

THE IDENTITY OF TERROR

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1.

Terrorist attacks are watched in disbelief.

Terrorist attacks are watched as completely believable.

Terrorist attacks are condemned without equivocation.

Terrorist attacks engender equivocation concerning the relationship between means and ends.

Describing an event as a terrorist attacks may be accurate.

Describing an event as a terrorist attacks is a political stance used to deny the presence of a founding injustice.

Interrupting this list necessitates recognizing that there are moments of truth in every instance. As a term therefore “terrorism” is inserted in a network of activities and is deployed and redeployed in the formulation of conflicting ethical and political positions. Rather than attempt to clarify this state of affairs by defining, absolutely, the way terrorism is to be understood and therefore determine in advance who the terrorist may be, a different approach will be taken. The inherent ambivalence will be allowed to endure. An initial justification for the position resides in the fact that what cannot be precluded is the possibility that within any conflict both sides could use the means of terrorism. (This would be not simply the claim by one side that the other deployed the means of terrorism; it could actually be the case.) The bombing of a sovereign power by another will be viewed by those bombed as an act of terrorism. The bulldozing of houses and villages, as a form of reprisal will be viewed by those made homeless as an act of terrorism. The destruction caused by a suicide bomber in a dense urban setting will for its inhabitants, and by extension all implicated in the act, count as terrorism. It is precisely this predicament that makes it possible to approach terrorism in abstract terms as though a general definition would account for its particular use. Terrorism is not the province of one group. It is not though in any one conflict one side is the terrorists and the other not. This is setting within which the term “terrorism” will be approached.

2.

One of the most obvious effects of the terrorist attack is the conception of object with which it works. (Object, in this context, is the one attacked; the subject is the one launching the attack.) When a bomb is placed in order to kill Protestants, or Muslims or Israelis, etc, the act of destruction is necessarily indiscriminate. It is not just that it does not discriminate between those against whom the attack is aimed directly and others who may become directly involved though the attack was not aimed at them; it turns all against whom the attack was directed into versions of the same; where sameness is defined by race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, etc. While this may seem to be claim about the particularization of a universal humanity it is not. Something else is involved. What is indicated is that terrorism is necessarily connected to the philosophical problem of identity.

The terrorist attack is always against an identity and in the name of another identity. Part of any response to terrorism has to recognize that it is inextricably bound up with this problem. Indeed, in order both to understand the issues involved and then to define the criteria in terms of which it is possible to develop arguments in relation to terrorism – and it is vital to add that what are important are arguments and not simple posturing – the connection to identity is of central importance. The argument is not that the question of identity is resolved and therefore closed in advance. The claim is that in order to understand what is occurring it is necessary to begin with the way in which identity works as the organizing term. Once it can be asked in whose name is an attack undertaken, then the name cannot be easily, if at all, separated from the question of how the identity of the named is understood. Important here therefore is giving a type of specificity to the conception of identity involved precisely, because it concerns a conception of identity that is bound up with a conception of sameness, it can be designated the sameness of identity. Such a formulation is important because the terrorist attack has to have a homogeneous conception of its object. Questions pertaining to the judgment of terror have to begin with this failure to discriminate. The politics of terrorism are the bound up with the politics of essentialism. This is even the case when it

can be argued that there is a justification for the terrorist attack. The justification is that it is a calculated response against a movement that essentialises.

An act of terrorism, understood as a response, is the counter to an essentialising movement that comes from the outside. The mistake however is to think that this movement towards the sameness of identity is the denial of individuality and thus has to be understood as the staging of an enforced anonymity. Precisely the opposite is the case. The terrorist attack, and here an analogy can be drawn with history of the concentration camp and with the “ethnic cleansing” that characterizes the recent conflict in Bosnia, always has a determined object, because it determines its object as the object. The terrorist attack is bound up and is only possible because of that determination. While it is clear that individuals are involved what is under attack is not individuality having become anonymous, it is the group interpolated within the sameness of identity. As such what this establishes is an important link between this conception of sameness on the one hand, and violence and terror on the other.

While there needs to be a distinction drawn between acts of terrorism and the situation in which, in Arendt’s words, “violence rules absolutely” they have an important affinity. She describes the latter situation in the following terms.

