

THE MARTYR AS THE VANISHING POINT FOR A NEW POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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PROLOGUE: TO BEGIN WITH SPEAKING OF THE ECONOMY

By Necessity

Aristotle's imperative "to begin with speaking of the economy"¹ may be interpreted as directed at anyone who engages in political philosophy. This interpretation is supported by the context in which the imperative appears: "And now that it is clear what the components of the *polis* are, it is necessary to begin with speaking of the economy, for every *polis* is composed of *oikiai*."² Aristotle himself adhered to this imperative in his *Politics*: after accounting for the constituent parts of the *polis*, he discusses economy and its relation to politics; only then does he turn to speak of politics in and for itself.

According to another possible interpretation, what is necessary is not only to begin with speaking of the economy, but to speak of an economy that is born of

¹ "ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον περὶ οἰκονομίας εἰπεῖν," Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253b.

² "ἐπεὶ δὲ φανερόν ἐξ ὧν μορίων ἡ πόλις συνέστηκεν, ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον περὶ οἰκονομίας εἰπεῖν: πᾶσα γὰρ σύγκειται πόλις ἐξ οἰκιῶν." Ibid.

necessity.³ Such was the view in Greek-speaking antiquity, where economy meant the prudent dispensation of the bare necessities of life, which were shared by humans with the rest of creation and managed within the bounds of the *oikos*. As Aristotle saw it, the prudent management of the abundant means of survival, supplied by nature herself, could generate a surplus of leisure time to be spent outside the boundaries of the economic sphere in the nobler activities of philosophy and politics.⁴

An economy more divine than many think

My work will begin... with the economy—which is loftier and greater than human conception... For it is necessary... for one who proposes to write a history of the *ecclesia* to begin with the very origin of Christ, an economy more divine than many think.⁵

Christian philosophers abided by Aristotle's imperative to begin by speaking of the economy. They did so "with a view to an economy suitable to the fullness of ages, that is, to recapitulate all in Christ,"⁶ endowing the concept of economy with new meanings. The term was used by the Church Fathers to describe "the economy of the mystery which from eternity has been hid in God."⁷ Consequently, instead of designating the boundaries of the earthly *oikos*,

³ This view is most associated with Hannah Arendt, who described the economic sphere as born of and ruled by necessity. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 28-51.

⁴ For a detailed description of the art and theory of ancient Greek economic thought, see: Dotan Leshem, "Oikonomia Redefined," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (2013): 43-61; idem, "The Ancient Art of Economics," *European Journal for the History of Economic Thought* (2014): 201-229.

⁵ Eusebius, "Church History," in *NPNF2-01*, edited by Philip Schaff. *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 1:8-9.

⁶ "εις οικονομιαν του πληρωματος των καιρων ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι τα παντα εν τω χριστω." Ephesians 1:10.

⁷ Ephesians 3:9.

economy was now seen as dispensed within (and defining) the boundaries of the heavenly *politeuma*.⁸ It was according to the economy of God that the apostle was made a minister of the Church, in order to fulfill His Word⁹ by enlightening all on the meaning of the economy of the mystery.¹⁰ A radical transformation occurs in the nature of the thing economized. While in pre-Christian Greek antiquity the economized objects are the necessities sustaining the life process itself, things common to humans and to all other living beings, according to the Church Fathers, it is the divine within man that is economized—that is, that which man and God hold in common.

Following Paul, Christian philosophers did not abide by the second interpretation of Aristotle's imperative; they did not maintain that the economy was born of necessity. They believed, on the contrary, that His economy begins with freedom. They perceived the economy as originating in the speech-act of God the Father, whereby He freely begot his Son,¹¹ who, in turn, willingly incarnated.¹² Thus, while complying with Aristotle's imperative to begin with speaking of the economy, the Christian philosophers conferred on us a choice: either an economy that is born of necessity, or one that originates in an act of free will.

⁸ Philippians 3:20.

⁹ See Colossians 1:25: “ἡς ἐγενομένην ἐγὼ διακονοῦν κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεισάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.”

¹⁰ Ephesians 3:9.

