The Fertile Grounds of The Human Condition: How Agriculture Challenges the Boundaries of Arendt's Labor, Work, and Action

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

More than half of planet Earth's habitable land is used for agriculture. This is a statistic that makes us think about the world we live in. When it comes to life on land, we are mostly surrounded by cultivated lands (Ritchie & Rosen, 2024). However, it is frequently reduced to a mere sector in the dispassionate logic of economics - an integral component of a machine for production and consumption. This limited viewpoint falls short of capturing the entire significance of agriculture. Its meaning has also been disregarded by Western political thinkers. However, Hannah Arendt provides a lens through which we might reconsider agriculture through her work that provides an alternative understanding of modernity, accommodating a renewal of the meaning of humanity. Her thought provides the tools to understand agriculture as a fundamental human activity rather than an economic metric. Thus, this research wants to explore the following question: *What is the meaning of agriculture for Arendt?*

To answer this question, I have decided to focus on Arendt's book *The Human Condition* because of its innovative conceptual language. In the book, Arendt challenges philosophical misconceptions regarding humans' *vita activa*, active life, providing an innovative conceptual framework that illustrates what it means to be human. According to Arendt (1958), traditionally, the *vita contemplativa*, contemplative life, has been regarded as the highest purpose of human existence, while the *vita activa* has been devalued in comparison (p. 14). Arendt highlights the tension present in our relationship with the world by breaking down the human experience into the domains of *labor, work* and *action*[2]. Agriculture, in this context, is located within the sphere of *labor*. According to Arendt, *labor* is an activity that people and animals alike engage in, as they are both bound by physical needs. *Labor*, thus, is not an intrinsically human activity. Since *labor* reduces people to recurring requirements without which they could not survive, it is therefore associated with sustenance, reproduction and cyclicality (p. 100). Contrarily, *work* is the process of building a permanent, human-made world that goes beyond the cycle of survival (p. 137). *Labor* is connected to physical activity; conversely, *work* makes use of the hands, which are exclusively human (pp. 118, 136). The creations of *work*, *use objects*, are meant to endure over time, whilst the products of *labor*, *consumer goods*, are intended to be destroyed through

[2] Throughout this text, *labor*, *work*, and *action* are italicized to signify their specific meanings and spelling as outlined in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

consumption (pp. 125, 137, 164). Ultimately, the notion of *action* encompasses the idea of a fundamental human quality that permits individuals' engagement in political endeavours. It offers a time and place where individuals can, through a "second birth," enter a political realm where they can demonstrate their uniqueness among equals (pp. 175–179). As a channel for personal disclosure, *action* is a world of unpredictability and unexpectedness that allows human frailty to surface (p. 178–179, 183). This realm also permits deeds to be remembered for eternity because, once committed, they cannot be undone (pp. 193-194). These definitions of this threefold understanding of Arendt's *Human Condition* provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the concept of land cultivation, which, contrary to Arendt, I find harder to categorise in only one of the realms of the triad. Hence, my research question for this thesis narrows down to the following: *How does the notion of agriculture in The Human Condition challenge the rigid boundaries between the realms of labor, work and action?*

In this thesis, it will be argued that the concept of agriculture does challenge the boundaries because, while the role Arendt sentences to agriculture is *labor*, I believe it holds features that transcend its categorisation. Given that agriculture shapes landscapes, provokes property claims, and forms settlements, all of which generate long-lasting effects, I contend that land cultivation has traits specific to *work* and points to a relationship with the realm of *action*. By drawing attention to the vagueness in Arendt's classification of agriculture, this research suggests a more in-depth examination. Through a historical analysis of farmed land from the perspectives of *work* and *action,* I propose to shed light on the importance of agriculture that goes beyond its primary *labor* function in *The Human Condition.*

Due to scope constraints, the thesis will adopt examples and attempt to analyse the proposed concepts through an Arendtian language, whose argument-building was based on a Western model; thus, this research will attempt to analyse Arendt with her same historical assumptions.

The thesis builds upon an Introduction, in which the topic of the thesis and the research question are proposed. Followingly, the literature review, found in Chapter One, will attempt to disentangle how the Arendtian scholarship has interpreted the concept of agriculture. Firstly, I will examine how the concept is treated in Arendt's essay *The Crisis in Culture.* Then, I will discuss how it is analysed from the perspective of *The Human Condition.* I will follow up this scholarly discussion by proposing in Chapter Two, my analysis and interpretation of the concept of agriculture in *The Human Condition*. Then, I will develop my argument by exploring land

cultivation under the lens of the Arendtian realm of *work*, arguing that it construes the foundation for the idea of human settlement, linking it to Locke's *Labour Theory of Property*. Following up to the idea of land property, I will describe the role the concept has historically held in Western political contexts by coupling it to the realm of *action*. Additionally, in Chapter Three I will lead to a short discussion on the conceptual sociopolitical consequences if agriculture is understood, in *The Human Condition,* also through the lenses of *work* and *action.* Finally, I will state the limitations of this thesis and suggest possible avenues for future research in the Conclusion.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will examine how secondary literature on Arendt interprets agriculture, a concept less explored in *The Human Condition*. This review aims to identify conceptual gaps in current scholarly interpretations of agriculture's role. Firstly, I will discuss how authors such as Whiteside (1998), Gerber (2023), and Lederman (2016) have explained the concept of agriculture having a "cultural" significance in Arendt's essay *The Crisis in Culture*. Then, I will illustrate how Lederman (2016) takes a step further, and with authors such as Shortall and Miller (2012), Markell (2011), Szerszynski (2003) and Honig (2016) explore the ambiguous character of the concept of agriculture in *The Human Condition*. Ultimately, I will synthesise the findings and address what the strengths and weaknesses of the current literature are.

