



Das römische Gespräch in a New Key: Hannah Arendt, Genocide, and the Defense of Republican Civilization

Author(s): A. Dirk Moses

Source: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (December 2013), pp. 867-913

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/672532>

Accessed: 13/11/2013 07:56

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Modern History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective

*Das römische Gespräch in a New Key: Hannah Arendt, Genocide, and the Defense of Republican Civilization**

A. Dirk Moses

European University Institute and University of Sydney

INTRODUCTION

All too often, the reputations of political thinkers mirror the fortunes of the state systems that invoke their names. Marxism fell out of favor as the Cold War wound down, replaced by liberal renderings of Hegel marketing the “end of history” or by postliberal alternatives ranging from antihistoricist melancholia to skepticism about modernity and the unipolar world order. The intellectual reorientation demanded by this seismic geopolitical and ideological shift also revived the corpses of half-forgotten figures: Carl Schmitt, the German theorist of the Nazi state, for example, was taken up by some leftist intellectuals for his evisceration of liberalism and rejection of the North American–dominated global status quo.¹

The enervation and ultimate dissolution of Cold War tensions also necessitated the search for the historical roots of the new present, calling forth a historiography on “imperial formations,” globalization, and memory.² Whether

* Thanks to Tony Barta, Alex Drace-Francis, Tommaso Giordani, Julia Hell, Matthew Hoye, Neil Levi, Robert Manne, Gabriel Piterberg, Justin Reynolds, Ruth Starkman, George Steinmetz, Lyndsey Stonebridge, Simon Taylor, Inés Valez, Martin van Gelderen, Lorenzo Veracini, Natasha Wheatley, and Ben Wurgaft for invaluable comments on previous drafts. The research seminar of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan also gave one version a thorough going over; I am grateful to Julia Hell for the invitation and Seth Howe for the comment. My thanks as well go to Laura Downs, Geoff Eley, Andrew Fitzmaurice, Sam Moyn, Dan Stone, and Patrick Wolfe for encouragement along the way. The usual disclaimers apply.

¹ There is an excellent discussion in Julia Hell, “*Katechon*: Carl Schmitt’s Imperial Theology and the Ruins of the Future,” *Germanic Review* 84, no. 4 (2009): 283–326.

² Mrinalini Sinha, “Mapping the Imperial Social Formation,” *Signs* 25, no. 4 (2000): 1077–82; Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe, NM, 2007). The *Journal of Global History* was founded in 2006. On the memory boom, see Gavriel Rosenfeld, “A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory ‘Industry,’” *Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 1 (2009): 122–58.

The Journal of Modern History 85 (December 2013): 867–913

© 2013 by The University of Chicago. 0022-2801/2013/8504-0005\$10.00

All rights reserved.

written by postcolonial critics of the West or affirmers of the British and then the American role in modernizing the world, histories of empire and international order have been at the forefront of research agendas for a decade.³ Accordingly, the polarization between the West and its communist opponents has been shifted onto the alternative although familiar axis of the West and its non-Western others, the latter of course having often benefited from Soviet support, a conjuncture registered in 1993 by Samuel Huntington in his controversial thesis about the “clash of civilizations.”⁴ Because of these continuities, iconic anti-imperial thinkers like Frantz Fanon are still read, cited, and even celebrated, certainly more than their Western champions such as Jean-Paul Sartre.⁵ The archaeology of liberalism’s relationship to empire has attracted considerable attention for the same reason.⁶

Shadowing this axis is the increased profile of genocide, that generic concept devised by another intellectual whose star has risen in the last decade, Raphael Lemkin. Stimulated by the terrible events in the Balkans and Rwanda in the 1990s, the interest in genocide likewise raises the question of America’s and Europe’s global role, sometimes even proclaimed duty, to prevent mass killing and then to keep the peace. Human rights are likewise often said to be largely a Western priority, if not a Western ideal, whose upholding justifies “humanitarian intervention” in other countries. The United Nations’s commitment to prevent genocide and protect human rights has universalized this moral imper-

³ Linda Colley, “Some Difficulties of Empire—Past, Present and Future,” *Common Knowledge* 11, no. 2 (2005): 198–214; A. G. Hopkins, “Comparing British and American Empires,” *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 3 (2007): 395–404; Herfried Münkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* (Cambridge, 2007); A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (Oxford, 2008); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld, 1783–1939* (Oxford, 2009); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2010); Durba Ghosh, “Another Set of Imperial Turns?” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012): 772–93; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York, 2012).

⁴ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 30–45, and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York, 1996).

⁵ Philip D. Curtin, *The West and the World: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2000); Anthony Alessandrini, ed., *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* (London, 1999).

⁶ For example, Uday Metha, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ, 2006); Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2006); Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ, 2010); Andrew Fitzmaurice, “Liberalism and Empire in Nineteenth-Century International Law,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 122–40.

ative for the postwar world, augmenting the vocabulary of “civilization” and “barbarism” that animated the older Western-dominated international order.⁷ These new ideals have been called the fruit of “political knowledge after total war, totalitarianism, and the Holocaust,” a formulation which recalls that many in the West regard the Holocaust in particular as the threshold of ultimate transgression, an icon of evil in a new, secular political imaginary that broke through after the Cold War.⁸

Recent discussions about “American empire,” especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and subsequent US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, furnish grounds to doubt the proclaimed novelty of this political knowledge and the supposed “human rights revolution.”⁹ For this rancorous debate reinvoked the familiar binaries of the republican political tradition—liberty and empire, civilization and barbarism, virtue and corruption—the political semantics associated with the legacy of Rome. Indeed, whether as an inspiration for the United States’s global mission or as a sign of its decline and fall, the Roman Empire is an explicitly invoked frame of reference for numerous scholars, journalists, and pundits.¹⁰ Central to this reference system is

⁷ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York, 2002); George P. Fletcher and Jens David Ohlin, *Defending Humanity: When Force Is Justified and Why* (Oxford, 2008); Alex J. Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect* (Cambridge, 2009); John Cooper, *Raphael Lemkin and the Struggle for the Genocide Convention* (Basingstoke, 2008); Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, ed., *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2011); Lise Morjé Howard, *Peace Keeping in Civil Wars* (Cambridge, 2007).

⁸ Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York, 2003). The *Journal of Genocide Research* was established in 1999. On the Holocaust as the source for human rights, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Human Rights and Memory* (University Park, PA, 2010), and the challenge to this view by Marco Duranti, “The Holocaust, the Legacy of 1789 and the Birth of Human Rights Law: Revisiting the Foundation Myth,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 159–86.

⁹ An example of the novelty thesis is Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock, eds., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (Oxford, 2012). A critique is Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2010). A most comprehensive and insightful discussion of the American empire literature is Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1348–91. On American empire, see Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore, eds., *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power* (New York, 2006); Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America, and the World* (New Haven, CT, 2006); and Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

¹⁰ Mark B. Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (London, 2002); Michael Ignatieff, “The American Empire: The Burden,” *New York Times*, January 5, 2003; Andrew J. Bacevich, ed., *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of Amer-*

the burning question about the legitimacy of imperial expansion in spreading “civilization”: the venerable problem of the relationship between violence and progress, of secular theodicy, of evil in history. Although this question is hardly surprising in a country whose founders were inspired by Rome, its contemporaneity—and the intensity of its disputation—is striking all the same.¹¹ The specter of Rome has returned to haunt a new generation of American leaders.

The “Western Civ” courses that thrived at US universities before and after the Second World War may have avoided the problem of secular theodicy by extolling the virtues of the country’s anticolonial liberal republicanism and decrying the vices of European empire—while conveniently omitting the fate of its indigenous peoples.¹² Understandably, the relationship between violence and civilization exercised Jewish émigrés entering the American academy in those decades; for them, it was experienced with life-and-death urgency. Steeped in classical learning, they formulated answers that were often projected onto Rome in different ways. Leo Strauss wrote to Karl Löwith in 1933 that he was “reading Caesar’s *Commentaries* with deep understanding” and thinking of Virgil’s words about sparing the vanquished, before declaring that Jews would be saved from Nazism not by liberalism but by “the spark of the Roman thought,” namely,

ican Empire (Chicago, 2003); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York, 2004); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, 2004); G. John Ikenberry, “Illusions of Empire: Defining the New American Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 2 (2004): 144–54; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, 2004), chap. 6; Eric W. Robinson, “American Empire? Ancient Reflections on Modern American Power,” *Classical World* 99, no. 1 (2005): 35–50; Herman Lebovics, *Imperialism and the Corruption of Democracies* (Durham, NC, 2006); Christopher Layne and Bradley A. Thayer, eds., *American Empire: A Debate* (New York, 2007); Harold James, *The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2008); Ali Parchami, *Hegemonic Peace and Empire: The Pax Romana, Britannica and Americana* (Abingdon, 2009); Brett Browden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago, 2009); Bruce Ackerman, *The Decline and Fall of the American Republic* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

¹¹ Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago, 1988); Francis D. Cogliano, *Thomas Jefferson: Reputation and Legacy* (Edinburgh, 2006); Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992). Generally: Fergus Millar, *The Roman Republic in Political Thought* (Boston, 2002).

¹² Compare Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” *American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (1982): 695–725; Andrew Sartori, “Robert Redfield’s Comparative Civilizations Project and the Political Imagination of Postwar America,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 6, no. 1 (1998): 33–65; Daniel A. Segal, “‘Western Civ’ and the Staging of History in American Higher Education,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2010): 770–805.

“from the principles of the right, that is, from fascist, authoritarian, and imperial principles.” Although he went on to study Greek more than Roman thought, Strauss always admired Churchill and the British Empire as the negation of the Nazi variant.¹³ While the Polish-born and Palestine-based Jacob Talmon was well aware that Roman power had also entailed the defeat of ancient Israel, he—no less than Löwith, whose famous book *Meaning in History* is littered with references to Rome’s genocidal excesses—thought the empire at least had guaranteed Jews’ equal legal status, unlike the tribal nations to the north.¹⁴ No such understanding was forthcoming from their French contemporary Simone Weil, who suggested just before her death in 1943 that the pagan Roman Empire lived on in Nazi expansionism, as it had in the Spanish and British empires; she contended that all of them were run by rootless adventurers who “exterminated or reduced to servitude all the peoples of Palestine” (in the Roman case) or “massacred or enslaved coloured peoples” (in the Spanish and British cases).¹⁵

This long-term recuperation of the distant European past for present purposes was identified in 1946 by fellow German (although non-Jewish) émigré Eric Voegelin as a manifestation of *das römische Gespräch*—which he translated as “the Roman debate”—that he said had been underway in the West since the eighteenth century. *Das römische Gespräch* is perhaps better rendered as “the Roman discussion,” connoting a political language or discourse. Its origins, wrote Voegelin, lay in the western European states’ rupture with Christianity and Roman traditions, which, ironically, compelled commentators to assess the new states’ fate against the cautionary example of Rome’s demise: henceforth, “the Roman debate becomes one of the most important instruments for this critique of the age, with the implication that in the decline of Rome we find the forces at work which also determine the decline of the West.” Spengler and Toynbee, declared Voegelin, stood in a tradition of pessimistic reflection stretching back to “Vico and Montesquieu, Ferguson and Gibbon, Niebuhr and Mommsen, Edward Meyer and Rostoftzeff.”¹⁶ To this list one might add an impres-

¹³ Leo Strauss, “Letter to Karl Löwith,” *Constellations* 16, no. 1 (2009): 82–83. See the discussion in Susan Schell, “‘To Spare the Vanquished and Crush the Arrogant’: Leo Strauss’s Lecture on ‘German Nihilism,’” in *Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (Cambridge, 2009), 185. Eugene R. Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher* (Waltham, MA, 2006), 63.

¹⁴ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1957), 25, 168; Jacob Talmon, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution* (Berkeley, 1981), 179.

¹⁵ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*, trans. Arthur Wills, preface by T. S. Eliot (London, 2005), 44.

¹⁶ Eric Voegelin, *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers, 1939–1985* (Columbia, MO, 2004), 48–49. On this style of analogical thinking, see Julia Hell, *Ruin Gazing* (Chicago, forthcoming).

sive cast of nineteenth-century British thinkers who agonized over the question of whether Greece or Rome was their empire's appropriate ancestor and model.¹⁷

That *das römische Gespräch* is by no means an arcane discussion confined to the academy is indicated, as we have noted, by the contemporary debate about American empire, in which Leo Strauss and his followers have been accused of virtually urging the adoption of "fascist, authoritarian, and imperial principles" at the expense of the republic's liberties.¹⁸ Non-Americans also participate in the debate when they depict the United States either as a rapacious oppressor of smaller peoples, in the manner of Weil, or, like Talmon, as a beacon of tolerance and law that benevolently bestows cosmopolitan civilization on ethnocentric smaller nations. Whatever the view, the compulsion to analogize with Rome—*das römische Gespräch*—continues as never before.

This is a context in which Hannah Arendt's work can be profitably studied. Hailed once again as a thinker for our "dark times" in offering guidance on all manner of pressing issues, her star shines in the firmament.¹⁹ While she has long been regarded as a champion of Greek thought who advocated the polis as the antidote to modernity's corruptions—a reading based foremost on her book *The Human Condition*—Arendt's broader oeuvre also reveals a preoccupation with

¹⁷ Raymond F. Betts, "The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Victorian Studies* 15, no. 2 (1971): 149–59; Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1980); Frank M. Turner, "British Politics and the Demise of the Roman Republic, 1700–1939," *Historical Journal* 29, no. 3 (1981): 577–99; Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1997); H. S. Jones, *Victorian Political Thought* (Basingstoke, 2000); Barbara Goff, ed., *Classics and Colonialism* (London, 2005); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton, NJ, 2007).

¹⁸ See, generally, Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2004), who distinguishes between Strauss and his followers.