¹¹ For the first formulation of this view, see Tatian, “Address to the Greeks,” in *ANF02* edited by Philip Schaff, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (Entire) (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 5.1-5.3. Later on, Christian Orthodoxy confined economy to the *mimesis* of the divine act of begetting as performed by the God-Bearer Mary in the incarnation. As Verna Harrison describes it: “This parallel between the Father and the Virgin officially entered the Church's dogma through its inclusion in the Chalcedonian Definition [...] Her parenthood is the most exact human icon of the divine fatherhood.” Verna Harrison, “The Fatherhood of God in Orthodox Theology,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 37, nos. 2-3 (1993): 185-212.

¹² On incarnation as economy, see George Léonard Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964), 102-3.

Free to choose by necessity

Ironically, while designating the economy as the sphere in which people practice free choice, contemporary economic theory follows Aristotle by rooting the economy in existential necessity.¹³ Neither *oikos* nor *ecclesia*, the economic sphere is now conceived as encompassing any psychic and social action that is governed by a specific type of "relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses [...] So far as the achievement of any end is dependent on scarce means, it is germane to the preoccupations of the economist."¹⁴ The type of relationship specified by the economic approach to human behavior configures¹⁵ humans as prudent utility-maximizers.¹⁶ Thrown by the "worldly philosophers" into a world of scarcity, *homo econmicus* is made to choose in a prudent manner between competing ends. Thus, paradoxically, the economic sphere is constituted as a sphere in which we are free to choose by necessity.

In each of these economies, people chose to attribute the excess they are bound to face throughout their lives to different origins. In classical Greek antiquity, excess was attributed to the circularity of nature; in the Christian economy, it is believed to originate in the Godhead. In contemporary economics, excess is believed to be located within humans themselves, in their desires that know no limits, and which are held responsible for the modern

¹³ For a comparative analysis of Ancient and contemporary economics, See Dotan Leshem, "Aristotle Economizes the Market," *Boundary-2* 40, no. 3 (2013): 39-57.

¹⁴ Lionel Robbins, *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (3 ed.; London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1935). This definition became commonplace and appears in most economic textbooks, according to Mark Blaug, *The Methodology of Economics: Or how Economists Explain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 87; Wade D. Hands, *Reflection Without Rules: Economic Theory and Contemporary Science Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Israel Kirzner, "Human Nature and the Character of Economic Science," *The Harvard Review Of Philosophy* 8 (2000): 14-23.

¹⁵ See Michel Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics," in *The Laws of the Market*, edited by Michel Callon (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1998), 1-57.

¹⁶ See Garry Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 4-14.

condition of scarcity. But while the topos of the economic sphere has changed dramatically over the years, from the ancient Oikos, via the Christian ecclesia, to the all-encompassing rise of the Social, one basic feature remained the same: Economy delineates a sphere of human existence in which excess is prudently and justly managed.¹⁷

Table 1: Aristotelian, Christian and Contemporary Economies

PARAMETER/ECONOMY	ARISTOTELIAN	CHRISTIAN	CONTEMPORARY
ORIGIN OF EXCESS	Nature's circularity	The Godhead	Human wants
SPHERE	Oikos	Ecclesia	The Social
TO BEGIN WITH	Necessity	Freedom	Necessity
MODE OF CONDUCT	Prudent & just	Prudent & just	Prudent & just
THE THING ECONOMIZED	Life process	Freedom	Each need and every desire indiscriminately

An economy more human than many think

Abiding by Aristotle's imperative to begin with speaking of the economy, the rest of the paper attempts to cast Arendt as offering in her *Report on the Banality of Evil* a radical re-secularization of the Christian concept of the economy, this time rooted in existential freedom. By doing so, we may be able to address “the problem of conscience, in a purely secular context, without faith in an all-knowing and all-caring God who will pass a final judgment on life on earth.” Arendt continues, contextualizing this problem as part of the more general

¹⁷ For a more detailed account, see Dotan Leshem, “The pre-Modern Origins of the Economy,” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 34, no. 2 (2012): 262-4.