Agriculture in "The Crisis in Culture"

In the following paragraph, I will review Whiteside's (1998) and Gerber's (2023) takes on the concept of agriculture in Arendt's 1960 essay *The Crisis in Culture* as constructing the foundations of the concept of culture.

According to Whiteside (1998), Arendt explores the cultural relevance of Roman agricultural practices (p. 33). Starting with the word's etymology, which comes from the Latin *colere* (to cultivate), Arendt argues that this concept promotes treating nature with respect, acknowledging its ability for self-regeneration, and promoting its growth (p. 34). Similarly, Gerber (2023) contends that Arendt's etymology of the term "culture" relates primarily to human interaction with nature, specifically how they tend to it until it is fit for human habitation (para. 20). He also points out how, according to Arendt, the Romans extended this idea even further, viewing the

farmer's stewardship of the soil as a prototype for humanity's overall outlook on the world (para. 20). According to Gerber, this connects to a fundamental aspect of how humans relate to their habitation of the world (para. 20). According to Arendt, agriculture changes nature and makes it more compassionate because we wish to live there. However, this is precisely why we take care of it (Gerber, 2023, para. 20). Therefore, Arendt believes that nature does not inspire caring since it is unconcerned with the preservation of individual items (para 21). In fact, Whiteside (1998) argues that Arendt applied her notion of culture only to natural things with man-made characteristics such as stability and beauty, whilst the term itself should push for an appreciation of the symbiotic relationship between man and nature, e.g. the cultivator that makes living things flourish (pp. 35-36). Arendt allows for violence against nature to justify the world-building process and, thus, Whiteside opens a conception of preservation that holds care for culturally-motivated natural entities but is ready to recognise irreversible processes of their destruction (pp. 35-36). Therefore, for both Whiteside and Gerber, the concept of agriculture in Arendt is closely related to the human-nature relationship, as it is one of mutual growth. More specifically, Gerber (2023) defines this as “a relation, it is clear, that can only be established through the activity of culture” (para. 20). This, then, is connected to how the cultivation of the land makes things grow and makes, most importantly, farmers grow through constant practices of renewal that insert them in nature’s cyclical processes.

Both Gerber and Whiteside agree on an interpretation of agriculture as forming the ‘roots’ of the idea of human culture in Arendt. Yet, a significant divergence in understanding becomes apparent. According to Gerber (2023), Arendt views agriculture as a means of modifying nature to better suit human needs, which encourages conservation efforts (paras. 20-21). This theory holds that nature itself lacks care since it is unconcerned with the preservation of the individual.
Whiteside (1998), instead, presents an alternative viewpoint. He contends that Arendt limits the meaning of "culture" to elements of nature that have been given human-made attributes, such as order and beauty. He thinks the term "culture" should refer to the entire relationship between humans and nature, including the cultivator who makes life possible. Despite this disagreement, Arendt's view of culture and the link that she finds between humans, nature and agriculture are interrelated, according to Whiteside and Gerber. They both believe that it is a relationship of mutual growth.

Land Cultivation in "The Human Condition"

If Whiteside (1998) and Gerber (2023) coupled Arendt's notion of agriculture with one of culture and a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, authors such as Markell (2011), Shortall and Miller (2012), Honig (2016), Lederman (2016), and Szerszynski (2003) analyse the concept through the lens of the *labor-work-action* triad presented in *The Human Condition*. In this paragraph, I will discuss the different perspectives furnished by these authors on the ambivalent character of the concept of agriculture. All of the scholars reinforce their arguments by underscoring the placement of the concept between the spheres of *labor* and *work*.

Lederman (2016), for example, drawing on the Roman origins of the term culture, recognises that their culture would be non-existent if there were not the foundations that agriculture lays for it (p. 399). Yet, he emphasises how Arendt, by strictly categorising agriculture in the domain of *labor,* does not open the possibility of agriculture having the role of "world-building" (p. 400). Activities that aid in creating a "human world" and a "real culture" are the ones performed by the "homo faber" (p. 400). He makes this argument to contend that, according to Arendt, culture is created by *homo faber* and for the sake of beauty (p. 400). Thus, agriculture does not have a place in the sphere of *work* (p. 399). Shortall and Millar (2012), too, highlight the crucial function that Arendt attributes to the cultivation of the soil, a *labor*-consuming activity that wears off the ones who practice it (p. 223). They, in fact, note how the cyclical nature of agriculture corresponds, in The Human Condition, to the cyclicality of life (p. 223). Furthermore, they discuss how, for Arendt, the necessity of agriculture should not be hidden because, through its acceptance, humans can rise above and reach through a "second birth" the public realm" (p. 224). Both Lederman (2016) and Shortall and Miller (2012) emphasise the placement of agriculture in the category of *labor*, the former because he assigns to agriculture its mere sustenance role while the latter sees it as a springboard for the realm of action.