¹⁹ Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge, 2010); Roger Berkowitz, Thomas Keenan, and Jeffrey Katz, eds., *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (New York, 2009); Lori J. Marso, "Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt: Judgments in Dark Times," *Political Theory* 40, no. 2 (2012): 165–93; Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Judicial Imagination: Writing after Nuremberg* (Edinburgh, 2011); Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (Bloomington, IN, 2006); Serena Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: A Phenomenology of Human Rights* (New York, 2008); Andrew Schaap, Danielle Celermajer, and Vrasidas Karalis, eds., *Power, Judgment and Political Evil: Hannah Arendt's Promise* (London, 2010); Anthony Long and John Williams, eds., *Hannah Arendt and International Relations: Readings across the Lines* (New York, 2005); Patricia Owens, *Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Oxford, 2007); Patrick Hayden, *Political Evil in a Global Age: Hannah Arendt and International Relations* (New York, 2009); Bonnie Honig, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park, PA, 1995); Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics* (Minneapolis, 1997).

the republican lineage that crystallized in ancient Rome.²⁰ She was familiar with Roman sources not only from her grammar school education and dissertation on Augustine (1929)—“an extraordinary tradition of Roman thought still lived on in him,” she wrote later—but also because the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors she read were steeped in the tradition.²¹ Thus, in addition to routinely citing the Roman writers Cato, Cicero, Livy, and Tacitus and later commentators like Machiavelli, James Harrington, and Montesquieu, Arendt extensively invoked figures such as Edmund Burke, J. R. Seeley, J. A. Froude, and John A. Hobson, whose characteristically republican analyses of empire formed the basis of the large section on imperialism in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*.²² While she never referred to Edward Gibbon’s eighteenth-century classic, his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and many other books on Roman history lined her library shelves.²³

It was no coincidence that Arendt was indebted to the legacy of Florentine civic humanism from Machiavelli to Hume.²⁴ *Das römische Gespräch* contained

²⁰ For the Greek interpretation, see George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ, 1984); and Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250–1600* (Cambridge, 1992), 285–86. The first registration of Arendt’s republicanism, so far as I can ascertain, is Margaret Canovan’s *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (London, 1974) and *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1992), although it did not catch on very much. For the rejection of this lineage in favor of one that places Arendt firmly in the nineteenth-century German reception of Aristotle, see Patricia Springborg, “Arendt, Republicanism and Patriarchalism,” *History of Political Thought* 10, no. 3 (1989): 499–523. As the work of J. G. A. Pocock shows, however, the dichotomy between Aristotelianism and republicanism can be seen as illusory: *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975). In this and other works, he tends to cite *The Human Condition* rather than *On Revolution*.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. and intro. Jerome Kohn (New York, 2007), 138.

²² Arendt’s debt to Rome can be better appreciated now that her lectures on politics from the later 1950s have been published: Hannah Arendt, *Was ist Politik?* [The promise of politics], ed. Ursula Ludz (Munich, 1993); cf. Jacques Taminiaux, “Athens and Rome,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana Villa (Cambridge, 2000), 165–77. Arendt’s attraction to republicanism went so far as to identify in Immanuel Kant an unconscious republican: Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago, 1982), 15.

²³ See the Hannah Arendt Collection, Stevenson Library, Bard College, New York. Liisi Keedus drew my attention to Arendt’s possession of these books.

²⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, “Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian,” *Daedalus* 105, no. 3 (1976): 153–69. Pocock has long acknowledged Arendt as an inspiration for his reconstructions of early modern political thought: Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 550, 573, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), 44, 48, and “Foundations and Moments,” in *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern*

a “linguistic inventory” of what Reinhart Koselleck called “basic historical concepts” (*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*) whose remarkable stability “semantically preprogrammed” her historical perception.²⁵ A rich tradition, Roman republicanism offered her a variety of positions on questions of war, conquest, and reason of state (*raison d'état*), and she drew on them both explicitly and implicitly. Accordingly, the fall of the Roman Empire provided the negative template for contemporary understanding: “What already happened once in our history, in the centuries of the declining Roman Empire,” she declared, “may be happening again today” to the West.²⁶ The weakness of the republican tradition, she implied in 1945, had rendered Germany vulnerable to Nazism: “Hardly another country of Occidental culture was so little imbued with the classic virtues of civic behavior.”²⁷ Like Viscount Bolingbroke in the eighteenth century and Machiavelli before him, Arendt wished to rescue the polity from historical change, by reviving republican virtues and political forms.²⁸

In what follows, my aim is less to reconstruct Arendt’s debt to this tradition for its own sake than to demonstrate the limitations of the civilizational ideal and its countenance of violent expansion. For while Roman writers often criticized this expansionism, or at least its mode, they tended to conserve and honor Roman traditions in the face of perceived decline or crisis; their reservations may have established some norms in the conduct of war but never challenged the rationale of the empire, whose expansion was necessarily violent. Arendt was no different—and neither, in effect, are those who invoke her without realizing the assumptions on which she relied. Thus, the critique evident in her work in the first half of the 1940s, when she was inspired by the antifascist resistance to Hitler, became blunted by her anxiety about the Soviet threat to “the West,” a term she used uncritically to connote a political tradition and community of values.²⁹ Whereas she had originally planned to write solely about Nazism as “race imperialism,” by 1947 she had decided to invoke the generic concept

Political Thought, ed. Annabel Brett and James Tully with Holly Hamilton-Bleakley (Cambridge, 2006), 48–49.

²⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, “Linguistic Change and the History of Events,” *Journal of Modern History* 61, no. 4 (1989): 649–66, and “Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 1–37; cf. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, “Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experiences,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 212–36.

²⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), 130.

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility,” in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York, 1994), 130.

²⁸ Isaac Krammick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, MA, 1968).

²⁹ On the Cold War context of this term, see Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006).

of totalitarianism in order to include the Soviet Union in her expanded analysis.³⁰ In 1945, she declared fascism to be the “arch-evil of our time” and its “roots” to be “Anti-Semitism, Racism, Imperialism”: in 1951, these same three elements were transformed into the “origins of totalitarianism,” with racism folded into the section on imperialism and a new section added on totalitarian movements and rule.³¹ And so the concern with genocide (although she hardly used the term) evident in her articles in the mid-1940s was replaced in *Origins* by concern with the emblem of “the camp” and the “total domination” that she thought was totalitarianism’s diabolical project: it destroyed a rather abstract notion of “human spontaneity” rather than concrete human lives.³² Similarly, she never warmed to anticolonial national liberation movements in the 1960s, although earlier she had hoped that political Zionism would ally itself with other oppressed peoples rather than with imperial powers.³³

In following this trajectory, Arendt was typical of many former leftists among New York intellectuals, like her friend Dwight Macdonald, who, after appraising Soviet society, “chose the West” to combat “evil,”³⁴ or her fellow central European émigré scholar Hans Kohn, who advocated a “New West.”³⁵ Indeed, “Western civilization,” a term with a nineteenth-century pedigree, became the glue of the anticommunist alliance.³⁶ Thus, the British Foreign Office sought to convince Americans of the distinction between the British Labour Party’s socialism and Soviet communism by proposing “a sort of spiritual union of the West,” as Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin put it.³⁷ British officials also shared Arendt’s attraction to federations and commonwealths—inspired

³⁰ Roy T. Tsao, “Three Phases of Arendt’s Theory of Totalitarianism,” *Social Research* 69, no. 2 (2002): 579–619.

³¹ Hannah Arendt, “The Seeds of the Fascist International,” in Kohn, *Essays in Understanding*, 150.

³² On Arendt’s recourse to “the camp,” see Samuel Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham, MA, 2005), 57–58.

³³ On that question, see Mark Levene, “Jews, Britons, Empire: And How Things Might Be Very Different,” *Jewish Culture and History* 12, nos. 1–2 (2010): 61–74.

³⁴ Dwight Macdonald, “The Root Is Man,” pts. 1 and 2, *Politics* 3, no. 4 (1946): 97–115; 3, no. 6 (1946): 194–214, and “USA v. USSR,” *Politics* 5, no. 2 (1948): 75–77; Hannah Arendt, “He’s All Dwight,” *New York Review of Books*, August 1, 1968; Gregory D. Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the Politics Circle: The Challenge of Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Ithaca, NY, 1996). I am grateful to Johannes von Moltke for suggesting the Macdonald connection.

³⁵ Adi Gordon, “The Need for West: Hans Kohn and the North Atlantic Community,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 1 (2011): 33–57.

³⁶ The *Spectator* invoked “the fate of Western civilization” during the Crimean War in 1854: “Why the War Must Go On,” *Spectator*, November 25, 1854. Thanks to Jakob Lehne for sharing this article.

³⁷ Ritchie Overdale, *The English Speaking Alliance: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Cold War, 1945–51* (London, 1985), 66.

by Bundism, she had earlier admired the Soviet Union as a federative alternative to the assimilation of the interwar homogeneous nation-state—as models for postimperialist global order: they would protect minorities but also ensure white rule in central Africa.³⁸ Like Strauss, she regarded England and its empire as “the last bulwark against the new barbarism” of Nazism. The British Commonwealth and the United States, she wrote in 1940, portended a postwar “commonwealth of European nations with a parliament of its own,” although by 1946 she realized that the homogenous nation-state had survived the war and would not easily yield to federative incorporation.³⁹ It was hardly coincidental that Arendt’s employer between 1963 and 1967, the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought, commenced business in 1941 as the Committee on the Study of Civilization.⁴⁰

While embedding Arendt further in these contexts is a legitimate scholarly undertaking, it is not the purpose of this article.⁴¹ Instead, this essay presents a detailed analysis of her thought so that the inner structure and full implications of the contemporary *römische Gespräch* can be better appreciated. These can be easily summarized. To revive rather than reject the civilization that produced fascism and the Holocaust, Arendt embraced an ideology of civilization modeled on the Roman republic and justified through its progressive incorporation of diverse peoples into a federated international order. She did so despite her ostensible skepticism about philosophies of history and theories of progress. Rome’s mythic foundation in colonial conquest and settlement and its spread of civilization by violent expansion was, she thought, an acceptable, indeed necessary, theodicy that could be distinguished from modern imperialism. Her fierce

³⁸ Cheikh Anta Babou, “Decolonization or National Liberation: Debating the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 632, no. 1 (2010): 41–54; Robert Pearce, “The Colonial Office and Planned Decolonisation,” *African Affairs* 83, no. 330 (1984): 77–93. Arendt’s views were consistent with the British imperial federalists discussed in Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

³⁹ Hannah Arendt, “The Minority Question,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York, 2007), 130, and review of *Nationalities and National Minorities*, by Oscar I. Janowsky, *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 3 (1946): 204. An example of federation enthusiasm at the time is Howard O. Eaton et al., *Federation: The Coming Structure of World Government* (Norman, OK, 1944).

⁴⁰ Clifford Wilcox, *Robert Redfield and the Development of American Anthropology* (Lanham, MD, 2006), 140; Mark Mazower, “The End of Civilization and the Rise of Human Rights: The Mid-Twentieth-Century Disjuncture,” in Hoffmann, *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, 29–44.

⁴¹ Leonard Krieger, “The Historical Hannah Arendt,” *Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 4 (1976): 672–84.

criticism of the latter and hypothesis that it was one of the “origins of totalitarianism” has obscured her fundamental approval of empire building over the millennia.⁴² Consequently, Arendt could not bring herself to blame the tradition for the origins of the genocide that she wished to prevent. While she was well aware that European colonists eliminated the indigenous peoples who stood in their way, she did not invest these genocides with any significance, an insensitivity that can be also attributed to her anti-“primitivism” and qualified sympathy for the Roman traditions of just war and reason of state.⁴³ It was fitting that the Danish government awarded her the Sonning Prize for Contributions to European Civilization just before her death in 1975.⁴⁴

For all this apologetic affirmation of the West, however, Arendt never became a conservative culture warrior. Her republican commitment led to insights as well as to blindnesses. While her initial enthusiasm for the Zionist project in Palestine was a product of this tradition, so was her later withering criticism of Zionism in action. No friend of militarism, she also invoked the “boomerang effect”—“the unexpected ruinous backfiring of evil deeds on the doer, of which imperialist politicians of former generations were so afraid”—to excoriate US domestic and foreign policy.⁴⁵ The ancient trope of imperial corruption and decline, then, was a powerful source of critique, and for such critiques she is halloved today.

But is this an adequate foundation for preventing genocide and protecting human rights, as supposed by many commentators? Far from being empowered by what Arendt called “the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition,” there are good reasons to think that genocide prevention and human rights are

⁴² See George Steinmetz, “Decolonizing German Theory: An Introduction,” *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 3–13; and the essays in Richard H. King and Dan Stone, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race and Genocide* (New York, 2007).

⁴³ For analyses of Arendt on race and empire, see Jimmy Casas Klausen, “Hannah Arendt’s Primitivism,” *Political Theory* 38, no. 3 (2010): 394–423; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA, 2009), chap. 2; Kathryn T. Gines, “Race Thinking and Racism in Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,” in King and Stone, *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, 38–53; and Robert Bernasconi, “When the Real Crime Began: Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and the Dignity of the Western Philosophical Tradition,” in *ibid.*, 54–67. Bernasconi’s important work on Arendt and the blind spots in German idealism regarding race and imperialism is gradually being registered in the literature: e.g., Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge, 2009), chap. 2.

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Young-Bruhl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, CT, 1982), 630.

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Home to Roost,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. and intro. Jerome Kohn (New York, 2003), 271.

imperiled by the concomitant trinity of savagery-barbarism-civilization to which she subscribed—as many do today.⁴⁶ In the end, I argue, Arendt's fealty to the republican tradition led her to betray the principle of plurality—her proclaimed antigenocidal ideal—because the civilizational ideal implied the unassimilable alterity of those people deemed savage or barbaric. The cost of uncritically taking up these Roman categories of thought was and is to tolerate, even justify, the violent excesses that logically flowed from their application. The Holocaust, in particular, could only be integrated into her account of the West by severing it from the history of Western expansion, beginning with Rome. Understanding this debt is the relevance of studying Arendt today, for her nuanced elaboration and updating of the republican tradition reveals its implications in a globalized world of American empire, thereby placing in historical perspective contemporary discussions about genocide and the justifications of war in the name of civilization.⁴⁷

We know that *das römische Gespräch* came into being because of a previous rupture; its function was to bridge that rupture. Arendt's *römische Gespräch* in "a new key" was her continuation of the conversation in unprecedented conditions: the world-historical *novum* of a "global, universally interrelated civilization" and the rupture of Western political and intellectual traditions that at once led to and were represented by totalitarianism. The past, she wrote, could not be transmitted because it had become "fragmented," nor did a shared reality or experience—indeed, a world—any longer exist to which appeal could be made.⁴⁸ In many ways, she was responding to the late nineteenth-century illiberal political culture of mass society and ethnonationalism that Carl E. Schorske identified in these pages as "politics in a new key."⁴⁹ This is the style of politics she decried in the suggestive imagery with which she began her *Origins*: "The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition"—imagery likely taken from Goethe, who registered how "our moral and political world is undermined with subterranean roads, cellars, and sewers."⁵⁰ It was her aim to restore the tradition's dignity after its rupture. The dismissal of Arendt as less a loyal republican thinker than a dangerous Heideggerian existentialist is therefore misguided. The appellations

⁴⁶ Hannah Arendt, "What Is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* (London, 1961), 140.

