For the sake of the good: id es, of truth (science [not technology]); beauty (art); love (intelletuals as 'love of the world')

I. My background
   A. Greek philosophy, ethics: interest in Arendt is ethical – the nature of thinking; of thinking about the human life.
      1. Eaglestone, in his talk: “She doesn’t talk about ethics very much.”
   B. Integrity project: the institutional, social and psychological preconditions for integrity and consequences of lacking it.

II. “The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.” (OT, ‘RoM’, 296-97)
   A. This is not something anyone can just seize; the conditions for it are not completely under an individual’s control
      1. But be recognized in order to be so
      2. Recognition requires particularization
         - “The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human.” (OT, ‘RoM’, 300)
   B. To be recognizably human, one must belong to some community or another. It is this community, I want to suggest, which enables persons to imagine (or disables us from imagining) forms of the fine for the sake of which to act and speak freely.
      1. It is because it enables us to conceive of the fine in some way or another that it creates the space within which persons can take a place, and so engage in significant speech and effective action.
      2. Because humans are distinguished to each other from other animals by their ability to conceive of a fineness that is not determined by biological necessity, some distinct community and language through with to conceive and articulate some particular form of fineness or another is necessary for us to recognize each other as human.

III. Freedom from Necessity: The political and the private.
   A. Familiar and apt in Arendt’s account of the Greeks, particularly of the Athenians
      1. That freedom is a quite distinct and foremost good;
      2. that this freedom is freedom from necessity;
      3. that the ‘necessity’ from which the free person is free is biological necessity, and everything that pertains to it.
B. Arendt relies especially on Aristotle in making the distinction. But it is in Aristotle that it is perhaps clearest that freedom is not just freedom from necessity. The freedom that could be worthwhile, that it could possibly be worth organizing the whole of life (both private and public) around, is freedom to act, speak and think for the sake of the fine.

1. Arendt picks this up of course, in her references to ‘saying great words and doing great deeds’ (e.g. *HC*, 35 ‘the shining exposure of great deeds’) – For the freedom of a *polis*, Arendt writes (*HC*, 30), ‘for the freedom of world’ (*HC*, 31 of *having* a world, not the world’s freedom). But this bland formulation suffers the same defect as the naked human: it offers us no sense in which words and deeds can be ‘great’. What is ‘greatness’ in speech and action? This is especially acute for us today, because lack of any conception of greatness – of what would make action a fine one, what sort of words are noble to speak – makes us unwilling to acknowledge that this could be a criterion or a desideratum of political life today.

2. What Arendt’s account also leaves out is that there was dissent and confusion within the Greek world, within Athenian public discourse and practice, precisely over what one was free for when one was free from necessity. This can be cast as a debate over what was the truly ‘fine’ or noble state for one to aspire to.

   - In the background is the greatness of Achilles: Even if his greatness consists partly in his ability to command speech in an effective and inspiring way, it is not incidental that this speech stirs one with its appreciation of and lust for glory, a particularly martial good.
   
   a. Odysseus was acknowledged to be able to speak well; but he was not heroic, and not great. He was a trickster, using his words and wiles to evade demonstrating the superiority in battle and direct confrontation required for glory.
   
   b. Achilles was great because Hector was great, and he overcame Hector. Yes, because he was willing to risk his life to demonstrate this superiority – this courage is not irrelevant; but the contest, and winning it, is the primary thing. The Trojans were great, and so the Greeks who overcame them even greater, because they could risk their lives and defeat the enemy in battle. This is an ineliminably martial conception of the ‘fine’, and there is no requirement that the ‘cause’ for which one fights be an especially noble one, according to some other standard of ‘noble’. (In fact, fighting over the kidnap of one’s wife was not considered a particularly noble cause at all.)