Markell (2011), in his article *Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of "The Human Condition"*, underlines the "walls" that separate the sphere of *labor, work* and *action* (p. 34). However, they seem to tremble the moment Arendt presents the categorisation of agriculture as *labor* rather than *work* because of its repetitive character (p. 42). Szerszynski (2003) notes as well the repetitiveness of cultivation of the land for which it is recognised as *labor;* nonetheless, the author offers an interesting argument (p. 148). He states that "[…] labour's own conatus to repetition can be seen as conferring a durability no less real than that conferred by fabrication"

(p. 149). This view could grant some durability and meaning to life patterns, opening a window to agriculture as not pertaining solely to the sphere of *labor*. Honig (2016) describes work as a "holding environment" for *labor* and *action*. She considers peculiar Arendt's description of cultivated land, which belongs to the domain of *labor* but holds characteristics of *work* such as resilience (p. 310). Honig, thus, compared to the other authors, tries to redefine Arendt's collocation of concepts. She argues for land being considered in its textual form, such as maps and asserts that behind Arendt's categorisation of land as *labor* there is a Jewish "unconscious" (p. 313). Indeed, she explores what political actions could have been implied if Arendt were to consider land cultivation as a "thing" (p. 313). She delves into the idea of participatory mapping, stating that Arendt was antagonistic to this practice (p. 318). She indeed argues that the idea of fallow land has been picked up politically, for example, in the context of the Israeli state formation to claim dominance over the mapped unused lands. Ultimately, Honig, (2016) suggests that Arendt's refusal to categorise agriculture and cultivated lands as *work*, attributing a "thingness" is backed by political reasons that saw Arendt sustain the Israeli occupation of Arab lands (p. 319). Therefore, Honig (2016) is the only author attempting to give significance to the ambiguous character of agriculture by redefining its "thingness".

Although the authors discussed here all concur that, in Arendt's paradigm, agriculture occupies an uncertain zone between *labor* and *work*, their assessments of its relevance differ. Markell (2011) notes that although there are apparent hard lines between different domains, he believes that these become hazy when considering agriculture's repetitive nature. Similar to this argument, Szerszynski (2003) contends that *labor*'s attribute of repetition might also provide life patterns a sense of longevity, possibly elevating agriculture above simple *labor*. Honig (2016), however, adopts the most critical stance by suggesting that Arendt's classification may have a political motivation. She contends that unoccupied land supports assertions of dominance that might be refuted if land cultivation were seen as *work*. This literature explores, through scholarly literature, the ambiguities surrounding agriculture in The Human Condition's *labor-work-action* triad.

Altogether, this literature review has tried to answer the question: *What is the meaning of agriculture for Hannah Arendt?*

Here we can see how authors like Gerber (2023), Whiteside (1998) and Lederman (2016) give a definitional answer tracing back to Arendt's clarification of the Roman etymological roots of

world culture in *The Crisis in Culture*. Here, agriculture, symbolising the ancient core of the word *culture,* stands for the foundations of the symbiotic human-nature relationship, which includes care and preservation. In contrast, other authors have instead narrowed down their research on the ambiguity that the concept of cultivation of land holds in *The Human Condition*, more specifically, answering the question: *How does the notion of agriculture in The Human Condition challenge the rigid boundaries between the realms of labor, work and action?*

In this section, I have analysed how differing authors identified this ambiguity linked to the categorisation of agriculture as *labor* rather than *work.* However, whilst authors like Markell (2011), Shortall and Miller (2012) Lederman (2016) and Szerszynski (2003) either note the ambivalence or either simply reiterate the labor-specific character of the notion of land cultivation. Meanwhile, Honig (2016) attempts to provide a specific interpretation to the concept by attributing land cultivation a "thingness" that might have a political connotation.

Overall, the current literature, except for Honig, has not been able to interpret the ambiguity of Arendt's positioning of the idea of agriculture. This is presumably because agriculture does contain *labor*-like qualities. Nonetheless, in this thesis, I contend that this ambivalence goes deeper and has a sociopolitical significance that Arendt might not have had the tools to address. Thus, I will follow with an analysis of the concept of land cultivation in *The Human Condition,* where I will attempt to explore it vis-a-vis the triad of *labor*, *work* and *action*.