“question whether conscience can exist in a secular society and play a role in secular politics. And it is also the question whether morality as such has an earthly reality.”¹⁸

A. INTRODUCTION: THE VANISHING POINT

Hannah Arendt's late discovery, which she accounted for in her “*report on the banality of evil*,”¹⁹ is that, contrary to what she had written in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,²⁰ “The holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story.”²¹ This argument has received substantial scholarly attention. But something that is essentially crucial was deduced from her late insight, and the nature of that thing is implied a few lines further down in the very same paragraph, when she argues:

For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody's grasp [...] Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.²²

Following a presentation of Arendt's “personas theory” in Part B, I demonstrate in Part C how the discovery that *the holes of oblivion do not exist and that one man will always be left alive to tell the story* re-orders the mode by which the three personas—the legal, the moral, and the political—are stripped from *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human* in the “novel form of government” introduced into our world by totalitarianism. A radical change in

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” *Social Research* 71, no. 3 (2004): 439.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1994).

²¹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 232-33.

²² Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 233. See also, Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949-1975* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 147; Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 434-35.

the order of the unmasking of the personas is deduced from the non-existence of the holes of oblivion; the kernel of this shift lies in the discovery that the moral persona, to which the martyr is revealed in the gaze of the spectator, forms an icon and cannot be unmasked from the face of humans. Thus, contrary to Giorgio Agamben's claim that the thing revealed in the "particular condition of life that is the camp"²³ is "bare life," what is truly revealed is the moral persona.

Based on my analysis of what is deduced from Arendt's change of heart, I aim in Part D to situate the vanishing point for a new political philosophy in the witness, who ensures that the moral persona cannot be unmasked. The vanishing point, as conceived by renaissance artists, is a point found on the horizon in which parallel lines converge, thus co-ordinating space and placing everything into perspective by forming a point. By secularizing the persona of the martyr, I argue, we may be able to establish such a vanishing point on the *economic* horizon (misrepresented in Arendt's account of the rise of the social²⁴), in which the parallel lines of *politics* and *philosophy* converge, thus ordering human communal spheres of existence. As testified by Arendt, such a reordering of space is indispensable, because

We live today in a world in which not even common sense makes sense any longer. The breakdown of common sense in the present world signals that philosophy and politics, their old conflict notwithstanding,²⁵ have suffered the same fate. And that means that the problem of philosophy and politics, or the necessity for a new political philosophy from which could come a new science of politics, is once more on the agenda.²⁶

²³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 120.

²⁴ As argued in Dotan Leshem, "The Distinction between Economy and Politics in Aristotle's Thought and the Rise of the Social," *Constellations*, forthcoming.

²⁵ For a short history of the role played by the concept of economy in the old conflict between philosophy and politics prior to the rise of Christianity, see Dotan Leshem, "Oikonomia in the Age of Empires," *History of the Human Sciences* 26, no. 1(2013): 39-44.

²⁶ Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 453.

In Part E, I seek to illuminate precisely what is revealed in the gaze of the spectators at the tormented flesh of the martyr who, facing political rulership, chooses truth over life. As testified by two of the Church Fathers, the element revealed in the gaze of the spectator towards the vanishing point that the martyr brings forth is *the economy of human nature*.

In the concluding section, I argue that the new political philosophy that Arendt placed once more on the agenda must *begin with speaking of the economy* as a glorious and mysterious partnership in a thing that is alien to us beyond recognition, a thing in which, despite its ontological alienness, we are capable of participating. Establishing the martyr as the vanishing point from which we may be able to constitute a new political philosophy calls for a return to Diotima's discourse of love begetting philosophical tradition. Such a reconstitution will turn our gaze to the different means of self-perpetuation by *begetting on a beautiful thing by means of body and soul*,²⁷ as enumerated by Diotima's students.

B. THE THREE HUMAN PERSONAS

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt studies the condition of appearance of "the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human"²⁸ in the totalitarian camps, which, as she argued, was the greatest danger for "the survivors of the extermination camps, the inmates of concentration and internment camps, and even the comparatively happy stateless people."²⁹ Arendt's argument concerning the nature of the totalitarian regime can be presented as follows: totalitarianism is "a novel form of government" because it is the first form of government to cast from humanity any mode of being revealed in the personas in which humans appear in the gaze of spectator. The novelty of totalitarianism can be found in its capacity to prevent men and women from perpetuating themselves in the gaze of the spectator by arresting the possibility

²⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, 206b.

²⁸ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.