⁴⁷ Compare Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton, NJ, 2010).

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1986), 302, *Human Condition*, 250 and generally sec. 6, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, *Willing* (London, 1978), 212–13, *Between Past and Future*, 137, and "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought, 1954," in Kohn, *Essays in Understanding*, 433.

⁴⁹ Carl E. Schorske, "Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Triptych," *Journal of Modern History* 39, no. 4 (1967): 343–86.

⁵⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, ix. Arendt quotes Goethe in *Promise of Politics*, 41.

are not mutually exclusive in the circumstances: she was rethinking that tradition in conditions of crisis and rupture—“in a new key.”⁵¹

This argument is elaborated in five steps. After outlining Arendt’s debt to Rome and her justification of its expansion, it proceeds in the next two sections to highlight her inability to manage genocidal settler violence and the consequently limited scope of her much-vaunted critique of imperialism. On that basis, it then analyzes Arendt’s controversial views on Zionism, laying bare her enduring commitment to the settler colonial projects that she thought spread civilization. The final section examines how she integrated the Holocaust into a defense of Western civilization by recourse to republican notions of reason of state. The article concludes by revisiting the contemporary *römische Gespräch* and questioning Arendt’s usefulness as a thinker for our times.

ROME AND THE SPREAD OF CIVILIZATION

Consumed with anxiety about the fate of liberty, Arendt wrote with sword drawn to prevent totalitarianism from enveloping the remnants of the political tradition she identified as the only source of resistance: Roman republicanism, whose last home she sometimes called “the Atlantic community,” that is, the Western European nation-states and above all the United States.⁵² The United States won her loyalty because, as she wrote in 1943, it “has come very close to the same conception” as the multinational Soviet one she had admired. Given the Jewish experience of persecution, the fact that the US state did not try to assimilate or expel minorities was of signal importance; it “is not only the government of united states but of united peoples as well.”⁵³ America respected cultural pluralism. Arendt’s admiration increased over time. In 1970, after she

⁵¹ Pangle, *Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, chap. 6. Similarly, see Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., *Responsible Citizenship, Ancient and Modern* (Eugene, OR, 1994). The analogy with Arendt’s admiration for Martin Buber’s renovation of Judaism is striking. See Hannah Arendt, “A Guide for Youth: Martin Buber,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 31–33. Julia Hell uses the felicitous term of “genuine imperial mimesis” that aims at “creative renovation” rather than “mere repetition”: “*Katechon*: Carl Schmitt’s Imperial Theology,” 295.

⁵² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963), 217. See, generally, Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2002). For the English and American connections, see Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (Cambridge, 2008); Steven Pincus, “Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth,” *American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (1998): 705–36; Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); and D. T. Rogers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (1992): 11–38.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis of Zionism,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 335. The identification of the USSR, British Commonwealth, United States, and Swit-

had lived in the country for decades and closely studied its political history, she hoped that the North American “traditional instruments for facing the future”—the civic power of the “Mayflower compact” and “voluntary associations”—might help it confront “the great turmoil of change and of failure through which it is going at the present.”⁵⁴ As we will see, the destruction of political federations based on compacts and covenants, which she thought were pioneered by Roman expansion, lay at the heart of the totalitarian menace.

What were the origins of this menace? The key is Arendt’s conception of Western history. Dispersed in passages and asides as if readers were assumed to be familiar with the background drama, her views are not set out systematically but are clear all the same. The *viva acta* of Roman political life was based on the work that creates permanent things for worldly immortality (*homo faber*) rather than the labor necessary for physical reproduction (*animal laborans*). Arendt does not elaborate on Rome’s fall but notes that it was accompanied by the “worldlessness” of Christianity and by Greek philosophy’s theoretical compartment to reality, problems she saw recurring in her own day.⁵⁵ Thereafter, the West was plunged into darkness. The Roman tradition was recovered—or, rather, rearticulated intellectually—in the Renaissance and manifested politically in the Atlantic revolutions of the late eighteenth century, that is, in the foundation of the French and American republics. These new states “were not only enacted, as Marx said, in Roman clothes,” she observed, “but also actually revived the fundamental contribution of Rome to Western history”; indeed, they “appear like gigantic attempts to repair those foundations, to renew the broken thread of tradition, and to restore, through founding new political bodies, what for so many centuries had endowed the affairs of men with some measure of dignity and greatness.”⁵⁶ The “enormous pathos” generated by these foundations—a pathos Arendt seemed to share—she attributed to the experience of freedom, “man’s capacity for novelty,” especially after “the centuries which separate the downfall of the Roman Empire from the rise of the modern age.”⁵⁷ Paradoxically, then, such revolutions were not ruptures with tradition but “the only salvation which this Roman-Western tradition has provided for emergencies,” because the past was the source of inspiration.⁵⁸

Founding a state instantiated republican traditions of political self-rule, although Arendt always opposed the state’s sovereign claim as inimical to human

zerland as exemplars of “the multinational state” was common at the time; e.g., Julius Stone, *The Atlantic Charter: New Worlds for Old* (Sydney, 1943), 79.

⁵⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Civil Disobedience,” in *Crises of the Republic* (San Diego, CA, 1972), 102.

⁵⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 21, 54, 115.

⁵⁶ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 53, and “What Is Authority?” 140.

⁵⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 27.

⁵⁸ Arendt, “What Is Authority?” 141.

plurality. However imperfect their constitutions, states acted as residual containers of a tradition that was threatened by the economically driven imperial expansion of the late nineteenth century. The imperialism manifested so spectacularly in the “scramble for Africa” in the mid-1880s represented for her “an almost complete break in the continuous flow of Western history as we had known it for more than two thousand years.”⁵⁹ The rot had set in earlier, in the seventeenth century—the beginning of the “modern age,” just before the Atlantic revolutions—when Western elites began to believe in limitless progress instead of remembering the tradition’s sacred foundation in Rome. This new temporal orientation fatally ruptured the trinity of religion-authority-tradition and its “common sense” standards of politics, ethics, and morality, an analysis she shared with Voegelin.⁶⁰ The twentieth-century totalitarian catastrophes ensued from this rupture. Even the United States, the product of the most successful republican revolution, was threatened by the “worldlessness” of a self-automated, global economic system beyond human control. Limitless expansion for its own sake, represented by imperialism and capitalism, was the enemy of the limited political order that provided a worldly home for humans. It attacked their freedom.

This process was, so to speak, the “external” enemy of the nation-state. Its internal decay was initiated when an ethnically conceived nation began to conquer the state, as Arendt observed in Europe between the wars; that is, it started with “the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation,” the concomitant discrimination against minorities, the production of refugees, and the destruction of the political sphere.⁶¹ Initially writing before the wave of decolonization in the early 1960s, Arendt saw the nation-state as the victim rather than victor of modern history. How were we to rescue republicanism after the sovereign nation-state had run its course as a political form?⁶²

To save the West in its emergency meant reconstructing the Roman political experience that, Arendt maintained, had never been satisfactorily registered in Western political thought. She was to perform this task. Several features of the Roman republic and empire needed highlighting to remedy the defects of the Western tradition’s Greek, Jewish, and Christian dimensions. The “political genius of Rome,” she wrote in *The Human Condition*, was “legislation and foundation.” Elsewhere, she added “the preservation of a *civitas*.”⁶³ State founda-

⁵⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 123.

⁶⁰ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 51.

⁶¹ Arendt, *Origins*, 275. Here she seems to take the insight from C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (London, 1934).

⁶² Hannah Arendt, “Zionism Reconsidered,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 371.

⁶³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 195, and *Promise of Politics*, 47. The rule of law as a fundament of the Western notion of politics and the state was underlined earlier by Max Weber in his famous address, “Politics as a Vocation.”

tions, their worship in sacred memory, and the rule of law constituted this Roman political experience. Each element was a building block in the justification for the Roman expansion she supported.

The first element, then, was the myth of Rome's foundation as recounted by Virgil in his epic poem *Aeneid*. Following centuries of commentary on the relevance of Virgil's poetry for contemporary empire, Arendt regarded the occurrences recounted there as "among the most remarkable and amazing events in Western history."⁶⁴ This poem about the foundation of Rome by the survivors of Troy's destruction was, for her, a lesson in human freedom—beginning a new polity "without the help of a transcendent God"—which is why it held such fascination for the men of the American revolution.⁶⁵ By sourcing Rome's origins in Troy rather than in the fratricidal violence of Romulus, Virgil obviated the problem associated with an "absolute new beginning," namely, that its "complete arbitrariness" and "abyss of pure spontaneity" contained the potential for virtually limitless violence. The utopianism and search for a "new absolute" characteristic of a Robespierre, which she associated with Plato, threatened terror unless safely institutionalized by inserting revolutionary moments into a historical continuum. Citing Harrington, she noted that "men of action, driven by the momentum of the liberation process . . . ransacked the archive of 'ancient prudence' to guide them in the establishment of a Republic." Successful revolutionary foundations, then, were establishments not of "a new Rome" but of "Rome anew": foundations were renewals (*erneute Gründung*).⁶⁶

Arendt was aware that the arrival of the Trojans and establishment of a new Troy entailed bloodshed, namely, war with "the native Italians." Victory was justified, she implied, following Virgil, because the indigenous Italian farmers were prepolitical, inhabiting a "utopian fairy-tale land outside of history," bereft of laws, closer to nature than to human society, a people "whose circling years produce no tales worth telling."⁶⁷ As we will see, these are the terms in

⁶⁴ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 174; Phiroze Vasunia, "Virgil and the British Empire, 1760–1880," in *Lineages of Empire: The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought*, ed. Duncan Kelly (Oxford, 2009), 83–116. Arendt was well acquainted with this story, having reviewed Hermann Broch's *Death of Virgil* in 1949: Hannah Arendt, "The Achievement of Hermann Broch," *Kenyon Review* 11, no. 3 (1949): 476–83. Only in the last decade or so do we see serious attention to Arendt's use of Virgil: John E. Seery, "Castles in the Air: An Essay on Political Foundations," *Political Theory* 27 (1999), esp. 477–85; Dean Hammer, "Hannah Arendt and Roman Political Thought: The Practice of Theory," *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002): 124–49, and *Roman Political Thought and the Modern Theoretical Imagination* (Norman, OK, 2008), 61–77; Michele Lowrie, "Vergil and Founding Violence," *Cardozo Law Review* 27, no. 2 (2005): 945–75; Douglas Klusmeyer, "Hannah Arendt's Case for Federalism," *Publius* 40, no. 1 (2009): 31–58.

⁶⁵ Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 2:211.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 211, 207, 216, *On Revolution*, 32, 210, "What Is Authority?" 139, and *Was ist Politik?* 102.

⁶⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 210–11, and *Life of the Mind*, 2:212–14.

which Arendt elsewhere described indigenous victims of settler colonialism who “live and die without leaving any trace, without having contributed anything to the common world.” In contemporary parlance, they represented “bare life” or, as Arendt presciently expressed the condition of refugees, “the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human.”⁶⁸

Her sympathies lay with the Trojans who were civilizing the natives by founding a political community with a temporal sense of origins: “Action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history,” and thereby imposes “a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time.”⁶⁹ What is more, they introduced settled agricultural communities and inaugurated the Roman ideal of the self-sufficient and patriotic farmer praised by Cato, one of Arendt’s favorite Roman authors, and by Victorian writers millennia later. It is little wonder that the literary scholar Richard Waswo calls Virgil’s *Aeneid* “the founding legend of Western civilization”: that civilization is spread by imperial conquest and settlement and justified by appeals to the cultural superiority of the colonists—exiles and migrants—with their settled agriculture over the autochthonous with their bare life.⁷⁰ Like most Europeans at the time, Arendt assumed such superiority because Roman expansion entailed the spread of liberty, which was sufficient justification for war.

To be sure, Arendt was wary of the Roman just-war tradition in modern conditions because technology meant that war could potentially destroy humanity in nuclear conflagrations.⁷¹ But she had no illusions about the legitimacy of past declarations of war. Quoting Livy, she observed that just wars and necessity—that is, self-defense—were synonymous.⁷² Rome’s belief that its opponents violated those military norms that it observed was at the root of its self-serving “sense of moral superiority in war,” as one scholar has put it.⁷³ Its

⁶⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 300.

⁶⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 8–9, 56.

⁷⁰ Richard Waswo, *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization from Virgil to Vietnam* (Hanover, NH, 1997). His analysis is strikingly similar to Arendt’s but with reversed signs.

⁷¹ Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950 bis 1973*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, 2 vols. (Munich, 2003), 1:243. Here she was effectively rejecting the Roman notion of just war because even defensive wars must exceed the law; there is only justice within the law, and it is impossible to weigh up human suffering with justice. As Cicero, one of her other favorite authors, wrote, “inter arma silent leges” (during war law is silent; *Pro Milone*, trans N. H. Watts, 5th ed. [Cambridge, 1972], 16). The exception she made with the native Italians and other indigenous peoples is significant: their suffering was acceptable for the march of civilization.

⁷² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 2–6.

⁷³ David J. Bederman, *International Law in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2001), 248. See also Clifford Ando, “Empire and the Laws of War: An Archaeology,” in *The Roman Foundations of the Law of Nations: Alberico Gentili and the Justice of Empire*, ed. Benedict

violence was justifiable. Even so, Arendt admired the accompanying Roman belief in the universal validity of the law and maintenance of peace, as expressed, for instance, by Cicero in *De Re Publica*, which we know she studied closely. Arendt stands at the end of a lineage that commenced with Cicero and was developed by the Renaissance humanists and early modern thinkers like Grotius who defended empire in these terms.⁷⁴ What John Pocock observed of Edward Gibbon applies equally to Arendt: “The liberty that mattered was the self-destructive liberty of empire-builders; that the Romans were depriving Spaniards, Gauls, Batavians and Britons of their liberty was recognized, but this had been no more than the warlike independence of barbarous peoples, not the complex and law-governed liberty of republican citizens.”⁷⁵

The mythic quality of this “plot” (Waswo) also lay in the outcome of the war between the Trojans and the natives. Arendt celebrated the fact that the outcome was not “victory and departure for one side, extermination and slavery and utter destruction for the others”; rather (citing Virgil), “‘both nations, unconquered, join treaty forever under equal laws’ and settle down together.” That is, they signed a treaty, blended in intermarriage to become a new people, and averted genocide due to Roman law and its conception of limited warfare, “that unique and great notion of a war whose peace is pre-determined not by victory or defeat but by an alliance of the warring parties, who now become partners, *socii* or allies, by virtue of the new relationship established in the fight itself and confirmed through the instrument of *lex*, the Roman law.”⁷⁶ Arendt was excited by this “genius of Roman politics” in subjecting the world to this law, which united peoples while preserving the distinctiveness of subidentities, unlike modern nation-states that tended “to assimilate rather than integrate”—for incorporation into the Roman Empire entailed less occupation and cultural erasure than ties of friendship on the basis of legal equality, even if they were de facto asymmetrical.⁷⁷ However rosy an interpretation of Roman conquest this

Kingsbury and Benjamin Straumann (Oxford, 2010), 30–52. A good guide to the historiography is Harry Sidebottom, “Roman Imperialism: The Changed Outward Trajectory of the Roman Empire,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 54, no. 3 (2005): 315–30.