Analysis

The Arendtian "Tilling of the Soil"

In this paragraph, I will discuss the Arendtian "tilling of the soil" by exploring its meaning and possible interpretations in *The Human Condition.* I will start the analysis by re-tracing some ambiguities emerging later, in the concept of agriculture in the book—Arendt's definitions of human-nature relationships. After scrutinising these ambivalences, I will conceptually locate Arendt's definition of land cultivation in this discourse by challenging its categorisation in the domain of *labor*.

In the book, the relationship between humans and nature does not stick on its own; it is mentioned throughout the text in various contexts. In the Prologue, she states that "The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition" (Arendt, 1958, p. 2). This, inevitably, ties men to nature, one might think, and so it would be easy to untangle Arendt's view on the man-nature

duality. Yet, this statement presents a context for *The Human Condition*: Earth. It is essential for the survival of humans, and representing the conditionality through which they can *labor*, operate, and act. However, throughout the text, it becomes quite evident how, through each realm of *The Human Condition* that she proposes, the relationship between humans and nature varies. Each conception of nature can be tied to one of her realms of either *labor, work* or *action*. It is not only a nature-as-Earth or nature-as-world distinction, it is *labor'*s *animal laborans* who is doomed to the "servant of nature and the earth" whilst *work*'s *homo faber* is destined to be the "lord and master of the whole earth" (p. 139). Here the step that the *homo faber* takes becomes evident: once he can subjugate the Earth, he can concentrate on building the world, in the Lockean sense, with his hands, whilst "natural processes" come to be through the *labor* of the body (pp. 80, 150). The leap *homo faber* takes is not just one spurring out of creation but it, in principle, derives from destruction. Thus, by use violence on nature, the puzzle is whether *homo faber* can claim for his own use and consumption. It can be argued that the world-making process involving the domination of the *homo faber*, and thus man, onto nature is a process of acquisition of property because it "indicates the privately owned share of a common world and therefore is the most elementary political condition for man's worldliness" (p. 253). It is unclear what the exact relationship between the politically active man and nature is, but the man who can join the realm of action is the one who has overcome the bodily needs that keep the *animal laborans* occupied (p. 176). The human who steps into the realm of *action* is bound to Earth because it is vital for the human condition, but he also transcends the demands of nature as Earth and does not contribute to nature as world.

In this context, the concept of "cultivated land" is important because, although Arendt defines it as belonging to the realm of *labor*, it holds ambiguity:as I will argue, it brings about aspects that borderline with the sphere of *work* but that also build up the very foundations of the premises of political *action*. The idea of agriculture is brought up first in the footnotes when agriculture is included in the list of historical liberal arts (p. 91). However, Arendt does not forget to point out that the classification of agriculture as a liberal art was exclusively intended as such in the ancient Roman world:

> [...]Not due to any special "usefulness" of farming as we would understand it, but much rather related to the Roman idea of patria, according to which the ager Romanus and not only the city of Rome is the place occupied by the public realm" (p. 91).

This caveat gives the reader a taste of Arendt's understanding of agriculture, which she will incorporate into the sphere of *labor* as a concept. Nonetheless, the mentioned 'usefulness' cannot be conceptually underestimated. *The Human Condition*'s section on the analysis of *work* almost begins with the development of the concept of agriculture. Here, Arendt makes an effort to outline precisely what separates *labor* from *work*. She uses agriculture as an example, albeit she refers to it as "the most necessary and elementary *labor* of man, the tilling of the soil" (p. 138). Arendt cautions the reader that this idea can illustrate how *labor* might turn into *work*; she supports this claim by stating that land can be changed from its natural state to soil that has been altered by humans. It can be argued, however, that Arendt regards agriculture—rather than the *consumer goods* that result from it—as the intermediary between "the objectivity of a man-made world" and the "sublime indifference of an untouched nature" because she claims that cultivated land "prepares the earth for the building of the world" (p. 137). Even so, this appears contradictory since, as Arendt puts it, *labor* is "oblivious of the world to the point of worldlessness," while agriculture creates the foundation upon which the world is built (p. 118). Cultivated soil gradually returns to its natural state if left unattended, according to Arendt (p. 138). Thus, agriculture is repetitious, especially when you take into account the requirement for continuous soil tilling, which establishes a cycle. From her perspective, agriculture is an ongoing process that needs *labor* to ensure the production of *consumer goods*, which are agriculture's byproduct and its means of survival. Arendt claims that tilled soil, agriculture, and its results are all related in a circular fashion that highlights their mutual dependence and puts them all under the *labor* category (p. 139). In a cyclical process, the land must be repeatedly treated to create abundance and subsistence (p. 139).

Ultimately, Arendt believes that the true problem of land cultivation is that reification cannot be pursued with it. This takes us back to the fundamental distinction between *work*'s *use objects* whose "existence is secured once and for all" and *labor*'s *consumer goods*, meant to be destroyed (p. 139). There are two main ambiguities when considering this categorisation: the first has to do with the idea of instrumentality, which holds that tools and instruments, that have the ability to

aid *labor* efforts, are themselves products of *work* rather than *labor*. The second indicates that agriculture is a fundamentally human endeavour that has bonded people through collaboration and settlement, which has changed landscapes in durable ways (p. 121). For the first ambiguity, it is important to notice that agricultural activity, which is supposed to be *labor* in Arendt's view, is accomplished through instruments that are durable in time*, use objects*, to produce *consumer goods*. Therefore, it can be said that land cultivation is an activity of the body accomplished with the tools made by the hands. For the second ambiguity, it should be highlighted that the interplay between property and nature implies that agriculture also phenomenologically alters territory in a systematic way that could correspond to the idea of *work*, as opposed to *labor*.