²⁹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 300.

of perpetuating the singular mode of the human being who, contrary to the cosmological order of things, is conducted along a rectilinear line.³⁰ It seems that the violent exposure to *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human* is the reason that Arendt argued that “the camps are the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power”³¹ that proved more “essential to the preservation of the regime’s power than any of its other institutions.”³² As presented by Arendt, the exposure of the human mode of being in its abstract nudity is carried out by the violent unmasking of first the legal, then the moral, and finally the political personas humans put on interchangeably, in the forms of governments preceding totalitarianism.

“The first essential step on the road to total domination is to kill the juridical person in man.”³³ The legal persona is unmasked from the face of the stateless people and those subjected to totalitarian government. This unmasking resulted in these individuals losing the “right to have rights,”³⁴ which brings forth three fateful exigencies. To begin with, the law no longer protects life itself.³⁵ Moreover, stateless people are denied the possibility of participating in a community bounded by law; that is, they are denied the possibility to appear in the political arena. Lastly, lacking a legal persona, these people cannot appeal to the courts. The loss of the legal persona that grants the law’s protection over life and bans humans from appearing in the political arena and courts is placed by Arendt as a prerequisite to the unmasking of the other two personas people put on (the moral and the political).

³⁰ Developed here by Hannah Arendt: “to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order [...] the human capacity to achieve this was remembrance, Mnemosyne, who therefore was regarded as the mother of all the other muses.” Hannah Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 42-43.

³¹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.

³² Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 456.

³³ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 447.

³⁴ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296.

³⁵ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 447-51.

In her presentation of the second persona stripped of naked human life, Arendt appoints the *martyr* as its icon:

The next decisive step in the preparation of living corpses is the murder of the moral person in man. This is done in the main by making martyrdom, for the first time in history, impossible: How many people here still believe that a protest has even historic importance? This skepticism is the real masterpiece of the SS. Their great accomplishment. They have corrupted all human solidarity. Here the night has fallen on the future. When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony. To demonstrate when death can no longer be postponed is an attempt to give death a meaning, to act beyond one's own death. In order to be successful, a gesture must have social meaning. There are hundreds of thousands of us here, all living in absolute solitude.³⁶

Before dwelling on the moral persona, I wish to present the third unmasking, which takes place only after the moral persona has already been stripped away, destroying any shred of singularity and individuality, "For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man's power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events."³⁷ In her later work, most explicitly in *The Human Condition*, such power is endowed by Arendt upon the political persona, a persona that Arendt views as "the hardest to destroy (and when destroyed is most easily repaired)."³⁸

³⁶ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 451.

³⁷ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 455.

³⁸ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 665.

Table 2: The “Persona theory” in *the Origins of Totalitarianism*

THE PERSONA UN-MASKED	LEGAL	MORAL	POLITICAL
ORDER OF UNMASKING	First	Second	Last
THE THING BEING ELIMINATED	Right to have rights	Martyrdom	Spontaneity
SPACE OF UN-MASKING	Refugee camp	Forced labor camp	Concentration camp
IMAGE	Hades	Purgatory	Hell
ORDER OF REHABILITATION	Last	Second	First

C. THE CHANGEOVER: THE MORAL PERSONA CANNOT BE UNMASKED

Since Arendt does not offer us a definition of what is martyrdom, made impossible in hell on earth, I'll use the following definition, as revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the tormented flesh of the martyr: martyrdom is an act of choosing truth over life in the face of political rule. It is described as such by Tatian:

Does the sovereign order the payment of tribute, I am ready to render it. Does my master command me to act as a bondsman and to serve, I acknowledge the serfdom. Man is to be honoured as a fellow-man; God alone is to be feared,—He who is not visible to human eyes, nor comes within the compass of human art. Only when I am commanded to deny Him, will I not obey, but will rather die than show myself false and ungrateful.³⁹

We can see that *making martyrdom, for the first time in history, impossible* amounts to the stripping of the persona in which human beings perpetuate truth

³⁹ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 4.

in the flesh as revealed in the gaze of the spectator. As testified by Rousset, whom Arendt quotes, *the real masterpiece of the SS* was not the denial of the human ability to die by putting an end to their own life. *Their great accomplishment* was denying the belief that there would be a testimony to *the attempt to give death a meaning, to act beyond one's own death*. The great achievement of the SS was that they managed to make the inmates of the camps believe that choosing truth over life would not be perpetuated, for the simple reason that for the potential martyr and spectators, the sheer idea that even *one man will always be left alive to tell the story* would have been virtually unthinkable.