⁷⁴ For example, Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 1:438. She likely also read it through Augustine’s *City of God*, which in bk. 2, chap. 21, elaborates on Cicero’s *De Re Publica*. Benjamin Straumann, “‘Ancient Caesarian Lawyers’ in a State of Nature: Roman Tradition and Natural Rights in Hugo Grotius’s *De iure praedae*,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 3 (2006): 328–50; J. E. G. Zetzel, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice: A Carneadean Debate in Cicero and Virgil,” *Classical Philology* 91, no. 4 (1996): 297–319.

⁷⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 4, *Barbarians, Savages, and Empires* (Cambridge, 2005), 332.

⁷⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 211.

⁷⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 125; Arthur M. Eckstein, “Rome in the Middle Republic,” in *The Imperial Moment*, ed. Kimberly Kagan (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 32–66.

view may have been, the point is how she construed this past for the future she wanted to imagine. “Rome,” she noted in May 1953, “[was] the first city that was founded on laws.”⁷⁸ Arendt was saying that this legendary foundation inaugurated the first antigenocidal principle, namely, that treaties and federation replaced “wars of annihilation,” as she called them, thereby drawing former enemies into a common world.⁷⁹ “What happened when the descendants of Troy arrived on Italian soil was no more and no less than the growth of politics in the very place where it had reached its limits and come to an end among the Greeks. With the Romans, politics grew not between citizens of equal rank within a city, but rather between alien and unequally matched people who first came together in battle.”⁸⁰

The Romans realized that forgiveness—or least sparing the conquered—was a political virtue, “a wisdom entirely unknown to the Greeks.”⁸¹ The expansion facilitated by this form of forgiveness marked “the beginning of the Western World”—indeed, it first “created the Western world as *world*” because barbarian societies, which were by definition “worldless,” were conjoined to the Roman one, producing a new reality they henceforth shared.⁸² Although she did not make the link explicit, it is possible to see Arendt’s Kantian notion of judgment as an “enlarged mentality” to be predicated on an imperial logic of expansion, because assessing the viewpoints of others depended on a pluralism achieved by the civilizational incorporation of the other; this process enabled the “world” that facilitated the imaginative capacity—the very faculty that she said Adolf Eichmann lacked. If liberty required expansion, as Machiavelli taught, then so did pluralism.⁸³ The enemy of both, therefore, was ethnocentrism.

Of course, Arendt knew that the colonizing tradition originated in the Greek polis. Quoting the maxim of Greek political culture, she wrote: “Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*’: these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost *any time and anywhere*.”⁸⁴ The polis was a transplantable proposition in time and space. We will see that this ancient colonization was of a piece for

⁷⁸ Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 1:371; David Armitage, “Empire and Liberty: A Republican Dilemma,” in van Gelderen and Skinner, *Republicanism*, 2:32.

⁷⁹ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 176–77.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁸¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 239.

⁸² Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 189, 180.

⁸³ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 43; cf. Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 41–42. On empire and diversity, see Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, chap. 2.

⁸⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 198; emphasis added.

Arendt with the spread of the Anglophone settler colonies and Zionist colonization of Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century.

For all that, she thought the Greek example was insufficient because the polis's ethnocentric self-absorption and radical independence made empire building all but impossible. The scattered poleis did not cohere into a greater whole; they constituted miniworlds rather than expanding the frontiers of civilization. The genius of Rome, we recall, was the incorporation of the colonization impulse into a once-and-for-all foundation of a polity. The memory of this foundation then congealed into a religious cult of tradition that Arendt prized as the glue that held together the *civitas*.⁸⁵

This idealized view of Roman expansion as a federation that avoided genocide may have been taken from James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) and his notion of "unequal leagues" (itself derived from Cicero), upon which Arendt drew in *On Revolution*.⁸⁶ And as Machiavelli, whom she also admired, had contended in his *Discorsi*, Rome expanded most efficiently by establishing leagues of confederacy. Here was the not so "new political principle" of unity-yet-diversity she had announced as the savior of the West at the beginning of the *Origins*. If, as Arendt wrote, all foundations, including conquests, entailed violence and violation—"the old legendary crime (Romulus slew Remus, Cain slew Abel)"—they were redeemed by their transformation into a society of law that "preserved different realms of being."⁸⁷ Machiavelli enjoyed her qualified admiration because he rearticulated the Roman political experience of foundation and understood that revolutions inevitably entailed violence.⁸⁸

THE LIMITS TO THE LIMITS ON VIOLENCE

While Arendt appreciated that violations marked virtually all political foundations, the point of the *Aeneid* myth was to secure the stability of the polity by concealing its bloody origins or at least legitimizing its violent conquests as acts of self-defense, extensions of freedom, and impositions of the rule of law over barbarous peoples. How, after all, could a state thrive if its foundation was thought criminal? Like Virgil, Arendt knew that since Western civilization usually spread by conquest, violence was almost invariably necessary for its expansion. The "colonization of America and Australia," for example, "was

⁸⁵ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 42–50; Robert Mayer, "Hannah Arendt, National Socialism, and the Project of Foundation," *Review of Politics* 53, no. 3 (1991): 473–74.

⁸⁶ On Harrington and Cicero, see David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 137–38.

⁸⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 10–11, 31, 188–89.

⁸⁸ Arendt, "What Is Authority?" 138–41; cf. Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 1:33, 71–72, 122.

accompanied by comparatively short periods of cruel liquidation because of the natives’ numerical weakness.”⁸⁹ In the *Origins*, Arendt wrote: “There have almost always been wars of aggression; the massacre of hostile populations after a victory went unchecked until the Romans mitigated it by introducing *parcere subjectis*; through centuries the extermination of native peoples went hand in hand with the colonization of the Americas, Australia and Africa; slavery is one of the oldest institutions of mankind and all empires of antiquity were based on the labor of state-owned slaves who erected their public buildings.”⁹⁰

Her admission that treaties were not signed with indigenous peoples, who were so often exterminated, undermines her case about the emollient effects of the Roman way of war. In fact, such extermination was built into its assumptions, as she effectively conceded when she wrote of “those isolated tribes who were vegetating their lives away when first discovered on new continents by European explorers, tribes that the Europeans then either drew into the human world or eradicated without ever being aware that they too were human beings.”⁹¹ While the *Aeneid* myth metaphorically reversed Troy’s annihilation by positing the Roman people as the union of Trojans and indigenous locals, thereby setting human survival at the core of the Western tradition, it did so at the cost of establishing a threshold of the human and a standard of civilization in whose name peoples not regarded as fully human and civilized could be dispossessed and annihilated. The limits to her pluralism were all too apparent in her readiness to accept this price of Western expansion. She was opposed not to civilizational progress but only to “the nineteenth century belief of *unlimited* progress.”⁹²

If Arendt expressed few scruples about such violence, she did not have many scruples regarding human inequality either. The “persecution of powerless or power-losing groups may not be a very pleasant spectacle,” she observed, “but it does not spring from human meanness alone.” Power and inequality were not irrational if socially functional. “Even exploitation and oppression still make society work and establish some kind of order.”⁹³ Her defense of European empires’ violence and exploitation was based on their utilitarian nature and instrumental aims, namely, founding and protecting a circumscribed political

⁸⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 187 n. 4. For the Australian frontier, see the essays in A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York, 2004).

⁹⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, 440.

⁹¹ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 176.

⁹² Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic*, 131. On this point, see the lucid discussion in Tony Barta, “Mr. Darwin’s Shooters: On Natural Selection and the Naturalizing of Genocide,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (2005): 116–37, and “On Pain of Extinction: Laws of Nature and History in Darwin, Marx and Arendt,” in King and Stone, *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, 87–108.

⁹³ Arendt, *Origins*, 5.

order. Violence was ultimately limited, an attribute that distinguished those empires from the limitless, antipolitical expansionism of modern imperialism and totalitarianism.⁹⁴

Arendt justified European settler colonialism over the centuries, on the basis of these assumptions. And she therefore took pains to distinguish legitimate empire building—establishing settler colonial societies—from the illegitimate imperialism of the late nineteenth century.

Imperialism is not empire-building and expansion is not conquest. The imperial passion, old as history, time and again, has spread culture and law to the four corners of the world. The conqueror wanted nothing but spoils and would leave the country after the looting; or he wanted to stay permanently and would then incorporate the conquered territory into the body politic and gradually assimilate the conquered population to the standard of the mother country. This type of conquest has led to all kinds of political structures—to empires in the more distant and to nations in the more recent past. At any rate, conquest was but the first step towards preparing a more permanent political structure.⁹⁵

Indeed, we recall, for Arendt the establishment of permanent political structures, with her assumptions about the *viva acta* and *homo faber*, was the paramount precondition for fully human life. We also know Arendt thought that the failure to fabricate such a human world entailed “worldlessness” and, consistent with this perspective, she regarded the long tradition of Jewish isolation from politics as “a form of barbarism.”⁹⁶ The analysis also applied to concentration camp inmates, who, like Jews, were excluded from their politics: “they were regarded as savages and, afraid that they might end up by being considered beasts, they insisted on their nationality . . . as their only remaining and recognized tie with humanity.”⁹⁷ The chauvinist, smaller Slavic peoples attempting to form nation-states after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were similarly alienated from “the old trinity of people-territory-state,” comprising “masses . . . who had not the slightest idea of the meaning of patria, not the vaguest notion of the responsibility of a common limited community and no experience of political freedom.”⁹⁸ Her much-cited description of Israeli Mizrahim protesting at the

⁹⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 228.

⁹⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Imperialism, Nationalism, Chauvinism,” *Review of Politics* 7, no. 4 (1945): 444, and *Origins*, 130. This view was not uncommon at the time: Benjamin Gerig et al., “Colonial Aspects of the Postwar Settlement,” *International Conciliation* 21 (1942–43): 196–97.

⁹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego, CA, 1970), 13. While she welcomed Zionism’s achievement in bringing Jews back into “history,” she also registered the price: “The specifically Jewish humanity signified by their worldlessness was something very beautiful”: Hannah Arendt, “‘What Remains? The Language Remains’: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” in Kohn, *Essays in Understanding*, 17.

⁹⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 300.

⁹⁸ Arendt, “Imperialism, Nationalism, Chauvinism,” 462.

Eichmann trials as an “oriental mob, as if one were in Istanbul or some other half-Asiatic country”—“mob” being her choice term for the worldless rabble—expressed this belief as well.⁹⁹

It was not as if she completely ignored the indigenous perspective. Tacitus provided the imputed view of the victim of Roman conquest when he composed this classic address for the British leader Calgacus in his *Agricola*: “Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the deep. If the enemy be rich, they are rapacious; if he be poor, they lust for domination; neither the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace.”¹⁰⁰

From this famous quotation, Arendt drew the conclusion that Roman commentators were superior to modern ones because they at least acknowledged “the side of the defeated as defeated.” Nothing more could be expected from the Romans, whose horizon excluded “some other absolutely different entity equal to Rome in greatness and thus worthy of being remembered in history.” But if she disapproved of this “limitation,” it did not affect her broader views: she adopted the victor’s perspective throughout—unlike, say, Simone Weil, who identified with the indigenous victims.¹⁰¹ Not for Arendt is Rudyard Kipling’s consciousness of empire’s costs in his famous phrase about “savage wars of peace.”

Arendt was able to entertain such notions about empire by consigning to a footnote the apparently atypical case of the Belgian Congo, whose conquest she knew had cost tens of millions of lives, and excusing the large-scale massacres as instrumentally limited actions.¹⁰² Ultimately, she did not think that the Romans and, later, the Europeans, were aggressors. Indeed, her reliance on Theodor Mommsen’s *History of Rome* suggests she was influenced by the theory of “defensive imperialism”—the accretive acquisition of empire by confronting perceived external threats rather than by premeditated aggression—which was popular among the ancient Roman apologists as well as in her day.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Arendt to Jaspers, April 13, 1961, in *Hannah Arendt–Karl Jaspers: Correspondence, 1926–1969*, ed. Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert Kimber and Rita Kimber (New York, 1992), 435.

¹⁰⁰ See Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 219. On this theme, see Brian Adler, *Valorizing the Barbarians: Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography* (Austin, TX, 2011); cf. Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York, 2009).

¹⁰¹ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 189.

¹⁰² Arendt, *Origins*, 444 n. 8, 185.

¹⁰³ Jerzy Linderski, “*Si vis pacem, para bellum*: Concepts of Defensive Imperialism,” in *The Imperialism of Mid-Republican Rome*, ed. William V. Harris (Rome, 1984), 133–

This view was consistent with her subscription to the *Aeneid* myth that, since Vitoria, had justified European expansion by reference to posited norms of hospitality and commerce that coded indigenous resistance as aggression and European violence as self-defense.¹⁰⁴

THE “BOOMERANG EFFECT” AND THE CRITIQUE OF IMPERIALISM

We stated at the outset that Arendt’s fealty to the republican tradition did not entail blind affirmation of Western civilization. It was also a source of limited if trenchant critique. That the “boomerang” thesis can be traced back to authors such as John A. Hobson has been noted, but its sources lie much further back with Roman writers like Sallust, author of “the first decline and fall,” who decried the corruptions of the republic by imperial expansion.¹⁰⁵ Arendt’s major sources on late nineteenth-century imperialism were Charles Dilke’s *Greater Britain* (1868); J. R. Froude’s *Oceania* (1886), named after Harrington’s book of the same title; J. R. Seeley’s *The Expansion of England* (1883); and, of course, Hobson’s *Imperialism* (1902), whose categories were in part indebted to earlier Victorian critics like Richard Cobden.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore worth briefly recalling their views.

