

**I.I.S. "C. Poerio"- Foggia**

**Hannah Arendt**

**VITA ACTIVA  
AND  
THE HUMAN CONDITION**

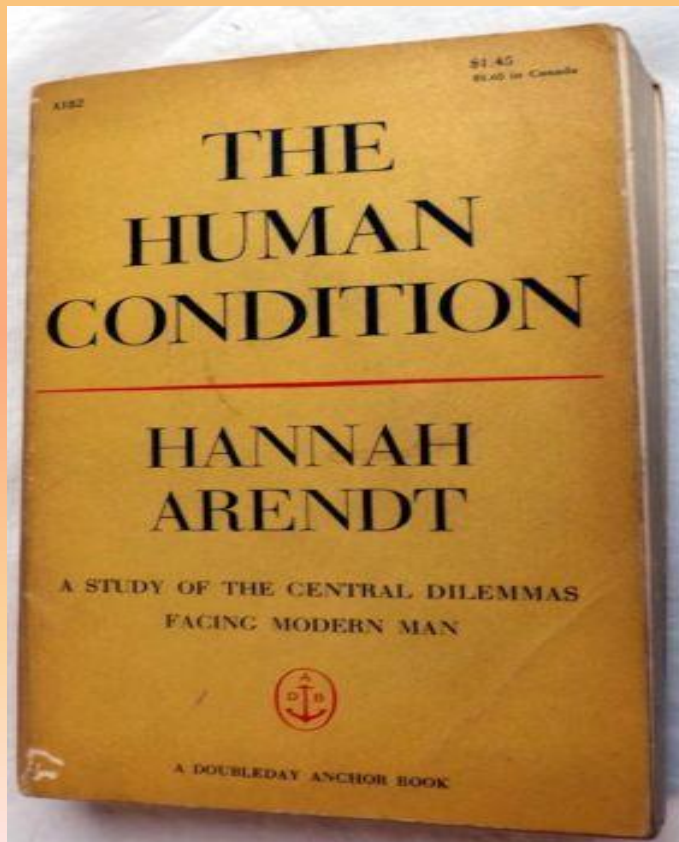
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# VITA ACTIVA AND THE HUMAN CONDITION



The excerpt we are presenting is a piece from Hannah Arendt's work **The Human Condition**, published in the United States in 1958 and translated in Italian with the title **Vita Activa**.

It is proposed as an essay on political theory, but represents a true attempt to redefine the image of man in light of the events of the 20th century.



# THREE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN ACTIVITIES

- LABOR

- WORK

- ACTION

Each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man.

# Labor

The human condition of labor is life itself.  
It corresponds to the biological process of the human body.




# WORK

The human condition of work is worldliness.

It corresponds to the unnaturalness  
of human existence ,  
whose morality is not compensated by  
'the species' ever-recurring life cycle.



# ACTION

It corresponds to the human condition of plurality,  to the fact that men, live on the earth and inhabit the world.





All three activities and their corresponding conditions are intimately connected with the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, **natality** and **mortality**.



**Labor** assures not only individual survival, but the life of the species.

**Work** and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time.

**Action**, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history

Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in **NATALITY** in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers.

However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.

In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.





The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence.

The world in which the *vita activa* spends itself consists of things produced by human activities; but the things that owe their existence exclusively to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers. In addition to the conditions under which life is given to man on earth, and partly out of them, men constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things.





Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence. This is why men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition.

The impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. The objectivity of the world—its object- or thing-character—and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.



PLURALITY: it is a key concept since it implies the idea that speaking of “Man” means speaking of “Men”, that interact among each other; in other words, they act politically pursuing the good of the community and not biological and conservative results.

NATALITY: Arendt calls natality, defined as the fact that each human life begins with birth, the "central category of political thought" . "Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action". The human capacity to act freely is said to be "ontologically rooted" in this "fact of natality". There is something very puzzling about identifying the root of human freedom in the condition of natality