Such is the background for the conversion Arendt underwent, bearing witness time and again to the testimonies that she gathered while preparing her *Report on the Banality of Evil*, which manifested in her assertion that *the holes of oblivion do not exist*. These testimonies are held responsible for the bottom line of her report: that martyrdom is always possible because *one man will always be left alive to tell the story*. Arendt's change of heart diametrically opposes Agamben's⁴⁰ generalization of Arendt's persona theory in *The Origins*, arguing that the "particular condition of life that is the camp"⁴¹ functions as "The Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern" (and not "just" as the central institution of totalitarian power as claimed by Arendt). An examination of the particular manifestation of the human condition in the camp through the lens of *The Report of the Banality of Evil* reveals that, even in the camp, one thing remains impossible: there is no way on earth the moral persona can be unmasked. It is this persona who is revealed in the gaze of the spectator on *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human*, and in it, the truth of human existence reveals itself. Thus, *humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation*.

⁴⁰ Agamben relies heavily on Arendt's thought in *Homo Sacer*; it is found in his use of Arendt's distinction between *zoe* and *bios* in Aristotle, and is marked by the notion of "la vita nuda" (translated into English as "bare life"), the very same notion that Arendt used to describe lives in the camp.

⁴¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 120.

D. THE MARTYR

We can appreciate the radical nature of the secularization that can be deduced from Arendt's belated discovery by turning our theoretical gaze to the witness that assures us that the moral persona cannot be unmasked: namely, the Jewish heavens and earth, the Christian Son of God, and Arendtian human plurality.

For the Jews, heavens and earth, to which Moses turns in Deuteronomy 32:1 ("Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear, you earth, the words of my mouth"), are hearsay witnesses that will ensure that the moral persona will not be stripped once more from the face of His people. Another example is found in the story of Cain and Abel, when "The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground; Now you are under a curse and drive from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand'" (Genesis 4:10-11). There is no human person to bear witness to the murderous injustice performed by Cain. Instead, it is the mouth of the earth that testifies to the evil done to God, and it is this hearsay testimony that ensures the enforcement of the moral persona upon the human mode of being. Put differently, according to this conception, humans cannot unmask the moral persona and do wrongs without being severely punished. This state is enforced by the presence of an all-knowing and all-caring God who will pass a final judgment on life on earth, ever attentive to the hearsay testimony of heavens and earth.

The Christians, who hypostatically unite Greek humanism and Jewish faith, take a great leap forward towards humans. As testified by Stephen, the *protomartyr*:

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.⁴²

⁴² Acts: 55-6.

According to the New Testament, Jesus is revealed in the gaze of Stephen as ever-standing on the right hand of God. The incarnation of God the Son ensures that in eternity, one man will always be left alive to tell the story; as such, He ensures the moral behavior of humans qua Christians. Arendt's insight makes the heavens and earth, as well as the incarnation of the Son of God, matters of faith. Their presence is no longer necessary for the purpose of ensuring the perpetuation of the moral persona of humans. This is rendered a matter of free choice because, as claimed by Arendt, there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible; human plurality replaces Christ as the One that ensures that martyrdom remains ever possible. What distinguishes human beings from the rest of created beings is thus *not* the political persona, a persona that can be stripped from the human mode of being. Humans are distinct by virtue of their nature as communal creatures, whose mode of being is equal to their moral persona. Humans, even if as a last resort, can always testify to truth in the flesh, and at least one person who gazes upon them will always be left alive to testify its revelation.

Although offering a radical secularization of the persona of the martyr, Arendt does not equip us with new testimonies that will replace Rousset's account brought forth in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, avowing the impossibility of martyrdom by questioning the nature of the truth revealed in the spectator's gaze upon the martyr. We must look for these testimonies elsewhere.

