested not on mutual promises but on the various privileges accorded to each order and estate of society (Arendt 1990,180).

The "state of nature" means that the dissolution of the *ancien régime* plunged the French people into a political vacuum or pre-political space, akin to the void that is before God's creation, which was the theoretical premise of the sovereignty contract described earlier. In fact, it is not a purely fictional theoretical assumption, but a real crisis that the French revolutionists had to deal with. However, the fact that the French Revolution resulted in terror was closely related to this urgent crisis. Sieyès's theory of constituent power arose in response to the state of nature:

...second, by putting the *pouvoir constituant*, that is, the nation, into a perpetual 'state of nature'. ('On doit concevoir les Nations sur la terre, comme des individus, hors du lien social...dans l'état de nature'.). (*ibid.*,163)

Sieyès makes the Nation the subject of absolute constituent power. As a result, the Nation is given the image of God's absolute beginning. Solving the problem of the vicious circle created by the political vacuum of pre-politics with absolute constituent power is no different from how the Hebrews solved the problem of beginnings, as Arendt puts it:

...we know the Hebrew solution for its perplexities - the assumption of a Creator God who is outside his own creation in the same way as the fabricator is outside the fabricated object. In other words, the problem of beginning is solved through the introduction of a beginner whose own beginnings are no longer subject

to question because he is 'from eternity to eternity'. (*ibid.*, 206)

It is thus easy to understand the fundamental reason why the process of the French Revolution was so plagued by absolute and violence that it could not succeed in laying the foundation of the republic through revolution: because violence is the product of a pre-political vacuum outside the political sphere (*ibid.*,180). When the state of nature as a pre-political vacuum demands an absolute beginning with an image of God, violence also enters the newly established political sphere and repeatedly destroys power as discussed in chapter one. Under such circumstances, the establishment of a stable political order is simply not possible.

In contrast to the French Revolution, the American Revolution sought a relative beginning. The American people had never placed themselves in a state of nature. Before they even set foot on the North American continent, the "New World", they had already constructed themselves as the body politic of the civilized world through the Mayflower Compact, a mutual contract. These Puritans, "Pilgrim Fathers" are called by Arendt "founders of colonies" (*ibid.*,229). In the colonial era, the people built on these founders, as Chapter 2 suggests, to create an entity of autonomy centered on a system of township and town-hall meetings. Since it was framed in terms of a mutual contract of mutual promises, Arendt concludes:

Conversely, the great good fortune of the American Revolution was that the people of the colonies, prior to their conflict with England, were organized in self-governing bodies, that the revolution - to speak the language of the eighteenth century- did not throw them into a state of nature... (*ibid.*, 165)

Thus, the American Revolution unfolded within a narrative of continuity. The reality of this continuity was based on the "experience" of the colonial people gained through years of participating in town-hall meetings: "It had taught not only them but the people who had delegated and 'so entrusted' them, how to establish and found public bodies" (*ibid.*,176). While the people of France carry the heavy historical burden of the *ancien régime*, the American people are "with a hundred and fifty years of covenant-making behind them" (*ibid.*). The Constitutional Convention was only the most decisive and overarching of the many foundations. The Federal Constitution was preceded by Jefferson's document of 1774

for The Virginia Convention (*ibid.*,127), by the “Fundamental Orders” and “plantation covenant” which the Connecticut colonists drew up for themselves (*ibid.*,167), by the Mayflower Compact, and by the whole town-hall council system, which was built on this series of mutual contracts. All of them belong to the foundations of the United States. There were always ancestors to whom the American revolutionists could trace back. Their beginning actions could always depend on a foundation. In theory, they went back to the political experience of ancient Rome, and in practice, they based their constitutional activity on the political experience of colonial self-government. As Arendt puts it:

Those who received the power to constitute, to frame constitutions, were duly elected delegates of constituted bodies; they received their authority from below, and when they held fast to the Roman principle that the seat of power lay in the people, they did not think in terms of a fiction and an absolute, the nation above all authority and absolved from all laws, but in terms of a working reality, the organized multitude whose power was exerted in accordance with laws and limited by them. (*ibid.*,166)

Thus, it was natural for the American revolutionists who sought the relative beginning to unite their beginning action with the foundation of their revolutionary action. According to the explanation of the relative beginning above, the American Revolutionists, as relative beginnings, were born into the political sphere of the autonomic council system. Based on the world of the township council system, they used their capacity for beginnings to constitute the Constitution to become the Beginners of the Republic, the Foundation of a new city-state, Founding Fathers of the United States (*ibid.*, 202). They were an absolute starting point vis-à-vis the newly born United States of America, as “Rome anew” (*ibid.*, 208). This corresponds to the American understanding of authority based on the Roman experience: in the United States, authority resides primarily in the Supreme Court, which derives from the absolute starting point of the United States of America as a republic, namely The Federal Constitution. The Federal Constitution, in turn, derives its authority from the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention composed of revolutionists. However, the authority of this Constitutional Convention derives from the fact that the people of the thirteen colonies authorized these revolutionists to be their delegates to the Constitutional Convention. The United States, in turn, can also be traced back to the early colonists and the various mutual contracts they made through their mutual promises, whether it was the

delegates to the Constitutional Convention, the revolutionists, the people of thirteen colonies, or the early colonists, all of them acted based on a relative starting point, constituting continuous moments of relative beginnings. It is in this sense that it can be said:

...it would be the act of foundation itself, rather than an Immortal Legislator or self-evident truth or any other transcendent, transmundane source, which eventually would become the fountain of authority in the new body politic. (*ibid.*,204)

Because the foundation is not a split second, but a continuous process that can be traced over and over again. The foundation of a state, of freedom, in a revolution, is simply the brightest and greatest moment in this process. It is in this retrospective process that the absolute is eliminated, for there is no moment that lies outside the whole process and above the others, but only a succession of foundations that exist before each moment.

In summary, the relative beginning and foundations are united in the constitutional activity led by the revolution, i.e., the establishment or the foundation of freedom and the foundation of the republic. The foundation of the new order can only be properly understood in this unity.

3.5. A Beginning Is a Return to the Beginning

This unification also leads to the duality of the beginning, i.e. a beginning is the return to the beginning. Arendt illustrates this point through her analysis of Virgil's poetry in *On Revolution* (as quoted earlier) and *The Life of the Mind: Willing*, especially in the latter:

Confronted with the riddle of foundation - how to restart time within an inexorable time continuum—they naturally turned to the story of the foundation of Rome and learned from Virgil that this starting-point of Occidental history had already been a re-vival, the resurgence of Troy. That could tell them no more than that the hope of founding a 'new Rome' was an illusion: the most they could hope for was to repeat the primeval foundation and found 'Rome anew.' (Arendt 1978,214-215)

In this respect, relative beginnings are equated with laying the foundation and tracing the foundation that preceded it, and at the same time implying that any beginning is, at the same time, nothing more than a resurgence, a revival, a return to the beginning, is the converse proposition also true? That is: those actions that seek to return to the beginning will ultimately be revealed as actions that establish a new beginning. At least that is the case with

those representative revolutionists. Arendt cites Tocqueville to summarize the beliefs of the French revolutionists: “one might have believed the aim of the coming revolution was not the overthrow of the old regime but its restoration.” (Tocqueville 1953,72; as cited in Arendt 1990,45). This is the same with those American revolutionists:

Paine wanted no more than to recapture the old meaning of the word ‘revolution’ and to express his firm conviction that the events of the time had caused men to revolve back to an ‘early period’ when they had been in the possession of rights and liberties of which tyranny and conquest had dispossessed them. (Arendt 1990,45)