Where violence rules absolutely, as for example in the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes, not only the laws – *les lois se taisent* as the French Revolution phrased it – but everything and everybody else must fall silent. It is because of this silence that violence is a marginal phenomenon in the political realm; for man, to the extent that he is a political being, is endowed with the power of speech.¹ (18-19)

That violence which has become identified with the operation of a political regime in necessitating silence allows for its own interruption because, for Arendt, it stands opposed to the defining character of human being. The social nature of being human and the articulation of that being through speech and argument while it cannot defend itself

against the actualization of violence's possibility, violence cannot use the means of speech and argument. Silence, while imposed, brings with it the ground of its being overcome. The point of affinity between the act of violence and "regime" is human being. This is not a claim about human beings or about humanity as an abstraction but about the being of being human understood as an ontological category. And yet, as Arendt points out, the tradition is marked by acts of founding or constituting violence. What must be questioned is the extent to which such acts of constituting violence play a role in developing an understanding of terror. As will emerge the value of Arendt's formulation is that in positioning violence and silence in opposition to speech, this will allow speech – though reworked in terms of the endlessness of negotiation – to be that which provides a basis both to judge and to counter claims either about terror or about terror's possible justification. Leaving aside questions of their mythic status – though such questions will in the end be necessary - constituting acts of violence can either stand outside the realm of the human and thus appear as divine or as unmediated violence, or in being incorporated into the realm of the human they mark violence as mediated from the start.

The first understanding of constituting violence stands in need of the demythologizing move that would occur as a consequence of maintaining the position that violence is always mediated from the start. Once all these elements are taken together what can be seen to emerge is the setting in which the terrorist act can be approached. The elements that mark it out included two central interarticulations. The first is between terror and the sameness of identity. The second is between the social and the ontological. What is important is how the components of this entire set up interact. Again, there is an implicit philosophical argument here. What is being suggested is that not only does it have to be the case that terrorism can only be understood by thinking through the concept of identity articulated within it. There is the additional claim that it necessitates – again in order that it be understood – the setting of the ontology of human being.

What however of the constituting act of violence? The insistence of this question lies in its inescapable link to a conception of the political that defines sovereignty in

terms of war or opposition. Machiavelli, Hobbes and Schmitt, amongst others, will all figure in such a set up.² One of the constituting acts of violence to which Arendt refers is Cain's murder of Abel. Despite its acuity, since it does not take up the problem of mediation Arendt's own interpretation will not be central here. Nonetheless, there is an element of the story that is of fundamental importance to these present undertakings. What is interesting about the story of the murder is the way it be construed as a uniquely human concern.

3.

The entire section of Genesis IV, 1-15. in which this occurrence takes place is concerned with fraternity, forgiveness and estrangement. Each of these terms involves alterity. An examination of 'fraternity' within the Hebrew bible reveals that what is at stake is the other person. Cain's transgression elicits the plea for forgiveness and for the murder he is condemned to the life of the stranger. There is almost a folding of the story back in on itself. While there is no doubt that a murder has occurred, verse 10 stages a formulation that makes the question of alterity a human question. In verse 9 God asks Cain where is his brother. On a literal level the text is unproblematic. God must have known that his actual brother (Abel) has been murdered. And yet another reading would have God asking Cain about the presence of the other (The 'brother' as the sign of an ineliminable and thus primordial alterity; the other to the same). Cain's reply has a certain infamy "I know not, am I my brother's keeper?" This is the question addressed by Cain to God. God's response is the exclamation that Cain has murdered both his brother and future generations. The move from the present to the future (present in the text by the use of the plural "bloods"³) indicates that Cain's question has greater extension than the mere moment of its being asked. What, however, of the question asked by Cain? It should be remembered that this is a question to which God could have replied. Moreover, it is the question concerning human relations. After all under examination is the question of the obligations alterity brings with it. The question is asked in verse 9 and the verses continue with the recognition of the deed and the punishment without there being at any time a return to the question. The temptation is to say that the question is left in suspension without being addressed. However, that would make the failure to respond no more than

a mere oversight. The important conclusion to be drawn is that God's silence means that the relation to the other is a fundamentally human concern. While elsewhere there will be an important discussion concerning how the stranger is to be understood (Leviticus XIX, 33) it remains the case that fundamental to all these discussions is that self/other relations both define the human predicament – indeed they are the human predicament – and have to be regulated as part of human life. If there is an act of constituting violence then it occurs within the set up in which ethics was ethos from the start.⁴ It is not external and as such an act of violence would constitute that which took place as a consequence. Violence is always already internal to the construction of social being. What is also there from the start therefore is the possibility of violence. However, it is neither divine nor pure violence. On the contrary it is the violence that is an inherent possibility within self/other relations. As such it is uniquely human. It is the idea of an inherent possibility that is of fundamental importance. An inherent possibility exists as a potential. Since there has to be a type of distinction between potential and its realization, this will have to mean that the actualization of this inherent possibility necessitates mediation. (The move from potential being to actual being involves mediation otherwise all that would be actualized would be the potential; moreover it would be actualized in toto.) The problem posed by the relationship between potential and actual existence is of great significance in this context because the move from a primordial self/other relation to the sameness of identity involves this potentiality.