Cobden (1804–65) and others a generation before him had voiced the traditional republican concern that imperial rule corrupted the domestic polity in a number of ways: governing foreigners entailed imposing despotism abroad and promoting the social power of military and other elites in England; adventurers corroded domestic political culture when they returned.¹⁰⁷ Such critics tended to value the virtues they perceived among settler colonists, looking to Greece rather than Rome as their model. Settlement, not conquest, was their ideal. At

52; Parchami, *Hegemonic Peace and Empire*, 88; Eric Adler, “Late Victorian and Edwardian Views of Rome and the Nature of ‘Defensive Imperialism,’” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 15, no. 2 (2008): 187–216.

¹⁰⁴ A. Dirk Moses, “Besatzung, Kolonialherrschaft und Widerstand: Das Völkerrecht und die Legitimierung von Terror,” *Peripherie: Zeitschrift für Politik und Ökonomie in der Dritten Welt* 116 (December 2009): 399–424.

¹⁰⁵ On Hobson and Arendt, see Karuna Mantena, “Genealogies of Catastrophe: Arendt on the Logic and Legacy of Imperialism,” in Benhabib, *Politics in Dark Times*, 83–112. For Sallust as author of “the first decline and fall,” see J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3, *The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge, 2003), 37.

¹⁰⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 181–82. Hobson in fact published a book about Cobden: J. A. Hobson, *Cobden: The International Man* (London, 1919).

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Phillips, “Saving Civilization from Empire: Belligerency, Pacifism and the Two Faces of Civilization during the Second Opium War,” *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 5–27; Norman Vance, “Anxieties of Empire and the Moral Tradition: Rome and Britain,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18, no. 2 (2011): 246–61.

the same time, they noted the ever-present danger that settlers might be corrupted by their savage environment.¹⁰⁸

Later Victorians like Seeley and Froude became haunted by the prospect of imperial decline and fall, as rival German and other empires challenged British hegemony. Accordingly, they sought alternatives to the pessimistic narratives offered by Sallust and Polybius. Sallust, in particular, was a confounding prophet because his account portrayed imperial decline as a product of the same kind of “republican” freedom and imperial success enjoyed by Great Britain: the attainment of independence and liberty led to the pursuit of glory and expansion that in turn heralded corruption. Rome’s destruction of Carthage, argued Sallust, meant the elimination of its last existential threat, yet the removal of that threat also eliminated the guarantee that public-spirited virtue would prevail over privately oriented ambition.¹⁰⁹ Machiavelli took up these insights in his commentary on imperial rule over conquered provinces; the military commander ruled there without checks and balances, unlike the magistrate in the core territories, thereby turning what should be an exercise of public power into an extension of the private realm. Only in the free and competitive interplay of institutions and opinion could virtue be guaranteed.¹¹⁰

John Hobson congealed these ideas in his famous critique, *Imperialism*, Arendt’s main source of inspiration for her own views on the subject. No less than his predecessors, Hobson distinguished between empires—effectively settler colonialism—and imperialism. The former was “a genuine expansion of nationality, a territorial enlargement of the stock, language and institutions of the nation” through migrants’ foundation of polities whose inhabitants would enjoy either full British citizenship or “local self-government in close conformity with her institutions.” Imperialism, by contrast, was a “debasement of genuine nationalism” because it entailed the “complete political bondage” of conquered subjects.¹¹¹ True empire, he continued, was epitomized by “the so-called *Pax Romana*,” namely, “a federation of States, under a hegemony, covering in general

¹⁰⁸ Miles Taylor, “Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19, no. 1 (1991): 1–23.

¹⁰⁹ Sallust, *The Jugurthine War and the Conspiracy of Catiline*, trans. S. A. Handford (Harmondsworth, 1963); Neal Wood, “Sallust’s Theorem: A Comment on ‘Fear’ in Western Political Thought,” *History of Political Thought* 16, no. 2 (1995): 174–89; Duncan Bell, “Republican Imperialism: J. A. Froude and the Virtue of Empire,” *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 1 (2009): 166–89; Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 127.

¹¹⁰ Benedetto Fontana, “Sallust and the Politics of Machiavelli,” *History of Political Thought* 24, no. 1 (2003): 107–8; Pocock, *First Decline and Fall*, chap. 10.

¹¹¹ John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York, 1902), 4. He cites Seeley on this point.

terms the entire known or recognized world.” The novelty of contemporary imperialism was the “cut-throat struggle of competing empires” with deleterious effects.¹¹² In the British case, he complained, its “despotism” in India and Africa had outstripped the “progress in population and practical freedom attained by our few democratic colonies” in settler colonies like Australia.¹¹³

Hobson spared no criticism of imperial rule. *Pax Britannica*, once “an impudent falsehood,” was now “a grotesque monster of hypocrisy” because imperialism was “aggression against lower races.” At home, government policy was increasingly determined by “financial jontos,” by which he meant that commercially minded politicians used public resources to advance private business interests. Worse still, further resources were devoted to the army and navy as militarism moved to the “forefront of practical politics.” Using the language of republicanism, he complained that these developments struck “at the very root of popular liberty and the ordinary civic virtues.”¹¹⁴

The boomerang effect manifested itself in the stimulation of “autocratic government” at home due to the increased secrecy of the executive and decline of popular control. Those ruling the “natives” in situ were damaged as well by “feeding habits of snobbish subservience, the admiration of wealth and rank, the corrupt survivals of the inequalities of feudalism.” Cecil Rhodes was a typical figure “whose character has been formed in our despotic Empire.” In sum: “It is, indeed, a nemesis of Imperialism that the arts and crafts of tyranny, acquired and exercised in our unfree Empire, should be turned against our liberties at home.”¹¹⁵

Arendt took up all these points: the distinction between legitimate Roman-style empire and late nineteenth-century imperialism; the British emulation of the Greeks in expanding by means of settlers rather than imposing its laws on others as the French did; the critique of despotic rule in the manner of Sallust, linked to the expansion of the private realm over the public (Arendt quoted Burke on this point in her *Origins*); the concomitant infection of foreign policy with commercial imperatives; the corruption of Europeans in the colonies and production of characters like Rhodes who gave themselves over to the imperialism of ceaseless expansion; the clash between Roman plebs and elites transformed into the contemporary rule of the “mob” and crisis of the traditional political class; and, finally, again like Sallust, the dialectical observation that expansion produces its own negation in the autogeneration of a type of people—European savages and barbarians—who would subvert the polity from within.¹¹⁶

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 6, 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132, 134, 140.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158–60.

¹¹⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 125–28, 183, 207–12, 302.

Arendt’s recourse to the republican critique of imperialism is plainly evident. It allowed her to discern Europe’s cultural and political decay in its exploitative rule of non-Europeans as well as in “global, universally interrelated civilization.”¹¹⁷ At the same time, while non-European intellectuals challenged Western pieties, Arendt, Hobson, and their European predecessors did not question the legitimacy of European expansion, so long as it accorded with certain precepts. Empire rather than imperialism was acceptable; indeed, it was a motor of civilizational progress. The cost for indigenous people was noted only in asides. Thus, Hobson confessed that settler colonialism was effectively tantamount to genocide, much as Arendt did half a century later: “When the settlement approaches the conditions of genuine colonisation, it has commonly implied the extermination of the lower races, either by war or by private *slaughter*, as in the case of the Australian Bushmen and the Hottentots, Red Indians, and the Marories [*sic*], or by forcing upon them the habits of a civilisation equally destructive of them.”¹¹⁸ And nonetheless, he—and Arendt—idealized settler colonialism. To be sure, many Victorians deplored such violence, urging inquiries and measures to “protect” the “natives.”¹¹⁹ One of them, John Stuart Mill, was so perturbed by the consequences for indigenous peoples that he worried colonization might be discredited altogether. In Duncan Bell’s apt term, the later Mill’s advocacy of colonialism became “melancholic.”¹²⁰ These tensions are apparent in Arendt’s hotly contested views on a controversial settlement project in which she participated: the Zionist colonization of Palestine. Arendt’s ensemble of analyses served to frame both her early justifications and her later biting criticism of Zionism—a criticism, however, that was ultimately undermined by its civilizational normativity.

SETTLING PALESTINE AND MELANCHOLIC ZIONISM

A secular thinker, Arendt eschewed religious legitimation for Jewish settlement in Palestine. She did not have recourse to Zionist rhetoric of “returning” to the

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹¹⁸ Hobson, *Imperialism*, 266. The “eliminationist” feature of settler colonialism, which seeks the land but not the labor of the indigene, is elaborated by Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–410. On settler colonialism generally, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, 2010), and the journal he has co-founded, *Settler Colonial Studies*.

¹¹⁹ Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895–1914* (London, 1968).

¹²⁰ Duncan Bell, “John Stuart Mill on Colonies,” *Political Theory* 38, no. 1 (2010): 34–64; Jahn Beate, “Barbarian Thoughts: Imperialism in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill,” *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 599–618; Mark Tunick, “Tolerant Imperialism: John Stuart Mill’s Defense of British Rule in India,” *Review of Politics* 68, no. 4 (2006): 586–611.

ancient homeland, and she consistently criticized Herzl's territorial solution to the "Jewish question." She seems to have regarded Jews foremost as a "European people" rather than as non-European Semites. For her, "Palestine can be regarded solely as an area of settlement for European Jews."¹²¹ Strange as it may seem, it is likely that her Zionist inspiration was based more on the "marvelously colorful tales of the adventures of Aeneas and his fellow Trojans" than on "the aimless desperate wandering of the Israeli tribes in the desert after the Exodus."¹²²

The Jewish right to the land, then, was based on the Roman ideal of settlers cultivating the soil. Reflecting the agriculturalist argument that productive land use gave property title—an argument advanced by her idol Martin Buber, for one—Arendt declared that "the right of the Jewish people in Palestine is the same right every human being has to the fruits of his work." Let us recall the centrality of work (*homo faber*) for Arendt. The lengthy worldlessness of Jews was a result of "the thousands-of-years-old separation of the Jewish people from cultivation of the soil," a privation that "is bad, even inhuman (and the greatest achievement of the Palestinian *yishuv* is to have reversed this separation)."¹²³ The problem was less exile than the interdiction of cultivation. She was thrilled by the colonization experiment that, if successful, would place a Jewish nation on an equal footing with other nations and mark the Jewish reentry into politics and world history. The right to this status, she reiterated in her essays in the early 1940s, lay in the fact that "the work of their own hands make[s] this earth richer and more beautiful." This was the "conquest of Palestine by hard work." The "Jewish rights to Palestine," she therefore declared, were "earned and founded on Jewish labor."¹²⁴ Such was her secularization of Buber's mystical evocation of agricultural work as the vehicle for Jewish redemption in their ancestral homeland.¹²⁵

Likewise, her insistent demand for an autonomous Jewish army to fight Nazi Germany was based on the right of the settler-colonist: "the right to take up the sword, which can be denied to no one who has put his hand to the plow or trowel." They would "defend the fruits of their labor and the meaning of their civilian life," namely, "their fields and trees, their houses and factories, their children and wives." She was anxious that the Zionist achievement be recognized as self-emancipation, not as the free gift of the imperial power—that is, as the product of Great Britain's incorporation of the Balfour Declaration

¹²¹ Hannah Arendt, "The Jewish War That Isn't Happening," in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 143.

¹²² Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 2:204.

¹²³ Arendt, "Jewish War That Isn't Happening," 175.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 144, 142; Hannah Arendt, "The Political Organization of the Jewish People," in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 236.

¹²⁵ For her idealization, see Arendt, "A Guide for Youth," published in 1935.

into its mandate trust of Palestine. Jewish political equality was attested by a really existing “community, for we are there ‘by rights and not just out of sufferance.’”¹²⁶

For their part, Arendt thought, the Arabs had neglected the task of cultivation and civilization: “the Arabs had 1,500 years to turn a stony desert into fertile land, whereas the Jews have had not even forty, and . . . the difference is quite remarkable”—a view that ignored the fact that the Zionist economy enjoyed insuperable comparative advantages. Its projects were often built on extant Ottoman and local Arab initiatives, Zionist industrial schemes were favored by an official concession regime, and, driving it all along, Jewish capital flowed in from around the world.¹²⁷ Her descriptions of Arab society reflected her broader view of Asian stasis and despotism—of their countries as semifeudal places ruled by clans and rich landlords who exploited a hapless peasantry.¹²⁸ Although she never subscribed to the convenient fiction that Palestine was denuded of Arabs, and even conceded that the land “is not even entirely ours,” she did think that the Zionists’ economic development and establishment of political society there trumped the rights of the Arabs because they were not fully human in her sense.¹²⁹ The Jews were doing the Arabs a favor: “In their blind ideological hostility toward Western civilization . . . they [the Arabs] could not see that this region would be modernized in any case and that it would be far wiser to form an alliance with the Jews.”¹³⁰ Like the Greek colonists, the Jewish ones were founding a polis where none had existed. And like the Roman ones, they were cultivating the soil, which would benefit everyone.¹³¹ Jewish colonization would give Arabs the chance to “overcome feudal, backward conditions and terrible poverty.”¹³² Therein lay the right of colonization.

As Mill did with regard to the British settler colonies, however, Arendt developed mixed feelings about the Zionist settlement in Palestine in the mid-

¹²⁶ Arendt, “Jewish War That Isn’t Happening,” 145. Ironically, here she is citing a phrase from Winston Churchill in his White Paper of 1922 that Zionists quoted in the Mandate period to assert their right to Palestine: W. F. Albright et al., eds., *Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab, and British Policies*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1947), 1:286.

¹²⁷ Arendt, “Jewish War That Isn’t Happening,” 184; Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford, 2013); Patrick Wolfe, “Purchase by Other Means: The Palestine *Nakba* and Zionism’s Conquest of Economics,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 113–71.

¹²⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Between Silence and Speechlessness” and “Why the Crémieux Decree Was Abrogated,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 195, 248.

¹²⁹ Arendt, “Minority Question,” 130, and “Crisis of Zionism,” 335.

¹³⁰ Hannah Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 438.

¹³¹ Hannah Arendt, “A Way towards the Reconciliation of People,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 261–62.

¹³² Arendt, “Between Silence and Speechlessness,” 197.