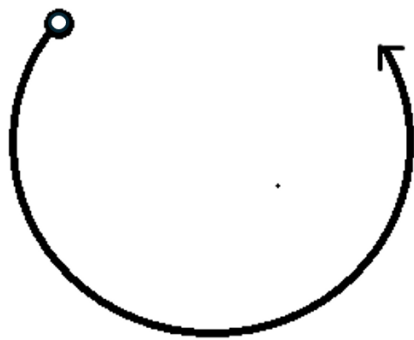
Moreover, revolutionists may also go further, more or less consciously advancing their own beginning actions by returning to the beginning. In *The Life of the Mind: Willing*, Arendt expresses her perplexity:

To be sure, there is something puzzling in the fact that men of action, whose sole intent and purpose was to change the whole structure of the future world and create a *novus ordo seclorum*, should have to go to that distant past of antiquity... (Arendt 1978,215).

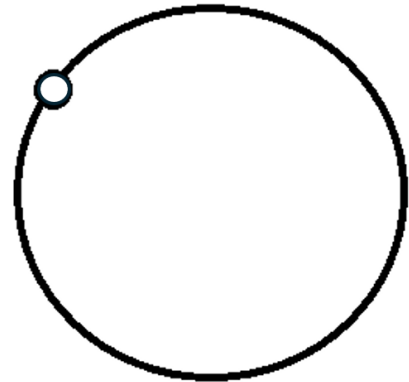
If the eighteenth-century revolutionists’ return to the beginning was a recourse to the Roman experience to lay the foundations of a republic, an ancient polity that had been lost to history, in the modern era. Then the posture of the twentieth-century revolutionists was not one of recourse to the ancients, but rather one of fulfilling of what the ancients had left unfinished. The so-called unfinished business, I mean that the revolution promised political freedom but did not fulfill that promise. Either it led to tyranny, as in the French Revolution, or it replaced the town-hall council system of political freedom with a system of limited government that guaranteed “civil rights” as in the American Revolution. Civil rights and political freedom are by no means the same thing (*ibid.*, 218). However, during the French Revolution, there was also a short period of spontaneous self-governing organizations like the town-hall council systems of the thirteen colonies. Arendt refers to them just as “councils” (*ibid.*, 240). The councils were, as Arendt implies, the system best suited to preserve the spirit of revolution and political freedom (*ibid.*,280). This system, together with the revolutionary spirit aimed at freedom, constitutes the revolutionary tradition that Arendt appreciates. Arendt explicitly describes the revolutionists of the eighteenth century as the ancestors of the revolutionists of the twentieth century:

Both Jefferson's plan and the French sociétés révolutionnaires anticipated with an utmost weird precision those councils, soviets and Räte, which were to make their appearance in every genuine revolution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (*ibid.*,249)