As has already been made clear an “inherent possibility” is linked to potentiality. Human being needs to be defined in terms of the relationship between potential and actual being. The task is determining how potential is to be understood. In the first instance it should be noted that it necessitates that violence always be mediated. Violence, while inherent, is never actualized as such. And yet, at first glance it could be argued that the potential, rather than account for the inescapable presence of mediation, is the human's capacity for its own annihilation. It would be as though what founds human being brings with it the capacity for its own destruction.⁵ However, such an argument would misunderstand the relationship between potential and actual being. It is not as though violence is an option that has to be mastered continually or which expresses itself

absolutely. That would only be possible if violence could be presented as unmediated. The necessity of mediation means that, in the move from a potential to its realization, the distinction should not be thought as absolute but as a continuum. In other words, while violence is always mediated, violence **is** – is what it is - in its always being mediated. There is no violence outside mediation, existing in a state of divine purity. While violence is a potential the fact that its actualization is always specific means that the site of violence is the site of human being. In the same ways as action is always mediated, human being is always mediated by its involving the plurality of human actions.⁶

In a general sense what marks self/other relations is the possible refusal of alterity; hence the force of Cain's question. Refusal is a form of mediation. That refusal extends as much to the other as it does to oneself. Indeed, it is this twofold extension that indicates how the refusal needs to be understood. Refusal is not as simple as the denial of alterity. It also brings with it the denial of sameness. There is no pure alterity. What emerges therefore as a generalized position is that any form of original purity is impossible. This is not because there is a founding trace that marks the origin but because any form of actualization is a mediation. In this context, there is only the co-presence sameness and alterity. The other is both same and other. What makes ethics ethos is that the predicament of human being is that the other is both same and other. What exists as an inherent possibility is the refusal of this founding complexity. Cain's question needs to be rewritten. It is not as though the already present nature of self/other relations has to be recognized, it is also the case that the relations mark out the self's relation to itself. Care becomes an original condition. It is not a duty to the other that has a ground outside that which determines human being, but emerges because of the ineliminable self/other relations that define human being.⁷ What potential means in this context is that which allows for its own interruption as the moment in which an act takes place. Precisely, because the self/other relation constitutes human being that act may involve refusal; refusal may take the form of violence.

Cain's question therefore is the mark of a refusal. That fratricide is a possibility entails nothing more or less than the denial of the other's presence as that which is given

in the continual oscillation between same and other. The continuity of an oscillation allowing for individuation – allowing, that is, for subjectivity – means that the source of violence is as much the refusal of sameness as it is of alterity. To insist that a face on the level of its appearance is completely other is to deny those elements that remain the same.⁸ To insist that it is the same is to deny its alterity. (Outside of pragmatic determinations neither element can be privileged.) Human being involves the continuity of a negotiation with that which is, *ab initio*, same and different. Violence is not refusal *tout court* since violence is always mediated. Rather, violence is a form that refusal can take. While a great deal more needs to be adduced in order to develop how the primordially of self/other relations is to be understood, a link between that relation and what was identified above as the sameness of identity needs to be introduced at this point.⁹

Prior to proceeding with establishing this link a note need to be added on individuality. The reason for its addition is straightforward. It may seem that counterposed to all essentialising moves is the individual. The individual would be prior to any attribution of identity; moreover the individual would have the status of being unique. What is unique has to be prior and have priority over all other attributions of identity. The difficulty with the term individual is that it is an abstraction. The individual has to be identified as that individual and in being thus identified the individual can be named. However, precisely, because the individual cannot control or have mastery over everything that is done with that name, or in the name of that name – and here there is an important opening up of the individual to the philosophical and political problem of proper names – what this indicates is the extent to which, even at the limit, the proper name is subject to the same process of individuation that yields subjectivity. Individuality is an abstraction that once given specificity brings questions of identity and alterity into play. It is not as though there is any particularity marked out by the assertion of individuality.

