

## Ecological citizenship and ethical responsibility: Arendt, Benjamin and political activism.

By Mick Smith | Dec, 2005

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### Abstract

Arendt and Benjamin created important, and in many ways complementary, understandings of historical and political action that are intimately associated with the genesis of individual ethical responsibilities. This paper considers the ways in which their theoretical perspectives might be extended and linked to defend a model of environmental activism quite distinct from those presented in top-down discourses of environmental citizenship. These emerging discourses of citizenship tend to suggest that ethical responsibilities are the products of, and to be apportioned within, pre-determined forms of contemporary governance. The 'good (environmental) citizen' is, broadly speaking, obligated to comply in a largely 'apolitical' manner with behavioural norms that facilitate the continuance of the current social/economic system. But responsibilities are not reducible to obligations, and envisaging ethics or politics as a process of predicting and managing historical change fundamentally misunderstands the inherently unpredictable nature of all political action. It also diminishes precisely the kinds of engagement that might generate the sense of responsibility necessary to inform an alternative ecological politics.

Arendt et Benjamin ont élaboré des con-naissances importantes et, de bien des manières, complémentaires, sur l'action politique et historique, qui sont intimement liées à la l'origine des responsabilités éthiques individuelles. On étudie dans cet article comment leurs points de vue théoriques pourraient être appliqués et liés à la défense d'un modèle d'activisme environnemental passablement distinct de ceux qui sont présentés dans les discours descendants sur la citoyenneté environnementale. Ces nouveaux discours sur la citoyenneté donnent à penser que les responsabilités éthiques sont les produits de formes préétablies de gouvernance contemporaine, dans le cadre desquelles elles devraient être réparties. De manière générale, un «bon citoyen» (en matière d'environnement) a l'obligation de se conformer en grande partie de manière «apolitique» aux normes comportementales qui favorisent le maintien du système social et économique actuel. Mais on ne peut pas réduire les responsabilités à de simples obligations, et en envisageant l'éthique ou la politique comme un processus permettant de prédire et de gérer les changements historiques, on sous-estime fondamentalement la nature essentiellement imprévisible de toute action politique. Et cela réduit précisément les types d'engagements qui pourraient engendrer le sens des responsabilités nécessaire pour faire connaître une politique écologique différente.

### Key Words

## Environmental responsibility, environmental citizenship, Arendt, Benjamin, ethics

### Introduction

"... it seems as if a way had been found to set the desert itself into motion, to let loose a sand storm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth" (Arendt 1975 [1951]: 478)

Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin developed their distinctive political theories as considered responses to modernity's darker side, in particular, but not exclusively, the rise of fascism in Germany. This development would lead, amongst so many other evils, directly to Arendt's exile and to Benjamin's suicide in September 1940 after his unsuccessful attempt to escape across the Pyrenees to Spain. It might seem then that both thinkers were caught up within, and carried away by, a larger 'historical process', of which fascism was itself a 'reactionary' (in both senses) consequence. Each had, in their own way, imagined this process in terms of a metaphorical storm that could cover the earth. For Benjamin, this storm, "keeps piling wreckage on wreckage" as it "irresistibly propels" us into an unforeseeable future. This storm, Benjamin (1992: 249) says, "is what we call progress".

It is certainly tempting to regard our current environmental crisis as yet another (negative) repercussion of this same world-wide historical process, this unfolding whirlwind of 'progress' with all its antithetical effects. But such a conclusion, though not without its merits, risks portraying individuals as little more than storm-blown chaff, powerless to resist or proffer alternatives to a situation deemed out of political control. It would also occlude both Arendt and Benjamin's own, much more thoughtful, understandings of the relations between individuals, history, and politics. Both, in fact, regarded the apparent inevitability of impending disasters, and our supposed inability to create political solutions to them, as consequences of this same (mis)understanding of history as a 'process'.