1940s. The timing is significant. The period of incipient violent Zionist opposition to the British Mandate and the international Zionist assertion of rights to all of Palestine coincided with her work on *Origins*. It is little wonder, then, that she applied the same categories of analysis to Zionism as to politics and history generally. The objects of her criticism will now be familiar. Rather than establishing a federation or commonwealth with Arabs in Palestine and in the region, the Zionists were reverting to the integral nationalism she associated with Central European chauvinism. The key for Jewish flourishing, even survival, in the region would be a UN trusteeship that prevented a sovereign state and the absolute cultural claims she had observed in Europe a decade earlier: the choice was “federation or Balkanization.”¹³³ Rather than incarnating the Virgilian ideal, with its mythic blending of settlers and locals to create a new polity, let alone one that respected difference in a superordinate structure, Zionists made little effort to integrate Palestinians into their new dynamic economy. Not that the Arabs welcomed the newcomers. Both sides were obtuse, she thought: “almost from the beginning, the misfortune of the building of a Jewish national home has been that it was accompanied by a Central European ideology of nationalism and tribal thinking among Jews, and by an Oxford-inspired colonial romanticism among the Arabs.”¹³⁴ Ben Gurion’s support of laws that prevented intermarriage represented such ethnocentrism, Arendt wrote later.¹³⁵

Generally, Arendt sought to promote cosmopolitan openness in the face of what she called “dangerous tendencies of formerly oppressed people to shut themselves off from the rest of the world and develop nationalist superiority complexes of their own.”¹³⁶ Zionists, she suggested, were making the same mistakes as newly liberated colonial peoples elsewhere in the world, no less than many Europeans before them—namely, permitting the nation to dominate the state. When the American Zionist Conference of October 1944 determined that “a free and democratic commonwealth . . . shall embrace the whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished,” she noted with alarm that Arabs were left with “the choice between voluntary emigration or second-class citizenship.” The conference had betrayed her and the binational Zionists of Brit Shalom, who had “tirelessly preached the necessity of an understanding between the Arab and Jewish peoples.”¹³⁷ Although Arendt had no sympathy with Arab resistance to

¹³³ Hannah Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland,” in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 399, and “Peace or Armistice in the Near East,” 446.

¹³⁴ Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East,” 437.

¹³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York, 1963), 5.

¹³⁶ Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland,” 396.

¹³⁷ Arendt, “Zionism Reconsidered,” 343; cf. Gabriel Piterberg, “Zion’s Rebel Daughter: Hannah Arendt on Palestine and Jewish Politics,” *New Left Review* 48 (2007): 39–57; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine,” in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. Steven E. Aschheim

Zionist colonization, she could not countenance in Palestine what she deplored in Central Europe, that is, ethnically exclusive nation-states that produced refugees and second-class citizens, as occurred in the Middle East in 1948.¹³⁸ “After the War it turned out that the Jewish question, which was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved—namely, by means of a colonized and then conquered territory—but this solved neither the problem of the minorities nor the stateless. On the contrary, like virtually all other events of our century, the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of stateless and rightless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people.”¹³⁹

Rigorously consistent in her analysis, Arendt went further than drawing parallels between interwar European states and Zionism; she saw the latter tending toward totalitarianism itself. The population “transfer” thinking that subtended the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem was akin to “the decision of a totalitarian state, implemented by its particular brand of ruthless force.” She denounced the firm conviction that non-Jews were by nature predisposed to hate Jews—the theory of eternal antisemitism—as “plain racist chauvinism” that “does not differ from other master-race theories.” The Yishuv was being corrupted in its struggle with the British and the Palestinians by “terrorism and the growth of totalitarian methods [which] are silently tolerated and secretly applauded.”¹⁴⁰ The cost of this approach would be high, she predicted in 1948: “The ‘victorious’ Jew would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders, absorbed with physical self-defence to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities. . . . The Palestinian Jews would degenerate into one of those small warrior tribes about whose possibilities and importance history has amply informed us since the days of Sparta.”¹⁴¹ Her opposition to the development of political Zionism culminated in an open letter in the *New York Times* in late 1948, signed by such other luminaries as Albert Einstein and Sidney Hook, condemning the Revisionists for having “openly preached the doctrine of the fascist state.”¹⁴² Non-Jewish ethnocentrism had been bad for the Jews, she was saying, just as Jewish ethnocentrism was bad for Palestinians as well as for Jews.

(Berkeley, 2001), 165–80; and Moshe Zimmerman, “Hannah Arendt, the Early ‘Post-Zionist,’” in *ibid.*, 181–93. See generally, Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

¹³⁸ Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East,” 426.

¹³⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 290.

¹⁴⁰ Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland,” 390–94.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁴² Open letter, “New Palestine Party,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1948, in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 417–19.

Arendt now engaged in closer scrutiny of this corruption's source. From the outset, she realized, Theodor Herzl's Zionism had been based too firmly in "German sources," meaning that Jews were imagined as a "biological entity" or "organic national body" rather than foremost as a political one; here her views paralleled Buber's advice to the Anglo-American Commission in 1946 that Zionism should not "create another national movement of the European type."¹⁴³ Herzl was "a crackpot" who reflected the "deep desires of the folk" and extraparliamentary political movements, which put him in "touch with subterranean currents of history"; here was the language of destructive undercurrents in Western history she took from Goethe and used at the beginning of *Origins*. As a result, she concluded, political Zionism was "essentially a reactionary movement," and the Yishuv was suffused by a "fierce chauvinism and fanatic provincialism."¹⁴⁴

For that reason, she was unwilling to pay the "moral price" that her Zionist critics like the Israeli philosopher Elhanan Yakira claim are the inevitable cost of Zionism's success.¹⁴⁵ Establishing an ethnonational state could not justify ethnic cleansing, she suggested, because it was a reactionary enterprise; colonial genocides could be justified, in contrast, when committed in the name of expanding civilization. And so, like Hans Kohn, she chose to base herself in the United States, the last bastion of freedom, rather than Israel, where the ideal of a federation or commonwealth of Jews and Arabs was being trumped by the sovereign nation-state on the interwar model that she thought an increasingly globalized world had rendered anachronistic.¹⁴⁶

For all these criticisms of Israel, however, she did not abandon this settler colonial experiment. The distinction she inherited between the positive imperial expansion of settler colonialism and negatively coded late nineteenth-century imperialism was never so evident as in her claim that "the building of a Jewish home was not a colonial enterprise in which Europeans came to exploit foreign riches with the help and at the expense of native labor." The point about settler colonialism, though, is that the settler covets the land rather than native labor, a dynamic that Arendt knew had been fatal to indigenous people since Europe's

¹⁴³ Hannah Arendt, "The Jewish State," in Kohn and Feldman, *Jewish Writings*, 382. Martin Buber, *On Zion: History of an Idea*, foreword Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. Stanley Godman (New York, 1973), xiii.

¹⁴⁴ Arendt, "Jewish State," 376, 386, "To Save the Jewish Homeland," 395, and "Peace or Armistice in the Near East," 434.

¹⁴⁵ Elhanan Yakira, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust*, trans. Michael Swirsky (Cambridge, 2010), 240. Here Yakira criticizes Arendt for her unwillingness to pay this price.

¹⁴⁶ On Kohn and the ambivalence about the terms of Zionist colonization, see Christian Weise, "The Janus Face of Nationalism: The Ambivalence of Zionist Identity in Robert Weltsch and Hans Kohn," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 51 (2006): 103–30.

expansion in the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁷ For her, Jews had transformed the land for the better—the progressive dimension of Zionism—“and this without conquest and with no attempt at extermination of the natives.” She thus heralded the “unique” Jewish achievements in Palestine, especially the Kibbutzim, which she called, again echoing Buber, “the most magnificent part of the Jewish homeland.”¹⁴⁸ Later, in 1967, during her supposed anti-Zionist phase, she exulted in Israel’s victory over Arab forces, sharing the Israeli view of Nasser as a neofascist.¹⁴⁹ The Roman categories of her thought simultaneously underwrote and mitigated the critique of Zionism because the outcome ultimately justified the violence used to achieve it. Her Zionism was accordingly melancholic, like Mill’s ambivalent defense of colonialism, but it was Zionism all the same because it sufficiently resembled her ideal of civilizational expansion compared to the surrounding Arab states. However stinging her criticisms of Zionism-in-practice, she was not the anti- or post-Zionist that some have made her out to be.¹⁵⁰

THE HOLOCAUST AND REASON OF STATE

How, then, does the Holocaust fit into her schema? Can the republican tradition be squared with the “new key” of post-Holocaust global civilization? The analytical task was to separate this previous imperial violence from Nazi genocidal imperialism. The Roman Empire had certainly committed excesses; Arendt often referred to its destruction of Carthage. Sometimes she even hinted at a connection between Roman and Nazi campaigns in the manner of Simone Weil. The “practical abolition” of “wars of annihilation” over the last hundred years, she thought, meant that their reappearance with totalitarianism was the “reversion of warfare to the days when the Romans wiped Carthage off the face of the earth.”¹⁵¹ On the whole, though, she lauded the Romans for replacing the Greek mode of unlimited warfare with a political modality that ended hostilities with a treaty and alliance, “inventing a new outcome for war’s conflagration.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Compare Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Cambridge, 1989); Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.”

¹⁴⁸ Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East,” 434–35.

¹⁴⁹ See the discussion in Piterberg, “Zion’s Rebel Daughter,” 56.

¹⁵⁰ On this point, see Steven E. Aschheim, “Hannah Arendt and the Modern Jewish Experience,” *Times Literary Supplement*, September 26, 2007. Symptomatic of a leftist attachment to her apparent post-Zionism is Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York, 2012), chap. 6.

¹⁵¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 5, and *Human Condition*, 228.

¹⁵² Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 178.

What about Rome's infamous destruction of Carthage? Peace was impossible with that city because its leaders were untrustworthy, thereby embodying "an anti-Roman political principle against which Roman statesmanship was powerless and which would have destroyed Rome had not Rome destroyed it first." Carthage was also equally powerful and hardly likely to yield on Roman terms.¹⁵³ Her analysis of the reasoning for Rome's policy of destruction in the Third Punic War shows that it mirrored the logic of colonial and imperial wars of expansion that so often ended in genocidal counterinsurgency and indigenous destruction—namely, the conqueror cannot accept parity with a rival. Roman political virtues were predicated on submission to its rule. Those who declined these terms would be destroyed. Such were the limits of Rome's vaunted toleration and pluralism. Cicero and Augustine may have concurred with this reasoning because of their partiality for Rome, but even they evinced greater unease at Carthage's fate than did Arendt. It was accordingly understandable that she inclined toward Cato the Elder, the model citizen whose aphorisms she often quoted and the instigator of Carthage's destruction.¹⁵⁴

Plainly, she did not think wars of annihilation were unprecedented. They had characterized antiquity, had been tamed by the civilizing process of the West, and then had reappeared with totalitarianism. What, then, was special about the Holocaust? Her only extensive discussion of this question in relation to the new genocide concept appears in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. It is well known that she criticized Eichmann's indictment for interpreting the Holocaust as "not much more than the most horrible pogrom in Jewish history," instead of recognizing its unprecedented nature. Unprecedented, she insisted, was the Nazi regime's determination that "the entire Jewish people disappear from the face of the earth." This was a "new crime," a crime "against the human status." "Expulsion," by contrast, was "an offense against fellow-nations"; genocide was "an attack on human diversity as such," a statement that echoed the UN Declaration on Genocide in 1946, which was heavily influenced by Raphael Lemkin's philosophy that the "human cosmos" was violated by the destruction of its constituent nations.¹⁵⁵ This much is clear, but why did she insist that genocide was unprecedented when elsewhere she suggested it was not? Even if she qualified this statement by confining it to the modern era, was she suggesting that no genocides had taken place, for instance, in the colonial world since 1500?

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 176, 184–86; cf. David W. Bates, "Enemies and Friends: Arendt and the Imperial Republic at War," *History of European Ideas* 36, no. 1 (2010): 112–24.

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, 1998), bk. 2, chaps. 18 and 21, where he discusses Sallust and Cicero in relation to Carthage; cf. J. Warren Smith, "Augustine and the Limits of Preemptive and Preventive War," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35, no. 1 (2007): 141–62.

¹⁵⁵ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 267–69.

Arendt distinguished between the Holocaust and previous genocides by contending that the former was purely ideological while the latter were pragmatic. Whereas conventional genocides, so to speak, were limited by utilitarian aims like pacification or domination, and were to that extent explicable, the extermination of Jews was unlimited, running counter to the war effort by the diversion of resources; it was therefore inexplicable.¹⁵⁶ That is why she wrote that the Holocaust “could not be explained by any utilitarian purpose; Jews had been murdered all over Europe, not only in the East, and their annihilation was not due to any desire to gain territory that ‘could be used for colonization by Germans.’”¹⁵⁷

What Arendt meant by “utilitarian purpose” was apparent from her references to territorial gain and colonization and also from her praise of the Jerusalem court for making an important distinction. On the one hand, states could suppress opposition, which resulted in “war crimes, such as shooting of partisans and killing of hostages” and even ethnic cleansing and destruction “of native populations to permit colonization by an invader.” These were a “known, though criminal, purpose,” a telling slippage about the transgressive nature of imperial expansion through the ages on which she did not elaborate. Indeed, she had noted that “massacres of whole peoples are not unprecedented. They were the order of the day in antiquity, and the centuries of colonization and imperialism provide plenty of examples of more or less successful attempts of that sort.”¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, the extermination of the Jews was a “‘crime against humanity’, whose intent and purpose were unprecedented.” Unprecedented too, she implied, was the nature of the regime that prevented Eichmann from judging his own actions by civilized standards. Eichmann and other Nazi criminals were committing crimes “under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong.” The context was unique because the motives for the Holocaust could not be read from Eichmann’s subjective intentions. While his evil was banal, the Holocaust was a manifestation of radical evil that issued from a supraindividual process of limitless expansion whose executors were people like Eichmann.¹⁵⁹ For Arendt, “the unprecedented crime of genocide *in the midst of Occidental civilization*” applied only to the Holocaust.¹⁶⁰ Genocide outside Occidental civilization—the West—was not so shocking. Consequently, she objected in particular to the penchant of historians to “draw analogies” between Hitler and other notorious

¹⁵⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 445. Here Arendt states the widely cited case of transport used in the Holocaust that could have been devoted to the war effort.

¹⁵⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 275.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 275–76.

