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DANTE IN THE MARGINS OF HANNAH ARENDT

Abstract: The *Action* chapter of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* opens with a quotation from Dante's *Monarchia*. Why does Arendt choose this exergue? Why does she open the discussion of the "political activity par excellence" and fulcrum of her reactivation of active life with a reference to an author who asserts the primacy of the speculative over the practical? Through a complex exegetical and critical-hermeneutical work, this article delves into Arendt's reflection and articulates its discourse in three parts: 1. *Margins and the Robber Quotation*, which talks about the marginal position of Dante in Arendt's work and the enigma of Dante's quotation; 2. *Dante as Philosopher of Active Life*, where, with the help of Étienne Gilson, Arendt presents Dante as the philosopher who, while reaffirming the primacy of contemplative life over the active one, gave it an unusual dignity in medieval thought; 3. *The Joy of Acting*, which shows that, by referring to the passage from the *Monarchia*, Arendt derives some fundamental characteristics of action, namely, the intensification of the agent's being and its revelatory function.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, Dante, Étienne Gilson, *vita activa*, action.

1. Margins and the Robber Quotation

An entire spiritual world lies at the margins of Hannah Arendt's work. First, one can find philosophy there, as she, even if growing up shouting "either philosophy or death," had expelled it from her pages and for a long time from her life, openly disagreeing with a philosophical professionalism unable to stand the confrontation with new historical and political realities. Around 1933 she saw the syllogistic arguments, the reasons of life, the liberation from the tradition in which she had been formed, fall prey to the service of a new lady that was no longer theology: it was politics, specifically, a provincial and narrow *petite politique* with inferiority complexes and delusions of omnipotence from *grosse Politik*. At that time, disappointed and offended, she threw philosophy off her page. For some time, she also threw away the pages altogether because she no longer wanted to deal with thinking and writing. The world demanded action and she acted.

When she arrived in the United States, thanks to the solidarity of other Jewish intellectuals, she resumed writing. Philosophy, however, remained banished, even when she wrote about a certain existentialist tone assumed by her recent reflection. Nevertheless, philosophy flowed back behind, underneath, inside her political theory; it ended up occupying the blank spaces. It was placed at the margins of Arendt's page and lurked, waiting for the right moment to prey on everything else. There are many acts of philosophical predation in Arendt. Her attempts to "marginalize" philosophy are therefore complex: they succeed, as she tries to dislocate philosophy in the liminal territory of the margin; they fail, insofar