These ambiguities highlight how Arendt's discussion of land cultivation within the context of *labor* raises unresolved issues with regard to political claims made on cultivated lands. I argue that these questions might be answered if the concept of cultivated land were to be explored through the lens of the spheres of *work* and *action.* I contend, therefore, that the notion of agriculture present in *The Human Condition* challenges the rigid boundaries of the *labor-work-action* triad. Through the next sections, by using the Arendtian conceptual vocabulary and analysing historical sources, I will discuss how agriculture holds significance outside the realm of *labor*.

Work: From Sustenance to Settlements

In this paragraph, the two puzzles that arise from Arendt's concept of land cultivation will be analysed. Arendt's terminology will be employed to highlight the *work* character that the concept may hold. It is important to remember the relationship that Arendt attributes to the *homo faber* with nature, one where the *homo faber* puts himself onto nature for the sake of world-building.

As mentioned before, land cultivation contains in it an activity classified as *labor* according to Arendt because of its inherent cyclicality and production of aliments needed for survival. I maintain that land cultivation is motivated by more than just the need to survive and trade *consumer goods*; it is also a process that involves long-term plans for landscape change and settlement formation, derived from humans acting as dominant over nature. This analysis will attempt to show that land cultivation goes beyond the domain of Arendtian *labor,* falling into a limbo overarching the three categories of *labor, work* and *action*.

The moment we regard agriculture as a means of permanently altering the landscape, rather than just sustenance, it takes on the 'thing-like' quality of *work* (Honig, 2016, p. 313). This is reinforced by the way it promotes the establishment of long-term settlements, creating a trace of human habitation on the planet. The intentional manipulation of the landscapes is suggested by archaeological findings, such as evidence of intensive agricultural activities and prehistoric land changes for crop cultivation (McGovern et al., 2007, p. 33; Marsh & Kealhofer, 2014, p. 695). Creating a long-lasting world is Arendt's idea of *work*, which is in line with this deliberate alteration of the environment. Furthermore, sedentary agriculture gave reasons for the first settled civilisations to flourish (Lev-Yadun, Gopher, & Abbo, 2000, pp. 1602-1603).

The claim on land that agriculture motivates is not uniquely traceable to prehistoric examples. In the book *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Gosh (2021) uses the examples of early North American colonies to illustrate how they used farming and agricultural techniques to alter and shape native lands following European agricultural standards, hence perpetuating an indirect and exhaustive kind of violence (p. 63). He describes this process using the sci-fi ideal of *terraformation.* According to the author, this modelling of landscapes set to certain standards can be argued in the context of what he calls "colonial settlement conflicts" (p. 66). Indigenous people had to endure long-term inflicted violence in the form of biopolitical warfare, through which the colonisers perpetrated massive ecological, biological and territorial manipulation. Thus, humans accomplished to use land production as a means of imposing violence not just on nature but also on people (p. 68). Thus, it has been shown that through the practice of farming and settlement formation, not only humans attempt to exert violence over nature but also over other people by radically changing their environment. Hence, if agriculture is viewed as a way to settlement formation, the resultant effect is that the land that it occupies generates a very claim on that land, giving permanence and a "thingness" to that land. Additionally, the argument made by Gosh is sustained by the justification that has been put up to support the European takeover of North America which is that Native Americans, being hunters rather than farmers, did not own the land in the Americas, nor did they require it all (Flanagan, 1989, p. 590). This discourse sparks up the echoes of Locke's *Labour Theory of Property* which proposes the idea that property was in principle evolved through the endeavour of labour employed on natural resources. In the following paragraph, Locke's theory will be analysed in reference to Arendt's conception of *work* and *labor*.

In his theorisation, Locke predicates property on the concept of labor and could be argued as being “bodily-centred” in an Arendtian view (Ballesteros, 2018, p.1). Thus, the *Labour Theory of Property* elaborated by Locke would explain agriculture as a passage to control and dominate nature through agricultural practices leading to the formation of settlements (Locke, 2021, p. 11). Additionally, the individual right logic of "we own what we make" in Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* claims dominance over everything non-human (Shapiro, 2012, pp. 14-15). However, Arendt (1958) challenges the Lockean idea of labour as “source of all property” (p. 101). Since private property is defined as things that belong to humans and are intended to last, Arendt's conception of property is rooted in the idea of *work* rather than *labor* (Arendt, 1958, pp. 60–61).