   - It is against this archaic, martial idea of ‘the fine’ that the Greek moralists – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – were reacting. To them, freedom is, on some version or another, the exercise of one’s highest and distinctively human faculties to their fullest. This is actually Aristotle’s account of the good for the sake of which the political art arranges things, and this is why war and all its greatness and glory are in fact for the sake of peace, and peace for the sake of contemplation.

   a. Although she takes her cue so much from Aristotle, and in spite of the fact that she does not say so explicitly, it seems hard to shake the impression that Arendt suffers from a nostalgia for the archaic Greek view when she writes of ‘speaking great words and doing great deeds’ (see her description of the necessarily agonistic nature of the Greek *polis*-life she idealises, *HC* 41) – and that however embedded within her historical discussion, there is ultimately no another conception on offer of what could make actions and words great or fine.
b. This is expressed already in her choice to describe such deeds as ‘great’, rather than ‘fine’. Aristotle’s virtue, active and contemplative, is ‘for the sake of to kalon’ – the fine, the noble, the beautiful; Athenian gentlemen of leisure were not, as we freely translate, ‘the great and the good’, but in fact kalos ka’agathos: fine and good.

i. ‘Great’ as a translation of kalon misses out entirely that realm of freedom governed by beauty.

- But Plato and Aristotle did not command universal assent with their conception of freedom as for the sake of the best exercise of our finest faculties. Their view was opposed to another prevailing view of freedom from necessity – namely freedom to exercise power by indulging whatever desires one happened to have. This is Callicles’ conception of greatness when he says the great man is the one who allows his desires to grow as great as possible – far beyond, and free from the constraints of any necessity – and has the power to satisfy them.

a. This is an intelligible form of freedom from the necessities of life, yet one which Arendt’s way of distinguishing public and private barely allows to come to light. Thus Arendt distinguishes social and political, for instance, as the difference between aiming at happiness and aiming at freedom (e.g. OR, 55). But that was not how the Greeks saw it. On both accounts freedom was happiness – the difference, and their dispute, is over whether happiness consists in free indulgence of superfluous desires (to ‘turn whichever way you like’ as Plato puts it), or in the free exercise of one’s higher faculties (and what those higher, or distinctively human, faculties were).

b. This dispute within Athenian views of ‘the fine’ shows that promoting the good of ‘freedom’ necessarily opens a further question of what freedom is for, and what the good is. ‘For the sake of freedom’ is not an adequate determination of the aim of any action.

c. And this should interest us particularly, I think, because it is often Callicles’ conception of the good of freedom that we default to today. Suspicious of asserting anything to play the role of Plato’s ‘good’, and unwilling to assert anything about what our ‘higher faculties’ and their ‘highest use’ might be, we take autonomy and freedom from necessity to be the freedom to do whatever we want – without consideration of what it is noble or fine to want.

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1 “the revolution had changed its direction; it aimed no longer at freedom, the goal of the revolution had become the happiness of the people”. (The section ‘The Pursuit of Happiness’ in On Revolution is perhaps more subtle? “the American usage which, especially in the eighteenth century, spoke of ‘public happiness’, where the French spoke of ‘public freedom’, suggests this difference quite appropriately. The point is that the Americans knew that public freedom consisted in having a share in public business, and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else. They knew very well, and John Adams was bold enough to formulate this knowledge time and again, that the people went to the town assemblies, as their representatives later were to go to the famous Conventions, neither exclusively because of duty nor, and even less, to serve their own interests but most of all because they enjoyed the discussions, the deliberations, and the making of decisions. What brought them together was ‘the world and the public interest of liberty’ (Harrington), and what moved them was ‘the passion for distinction’ which John Adams held to be ‘more essential and remarkable’ than any other human faculty”, 119)
IV. Calliclean self-indulgence cuts across Arendt’s categories in an illuminating way: for it is private, but it is in no way bound by necessity or the demands of life. It ought make no claim to be a politically worthy goal, or belong to the domain of freedom properly so called.