Turning to the texts composed by Pre-Christian philosophers, the company that attempts day and night to gaze at Truth offers very little help to us when trying to unravel the precise content of the truth that appears in spectator's gaze at the martyr's tormented flesh. This is so despite the fact that Socrates—*The Philosopher*—whom generations of philosophers made sure to perpetuate as *The Icon* of philosophical *askesis*, was the first to make the choice of truth over life in the flesh. The reason for this disqualification from bearing testimony is found in the choice of Socrates' friends and students to deny him their gaze at the moment of his death, as described in the *Phaedo*:

But when we watched him drinking and saw that he had drunk the poison, we could do so no longer, but in spite of

myself my tears rolled down in floods, so that I wrapped my face in my cloak and wept for myself; for it was not for him that I wept, but for my own misfortune in being deprived of such a friend. Crito had got up and gone away even before I did, because he could not restrain his tears. But Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time before, then wailed aloud in his grief and made us all break down, except Socrates himself. But he said, "What conduct is this, you strange men! I sent the women away chiefly for this very reason, that they might not behave in this absurd way."⁴³

Instead of gazing at Socrates' dying flesh, his friends' and students' eyes overflowed with tears caused by self-pity, and they covered their faces in guilt. Doing so, they denied *The Philosopher* the opportunity to make truth present in the flesh, since there was no one to testify to its revelation. Moreover, as if trying to prevent Socrates' failed attempt from reoccurring in their theoretical gaze, his students did not follow him down the path he selected; they chose life over truth. Thus, instead of sticking to truth, they labored in their minds to constitute a human community that sanctifies life itself, a community in which the philosopher will never again, even at the price of losing the freedom experienced in community, avoid gazing at the revelation of truth in the flesh. When they failed to do so, they chose life.⁴⁴

If we wish to locate testimonies to the content revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the martyr's flesh, we must turn to the texts composed by Christian philosophers who, in the 300 years following Stephen's martyrdom, had numerous opportunities to practice theoretical gazing at the martyr. But before doing so, we must establish martyrdom as a philosophical *askesis*. Gregory of Nyssa makes this argument in his *First Homily Concerning Stephen, the Protomartyr*:

Yesterday the Lord of the universe welcomed us whereas today it is the imitator [Stephen] of the Lord. How are they

⁴³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 117c-e.

⁴⁴ Thus Plato argues in his Seventh Epistle that the philosopher "ought to speak, if so be that his speech is not likely to prove fruitless nor to cause his death" (Plato *Epistle 7*: 331d. See also, *Epistle 5*: 322b), and when Aristotle's life was endangered, he chose to flee Athens over testifying truth at the price of life.

related to each other? One assumed human nature on our behalf while the other shed it for his Lord. One accepted the cave of this life for us, and the other left it for him. One was wrapped in swaddling clothes for us, and the other was stoned for him. One destroyed death, and the other scorned it.⁴⁵

We can see that Gregory positions Stephen as hypostatically uniting two traditions in martyrdom: the philosophical practice following Socrates, and the Christian practice mimicking the operations of Christ. As argued by Gregory, Stephen achieves this union by restoring the philosophical-Socratic tradition, acting in the opposite direction from that of God the Son; while God the Son accepted the cave of this life for us, Stephen left it *in the flesh* for Him. Gregory's use of the image of the cave in this context is no accident. It knowingly refers to the "Cave Parable."⁴⁶ The Protomartyr, then, mimics Christ by performing Socratic *Askesis*, making present in the flesh the choice of truth over life as given to the gaze of the spectator.

We can see how the protomartyr is saving philosophical tradition by bearing witness to truth in the flesh when faced with political rule. The question remains as to what is the nature of truth revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the tormented flesh of the martyr. The answer to this question, in at least two of the testimonies handed down to us, is *economy*.

E. ECONOMY

Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of ecclesiastic history, reports that "[the spectators are] struck at the sight of the economy of his [the martyr's] flesh, seeing even the interior of the circulatory system of his blood and his arteries,"⁴⁷ and John of Damascus is no less graphic, testifying that "It as though his human

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, "First Homily Concerning Stephen, the Protomartyr," *Patrologia Graeca* 46, 701-4.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 514-16.

⁴⁷ Eusebius, *Patrologia Graeca* 5, 1032 a.

form has disappeared. He is naked, the bones crushed, the parts of the body broken, and one can see the economy of his human nature [*ten oikonminian tes anthropoines phuseo*].⁴⁸ Put differently, both John and Eusebius testify that the thing revealed in the gaze of the spectators at the sight of the martyr, naked, his bones crushed and his arteries cut open, is the economy of human nature in the flesh, an economy that is revealed in *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human*.