Benjamin, in particular, was highly critical of 'historicism', the dominant and dogmatic belief in an unfolding continuum of historical progress, as something "irresistible ... that automatically pursued a straight or spiral course" (Benjamin, 1992: 252), a view that pervaded (and still pervades) many political circles. This unfounded faith, he suggested, underlay the inaction of so many social democratic politicians faced with the 'inexorable' rise of fascism. Their "stubborn faith in progress" and "their servile integration in an uncontrollable apparatus" (Benjamin, 1992: 252) had led them to believe that the flow of history would assure their eventual success. But when, having already taken politics out of the hands of those they claimed to represent (that is, for Benjamin, the working class), this proved unlikely, this historicism all too easily took on a negative aspect, translating into a resigned acceptance of a most appalling state of affairs about which, it was claimed, 'nothing could be done'. (1) This, it seems, is a historical situation that risks being repeated today, this time as an environmental tragedy, a situation where despair at accelerating ecological losses, the global spread of consumer capitalism, and dire climatic predictions, easily encourage a similar political resignation.

This would be a mistake, and one we would all rue, for it is, says Arendt (1993 [1961]: 168), "in the nature of the automatic processes to which man is subject, but within which and against which he can assert himself through action, that they can only spell ruin to human life". Wherever history comes to be regarded as an automatic process, disaster follows, in part at least because this perspective makes political action seem superfluous, ineffective, and/or entirely the concern of history's self-appointed administrators, that is, professional politicians. If one accepts such a situation as political reality then all that remains is to continue 'working' and 'labouring' away under the delusion that this in itself constitutes a "political achievement" (Benjamin: 1992: 250): From Arendt and Benjamin's sense it most certainly does not. Indeed it represents an abdication of politics. It is the political equivalent of burying one's head in (what seems to) work as the sand-storm approaches.

For Arendt politics is 'action' and action is defined as a mode of human existence, of being-with-others, that is distinct from, and much more than, simply 'labouring' to fulfil our animal needs, or 'working' to

produce artefacts, for example, the consumer goods that now litter the modern world. (It is also something entirely different from the posturing, lying, and play-acting that characterise much of 'party' politics in its narrow, but now widely accepted, sense.) (2) Politics emerges through our ability to act into the world, that is, to initiate novel events and possibilities through our words and deeds. The political act is an expression of human individuality and freedom, a beginning where "something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before" (Arendt 1958: 178). What we say and do in concert, though not necessarily in agreement, with others, creates that public 'space of appearances' where we each reveal who (rather than what) we are, where our unique individuality comes to the fore. In other words, our appearance in the political sphere is not a matter of any functional role we might play in society, as, say, mechanic, chef or academic, but is envisaged as a locus of creative self-actualization in the presence of others. For Arendt this is precisely what it should mean to be a citizen.

Action though is inherently risky, not just in the sense that every actor takes a personal risk in exposing their words and deeds, and thereby themselves, to the approval or censure of others, but because, once set in motion, actions' effects inevitably ramify unpredictably and uncontrollably into the future. Where labour and work maintain necessary 'services' or produce relatively solid and permanent 'things', human actions are modes of involvement in ever-changing circumstances. Their ongoing effects can become exaggerated or attenuated, apparently dissolving without trace, only to be remembered and reappear as they momentarily crystallize out in the most unexpected ways around events that can have profound political resonances. They are, in short, impossible to follow in their entirety. Yet despite, or rather because of this, we are, as individuals, responsible for the almost infinite effects our actions may have, for we have set them in motion and it is these actions, more than anything else, that define who we are. From an Arendtian perspective then, personal responsibility is coeval with individual political action.

It is clear then that actions, by their very nature as expressions of individual human freedom, cannot be subsumed within an over-arching process. "It is the function [...] of all action, as distinguished from mere behaviour, to interrupt what otherwise would have proceeded automatically and therefore predictably" (Arendt, 1970a: 31). Actions are always likely to disrupt and fracture any attempt to regard history as something that follows laws, whose twists and turns are pre-ordained or predictable. So, despite the pervasiveness of ideologies of progress or decline, we find that "all our experiences in this century, which has constantly confronted us with the totally unexpected, stand in flagrant contradiction to these notions and doctrines, whose very popularity seems to consist in offering a comfortable, speculative or pseudo-scientific refuge from reality" (Arendt, 1970a: 28). Nothing in politics or history is inevitable since both are composed by human actions. The problem, for Arendt and Benjamin alike, is that what currently passes for politics is nothing of the kind; rather, it is indicative of the atrophy of the political sphere.