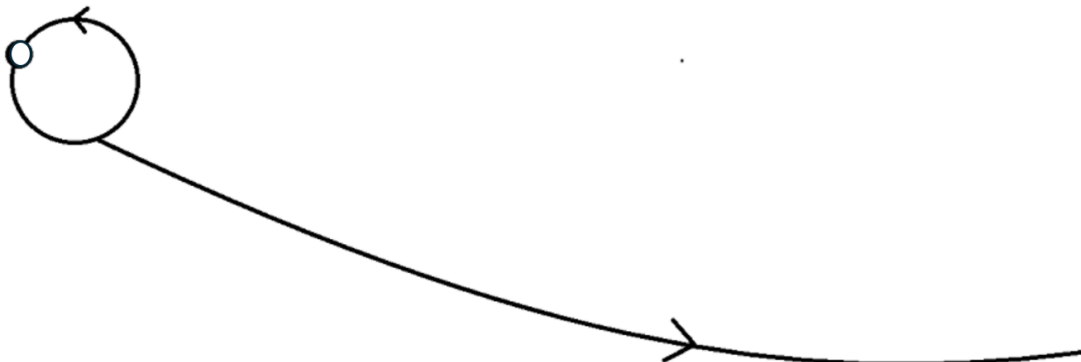
The council system has never been victorious: the councils of the French Revolution were drowned out by the revolutionary dictatorship, the town-hall system of the American Revolution was sidelined by limited government, the Paris Commune was wiped out by Thiers's army, the Soviets were suppressed by the Communists, and the Hungarian Revolution was stifled by the Soviet Union. Never in history has the council system been a long-term stable political order. Arendt's expectation for such an ideal politics therefore seems to be built on scattered sand. But in my defense: it is precisely this frequent failure that illustrates the resilience of the council system. Frequent failure means that it also recurs frequently. And still, councils have recurred in the form of spontaneous organizations at different times and countries. The beginning to which those failed revolutionists of the twentieth century sought to return is, therefore, one that has not yet been completed and therefore remains to be completed. The feature of this council system as a beginning is that not only has the beginning not yet acquired its foundation, but there is also a separation between the emergence of the beginning and its completion. This makes the beginning at the very first not the beginning of history, of a tradition, but the beginning of itself at first, making itself an extension in time. This is the problem that Arendt does not discover, or at least does not make clear. It is my final thought on the perplexity of the beginning: *The beginning is a return to the beginning* is the image that this extension presents to us: a ray that bends in on itself. When it closes, it becomes a point, the starting point of a new order. This is shown in the pictures: Picture 1 shows a beginning that is not yet complete. Picture 2 shows a beginning that is complete and can be the starting point of a new order. This circle can be seen as a point at the macro level. Picture 3 shows the position of this starting point in the new order. Note that in Picture 3, the new order begins with the new beginning, and its move remains a (part of a) bending ray. In the future, there might come a time when this order will resort or recourse to its beginning as a foundation.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

The real meaning or purpose of the return to the beginning was to complete the beginning: for the revolutionists of the twentieth century, the success of the council system; for the revolutionists of the eighteenth century, the renaissance or rebirth of the Roman Republic, which had disappeared from the history. Hence, from the perspective of the Founding Fathers, the revolution was about the creation of a “Rome anew” rather than a “new Rome” (*ibid.*,212). For the Romans, it was to rebuild Troy. In short, it is to bring back to the present the past that had disappeared, that had been blocked by the rupture of history. It is to realize it, thus re-establishing its continuity. It is the beginning of the continuity of successful re-establishment that is called the foundation. Here I would like to repeat Arendt’s definition of the perplexity of the beginning: “an unconnected, new event breaking into the continuous sequence of historical time” (*ibid.*,205). Arendt does not realize that the “new event” she is talking about here is not a realized beginning, but only the emergence of the beginning, the starting point of the ray that bends in on itself. This starting point is what motivates people to re-establish continuity. When continuity has not yet been successfully

established, the ray manifests itself in broken fragments of history. Once continuity is re-established, the starting point of the ray ceases to be a unique point. It just becomes a moment of the finished ray (the circle). The moment is always preceded by another moment that serves as its foundation. But this situation arises only because in the re-established continuity the failures of the past are codified by historical narrative as a continuous and unified tradition. It gains its significance by being reinterpreted as one of the foundations for the beginning.

Conclusion

Under modern conditions, the perplexity of the beginning is most centrally proposed by the revolution as an event. It is also answered in the historical analysis of revolutions. It is the many perplexities that revolutions successively produce that compel revolutionists and their generations to seek solutions that will enable the revolution not only to create a new political order, but also to sustain it for a long time. The popular power of the French Revolution, in the form of constituent power, created the space for political freedom for the people. However, limited by the historical conditions in which the revolution took place, the popular power degenerated into destructive violence. Popular power then was unable to take on the responsibility of constructing the foundations for political freedom. The American Revolution, on the other hand, serves as a model for Arendt's reinterpretation of the history of modern revolutions (Wellmer 2006, 220). With its creation of a federal republic that operates according to the Constitution, the American Revolution demonstrates how modern revolutions can, by appealing to the political experience of the ancients, find two firm and solid foundations for the space of freedom: the tradition of self-governance that the early colonist developed with their town-hall council system. The second is the political experience of the Roman Republic. The success of the modern revolution, which aims to establish a constitutional republic by constitution-making activity, is in turn, based on the past, history, and tradition, to re-establish the continuity between the present and the past, which has been interrupted by the revolution as a new event.