4.

What was identified above, as the sameness of identity can be understood as that move which attributes identity. The position from which the attribution is made is always

external to the group being identified; moreover the group may be constituted as such by the ascription of an identity. Once discrimination is 'legitimated' by its inscription in legislation, once it occupies the realm of popular culture by its incorporation into a chant or slogan, those named within it are given an identity.¹⁰ While that identity may be contested, or as is more likely it's meaning refused, what occurs to the group, thus determined, takes place as a result of the ascription of that identity. For the National Socialist there were exact regulations determining who was a Jew and who was not. The ascription of being a Jew was sufficient to deny German citizenship. (German citizenship had been 'legally' removed from Jews by the Nuremberg laws.) While not as rigorous, nor necessarily as horrifying, it remains the case that tests for the right to obtain or maintain citizenship continue to exist. The difficulty with arguments to do with autonomy as an end in itself occurs at this precise point insofar as the condition for autonomy may be the very moments of particularity that are effaced in its acquisition.

The terrorist attack positions those against whom it is launched as the same. In a brute physical sense this is the nature of the bomb blast. It is not anonymous flesh that is damaged or blown apart. It is always determined and thus mediated flesh. (Flesh is only ever embodied.) And, as has already been suggested, this may be in response to a similar though not necessarily as violent an ascription of the sameness of identity. What is occurring in such a situation therefore would be clash between forced conceptions of identity. Both forms of actions – the terrorist attack and that which may have prompted it – are themselves acts with ends. In neither case would it be possible to give an abstract or generalized account of these ends. Each instance would be specific. And yet, even in allowing for that specificity is there a ground of judgment outside mere political utility; the utility of ends and means? The starkest question to which terrorism gives rise is the possibility of judgment that takes the setting – the complex of interarticulations identified above – into real consideration? The point needs to be made clear. There is no attempt to develop a justification. Rather, the real question is the ground of judgment; i.e. developing a ground from which any condemnation of an act of terrorism would take place. (Again it should be remembered that terrorism is as much the province of states – even democratically elected states – as it is of those branded 'terrorists' by such states.)

The ground of judgment has to be one that recognizes the particularity of terrorist violence. What then is the relationship between the act of terror and the primordially of self/other relations? What is the connection between Cain's question and acts of terror? The answer cannot be that terror undermines self/other relations. Or that terror strikes against humanity. Both claims involve a generalization or an abstraction that cannot be substantiated. Both the primordially of self/other relations and any claim about humanity (where the latter claim is understood as referring to the being of being human) cannot be posed in complete differentiation from the continuity of their actualization. What the primordially of the self/other relation entails – and this will be the case no matter what particularity is given to that relation – is a site of activity. It is not just that action involves the other or that it involves alterity of necessity. It is more emphatically that actions involve sites of negotiation. Actions begin to make up social being. The judgment of actions concerns the way they allow the continuity of social being to hold together. Part of that holding together is the possibility of activity within the domain of social being. If, for example, all women, Muslims, Palestinians, are restricted in virtue of an essentialising form of identity attributed to them, then this is not wrong because it infringes upon their autonomy, or their individual liberty. It is an act that can be judged as it signals a failure to negotiate the primordially of self/other relation. Acts of restriction or exclusion that are based on the identity of sameness are premised on a refusal to accept the predicament of human being. Expressed in this way means that attempts to rectify the situation – or even to engage with such situations – cannot take place as though all that were necessary were arguments to do with equality. Equality – understood as a version of sameness is fundamental – and yet it cannot be assumed as an end itself. Arguments and practices be they philosophical, cultural and political, will be different if they seek to maintain the primordially of self/other relations than ones based on securing (or negatively opposing) equality.

In terms of the possibility of judgment – a possibility bound up as much with evaluation as it is with the formulation of policy – that the difference between what allows for the ineliminable presence of self/other relations, and the position that seeks to

overcome them in the name of sameness, can be rewritten in terms of a difference between dissymmetry and symmetry. Maintaining dissymmetry involves working with more than the already present status of difference. There are two components to this position. The first is that maintaining involves activity. Since the differences in questions cannot be resolved but provide a continual state of negotiation, what is important are the activities, which, while allowing for pragmatic closures, nonetheless hold the sites of negotiation as continually open. The second pertains to how there could be a justification for such a set up. In other words, what will provide the basis for this maintenance? The answer to this question has to do with the being of being human. Dissymmetry has to be understood as the original condition.¹¹ Given this original condition the response it can be said to envisage is one that is characterized by an affirmed reconciliation to irreconcilability. What would stand opposed to maintaining this set up would be the attempt to efface it in the name of symmetry. Again what is being adumbrated here is the context in which the terrorist act occurs.

