The Idea of Beginnings

 فكرة البدايات

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Pirates and Emperors
القراصنة والأباطرة

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Definition

Beginning (Oxford dictionary)

1.0 The point in time or space at which something begins.
   - ‘he left at the beginning of February’
   - ‘they had reached the beginning of the street’

1.1 The first part or earliest stage of something.
   - ‘the ending of one relationship and the beginning of another’
   - ‘she had the beginnings of a headache’

1.2 The background or origins of a person or organization.
   - ‘he had risen from humble beginnings to great wealth’
Problems of our modern age (مشاكل عصرنا الحديث)

- Loneliness/Alienation (عزلة)
- Disconnect between past and future (الفصل بين الماضي والمستقبل)
- The desire for a solid place of belonging in the world is part of what it means to be human (الرغبة في الانتماء للوطن في هذا العالم، يعد جزء من انسانيتنا)
- Automation (الآلي)
- Purposelessness (بلا هدف)
- Hyper-connectivity and the dying of reflection

How to engage with these problems?
- Realisation that humans are not born for food and work
- Connecting one’s biography to history
- Elevating one’s sense of role in the world
- Reconceptualising modern problems
The pull of the modern individual

Nihilism
Relativism
Escapism
Nationalism
Fascism
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Hannah Arendt and the fate of the public realm

“The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist.”
— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism
Existential awareness of Natality and Mortality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth-oriented (natality)</th>
<th>Death-oriented (mortality)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love of the world</td>
<td>Being in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embraces plurality as the foundation of the human condition</td>
<td>Being with others is an inauthentic mode of being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom linked to consciousness of natality</td>
<td>Freedom linked to consciousness of mortality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oriented towards the public</td>
<td>Oriented towards the self</td>
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First published 1958

**Hannah Arendt**
1906-1975

First published 1927

**Martin Heidegger**
1889-1976
Vita Activa

Translated into Arabic 2015

First published 1958

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Re-enacting one’s birth
Components of a Beginning in Arendtian Thought

Mكونات بداية فكر أرنتد

BEGINNINGS

Freedom

Responsibility

Equality

Plurality

Forgiveness

Promise

Speech

Action/Deed

Naming

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Defects of beginnings: irreversibility and loss of control

(Promise (وعد) Forgiveness (مغفرة) Punishment (عقاب))

Martin Luther King Jnr. 1963 historical address
South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-98)
Nuremberg Trials (1945-46)
Can a beginning and the process that follows be seen as separate?

“A beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention.”

- When life events are constructed in narration form, then storytelling becomes a powerful medium to think about envisioning individuals acting together in a pluralistic capacity. The narrator and listener come to understand themselves as having collectively shared an experience that in retrospect comes to be considered a beginning.
- Stories promote communication to situate the individual’s identity and being by linking to the past and future in order to understand the next steps to take.
- “An intention, therefore, is a notion that includes everything that later develops out of it, no matter how eccentric the development or inconsistent the result.”
- A beginning contains more than action, it is also “a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness”
- Arendt ascribes uncertainty and voidness to beginning, while Said gives certainty to beginning. Yet they both agree on the ferocious unpredictability in the processes that arise out of beginnings.
Origins are not the same as Beginnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginnings</th>
<th>Origins</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognised as a beginning</td>
<td>Divine (lays claim to truth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associated with fragile human endeavours</td>
<td>Associated with genealogy, set of values, authenticity and nobility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognisable date</td>
<td>Difficult to date and contest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Historically indetermined</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requires creating, imagining or recognising a beginning</td>
<td>Ambiguous as it is narrowed down to decades or centuries, rather than years.</td>
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<td>“radical severity and verify evidence of at least some innovation – of having begun.”</td>
<td>Often regresses to pursuit of absolute origins</td>
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<td>a causal relationship between beginning and “making or producing difference.”</td>
<td>can produce novelty or “startling unexpectedness,” but origin cannot enforce novelty.</td>
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The illusion of the New Year as a new beginning

“You end up seriously thinking that between one year and the next there is a break, that a new history is beginning; you make resolutions, and you regret your irresolution, and so on, and so forth. This is generally what’s wrong with dates.”  (Gramsci, “Sotto la Mole,” 1 January, 1916.)
The End