#### Action and the Alienation of Responsibility

In one of his earliest published pieces, written just before the internationally orchestrated destruction of the First World War began to unfold, the young Benjamin (1996 [1913]: 3) remarked that in "our struggle for responsibility, we fight against someone who is masked. The mask of the adult is called 'experience'. It is expressionless, impenetrable, and ever the same. The adult has always already experienced [erlebt] everything". This claim to universal experience, envisaged as a knowing "superior" smile at the follies of youth, is, Benjamin suggests, wedded to particular, but hidden, socio-political purposes. First, it attempts to dispel any 'illusion' that things might ever be different, be changed by youthful acts or by escape from the eternal repetitiveness of a world where all that seems new has already been tried and found wanting. Experiential 'maturity' thereby serves to buttress a 'we know best', patronizing and perhaps patriarchal, form of authority, a *realpolitik* based in the supposed necessity of accepting that which is taken to constitute current political circumstances. Second, it seeks to defuse and anaesthetize the imaginative and activating spirit (*animus*) that would otherwise strive to make a different world. In short, the claims of experience are surreptitiously used to divert the

nascent individual's struggle towards political and ethical responsibility into an externally pre-determined obligation to play the already formulated role of compliant 'citizen'.

Unbeknown to Benjamin of course, millions of young people who felt so obligated were, over the succeeding four years, to die from gas, bullets, and bombs. The fact that so many were apparently willing to lay down their lives in this 'war to end all wars' might itself reveal something about the genesis of individual political responsibility and its, by no means straightforward, relations to obligation. One might speculate that their participation was not unconnected to the ways in which this archetypically modern war was presented to Benjamin's contemporaries as the only truly world-changing event in which ordinarily powerless individuals like themselves might get to take responsibility for, and potentially alter, the course of history--a responsibility that they were never offered, indeed were actively denied, in times of peace. In other words there is a subtle (and in propaganda terms, by no means so subtle) blending of the dominant understanding of history as an all-encompassing and inevitable process together with a recognition of the potentially momentous consequences of individual actions in these unique bellicose circumstances. While the outbreak of war is always portrayed as inevitable, a conjunction of forces leading to a historically inescapable necessity, its outcome is portrayed as hanging in the balance of individual acts of heroism.

War then is indeed a 'continuation of politics by other means', although perhaps not in the sense intended by von Clausewitz. However, the individual's supposed efficacy in this intolerably violent form of political action is belied by the very form of modern wars, that is, by the state orchestrated dispatching of uniformed masses to their technically mediated and, usually anonymous, deaths. In such military 'action' "individualism is the first value to disappear" (Fanon quoted in Arendt, 1970a: 67) and it is not accidental that responsibility for even the most appalling acts also tends to be dissipated. (3) What is more, when appeals to heart-felt responsibilities prove ineffective at recruiting the required numbers, their place is taken by obligations (as the refusal to fight is deemed an individually irresponsible form of in-action), force, and conscription. The political space of appearances offered by modern warfare is then, with few exceptions, illusory--though its consequences, including environmental consequences, are clearly not. Indeed, as Arendt (1970a) emphasises, the results of political violence tend to be even more unpredictable than those of other forms of action.

The point is then that modern war and peace are not, as they might initially appear, antithetical. The (largely false) suggestion that war offers the individual a chance to intervene in history is actually complemented by and feeds upon those same individuals' experiences of the difficulties in actively participating in a peace-time arena that has become re-formulated as a continuous political process and as continuing historical progress. This understanding serves to justify the containment, management and eradication of the very kinds of individualism, novelty and unpredictability that Arendt believes so definitive of genuine political activity. (This perhaps offers a different explanation as to why, despite the proliferation of wars, the triumph of this vision of politics as a 'public' process might still be portrayed as the 'end of history'.) History and politics alike are taken out of the hands of individuals, who are led to believe that they are powerless to act, that is, to initiate political change.