Furthermore, modern revolutionists, who inherited the legacy of the ancients, through the framework of a mutual contract of mutual promises, made it possible for freedom and order. Freedom and order were originally in tension. However, under the framework of mutual contract, they constitute a mutually reinforcing cycle based on a constructive understanding of power. Freedom is no longer seen as a threat to the political order, but rather as a capable force for its consolidation; order is no longer a fetter to freedom, but rather a refuge for its multiplication and expansion. This mutually reinforcing relationship is, as Arendt argues, the foundation of freedom and the aim of revolution. The foundation of

freedom establishes a certain relationship between beginning and foundation. Beginning and foundation are joined through a constructive understanding of power. The relationship also combines them in the constitution-making activity dominated by the constituent power. The unification of beginning and foundation responds to the perplexity of how that beginning, which seems to appear arbitrarily outside of any understandable continuity, is a new beginning.

The core of this response lies in the correct understanding of human beings as a relative beginning rather than an absolute beginning. This means that human beings are temporal beings born into the world. Thus, they are both new beginnings and beginners. As beginners, they are indeed an absolute starting point relative to that new sequence of time that they opened up. However, what makes them beginners presupposes that they are, at the very first new beginnings, born into a human community and exist in the world. This means that a relative beginning always has its foundation and can only realize its capacity to begin if it is conditioned by a foundation. So, beginnings are always traced back to a foundation. However, the foundation itself is nothing else but a relative beginning. The unification of the beginning and the foundation is thus presented essentially as two aspects of the same process.

The process demonstrates that a beginning is a return to the beginning. Arendt develops her idea of the council system from a critique of the historical development of the American Revolution. The many political experiences that this idea contains clearly demonstrate the processual nature of beginnings. In this process, beginnings are in fact understood as extensions in time. The key is to understand the emergence of beginnings as separate from their completion. As a schema for describing this process, I have taken pictures of a ray that bends in on itself and strives for closure. The revolution as a new event is the beginning of this ray. At the starting point, the beginning is indeed difficult to comprehend because it is at this point neither situated within any pre-existing tradition or continuity, nor has it yet to explain what kind of continuity it is establishing. The beginning and the foundation are at this time completely separate and indifferent. As has been said before, when revolutionists are committed to the establishment of a new order, to the creation of a new government, and doing their best to keep it, they look to the past, to history, to tradition, to the ancestors. This

manifests itself in rays extending forward and bending in on themselves. When they succeed in discovering the foundation on which the beginning could be founded, they complete that beginning, and the ray closes into a circle. On the one hand, the circle can be seen macroscopically as a point, which means that the new beginning re-establishes the continuity with the past and becomes the starting point for the new order of the future. On the other hand, microscopically it is a circular movement of itself, which, by constantly returning to its own point of beginning. It becomes the foundation that can constantly provide stability for the new order of which it is the beginning.

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between beginnings and foundations within the context of modern political revolutions. As Hannah Arendt argued, the American Revolution, with its establishment of a federal republic and a Constitution inspired by ancient political traditions, provides a model for successful modern revolutions. Arendt's reinterpretation highlights the authentic unification between freedom and order through a mutual contract, where both elements reinforce each other. This unification is reflected in the constitution-making activity dominated by constituent power, bridging the gap between beginnings and established foundations. The processual nature of beginnings, as seen in the council system and revolutionary experiences, underscores that new political orders are extensions in time, seeking continuity by reconnecting with predecessors' foundations. It means the beginning is the return to a previous beginning. Ultimately, this cyclical process transforms the new beginning into a stabilizing foundation, ensuring continuity and stability for future political structures.

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