As suggested in the testimonies of the Church Fathers, the economy of human nature revealed in the gaze of the spectator can serve as the vanishing point from which the equivalence of the human mode of *being human and nothing but human* and the moral persona is made present. According to Patristic writings, the economy of human nature⁴⁹ is revealed in our choice to partake in some One whose nature is alien to us beyond recognition, and despite this ontological alienness, to participate in it. In the Chalcedonian Creed, the Church Fathers deemed that thing to be divinity in person, with which man unites unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, and inseparably. It is human's partaking in this alienness that assures the Christians that the earthly reality of a moral economy makes common sense due to the fact that, as testified by Stephen at the cost of his life, the Son of man stands on the right hand of God and thus guarantees that one man will always be left alive to tell the story. But for those who choose not to enter communion in the economy of the incarnation of God the Son, the question of the earthly reality of morality makes little sense, and remains to be addressed. We are endowed with the mission of reconstituting the existence of a partnership in alienness by secularizing anew the economy of human nature. Put differently, we are faced with the task of radically secularizing the economy by presenting morality (which is absent from the liberal

⁴⁸ John of Damascus, *Patrologia Graeca* 96, 1309a. Translation taken from Marie-Jose Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 41.

⁴⁹ For the most comprehensive discussions of the meanings attached to the economy in Christian thought see Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 18-68, and Gerhard Richter, *Oikonomia: Der Gebrauch Des Wortes Oikonomia Im Neuen Testament, Bei Den Kirchenvatern Und In Der Theologischen Literatur Bis Ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

secularization of the economy) as revealed in the abstract nakedness of *being human and nothing but human*.

Here, again, we may return to Arendt, who offers us a way to *secularize the Christian conception of the Godhead as community*; As described by Vladimir Lossky⁵⁰ and John Zizioulas,⁵¹ the Cappadocian Fathers revolutionized Greek Ontology by equating persona with the divine mode of being, theorizing the *Godhead* as community (but not *humanity* as community). Attributing this equivalence to "*human being as communion*" offers a radical secularization and another revolution in the ontology that sees its origins in Greek ontology. This, for the simple reason that a quality that was attributed to God alone is now attributed to us humans. It must be said that a secularization achieved by attributing a divine quality to humans does not necessarily exclude the Christian conception of man. In Christianity, after all, man is conceived as created in the image and likeness of God, with the ability to mimic Him qua communal being. Moreover, Arendt's secularization does not necessitate the expulsion of God from the economy, and is therefore not mutually exclusive with the Christian conception of the economy. Thus, the secularization of the economy offered here is radically different from the modern-liberal one. Unlike the liberals, who in their lust to expel both God and sovereign from the economy denied it of morality (and violence, in the case of the sovereign), leaving it at the mercy of utility, Arendt paved the way for another kind of secularization, one that is not haunted by the modern awe of God. Lacking this perverted awe, Arendt's secularization does not rush to expel God from the economy as if possessed by demons. Nor does it exclude the possibility of morality making its appearance in the economy. On the contrary, it posits morality as ontologically prior to utility

⁵⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 41-42.

⁵¹ As aptly summarized by John Zizioulas: "By calling the Person a 'mode of being' [...] the Cappadocians introduced a revolution into Greek ontology, since they said for the first time in the history of philosophy (i) that a prosopon is not secondary to being, but its hypostasis; and (ii) that a hypostasis, that is, an ontological category, is relational in its very nature, it is prosopon." John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 186.

when it comes to the economy. This is confirmed by the fact that, while utility is lacking from totalitarianism and the camp, morality is not.⁵²

The human mode of being that is revealed in the economy of human nature may well function as the vanishing point found on the economic horizon, at which the parallel lines of politics and philosophy converge. As such, it is suited to serve as the vanishing point for a new political philosophy. In other words, for the human mode of being revealed in the moral persona to make common sense in a secular society and to play a role in secular politics, we need to begin with a radical re-secularization of the Christian concept of the economy of human nature as rooted in existential freedom. To begin to reconstitute political and philosophical economy, we must locate something that is revealed in the economy of human nature, a thing that is fully alien to us. At the same time, it must be a thing in which we choose to participate, and for which, despite this ontological alienness, our full participation is commonly sensed. Thus, against Agamben's⁵³ claim that the thing revealed to us when each and every persona was unmasked is bare life, the new political philosophy that follows Arendt's conversion will insist that the thing revealed in our gaze is the moral persona appearing in the economy of human nature: a glorious and mysterious communion in a thing that is alien to us, and yet still invites our active participation. It seems to me that it is here, in the re-secularization of the