Nonetheless, after the analysis of the meaning of agriculture in *The Human Condition* it emerges that Arendt ignores land cultivation as being an activity pursued on privately owned land, a durable private possession (p. 68). Through the idea of Arendtian property, I contend that agriculture takes on aspects of the realm of *work* since humans, through it, attempt to alter landscapes and create something more permanent by forming settlements. Humans depend on land cultivation as part of their life cycle, nonetheless, I contend that it is through a process of domination over nature, a role which characterises the Arendtian *homo faber* that humans approach agriculture, not as subjects of nature but as domesticators of it. Consequently, from this logic, land cultivation has been a paradigm of ownership. This has translated, historically, into an idea of land as essential for claims of political action through the initial development of settlements and later on into a Western concept of state.

Political Action Set in Land

In this section, a historical analysis of the political significance of land property will be proposed. The reason behind this analysis is to show the attachment and importance, as also shown by Arendt in *The Human Condition,* of land and private property to participate in political activities in her conception of the *polis*. Politics is necessary because the sheer act of using cultivated land as a tool to alter nature demands it. Forms of governance, which are central to the political domain, are necessary for the management of this common resource, the resolution of possible disputes and the maintenance of its sustainability. Arendt (1958) locates action and speech in space, which is created at the moment they are enacted by its participants; it is a lived

space and can be created at any moment (p. 198). Thus, it is important to interrogate whether this space is predicated on agriculture in the land that constitutes the Arendtian private sphere. *Action* located in space is the only place, according to Arendt, in which power can be exercised. Power, in the Arendtian definition of it, pertains exclusively to the sphere of *action* and it is based on two important premises: it requires taking coordinated actions and the capacity of promise (Arendt, p. 244; Tynniken, p.1). Additionally, it is crucial to consider that people enter the realm of *action* only when they leave behind and are not dependent on bodily necessities, albeit the activities that are part of *labor*, including the tilling of the soil as well. Thus, it is important to question what role land cultivation plays in the domain of *action*. From the perspective of *The Human Condition,* it is something that is left behind; however, I contend that it has historically played a significant role in influencing political action. In this historical analysis, I will present examples put forward by Arendt and analyse them further contending the role land ownership has had in these contexts for political action.

In Arendt's reference model, the Athenian *polis* (city), it is important to note how the myth of the *polis* has built up on an urban-centric model that implicitly denies all the rural nuclei that were under the rule of the polis (Oliver, 2009, p. 223). The relationship between rural and urban areas was very tight in Athens, where its free inhabitants had equal rights (Hansen, 2003). The primary economic activity in the polis was agriculture, and as argued by Burke (1992) economy and politics were very intrinsic to each other. In the context of citizenship recognition for foreigners, the most precious honour foreign residents could achieve was the right to ownership of land (Colorio, p. 104). Already in archaic Athens, the idea of citizenship relegated to land was very strong, as Magnette (2005, p. 11) states:

> The main threats to Athenian harmony were conflicts about land: too many men, under various statuses, were working on too little land. Solon tackled these tensions by acknowledging to all the ownership of the land they were working on in the fields of Attica [...] In order to prevent this equilibrium from crumbling under external pressure, he also took measures that limited immigration into Athenian territory. These were the heralds of an 'Athenian identity, defined by individual ownership of land and by its opposite: the situation of slaves and foreigners.

As Colorio (2010) suggests through the thought of Aristotle, civic space was considered a common thing, and therefore, being the owner of part of the city's territory meant, in turn,

sharing in the common things of the *polis* (p. 105). This is reminded to us by Arendt (1958) when noting that the *horoi,* the boundaries that divided the different land estates, were considered divine and that in the Athenian polis context, "a man could not participate in the affairs of the world because he had no location in it which was properly his own" (pp. 29-30). Therefore, we can highlight the interconnectedness between land ownership and citizenship evident in the description of the *polis* in *The Human Condition.* Ownership thus symbolically gave the passage to the public sphere, that brought men to the feeling of being actively part of something *koinon* (communal), separating it from the *idion* (the own).

Arendt highlights this distinction also between the private life and what concerned the *res publica* (public things) for the Romans (p. 56). Similarly, the Roman citizenship system was highly dependent on the concept of landowning. The elevated consideration that the Roman culture had for agriculture is reminded to us by Arendt, who connects land cultivation to the "Roman idea of Patria" (p. 91). Each Roman citizen was attributed, even if symbolically, a piece of land (Jacab, 2015, p. 116). More interestingly, the land division system invented by the Roman land surveyors, known as *centuriation* played a vital role in the establishment of clear territorial and proprietary boundaries (Jacab, 2015, p. 115). This practice emerged in Republican Rome as an essential way to determine land ownership because "only a piece of land with certain boundaries can be called one's own" (p. 115). In addition, *centuriation* was managed through the centuries to shape the landscape, signs that can still be noticed today. It was also crucial to consolidate the administrative authority and the protection of property rights in both Roman Italy and the provinces.