This now describes the situation faced by those who struggle for environmental responsibility and social change. As in Benjamin's youth, the voice of *realpolitik* suggests that any action necessary can be encompassed within the current political process, that everything possible has already been tried, that there are no alternatives to the inevitable growth and expansion of the present socio-economic 'system'. Armies of faceless governmental and corporate managers work to ensure 'business as usual', while propagandists spin debilitating lies to mask the pile of debris growing in progress' name. The effectiveness of such messages is, of course, dependent upon maintaining a skewed distribution of these environmental 'wrongs', between global South and North, poor and rich neighbourhoods, and so on. And this bureaucratic 'governance' of every aspect of life is made possible and has become so pervasive precisely because it both arises from, and contributes to, a condition where history, politics, and society as a whole, are 'systematized'--understood as mere processes to be managed.

This situation can only diminish political freedoms and our ability to tackle environmental problems. Indeed, for Arendt, bureaucracy, "the rule of no-body" (Arendt, 1958: 40), is "the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act" (Arendt, 1970a: 81). It relies upon and fosters an impossible ideal of systemic continuity and predictability and is consequently both irresponsible to calls for change and inherently irresponsible; it allows and even facilitates the passing and dispersion of responsibilities for decisions and actions in such a way that they never rest with any individual (Weber, 1964). (4) This is partly because the organizational subdivision of labour in bureaucracy and business alike ensures that each person "performs, more often than not, actions which by themselves are quite innocuous, and would not--could not--cause the effects in question without the complementary actions of many other people" (Bauman 1994: 8-9). Thus, even those helping to enact the most grievous social and environmental harms can continue to feel like 'responsible persons'.

This dissolution of the space of political action and its replacement with a mass-society managed in increasing detail, and with decreasing success, by bureaucracies and their commercial equivalents is indicative for Arendt (1993:89) of "the modern age and its world-alienation". Although Arendt was not especially ecologically oriented she certainly recognised the environmental ramifications of this situation--"the traffic problem in the cities; the pollution of air and water--are the automatic results of the needs of mass societies that have become unmanageable" (Arendt, 1970a: 84). Just as treating history as a process is politically alienating, so too treating nature as a process, as something merely measurable and predictable, a resource for social progress, alienates us from the earth, our home. In both cases we become distanced and separated from "involvement in and concern with the close at hand" (Arendt, 1958: 251). Modernity then is characterized by this "two-fold loss of the world--the loss of nature and the loss of human artifice in the widest sense" (that is the ability for humans to be politically creative). The almost inevitable outcome (because for Arendt responsibility can only emerge through political action) is an environmentally irresponsible society, an "economy of waste", and a consumer culture operating "at the expense of the world we live in" (Arendt, 2003: 262). (5)

Our alienation from the world of nature and of active participatory politics has further implications. First, while socially effective acts are increasingly excluded from the political process, as a society we have, Arendt (1993: 62) argues, started to "act into nature, to carry human unpredictability into a realm where we are confronted with elemental forces which we shall perhaps never be able to control reliably" (see also Smith, 2006). In treating (and misunderstanding) nature as a process to be managed (6) modern societies have set in motion inherently unpredictable environmental consequences that now reappear in the form of environmental problems. Arendt uses the example of nuclear power as one instance of this 'acting into nature', where a privileged few incite and develop new worldly 'processes' which in turn dictate new limits on politics, but we might now cite many others, such as genetic engineering. (7) The record number and force of the hurricanes battering Florida and Louisiana's coasts in 2005 also seem, at least in part, to be consequences of ramifying human activities, despite the denials of the existence of (and responsibility for) global warming by those who continue to profit most. Through acting into nature (understood as process) modern elites have created globally integrated social and environmental 'systems' that together constitute "the tremendous structure of the human artifice we inhabit today, in whose framework we have even discovered the means of destroying it together with all non-man-made things on earth" (Arendt, 1993: 54).

Second, the lack of a political arena where real changes might be initiated by individuals is not only world-alienating, but also undermines the link between individual political responsibility and environmental destruction (for Arendt, as we have seen, responsibility is coeval with political action). But although this severance is not new it now occurs at a time when governments are actually trying to divest responsibilities (or perhaps here one should say distribute 'obligations') onto the shoulders of individuals. Responsibility is, like everything else, being privatized (see Bauman, 2005), this time under the rubric of 'environmental citizenship'. As 'good environmental citizens' individuals are first exhorted, and then when this fails, conscripted and compelled, to take responsibility for the state of the

same world they find themselves alienated from. As with the case of war, while the world's current environmental situation is portrayed as a consequence of historically inescapable forces its solution, according to propaganda, also apparently hangs in the balance of individuals' acts.