The terrorist act refuses, in the first place, the maintenance of dissymmetry as that which entails an endless negotiation with ineliminable difference; a negotiation always interrupted by the pragmatic necessity for decisions. In the second place what is also refused is any conception of symmetry other than one driven by the identity of sameness. The terrorist act has as its end a synthetic political realm. Instituted in the name of a synthetic unity for a synthetic unity. This will account for why there is an important connection between the conception of identity at work within “ethnic cleansing” and the terrorist act. While the terrorist attack involves these two different forms of refusal it only acquires particularity once it is brought into conjunction with what has already been described as the identity of sameness. The throwing of a bomb turn all against whom it is thrown into the same; i.e. they comprise the same object of attack and what is attacked is one and the same. It is an attack that refuses any type of negotiation; that refusal, in using the form of violence, is the most emphatic form that refusal can take. While the terrorist attack may seek justification in the claim that it is the only possible response to actions – perhaps even State sanctioned actions which themselves may warrant the description ‘terrorist’ – that themselves fail to discriminate and in so doing construct an identity of

sameness, the justification will fail precisely because the refusal to negotiate differences is not a response to the refusal to negotiate differences. What will interrupt an initial refusal is the continual insistence on how a state can be brought about in which a reconciliation to irreconcilability will predominate.

The terrorist act can be identified as the act of violence that enforces an identity of sameness and in which the nature of the act can give rise to no other response than that of violence. (The response may be another attack though in greater probability it will be an act 'legitimated' by a state and justified by either national or international law.) Both the terrorist act and such a response – a response open to the charge of terrorism - are both characterized as forms of violence that are structured to refuse the possibility of negotiation. And here it is necessary to see a real confluence between pragmatic negotiations and the endless negotiation demanded by the primordality of self/other relations.

Finally, it should be noted that the point made above concerning different analyses giving rise to different cultural and political practices is central here. Once it can be argued that the response to the denial of difference is the affirmation of differences – and what that means as a strategic possibility will differ, of necessity, from one context to another – then the political and cultural activity flowing from it will be markedly different from those linked to the bomb or the bull dozer. The affirmation and the denial of difference has to be understood in terms of self/other relations which in being maintained enjoin the continuity envisaged by the formulation reconciliation to irreconcilability.

5.

What is essential, and what has been attempted in the argument presented above, is that the terms "terrorism" and "terrorist" not be identified with actions of a specific group, as though this attribution provided either a proper account of what terrorism is, or an adequate description of the nature of the group. Identifications of this form do not stem from any real political analysis of the causes of such actions, and nor would they

account for why the terminology of terrorism would be used to describe them. The only way of circumventing the charge and counter charge of terrorism is by giving an account of terrorism that situates it within the context of social being. What has to be precluded is the move that would seek to justify a specific act – and again this claim will have to be true for both parties to any real conflict - by arguing that is the inevitable outcome of a particular political or cultural situation. The reason that such an approach has to fail is two fold. The first is that it works without any attempt to give an account of terrorism independently of its uses as a tactic by particular groups or states. Secondly, and relatedly, the impossibility of resolving the problem of relativity is that the situation in which terrorism is possible and where some would seek to justify it is reproduced. Holding relativity to one side involves working with the recognition that terrorism is on the one hand bound up with the philosophical problem of identity, and equally has to be accounted for in terms of the nature of the relationship between violence and the primordially of self/other relations. Once those relations are understood in terms of a founding and ineliminable dissymmetry - a dissymmetry that, while allowing for violence as a potential is also sundered by such violence - then what this engenders is the ground in terms of which actions and policy can be judged. The challenge presented by terrorism is to develop a conception of judgment that escapes the hold of both moralism and the politics of gestures. This can occur once it becomes possible to draw on speech. Speech needs to be understood as marking that which ties social being to the primordially of self/other relations. Speech is the condition in which the endlessness of negotiation becomes possible. Maintaining speech, holding to its site, is to allow for that openness in which a reconciliation to irreconcilability can continue.

¹ Hannah Arendt. On Revolution. Penguin Books. Harmondsworth. page 18-19.