⁵² Arendt notes time and again that utilitarian logic is expelled from totalitarianism, as for example: "the totalitarian regimes are thus resolutely and cynically emptying the world of the only thing that makes sense to the utilitarian expectations of common sense [...] Common sense trained in utilitarian thinking is helpless against this ideological supersense, since totalitarian regimes establish a functioning world of no-sense." Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 457-58. See also: 347-49, 409-11, 417-19, 440-46, 460. The nature of the totalitarian regime, according to Arendt, is to aim for ultimate power. Such power can be achieved when all human beings, without exception, are subject to control in all aspects of their lives. Such control is achieved in the community of the dead in the camps as described in Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 456-57.

⁵³ It should be noted that in his *Genealogy of Economy and Government* Agamben does not offer an account of how the economic form of power alters, if at all, our understanding of the camp as the biopolitical paradigm of the modern. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, Homo Sacer II, 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2011).

participation in alienness, that the vanishing point for a new political philosophy lies, in an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task in a world in which not even "common sense trained in utilitarian thinking"⁵⁴ makes any moral sense any longer.

F. CONCLUSION: THE PARTNERSHIP IN ALIENNESS

[...] gazing upon essential beauty entire, pure and unalloyed
 [...] [the one who] could behold the divine beauty itself, in
 its unique form [...] looking that way, observing that vision
 by the proper means, and having it ever with him [...] he
 sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible, to
 breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his
 contact is not with illusion but with truth. So when he has
 begotten a true virtue and has reared it up he is destined to
 win the friendship of Heaven; And if another man is to be
 immortal so does he.⁵⁵

There should be no difficulties in tracing the pan-human appearances of the partnership in alienness. In order to do so, we do not need to go as far as the tormented flesh of the martyr that bears witness to all of his members participating in the economy of human nature; the partnership is commonly sensed by us on a daily basis. To begin with, such a partnership is made present in the faces of our offspring, in which we are full members; despite this partnership, their existence in the world is independent and alien to us. It is to be found in the human condition of natality, in our ability to beget in body and soul. It had already appeared at the moment of the inception of Greek Philosophy, at the culmination point of the dialogue in which Diotima taught Socrates what eroticism is all about. The partnership in alienness is to be found in each kind of "begetting on a beautiful thing by means of body and soul" by which humans erotically aspire to perpetuate themselves. As described by Diotima's students,

⁵⁴ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 458.

⁵⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 211-12.

we perpetuate ourselves by bodily begetting our offspring, demonstrating soundness of mind in the economy, passing judgment on the work of the poet, pursuing the ideal mode of life in politics, and liberally engaging in philosophy. Each time we perpetuate ourselves in one of these forms, begetting the economy of human nature in which we, as erotic creatures who beget ourselves perpetually, perpetuate ourselves, we participate in something that is alien to us beyond recognition. I think that we may be able to reconstitute political philosophy based on the self-perpetuation made present by participating in alienness. Thus, for example, self-perpetuation may assist us to evaluate the moral economy as revealed in different human communities. This can be achieved through an evaluation of how self-perpetuation exists in each of the modes enumerated by Diotima conditioned in a given human community.

It must be emphasized, before concluding, that philosophical self-perpetuation occupies a privileged point; in its absence, no other self-perpetuation is made possible. As Diotima told Socrates, *if another man is to be immortal so is the philosopher*. This can be read as an implied threat by *The Philosopher* to his fellow citizens, meaning: “if the philosopher is denied of self-perpetuation, we will make sure that no one else will be able to do so.” But it seems to me that Diotima instead offers us the basic measure of any human community, for if the only means left for humans qua philosophers to perpetuate themselves is in the flesh, then we are in the presence of a political community that is genuinely oppressive; it denies the appearance of any other personas in which humans are capable of perpetuating themselves. More importantly, it creates a situation in which that the only place left for the mode of being human and nothing but human to make its appearance is in the economy of human nature, as revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the tormented flesh of the martyr.