The scope for environmental action within the frameworks offered by the modern state is, unsurprisingly, often just as illusory as that offered during war. What is more, the call to environmental arms is much less convincing because those sounding it simultaneously have to deny the existence of any moment of crisis or even any real need to alter history's present course. Nor, for that matter, are governments or businesses usually willing to identify an actual enemy of the environment, since they are, after all, usually the foremost contenders. (8) Consequently, self-interest and subterfuge are the only remaining bases for appeal and the 'responsibilities' we are called on to exercise also involve little out of the ordinary--drive a few miles less, recycle plastic containers, compost organic waste, and so on. These 'acts' are, in fact, largely apolitical in an Arendtian sense, since they bear more resemblance to forms of labour or work. They usually do not initiate anything new, or offer any real possibility for the individual to change the world; rather they become a means for ameliorating some of modernity's excesses.

This in no sense suggests that such activities are environmentally worthless, but does recognise that, once integrated into the managerial systems that typify the status quo, their ethico-political effects are limited. There may, of course, be politics and political activism involved in getting issues like recycling taken seriously, in setting up and defending such schemes where they conflict with the so-called 'necessities' of social, economic and political systems, and in trying to convince neighbours of such schemes' importance. And it is here that the real potential of any Arendtian version of environmental 'citizenship', if we should still call it that, can be glimpsed; here responsibilities emerge within and through the words and deeds of individuals and communities acting in concert. Such active involvement is perhaps the key way in which many people's everyday life becomes politicized and ethical understandings of their environmental responsibilities are generated, sustained and renewed; it also often leads to political involvement in broader, less 'issue-based', ways. The case of seed savers in this volume (Phillips, 2006) is a perfect example where what, from some perspectives, might seem to be just a matter of apolitical labour/work actually becomes intimately connected to participants' political activities and concerns. This kind of activism, though certainly supported by many of those writing on ecological citizenship, (Smith 1998, Light 2002, Dobson 2003) sits uncomfortably with governmental emphasis on supposedly 'depoliticised' obligations, and duties, (a language which even these writers sometimes use, thereby eliding the differences between responsibilities and obligations).

And this leads us to the crux of the matter, namely, that for Arendt all genuine politics, and by extension any environmental politics, must be, by definition, activist in her predefined sense of the word.

#### Arendt, Benjamin, and Responsible Environmental Activism

Unfortunately, while the "present condition we are in needs people to make their voice audible, it is the exit [from political engagement] that our political institutions, and the idea of 'citizenship' they favour promote" (Bauman, 1995: 286). Arendt's political theory effectively offers an alternative to these top-down approaches which, focused as they are on managing social systems and environmental processes, redefine "the citizen, in theory and in deed, as a satisfied customer of a society made after the image of a shopping mall" (Bauman, 1995: 283). The quiescent role of consumer in no way fits an Arendtian idea(l) of an environmental 'citizen', that is, someone who reveals who they are though their attempts to initiate political change--not via the labels they wear, what 'goods' they buy, what car they drive, or even by how much they recycle. Similarly, environmental responsibility, rather than devolved obligation, arises only in recognising that as an individual one might, in however unlikely a way, make a difference.

As in Benjamin's own times, people do still (have to) struggle to take such responsibility. Modern forms of governance in alliance with global corporations use all their accumulated experience to diminish, divert, and manage every microscopic detail of the spheres within which individual actions might appear. In this sense, the rampant earth-destroying consumerism that characterizes our age is just another side of the bureaucratically enforced "suspension of action" (Arendt, 1970: 81) and the subsequent shrinkage of the public (political) realm. But freedom and responsibility, the coeval sources of politics, cannot actually be purchased in a market-place, nor are they possible in a totally administered society.

Arendt's understanding of political action facilitated her atypical insights into the apparently disconnected protest movements of the 1960's. Whether in the Soviet-dominated East or the capitalist West they were directed precisely against "the ruling bureaucracy" (1970a: 81) and consequent upon the "huge party machines [that] have succeeded everywhere in overruling the voice of citizens". Such movements, insofar as they too resisted tendencies to homogenise political differences and turn history into a realm of necessity (Hansen 1993:184), were part of a struggle to take responsibility from those who exhibited none. And while she did not live to see the rise of many of the explicitly environmental forms of activism there is little doubt that she would have regarded them in similar terms, in this case as attempts to speak and act against an exploitative view of our relations to nature as a historical inevitability.