² One of the most emphatic presentations of this position is found in Schmitt's argument that "the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy". Carl Schmitt. The Concept of the Political. (trans George Schwab). University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1996. Page 26.

³ It is not his “brother’s blood” that has been split, the text is more complex, but his “brother’s bloods”. Most commentators understood the plural to denote his “possible descendents” (Rashi) Even on a ‘literal’ reading therefore the text opens beyond the moment.

⁴ Even though Arendt does not draw a distinction between the fratricide involving Cain and Able from the one involving Romulus and Remus, it is important, even for her own argument, to distinguish between them. The former affirms the impossibility of a position defined outside the realm of the social, while the latter locates the myth or origin outside sociality as its condition of existence. The latter therefore is mythic in structure.

⁵ It is clear that Ode to Man (330-375) in Sophocles’s Antigone, is central in order to understand this potential. For Sophocles human being’s capacity for acting in a way that places it beyond that which defines its being is part of what makes a given individual the strangest of the strange. Acting in a way that is contrary to an understanding of the political nature of justice – and here the political can involve respect for divine justice - means that the one who acts is, in virtue of those actions. Being without a "polis" need not be taken literally. The state of affairs it suggests is a refusal on the part of the agent to act in accord with the propriety sanctioned, if not demanded by the being of being human. Despite its problematic status the most philosophically significant commentary on this passage of the play is Heidegger’s. See Martin Heidegger. An Introduction to Metaphysics. (translated by Ralph Manheim) Yale University Press. New Have. Pages 146-65.

⁶ Taking this position a stage further necessitates developing an ontology of original plurality. While it cannot be argued for here I have attempted such an undertaking in The Plural Event. Routledge. London. 1993.

⁷ Allowing care such a role opens up two different t areas of investigation. The first would be to at the role played by “care” (Sorge) in Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit. The point of of investigation would be the the conception of identity and relatedness that emeeded in that context. The other would be to look at the construction of “care” (souci) developed by Foucault in Le Souci de soi.

⁸ That faces and bodies must always be the interaction of genders, races, ethnicities, abilities, disabilities will involve a complexity far greater than the simple logic of oppositions male/female, white/ black, able bodied /disabled, etc can provide. Here is the point at which a thinking of difference can take on a more directly political role. Again however the philosophical question concerns how difference is thought given that difference cannot be simply posited. Pursuing this complexity can take many forms: see, amongst many others, Jean-Luc Nancy L’”il y a” du rapport sexuel; Cronenburg Crash; Partrick White The Twyborn Affair; Franz Kafak Metamorphoses; Arthur Miller Focus.

⁹ It would be at this point that an engagement with Levinas would need to take place. When for example Levinas argues for an “original irreducibility” as a way of describing

the relation between self and other, the problematic element is how this apartness is to be understood. Dissymmetry, which is key to the relation is being presented the context of this paper in terms of an ‘apartness’ that is also an ‘a apartness’. In “Transcendence et hauteur” (in Liberté et commandement. Fata Morganna. Cognac. 1994). in regards to a concern with the “rights of man” Levinas argues that;

Le droit de l’homme qu’il s’agit ainsi de faire reconnaître est le droit d’un Moi. L’homme est conçu comme un moi ou comme un citoyen - jamais dans l’originalité irréductible de son altérité à laquelle citoyen n’accède pas dans la réciprocité et la symétrie.⁹

The right of man that is of concern has to be recognised as the right of an ego/self/I. Man is conceived as an ego/self or as a citizen. Never in terms of the original irreducibility of his alterity to which the citizen never accedes except in terms of reciprocity and symmetry. (page 42)

While the argument for a founding dissymmetry is accepted that dissymmetry has to be set in the context of an original relatedness.

¹⁰ There is, of course, an extra dimension that needs to be introduced here. Part of what is involved in the ascription of identity – the sameness of identity – signals the general presence of the crisis of identity. One of the disturbing elements is that the racist gains identity in hating. Racism is not the same as terrorism nonetheless the link between them is the crisis of identity. For an important psychoanalytic investigation of racism that is concerned with crisis of identity is Daniel Sibony. Le “racisme” ou la haine identitaire. Editions de seuil. Paris. 1997.

¹¹ This is not to argue that this original condition is the state of nature. Nor is it to suggest that it is pre-social. The force of Arendt’s Aristotelianism is that it locates human being within the realm of the polis and thus as always already engaged with the complex relationship between polis and nomos.