The direct attribution of land for each citizenship was not granted to everyone; as a matter of fact, the category of *humiles* (humble) were allowed the right to vote in the tribunes only in 307 B.C. through a political move by Appius. The legislation was therefore groundbreaking since it gave everyone who did not obtain their wealth from land their first set of civil rights and obligations (Staveley, 1959, p. 414). Correspondingly, a similar transition is also shown in *The Human Condition* in the attempt to highlight the working class's political productivity, which reached an opportunity for change when the condition of owning property was removed in order to exercise one's right to vote (Arendt, 1958, p. 217). Even if not mentioning a specific moment in history (because of different moments for each state), Arendt describes the status of the working class before the right to vote as being composed of free inhabitants of a society run by

its citizens, them being exclusively estate holders (p. 217). Nonetheless, in the processes of Roman colonisation and the formalisation of provinces, all settlers were given a privately owned plot of land. Thus, in the direct or indirect form, it is already recognisable that models of citizenship were based on land property and the idea of something stable, like settlements.

The Romans left behind many bureaucratic and administrative traditions in Mediaeval Europe through the usage of the Roman *Codex Agrimensorum*, a corpus that concentrated specific knowledge regarding the practice of spatial surveying of the lands. Del Lungo (2004) extensively develops his consideration of territorial surveying activity in Italic territory in Mediaeval times to postulate the thesis that, contrary to the traditionally held opinion, in the proposed chronological period, surveying practices not only remained in force but even flourished. The term used by Del Lungo is *agrimensura,* meaning measuring the cultivated lands. This practice developed in the Roman Empire through the practice of a systematic land registration of its colonies. This translated in Mediaeval times into the increasing division of land properties within the setting of feudalism. The establishment of these registers formed the primary political division of the feudal system, a progressive division of land, the "fief", and responsibilities that progressed on a top-to-bottom scale of authority ranging from the sovereign to the lords, to the vassals and finally to the peasants (Bloch, 1965, pp. 283-297). In a chain of promises and military protections, it was ultimately the peasants who worked the land and paid their taxes through the material profits they made out of them (pp. 286, 324). The political composition of the Western feudal system was based on a warranty of lands that were assigned, exchanged, and conquered. Since the feudal system cannot embody Arendt's (1958) conception of political action as it is argued to be a period of a private "common good", it is important to recognise the fundamental role land played in the political context of the Middle Ages (p. 35). For Arendt, the feudal system could have never embodied an example of political *action*, probably because of its infinite fragmentation. As much as the feudal system crumbled into new political arrangements, cultivated land continued to be owned by nobles and royals who had control over vast portions of territory.

A noticeable shift came with the British Enclosure Movement, which was an attempt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to convert communal land— that was open to the public for food production and animal grazing—into privately owned land, typically enclosed by walls, fences, or hedges (Dyer, 2006, pp. 25-26). As the enclosure movement was going on in England,

other parts of Europe were still relegated until the end of the nineteenth century to semi-feudal systems that were formally abolished. Arendt (1958) describes this shift as the *modern age* (p. 92). Firmly, however, throughout the book, she demonstrates the historical and "sacred" relevance of property by strictly linking it to citizenship. To have a piece of land, a location in the world, meant being recognised as citizen; it was not wealth that could secure your political participation but the active dominance of something tangible and which could leave a territorial mark (p. 61). This started to vanish, according to Arendt, in the *modern age* "with the expropriation of the poor and then proceeded to emancipate the new propertyless classes" (p. 61). This historical moment left a mark on the meaning of citizenship by blurring the key requirements to enter the political realm, as in the Athenian *polis*, as mastering the private sphere from its necessities was opened to people "centred around the one activity necessary to sustain life" —a *society of laborers* (p. 46). Thus, we can see in *The Human Condition* how land ownership implies a context for political action to be performed.

Conclusively, this paragraph attempts to show how Arendt's emphasis on the division of *labor*, *work*, and *action* may be overstated by analysing the political implications of land ownership and cultivation. In my opinion, this could be revealed by considering how land ownership has always been inextricably linked to political involvement and power. For centuries, land has acted as a foundation for citizenship, revolutionising governmental frameworks and consolidating authority in the hands of its possessors. The next section will discuss how the model of land ownership has consigned political models to a sedentary existence.

Discussion

A (non) space for political action

In this chapter, I will discuss how the conception of land cultivation can be interpreted and what it signifies for the conception of political action in The Human Condition. Contrary to its classification in the sphere of *labor*, agriculture, conveys a meaning that carries the potentialities land cultivation bears - and has borne - politically. The depoliticized conception of land offered by Arendt in *The Human Condition* reflects a commonly held view among Western political theorists. The link between agriculture and settlement is, thus, overlooked. Humans view land as their property, something immutable and permanent. They replicate their needs and wishes on land by reflecting a relationship with nature that necessitates an ephemeral sense of ownership.