This, it might be argued, is indeed what various forms of environmental activism and non-violent direct action attempt to do. Whether in the forests of Clayoquot Sound or the city of Seattle, in the urban events of Reclaim the Streets or the 'wilderness' campaigns of 'Earth First!' these amorphous and ever changing collectivities of individual activists attempt to create spaces where an environmental politics might, however briefly, appear. They refuse to be passive consumers and exemplify instead an imaginative 'Do it Yourself' political culture expressed in many forms of social and environmental dissent (McKay, 1998). To take just one of these examples, Reclaim the Streets (2006) events explicitly challenge the predominant 'car culture' through carnivalesque actions set on the purportedly public, but actually increasingly regulated, surveilled, and managed, highways. By intervening directly in traffic systems and 'flows' this "disorganisation" of concerned individuals creates a real sense of the power and possibilities arising through acting together spontaneously; a feeling conspicuously absent from the politics staged by and for the mass-media.

"Freedom", says Arendt (1970b: 221), "always implies freedom to dissent" and insofar as these forms of environmental activism have become an effective way to raise alternative voices in public they could be said to constitute a (post)modern politics. Many of these activists also exemplify, in their words and deeds, the kind of individual ethico-political responsibility and judgement that Arendt believes necessary to conduct, explain, and justify political resistance to overwhelming force, and hence to counter the passive acceptance of destructive acts carried out in the name of history and progress. As Isaac (1993: 538), remarks, Arendt's work seeks to "guard against the faith of modern ideologies in the future consequences of present means. [...] and] to endorse a retrieval of action, the kind associated with the resistance movements" in which Arendt herself had been engaged. Pitkin too remarks that this was "the project of *The Human Condition*: to articulate a general theory of free-citizenship [...] a sustained and serious exploration of the 'political' alternative to parvenu conformism and social process" (Pitkin, 1998: 112).

From Arendt's perspective environmental activism would have to be regarded as absolutely central to any conception of an environmental citizen but this certainly finds no favour with those in power and bears little resemblance to the obedient task-following favoured by top-down governmental approaches. Some, like Dobson (2003), believe that it may be possible to extend, radicalize, and enlarge the scope of these top-down ideas through current citizenship programs in schools. Those implementing these programs might be encouraged to emphasize the importance of, for example, discussions about environmental responsibilities, and actually participate in environmental activities, rather than just studying matters of political process. Whether this will (be allowed) to happen is

uncertain and in this sense, debates over environmental citizenship programs will reflect wider debates about the purpose and possibilities of educational 'systems' in general. Are they intended to instil passive acceptance of current norms or, alternatively, to encourage individual initiative and creativity? Education usually does both, but then, if Arendt is right, the form taken by environmental citizenship programs will inevitably become, and should be a site of political contention. Environmental citizenship is precisely not an educational process one can take the politics out of. Indeed, from an Arendtian perspective you can't be taught citizenship as such, although one can come to understand the possibilities and constraints on acting into the public realm on ones' own initiative.

In any event, environmental activists will have to recognise that the quiet everyday extermination of species, habitats, and cultures that presently passes for peacetime now has its own bellicose counterpart in a new and endless, war to end all wars, that is, the war on terrorism. It is by no means accidental that this very term is now regularly applied by those profiting most from environmental destruction as a catch-all term to label any and all environmentalists who attempt to speak out or act in order to defy the current world order's onward march. As Rowell (1996: 250) notes "what the authorities and industry are aspiring to do is to negate the effects of direct action and equate it with terrorism". That this latest form of (corporate funded) propaganda should be resisted is vitally important, for it is intended precisely to silence political debate about the condition of the environment. Environmental politics, in the Arendtian sense, requires that environmentalists continue to speak and act into a public space of appearances, to struggle for responsibilities, rather than meekly accept obligations. Bauman, who is strongly influenced by Arendt, suggests that democratic societies need to recognise that "a society that engages its members [...] requires neither disciplined subjects nor satisfaction-seeking consumers of socially provided services, but rather, tenacious and sometimes obstinate, but always responsible, citizens. To be responsible does not mean to follow the rules; it may often require us to disregard the rules or to act in a way that the rules do not warrant. Only such responsibility makes the citizen into that basis on which can be built a human community resourceful and thoughtful enough to cope with the present challenges" (Bauman, 1994: 45).