¹⁶⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, xiv; emphasis added.

figures in history. “The point is that Hitler was not like Jenghiz Khan and not worse than some other great criminal but entirely different. The unprecedented is neither the murder itself nor the numbers of victims and not even ‘the number of persons who united to perpetrate them.’ It is much rather the ideological nonsense which causes them, the mechanization of their execution, and the careful and calculated establishment of a world of the dying in which nothing any longer made sense.”¹⁶¹ Totalitarianism was a wholly new phenomenon and should not be confused with previous regime forms and their crimes:

For the moral point of this matter is never reached by calling what happened by the name of “genocide” or by counting the many millions of victims: extermination of whole peoples had happened in antiquity, as well as in modern colonization. It is reached only when we realize that this happened within the frame of a legal order and that the cornerstone of this “new law” consisted of the command “Thou shalt kill,” not thy enemy but innocent people who were not even potentially dangerous, and not for any reason of necessity but, on the contrary, even against all military and other utilitarian considerations.¹⁶²

To make her point, Arendt tested Eichmann’s claim that German actions could be understood in terms of a *realpolitische* state of emergency, the rule of *raison d’état* that originated with Roman thinkers like Cicero and Tacitus.¹⁶³ She may have known that Hitler also availed himself of reason of state (*Staatsraison*), and the German historian Friedrich Meinecke linked it to the Nazis as well.¹⁶⁴ Arendt’s immersion in the tradition provided her with the tools she needed to make the necessary distinctions. Two sorts of reasons of state could be distinguished: a ruthless one that would break treaties and commit excesses when expeditious, commonly identified with Tacitus and later with Machiavelli,¹⁶⁵ and a milder version, sourced in Cicero, that was taken up by later think-

¹⁶¹ Hannah Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” in Kohn, *Essays in Understanding*, 243; Arendt, *Origins*, viii, 444. For analyses of Arendt’s method in this regard, see Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1996); and Stephen J. Whitfield, *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* (Philadelphia, 1980).

¹⁶² Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship,” in Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 42.

¹⁶³ Compare Richard Tuck, *Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 1999).

¹⁶⁴ Lothar Gruchmann, “Hitler über die Justiz: Das Tischgespräch vom 20. August 1942,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 12 (1964): 99; Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Contemplations and Recollections*, trans. Sidney B. Fay (Cambridge, MA, 1950). See also Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison D’État and Its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (New Haven, CT, 1957).

¹⁶⁵ Peter Burke, “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge, 1991), 479–98. Arendt,

ers whom Arendt admired, like Augustine and, later, Edmund Burke. Here, the operative principle was necessity rather than expediency. The reasons for action needed to be universally recognizable, could not become a regular principle of government, and needed to eschew “infamy.”¹⁶⁶

In keeping with this tradition, Arendt noted that “concessions [can be] made to the stringencies of *Realpolitik*, in order to preserve power and thus assure the continuance of the existing legal order as a whole.” Such crimes, she conceded, were exempt from legal redress, “because the existence of the state itself is at stake, and no outside political entity has the right to deny a state its existence or prescribe how it is to preserve it.” This argument did not apply to Eichmann, she continued, when a state like the Nazi regime “is founded on criminal principles.”¹⁶⁷ Here she was also applying the test of the German Social Democrat and legal philosopher Gustav Radbruch, who in 1946 famously argued, following Cicero and Augustine, that laws that were intolerably and deliberately unjust could not be regarded as legal.¹⁶⁸ “Can we apply the same principle,” Arendt asked, “that is applied to a governmental apparatus in which crime and violence are exceptions and borderline cases to a political order in which crime is legal and the rule?”¹⁶⁹

This defense of the softer version of *Staatsraison* meant the legitimizing of genocide against indigenous peoples, who were usually legally classified as rebels and therefore not protected by the laws of war. It was thus the subtle distinctions contained within the republican tradition of reason of state that enabled Arendt to distinguish between the Holocaust and genocides that occurred in the colonies. As we have seen, Arendt was not especially interested in this aspect of settler societies, the form of colonialism she praised consistently in her writings, because the English colonists, in particular, established political societies to her liking.¹⁷⁰ It is for this reason, perhaps, that she does not mention Rome’s laying waste of the rebellious Numantia on the Iberian peninsula in 133 BC or the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which Lemkin cited as a case

Human Condition, 35, and “What Is Authority?” 138. To be sure, Arendt had reservations about Machiavelli’s recourse to violence: “What Is Authority?” 139.

¹⁶⁶ David Armitage, “Edmund Burke and Reason of State,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 4 (2000): 617–34; Richard Bourke, “Edmund Burke and the Politics of Conquest,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 403–32.

¹⁶⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 291–92.

¹⁶⁸ Stanley L. Paulson, “Lon L. Fuller, Gustav Radbruch, and the ‘Positivist Theses,’” *Law and Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (1994): 313–59; Frank Haldemann, “Gustav Radbruch vs. Hans Kelsen: A Debate on Nazi Law,” *Ratio Juris* 18, no. 2 (2005): 162–78.

¹⁶⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 291–92.

¹⁷⁰ The Mayflower compact of Puritan settlers, e.g., received lavish praise in *On Revolution*, and positive references to North America and Australia abound throughout her work: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 167–68, and “Imperialism, Nationalism, Chauvinism,” 452.

of genocide.¹⁷¹ Arendt limited the Roman way of warfare to interstate conflicts, occluding colonial and civil wars and thereby licensing reason of state for republican state building and consolidation.¹⁷²

CONCLUSION

It may be argued against my contention about Arendt's revival of Roman and republican traditions that, following Heidegger, she thought Western history had imploded and that little could be salvaged from the past. After all, she wrote in her *Origins* that "we can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion." Those stark words, written in the pessimistic year of 1950, complement her wish for human dignity to be guaranteed by "a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities."¹⁷³ Later, in 1969, she would express her commitment, nurtured since her affiliation with the antifascist resistance, to spontaneously assembled councils that emerged in revolutionary conjunctures and to the federation of such assemblies in larger units through treaties and compacts that would make for a "new state concept."¹⁷⁴ As we now know, this is precisely how she came to conceptualize the Roman Empire; strange as it may seem, she was arguing that they expressed the same political principle. When she wrote *Origins* in the 1940s, she seemed only vaguely conscious of this heritage, although even then she deployed classic republican tropes in her analysis.¹⁷⁵

Arendt's anxiety about the totalitarian threat led her to North America and then to recall, honor, and learn from Rome more explicitly; in that sense, she became a "neo-Roman" thinker.¹⁷⁶ For all that, she did not think her new home was Rome anew, let alone a new Rome, as she phrased the distinction between

¹⁷¹ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, DC, 1944), 80 n. 3. On Arendt and Lemkin, see Seyla Benhabib, "International Law and Human Plurality in the Shadow of Totalitarianism: Hannah Arendt and Raphael Lemkin," in *Politics in Dark Times*, 219–46.

¹⁷² Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 190.

¹⁷³ Arendt, *Origins*, ix.

¹⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," in *Crises of the Republic*, 230–32.

¹⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago, 1996). Here I take issue with Philip Pettit's distinction between a "communitarian and populist approach" that he associates with Arendt and a "commonwealth or republican position" that he avers. See his *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, 1977), 8.

¹⁷⁶ On this term, see Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

taking up “the thread of continuity which bound Occidental politics back to the foundation of the eternal city,” on the one hand, and “the foundation of a new body politic,” on the other.¹⁷⁷ That imperial-republican polity could be neither revived nor even emulated in modern conditions: “The dominion of the Roman Empire over the civilized and barbarian parts of the world was only bearable because it stood against the dark and frightening background of unknown parts of the earth.” Rome offered “no solution to our present political problems,” namely, politics in a new key: the product of a globally interconnected world in which the humanly created but uncontrollable economic processes determined the fate of nations and peoples, rendering them worldless.¹⁷⁸ Modernity’s rupture of Rome’s political traditions meant one had to think “without banisters”: it was impossible, she therefore determined, to “stabilize the situation in which we have been since the seventeenth century in any *final way*”—echoing Voegelin’s reasoning about why *das römische Gespräch* had commenced in the first place.¹⁷⁹ What remained of the Roman legacy was the ancient ideal of federations as in a united Europe of nation-states: a “federal system, whose advantage is that power moves neither from above nor below, but is horizontally directed so that the federated units mutually check and control their powers.”¹⁸⁰ This ideal was one of “the rich and the strange, the pearls and coral in the depths” of the ocean floor that she carried to the surface.¹⁸¹

Progressive as it sounds, this ideal remained underwritten by considerable Eurocentrism. Arendt regarded European decolonization, for example, less as the truculent and at times desperately resisted strategic withdrawal from imperial possessions than as a voluntary relinquishment that indicated the victory of republicanism over the transnational movements of racism and imperialism. “It is one of the glories of Europe, and especially of Great Britain,” she wrote breathlessly, “that she preferred to liquidate the empire.”¹⁸² The West—now effectively the United States and the remnants of the British Empire—had not succumbed to totalitarianism, unlike Germany and Russia. “The fear of boomerang effects of imperialism upon the mother country,” she declared optimistically in 1958 during Great Britain’s brutal suppression of the “Mau Mau” uprising in Kenya, “remained strong enough to make the national parliaments a

¹⁷⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 212.

¹⁷⁸ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 82.

¹⁷⁹ “Hannah Arendt on Hannah Arendt,” in *Hannah Arendt, the Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (London, 1979), 336; emphasis added.

¹⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, “Dream and Nightmare,” in Kohn, *Essays in Understanding*, 416, and *Crises of the Republic*, 230; Klusmeyer, “Hannah Arendt’s Case for Federalism,” is very insightful on this point.

¹⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin, 1892–1940,” in *Men in Dark Times*, 205.

¹⁸² Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” *Journal of Politics* 20, no. 1 (1958): 35, and *Origins*, xviii.

bulwark of justice for the oppressed people and against the colonial administration,” although in fact the British—and the French—did their level best to prevent the application of the Geneva Conventions in these colonial conflicts.¹⁸³ Her point was that their counterinsurgency did not escalate to Auschwitz-style proportions, however dirty these wars, and for this reason she had no truck with the anticolonial, national liberation movements of Africa and Asia, least of all for their European supporters like Sartre.¹⁸⁴

The praise Arendt lavished on the council movements in Hungary in 1956, which arose to resist Soviet imperialist totalitarianism, was thus not extended to anticolonial movements of the same period that were of course seeking national liberation from the comparatively liberal empires of the West. It should not be forgotten, she reminded those seeking to escape empire, that the West’s powerful domestic institutions had resisted genocidal tendencies in its colonies for the good of all. “It is to the salutary restraining of these institutions that we owe those benefits which, after all and despite everything, the non-European peoples have been able to derive from Western domination.”¹⁸⁵ Non-European peoples needed to appreciate these Western virtues, including the nature of authority, she suggested.

Not (yet) political beings, Africans and Asians embodied an alterity that challenged Arendt’s conception and defense of human pluralism.¹⁸⁶ This prejudice was also evident in her dismissal “of traditional Oriental despotism, in India and China,” and the proposition that non-Roman imperial formations could preserve the pluralism she so cherished. As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have recently shown, however, those other empires accommodated difference as well, only differently.¹⁸⁷ What is more, Arendt’s view of the Roman Empire as a limited

¹⁸³ Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” 35; Fabian Klose, “The Colonial Testing Ground: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Violent End of Empire,” *Humanity* 2, no. 1 (2011): 107–26.

¹⁸⁴ Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*, 98. On Britain’s postwar counterinsurgencies, see Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain’s Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke, 2011). A recent analysis of Britain’s violence in Kenya is S. M. Shamsul Alam, *Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya* (New York, 2007). The conventional view of British restraint to which Arendt subscribed is probed in Bruno C. Reis, “The Myth of British Minimum Force in Counterinsurgency Campaigns during Decolonisation, 1945–1970,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 2 (2011): 245–79.

¹⁸⁵ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 136, and “Imperialism, Nationalism, Chauvinism,” 447.

¹⁸⁶ Compare Todd Shepherd, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), 242–47, who points out that France granted automatic citizenship to Algerian Jews but not those Algerian Muslims (“harkis”) who had collaborated with the occupation; their alterity made them a difficult proposition for assimilation to “Frenchness.”

¹⁸⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 311; Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*.

polity deploying commensurately limited violence is hard to reconcile with Rome’s own self-understanding as potentially encompassing “the *orbis terrarum*.”¹⁸⁸ After all, what she admired about Rome’s theoretically limitless expansion was the extension of civilization to the barbarous.

Arendt’s blindness to her blindness in this regard was evident in her belief, noted above, that settler societies like the United States successfully harmonized immigrant nationalities in a tolerant polity. Whether in the racist immigration restrictions of Australia’s “White Australia Policy” and analogous policies in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States or in the biopolitical disciplining of minority populations, however, the imperative to exclude and homogenize in the first half of the twentieth century is difficult to gainsay.¹⁸⁹ What is more, the American republican liberty she prized was predicated on not only the dispossession and genocide of Native Americans but also the slavery of Africans that prevented the destabilizing presence of a large poor white population.¹⁹⁰ No doubt, Arendt’s optimism was conditioned by her Central European experiences and understandable hostility to the prevalent ethnonational conception of politics at the time. Even so, in view of her similar hostility to the civil rights activism of African Americans, no less than to contemporaneous anticolonial movements, it seems difficult to seek her guidance about statelessness, refugees, human rights, and republican foundations with the confidence we see in recent publications.¹⁹¹ For rather than positing “the political” as a domain in which the right to participate can be claimed and contested, she ascribed nonpolitical status to entire categories of humans—indigenous peoples, those engaging in *animal*

¹⁸⁸ C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore, 1994), 18.

¹⁸⁹ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002); Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2005); Ladelle McWhorter, *Race and Sexual Oppression in Anglo America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington, IN, 2009). Not for nothing did Carl Schmitt, writing in 1926, identify Australia’s restrictive immigration policy as the logical outcome of democracy’s hostility to heterogeneity: *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 9.

¹⁹⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: 2010). Thanks to Patrick Wolfe for drawing my attention to these books. See his “The Settler Complex: An Introduction,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 1–22.

¹⁹¹ Compare Natan Sznajder, *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order* (London, 2011); Nikolas Kompridis, “The Idea of a New Beginning: A Romantic Source of Normativity and Freedom,” in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (Abingdon, 2006), 48–49.

laborans, and others reduced to “bare life”—who were thereby excluded from civilization and its emoluments.¹⁹²

If Arendt’s vaunted cosmopolitanism was less universalist than commonly supposed, her Eurocentrism was also revealed by her intuitively emotional reaction to the first news of Auschwitz. “Decisive” was not “1933” but “1943,” as she put it when hearing credible information about the death camps. “Something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves,” she told her interviewer Günter Gaus about the experience. “The method, the fabrication of corpses, and so on,” was radically new. “Personally, I could accept everything else.”¹⁹³ To confront the historical realm of “real evil” as opposed to the literary and philosophical realm of “radical evil,” she concluded, led to “speechless horror, when all you can say is: This should never have happened.”¹⁹⁴ What occurred in the decade after 1933 was explicable, even acceptable.