The idea of land property provided the fundamentals of a rooted community in the form of settlement, which required resource allocation and cooperative efforts. On one hand, it has served as a springboard for political participation and citizen recognition. On the other, this ownership has created the conditions for exercising a right to political action. Thus, is the human conception of political participation solely relegated to a fixed space? The *Human Condition*'s ideological framework can assist in providing an answer to this query. There is always the possibility for the space of appearance to actualise when people come together through action and speech, as Arendt emphasises: "Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence" (pp. 198–200). Nonetheless, it is important to notice how, for Arendt, the fulfilment of this power has had a specific setting:

> Only where men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them, and the foundation of cities, which as city-states have remained paradigmatic for all Western political organization, is therefore indeed the most important material pre-requisite for power (p. 201).

Therefore, it may be claimed that Arendt believed that political space is connected to a fixed one, achieved materially through a land with boundaries and dominated by humans. Then, what would be the political process for locating non-liminal communities? Agriculture, with its connotation of "delayed returns," does not find potentiality in the Arendtian sense because the concept of nomadism has always been positioned as the antithesis of sedentism (Scott, 2018, p. 68). Being non-settled, nomads would not have the space to be free and they miss the possibility of reflecting their dominance onto nature through the idea of settled agriculture and land property (Arendt, 1958, pp. 30-31). Therefore, nomadism would not find a place in the society that Arendt envisions since it does not belong to a shared reality where property grants physical tangibility and allows for political activity (p. 65). Since Arendt's theory of the *human condition* does not provide a conceptual or tangible space for potentiality outside of predetermined settled societies, one could argue that it is settlement-centric. Hence, those who are 'non-settled,' like nomads, would be viewed as inferior in the Arendtian worldview, which describes a *human condition* in which political engagement embodies the pinnacle of human potential.

There is a case to be made for the idea that settled people cling to the promise that pledges non-volatile land, to which they ascribe their potential for political identity and property, in

addition to depending on promises made in a political setting (p. 244). Arendt's political *action* is characterised by firmness and stability, echoing a Western political tradition that places politics in fixed and delimited settings. Property, a byproduct of settlement and cultivation, "indicates the privately owned share of a common world and therefore is the most elementary political condition for man's worldliness" (p. 253). Hence, property finds its *locus* in the world and not Earth, in the man-made world and not in the obscure Earth capable of relinquishing humans; it is in a nature that does not overcome humans but is dominated by them that Arendt places the defining liberties of humans.

This thesis suggests that Hannah Arendt's triad of *labor*, *work*, and *action* may be too inflexible to fully capture the intricacies of some phenomena, even while it provides a useful framework for comprehending human activity. Applying this lens to agriculture exposes shortcomings in Arendt's conceptual framework as construed in *The Human Condition*. Thus, this research attempts to go beyond merely debating the categorisation of agriculture as *labor.* It implies that acts straddling these boundaries may challenge Arendt's paradigm. This conflict highlights a more serious debate: *The Human Condition* builds on strong underlying assumptions already established when Arendt developed her thoughts on political theory. This argument, thus, makes room for a more thorough examination of her framework's shortcomings and the necessity of considering different viewpoints when analysing Western politics, dominated by unquestioned narrow beliefs about the structure of society.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to provide an alternative understanding of agriculture through a conceptual reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition.* This analysis was prompted by the question: *How does the notion of agriculture in The Human Condition challenge the rigid boundaries between the realms of labor, work and action?*

To answer this question, I have sought to present agriculture from the perspectives of the human activities of *labor*, *work* and *action*. The exploration of these concepts has revealed a close-linked connection and multifaceted relationship between land cultivation, property ownership, and political *action*. Land cultivation I contend, presents a basis for a more complex argument on *work* and property, whilst Arendt categorises it in the sphere of *labor*. While it can provide sustenance, it encompasses settlement formation and long-term planning, which belong

to Arendt's *work* category. To demonstrate this argument, I have utilised historical evidence by showing that agriculture has always been an activity that has involved shaping land for human benefit, thus potentially signifying a claim of property over land. This has made land cultivation take on a ‘thing-like’ characteristic that has served politically to attribute citizenship and has established political orders. Accordingly, relating land cultivation and property to the sphere of *action* has shown that Arendt's political "space of appearance" is tethered to fixed and defined spaces. This has raised a significant question: can political participation only occur on the premises of assembled communities in defined locations? Thus, the existence of nomadic societies and alternative political structures challenges Arendt's political thought set in sedentism. We then must interrogate ourselves whether it is a promise of a designated area of land that keeps us engaged in active citizenship and whether an emerging political disengagement is due to a loss of these established spaces at the advantage of virtual “spaces of appearance”. This research implies that Arendt might ignore other avenues for human interaction and political opportunity in favour of concentrating on a certain kind of political space. However, the scope of this thesis is narrow. While the majority of the arguments are based on Eurocentric premises, they also evaluate only historical data. More research should take into account a wider range of current case studies. More precisely, the implications suggested by this research should be taken into account while examining *The Human Condition* part on man's escape from Earth. Also, the ‘new’ spaces of appearances, such as social media, should be analysed in future research in light of the fundamental role spatialisation has for Arendt’s political *action*. Finally, environmental - and not only political - perspectives should be employed to analyse the consequences of agriculture as forming human settlements.

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