A. This was Plato’s argument – but he had to argue for it. Arendt’s way of distinguishing public/private, and neglecting to consider what any freedom worth the name is for, actually makes it harder for us to see why this should be excluded. What is not great and admirable about Callicles’ great man, who has the freedom to allow his desires to grow as large as possible and to constantly satisfy them?

1. If we want to deny this is great, or fine, or noble, we need some conception of what is great, fine, noble, worthwhile, admirable; and

2. Simply the fact of being free from biological necessity will not suffice here.
   - [an afterthought: Billy Budd discussion. Arendt wants to positively banish absolute good, orientation towards it, from the realm of the political just as life’s necessities are to be banished.]

B. Achilles is no longer inspiring to us as a model of greatness; neither Solon nor Pericles is convincing. What we admire more, what we need most, perhaps, are those who can recover a sense of nobility – something that can make life meaningful, instead of just pleasant or unpleasant. This is where a social/political distinction is both helpful and limited.

1. Helpful: We moderns, with our social mentality, are not wrong to think that a more comfortable life – at least the basic comforts of life being as widely distributed as possible – is a communal concern, and a concern of good governance. But this is a subordinate end. Life must be possible before it can become meaningful.
   - the ‘household’ demands of necessity are worth communal attention because they are the precondition for the having any conception at all of the fine – of what makes life meaningful, human, worth living.
   - And Arendt acknowledges that “man cannot participate in affairs of the world without a location which [is] properly his own” (HC, 29-30); but without attention to the role played by having a conception of the fine, the honourable, the worthy, the good, it is unclear why and how community is a precondition of any such place (besides OT, ‘RoM’, see also HC, 25).

2. Limited: And yet, the ‘social’ end is not just instrumentally good to the political end of freedom. Others flourishing ‘biologically’ – being within a community of people who are not driven by necessity and so have the opportunity to conceive of what life might be for – is good for me, but not biologically. That is, ‘the public good’ – that second-rate goal of the equitable distribution of necessities for life – frees people to participate authentically in genuine public discourse and pursuit of the fine. And that there should be wide and multi-vocal participation is part of my freedom. Without other participants, my own speech is meaningless, my actions irrelevant, and my freedom non-existent, because the place for such freedom is created by the distance and the discourse between persons.

3. Further, authentic participation requires drawing on – but not being determined by – one’s personal, private, social experiences of the human. There is no naked human experience, and no aspiration to such articulation could be intelligible to us. Without drawing on the particular and attempting to bring it to shared articulation, there can be no conceiving of the fine, the noble, the good or great for the sake of which we might speak and act freely. [1841]
this place is more secure, and its freedom finer, the more of the human it can encompass. Community and society: To be recognizably human, one must belong to some community or another – not just a state structure, but a common culture. But even the social is an ineliminable part of this. For, after all, that we all must satisfy the necessities of life in some way or another is a shared fact about us; and so it is through our having some distinctively human way or another of pursuing these we become recognizably human to one another. It is in general through the particularities that create a shared world between people that we can conceive of the 'fine', have articulate and meaningful disputes about it, and reach greater (if incomplete) clarity about the forms it can take.

- And these modes of particularization cannot be neatly circumscribed as 'public' and 'private'

- and it is a concern of everyone that life should be able to have some meaning or another. So it is a concern of everyone to put the preconditions for that in place.

Is that too obscure? The idea is to look at the notion that community is the necessary condition for humanity being recognized and being able to come to articulation; that this expression of humanity consists in effective action and significant speech. And then to turn to the public/private distinction, and the 'social' which she says cuts unhelpfully across and against this, with the question: What are the institutions, practices and so on which create and enable (or undermine and disable) community in the relevant sense.

If it turns out that she has so defined 'the political' that it could - in principle, and not just contingently - never be satisfied, then perhaps we should look again at some of the oppositions (particularly between biological life/necessity and political life/freedom) and see whether there is some way (or some conditions under which) they could be co-ordinated rather than opposed.