Finally, there is one more issue that further complicates this question of environmental citizenship, namely, the very nature of environmental concerns themselves. Many environmentalists attempt to give voice to and act on behalf of those denied any expression at all in all theories of citizenship--including Arendt's. The animals, plants, rivers, and ecologies they seek to protect from the storm of historical 'progress' threatening to engulf them all are simply excluded from understandings of environmental relations built on human citizenship. The fact that they appear only as passive means to human political ends is, I would claim, part of this same misunderstanding of social and natural history as inevitable processes. Perhaps then we could recognise that Arendt and Benjamin's political concerns need to be extended in another way, one that recognises the biological diversity and creative exuberance of our fellow denizens, human and non-human (Smith, 2005). Resistance to world-alienation might then find us involved in a different struggle for responsibility motivated by what Arendt termed *amor mundi*, that 'love for the world' which she too said she had begun to feel towards the end of her life.

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(1) The totalitarian ambitions of fascism lay precisely in its conception of itself as an irresistible historical and political movement that was "quite prepared to sacrifice everybody's vital immediate interests to the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature" (Arendt, 1975: 461-2).

(2) This narrow definition, and the nefarious practices with which it is frequently associated, are largely responsible for both the widespread contemporary disillusionment with 'politics' and the suspicion, promulgated by those benefiting from this definition, of anything termed political activism.

(3) This is not to deny that individual acts of heroism still occur, or that a few may be singled out as individually responsible for atrocities once war ceases. It does, however, suggest that, paradoxically, hero and villain alike are appropriated propagandistically in ways that they too become iconic of other larger inevitable forces--of national bravery or an axis of evil rather than surviving in memory as individuals. Ironically, for Arendt, history began as a way of ensuring, through story-telling, that individuals' deeds and words, including those of Homer's ancient warring heroes, would be granted some degree of social and temporal permanence. But history was, in this sense, the domain of heroes only in the way that herds applied to all free men involved in the Trojan enterprise (Arendt, 1958: 186). The term hero was associated with exceptional courage only to the extent that this was necessary for these heroes to act, to appear as themselves in a public arena, that is, the same form of courage Arendt deems necessary to be a political citizen. Modern wars offer little room for this kind of heroism.

(4) As Arendt argues, "the greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons" (Arendt, 2003: 110).

(5) Of course it might be argued that people might learn, or be encouraged, to behave as though they were environmentally responsible individuals but this is by no means the same thing, indeed such a view can foster ethical, political, and environmental, irresponsibility precisely because it confounds genuine ethical involvement (responsibility) with rule following (obligation): When the rules change, as, Arendt argues, they did in Nazi Germany, the rule follower simply changes with them rather than offering ethically informed political resistance to such changes.

(6) Benjamin too, while in no sense a proto-environmentalist, tried to develop a non-historicist 'natural history' which emphasized the creative potential of our relations with the nonhuman (See Hanssen 1998).

(7) The supposedly apolitical actions of scientists and technocrats can thus lead directly and indirectly to further limits on politics. As Arendt says, it "certainly is not without irony that those whom public opinion has persistently held to be the least practical and the least political members of society [scientists] should have turned out to be the only ones left who still know how to act and how to act in concert" (Arendt, 1958: 324). The unpredictable risks and consequences associated with nuclear power are already evidenced in the social and environmental effects of Windscale, Three Mile Island, and Chernobyl. They also include the numerous political ramifications of nuclear proliferation and the potential for new military conflicts, for example, those over Iran and North Korea. On a more mundane, but still important level, they include the systemic limits to politics that emerge from increasing centralization of power supply, technical management of risks, the need for domestic security, international monitoring, waste 'disposal', and so on.

(8) This is not to say that individual nations or businesses do not point the finger of blame and responsibility at others, as rhetoric over the USA's role in global warming and China's increasing contributions to greenhouse gases show.

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