Arendt was not alone in her reaction. George Steiner, for his part, wrote that his “own consciousness is possessed by the eruption of barbarism in Europe,” which “did not spring up in the Gobi desert or the rain forests of the Amazon,” although he disclaimed “for this hideousness any singular privilege.”¹⁹⁵ The problem, though, is the coding of totalitarian violence and especially the Holocaust as “the eruption of barbarism in Europe”—that traditional republican civilizational category which subtended the extermination of native peoples and imperial wars over millennia. Arendt, Steiner, and others, it seems, were not shocked by barbarism outside Europe, whether ascribable to Europeans or non-Europeans: it was the historical norm that constituted European and generally Western hegemony. Shocking was the genocide of Europeans and of course their own persons, family, and friends. Here was the claim for the Holocaust as civilizational rupture (*Zivilisationsbruch*) decades before German-Israeli historian Dan Diner made it the cornerstone of his philosophy of history.¹⁹⁶ This contention has become a commonplace in Holocaust studies and is the basis for contemporary secular temporality, implying that only with the Holocaust of European Jewry did state and ethnic violence radically transgress the tissue of human solidarity to such an extent that henceforth its commemoration was necessary for the moral bearings of Western civilization.¹⁹⁷ Far from proposing

¹⁹² Jacques Rancière, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, nos. 2–3 (2004): 297–310.

¹⁹³ Arendt, “What Remains?” 13.

¹⁹⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” *Social Research* 61, no. 4 (1994): 761, 763.

¹⁹⁵ George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York, 1977), viii.

¹⁹⁶ Dan Diner, “Den Zivilisationsbruch erinnern: Über Entstehung und Geltung eines Begriffs,” in *Zivilisationsbruch und Gedächtniskultur des beginnenden 21. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Heidemarie Uhl (Innsbruck, 2003), 17–34.

¹⁹⁷ I refer to the institution, in 2000, of Holocaust Memorial Day in the United Kingdom and the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, as well as the establishment, in 2005, of an International Holocaust Remembrance Day

a continuity or “boomerang” thesis regarding colonialism and the metropole, as commonly supposed, Arendt intended to show discontinuity between what she called “the Western tradition”—ultimately a settler colonial one—and totalitarian crimes, which she ascribed in part to modern imperialist conquest. In this way, the Holocaust functioned as a screen memory that blocked from view the civilizational, indeed racial hierarchies on which the republican edifice was based.

As we know from the deliberations about the UN Genocide Convention three years after her 1943 experience, that which “shocks the conscience of mankind”—to use the phrase from the UN General Assembly declaration on genocide—is highly political: what is experienced as transgressive, or especially transgressive, depends very much on who you are. Others have been outraged by previous events or processes, like the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁹⁸ They did not accept Arendt’s “everything else”: the everything else was also a problem. Arendt’s republicanism and reaction to the Holocaust bears out Aimé Césaire’s observation that Europeans were only shocked by Nazism because they were treated as European imperialists had treated non-Europeans for centuries.¹⁹⁹ She had little time for such anticolonial critics of Europe, but I have not been able to discern in her work an answer to Fanon’s accusation that “the West saw itself as a spiritual adventure. It is in the name of the spirit, in the name of the spirit of Europe, that Europe has made her encroachments, that she has justified her crimes and legitimized the slavery in which she holds four-fifths of humanity.”²⁰⁰ There is no obligation to agree with Fanon and Césaire, but their critique deserves a fuller response than it has received so far.²⁰¹

In demonstrating these implications of Arendt’s thought for the republican tradition, my aim is not to debunk an iconic thinker by again highlighting her well-known deprecating observations about Africans and African Americans.²⁰² Nor is it to comfort those who condemn her for supposedly betraying

by the United Nations. On this development, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Memory and the Holocaust in a Global Age* (Philadelphia, 2005).

¹⁹⁸ Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness* (New York, 1999), 38–39. Needless to say, the non-Western critique of Western civilization precedes the Second World War: Michael Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asia Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology,” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 31–63.

¹⁹⁹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, rev. ed. (1955; repr., New York, 1972). See also Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, chap. 3; and Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York, 2008).

²⁰⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, preface Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1963), 313.

²⁰¹ Symptomatically avoiding their charge of Eurocentrism is Dan Diner, *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse: Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust* (Göttingen, 2007), 104–7.

²⁰² Shiraz Dossa, “Human Status and Politics: Hannah Arendt on the Holocaust,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 2 (1980): 309–23; Anne Norton, “Heart

Jews and Israel in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* or for consorting with the enemy Martin Heidegger.²⁰³ Still less do her critics get to the heart of the matter when they accuse Arendt of exculpating German culture from complicity with Nazism by displacing such responsibility onto abstract modernity.²⁰⁴ In fact, like many of her Zionist opponents, she thought that the “Western tradition” was not the cause of totalitarianism but the antidote. My aim, rather, is to draw attention to the limits of *das römische Gespräch* today.

They are all too evident in the persistence of imperial wars waged in the name of humanity and international law, wars that violate the late Enlightenment’s “Commonwealthman” ideals of transnational political federation without colonial domination that the United Nations is supposed to embody.²⁰⁵ Although Arendt was drawn to these ideals, consistent as they were with the United States’s formerly anti-imperial self-understanding, she ultimately sided with the Rome that could not tolerate “some other absolutely different entity equal to Rome in greatness.” This intolerance to parity sounds eerily familiar, as does Rome’s invocation of other countries’ violation of the law of nations as a reason to invade, occupy, and modernize, irrespective of the “collateral damage.” No price, it seems, can be too high in bringing peace and civilization to those dark corners of the globe, or, rather, not much attention is devoted to the price in the grand scheme of civilizational expansion, whether for Hobson, Arendt, or their latter-day epigones.

of Darkness: Africa and African Americans in the Writings of Hannah Arendt,” in Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 47–61; Gail Presbey, “Critic of Boers or Africans? Arendt’s Treatment of South Africa in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford, 1997), 162–80.

²⁰³ For example, Walter Laqueur, “The Arendt Cult,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 4 (1988): 483–96; Bernard Wasserstein, “Blame the Victim—Hannah Arendt among the Nazis: The Historian and Her Sources,” *Times Literary Supplement*, October 9, 2009; Yakira, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust*, chap. 3.

²⁰⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge, 1987), 75–90; Dan Diner, “Hannah Arendt Reconsidered: On the Banal and the Evil in Her Holocaust Narrative,” *New German Critique* 71 (Spring–Summer 1997), 177–90; Richard Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

²⁰⁵ On this tradition, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800* (New Haven, CT, 1998); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2003); James Bohman, “Non-domination and Transnational Democracy,” in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, ed. Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (Oxford, 2008), 190–216; Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions* (Madison, WI, 1993); Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *The Republican Legacy in International Thought* (Cambridge, 1998); Inés Valdez, “Perpetual What? Injury, Sovereignty, and a Cosmopolitan View of Immigration,” *Political Studies* 60, no. 1 (2012): 95–114.

To be sure, as the Cold War drew the United States into the Vietnam War, Arendt descried the corrupting affects on the North American polity in familiar republican terms: the “boomerang effect” was undermining the polity’s precious foundation that she had celebrated in *On Revolution*. This critique of the country’s Vietnam adventure certainly came rather late in the day—in the 1970s—long after others had sounded the tocsin about the country’s imperiled institutions, let alone the millions who had perished in southeast Asia.²⁰⁶ In the end, the critical potential of *das römische Gespräch* was mitigated by the supervening commitment to the tradition’s existence when it was perceived as threatened. Because it can only offer critique from the position of hegemony, then, it is ultimately a weak language of dissent or opposition.

Accordingly, despite Arendt’s use of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to depict European rule in Africa in her *Origins*, she could not follow his relativization of the civilizational ideal when he has Marlow in London pondering how the Romans viewed the savagery of the ancient Britons. Nor did she subscribe to her friend Walter Benjamin’s thesis about the dialectical relationship between civilization and violence. “There is no document of civilization that is not simultaneously a document of barbarism,” he wrote in an overcited aphorism that also mentions Carthage’s destruction. Nor did she follow him in empathizing with the victims rather than the victors of history, although she edited and introduced his text in its English translation.²⁰⁷ Arendt’s close reading of Kant did not lead her to share the criticisms of imperial conquest he expressed in his *Perpetual Peace*, with its ironic invocation of civilization and suggestion that Europeans’ modernity made them the more efficient barbarians.²⁰⁸ While Arendt

²⁰⁶ See, among other texts, Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers” (1971), in *Crises of the Republic*, 9–42, and “Home to Roost” (1975), 257–75. There is an excellent discussion of Arendt’s critique of US empire in Bates, “Enemies and Friends,” 120–24.

²⁰⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 256. Benjamin wrote of the “sadness” about historical suffering associated with this empathy. Arendt seems to have restricted her sadness and empathy to victims of totalitarianism. Everything else, she said, was somehow acceptable. Although Bernard Wasserstein begins his monumental *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time* (Oxford, 2009) with Benjamin’s famous aphorism, the book tends toward Arendt’s binary rather than Benjamin’s dialectical view of the relationship.

²⁰⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, trans. and intro. M. Campbell Smith (London, 1903), 6, 130–31, 139–42. This point is all the more ironic for it is in this text that Kant makes a case for federal unions (*eine föderative Vereinigung*) that “would still permit the exercise of citizenship within bounded communities,” as Seyla Benhabib puts it: “Reclaiming Universalism: Negotiating Republican Self-Determination and Cosmopolitan Norms” (paper presented at the Tanner Lectures on Human Values, University of California, Berkeley, March 15–19, 2004), 124, http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/b/benhabib_2005.pdf.

would trace the West's decline, she was unable to conceive of its fall because it represented humanity's last hope.

Apprehension about the Sallustian and Machiavellian explanations for the decline and fall of empire—the experience of freedom leading inevitably to expansion and then corruption, especially when all rivals have been vanquished—has typified worried imperialists since Vietnam. In 1986, the sociologist Lewis S. Feuer, exasperated with neo-Marxist critiques of empire, published *Imperialism and the Anti-imperialist Mind*, which began with the apocalyptic observation that “whether Western civilization has entered upon a declining phrase, whether a mood of anti-civilization is spreading, such as that which marked the decay of the Roman Empire, is the question that most haunts political philosophers today.”²⁰⁹ Like Arendt and Strauss before him, Feuer distinguished between civilized and barbaric empires (he used the terms “progressive” and “regressive”), a categorization he mapped onto the Cold War rivalry between the American and the Soviet empires.

The Soviet collapse a few years later led conservative commentators in particular to speak hubristically of American empire in terms of Rome and Britain. “People are now coming out of the closet on the word ‘empire,’” exulted columnist Charles Krauthammer in 2001: “The fact is no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily in the history of the world since the Roman Empire.”²¹⁰ Other journalists could not resist the analogical temptation either. Robert Kaplan drew on imperial history, including Rome's Second Punic War with Carthage, from which to draw inspiring lessons about “warrior politics” and the “pagan ethos,” while Cullen Murphy asked outright, “Are we Rome?”²¹¹ Max Boot advanced “the case for American empire” and invoked Kipling, evidently without irony, in *The Savage Wars of Peace*.²¹² Even critics talk of the United States as “a new Rome.”²¹³ The salience of the republican distinction, transmitted by Arendt, between good empire and bad imperialism is reproduced now as then. Thus, the

²⁰⁹ Lewis S. Feuer, *Imperialism and the Anti-imperialist Mind* (Amherst, MA, 1986), 1; cf. Rene Noorbergen and Ralph W. Hood, *The Death Cry of an Eagle* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1980).

²¹⁰ Quoted in Emily Eakin, “‘It Takes an Empire,’ Say Several U.S. Thinkers,” *New York Times*, April 1, 2002; Gregg Easterbrook, “Out on the Edge: American Power Moves beyond the Mere Super,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2003.

²¹¹ Robert Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (New York, 2001); Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (Boston, 2007).

²¹² Max Boot, “The Case for American Empire,” *Weekly Standard*, October 15, 2001, and *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, rev. ed. (New York, 2003).

²¹³ Andrew J. Bacevich, *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War* (New York, 2010), 162.

historian Thomas Madden identified the United States with Rome as “empires of trust” based on informal systems of alliances and devoid of excess—a revival of the defensive imperialism thesis—which he distinguished from empires of conquest or commerce.²¹⁴

Can naked power and the emoluments of civilization be so neatly separated? Not according to Robert Kagan, a foreign policy commentator at the Brookings Institution. The latest participant in *das römische Gespräch*, he has written a much-discussed encomium for US global power that presents a frightening scenario: “The downfall of the Roman Empire brought an end not just to Roman rule but to Roman government and law and to an entire economic system stretching from Northern Europe to North Africa,” he reminded readers of the *Wall Street Journal*. “Culture, the arts, even progress in science and technology, were set back for centuries.” The same fate portends today if American empire declines and falls. Accordingly, he urges that the United States should embrace its global mission and relinquish the bashfulness of defensive imperialism, for its hegemony benefits all.²¹⁵ Gone is the caution of a George Kennan, who worried that an American attempt to impose institutions on other countries in a bipolar world would eventually undermine its own.²¹⁶

Despite the contemporary invocation of Arendt’s life and work to confront such imperial hubris, her alternative of extolling the virtues of benign empire and Western civilization seems inadequate, indeed impotent, because it shares too many basic assumptions about western hegemony with Kagan and his ilk.²¹⁷ Worse still, *das römische Gespräch*, now in the new key of a globalized world, serves at once to heighten anxiety about possible decline and then to drive expansion for empire’s permanent security, thereby incarnating the very tendency to limitlessness and uniformity that Arendt deplored. If we are living in “dark times,” it may be necessary to rethink the categories of our enlightenment.

²¹⁴ Thomas F. Madden, *Empires of Trust: How Rome Built—and America Is Building—a New World* (New York, 2008). This general discussion is analyzed in Eric Adler, “Post-9/11 Views of Rome and the Nature of ‘Defensive Imperialism,’” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 15, no. 4 (2008): 587–610.

²¹⁵ Robert Kagan, *The World America Made* (New York, 2012), and “Why the World Needs America,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2012; Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies* (New York, 2004).

²¹⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, 1984), 43–44.

²¹⁷ Here I disagree with Paul Gilroy’s appropriation of Arendt against the so-called war on terror in his *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York, 2005).