

Violence as a Symptom of the Crises of Power in Modernity: A Philosophical Hermeneutic Study of Hannah Arendt's *Tentang Kekerasan*

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Abstract: Violence occupies a significant place within modernity's discourse. The modern era, characterized by its tendency toward instrumental rationality, has increasingly enabled violence to appear as a practical solution for shaping civilization. Hannah Arendt, a political theorist who consistently rejected the label of philosopher, contributed an important thesis on violence in *Tentang Kekerasan*, an essay written during the final period of her intellectual life. This study aims to examine Arendt's conception of violence and to explore her understanding of violence within the context of modernity. Employing Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, this research seeks to develop a deeper interpretive understanding of violence as a manifestation of the crisis of modernity. The fusion of horizons and the reflective role of the interpreter are emphasized as central elements of philosophical inquiry, distinguishing this approach from positivistic methods of analyzing philosophical concepts. Through dialogical engagement with Arendt's earlier works, including *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*, *The Human Condition*, and *On Revolution*, this study finds that, despite the fragmentary character of her thought, Arendt consistently returned to a common concern: a profound anxiety regarding the pervasive use of violence in the modern age. In *Tentang Kekerasan*, Arendt not only maintains but radicalizes her critique of violence. For her, violence can never generate power, since power emerges only through political legitimacy grounded in human plurality and freedom. Violence possesses no constructive political function, at most, it may serve as an instrument of liberation in revolutionary struggles. Yet even in such circumstances, violence retains the potential to produce for more destructive consequences, culminating in the deterioration of the common world shared by human beings.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, *Tentang Kekerasan*, Violence, Modernity, Philosophical Hermeneutics

Abstrak: Kekerasan mendapatkan tempat penting dalam diskursus modernitas. Era modern dengan kecenderungan logika rasionalitas instrumentalnya telah memudahkan kekerasan untuk tampil sebagai solusi praktis membentuk peradaban. Hannah Arendt, seorang teoritikus politik yang menolak dirinya disebut filsuf ini telah menyumbangkan tesis penting terkait kekerasan dalam esai yang ditulis di masa akhir hidupnya yaitu *Tentang Kekerasan*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pemikiran Arendt tentang kekerasan di era modern. Menggunakan hermeneutika filosofis yang dikembangkan Hans-Georg Gadamer, penelitian ini mencoba menciptakan anasir baru yang tentunya lebih mendalam dalam membaca manifestasi kekerasan sebagai gejala krisis modernitas. Fusi horizon dan penekanan pada refleksi penafsir mendapatkan tempat lebih pada penelitian filsafat semacam ini dibandingkan cara positivistik menganalisis konsep-konsep filosofis. Bersamaan dengan dialog terhadap teks-teks sekunder yaitu karya-karya Arendt sebelumnya seperti *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*, *The Human Condition*, dan *On Revolution* penulis dapat menyimpulkan jika secara tidak langsung seorang pemikir fragmentaris seperti Arendt juga memunculkan tema pembahasan yang serupa dalam berbagai karyanya yakni; kegelisahan mendalam terhadap penggunaan kekerasan di era modern. Dalam *Tentang Kekerasan* Arendt tetap mempertahankan kritik terhadap kekerasan, bahkan lebih radikal. Baginya kekerasan tidak akan pernah menciptakan kekuasaan yang mana bagi Arendt kekuasaan hanya bisa didapatkan melalui legitimasi politik yang di dalamnya mengandung

kondisi pluralitas dan kebebasan manusia. Kekerasan tidak mengandung unsur konstruktif bagi politik, dimana ia hanya dapat hadir sebagai paling banter pembebas dalam usaha-usaha revolusi tanpa mengecualikan potensi yang jauh lebih ganas dari implikasi logis penggunaan kekerasan jangka panjang yaitu kerusakan dunia bersama milik manusia.

Kata kunci: *Hannah Arendt, Tentang Kekerasan, Kekerasan, Modernitas, Hermeneutika Filosofis*

▪ INTRODUCTION

Modernity began with the enlightenment, which carried within it a profound optimism regarding human life and existence. More than merely shifting humanity's focus from the *theos* to *anthropos*, to become modern meant challenging inherited understandings and overcoming humanity's tendency toward self-forgetfulness. Yet, paradoxically, the radical human spirit that sought to create and transform life ultimately became alienated from itself, as its consciousness was increasingly absorbed into an artificial world. Nature no longer appeared in its own natural form, while human beings were reduced to mere *homo faber*, creatures who 'create' the world (Kovács, 2012). As a result, the mysterious dimensions of everyday existence came to be regarded as insignificant, leading humanity toward a profound alienation from the lifeworld through the dominance of instrumental rationality. This helps explain why the conveniences achieved by modernity have compelled human beings to inhabit a world that has become increasingly unfamiliar to them.

The alienation of human beings from their world in the modern era has generated serious consequences. The world increasingly appears as nothing more than a space and condition governed by mechanical principles, demanding efficiency and productivity above all else. Within such a world, emotions and conscience cease to be valued; what remains authoritative and enduring is the instrumentation of power through the rise of the 'social'. According to Arendt, the crisis of modern politics stems from the emergences of the social realm, namely the condition in which concerns related to biological life have come to dominate the public sphere (Oksala, 2010). Modernity exploits the human body politic by reducing it to a mere statistical potential. Through violence, particularly as an instrument, politics is transformed from an affirmation of the existence of a common world into a civilization grounded solely in the pursuit of progress, productivity, and domination.

“Jika esensi kekuasaan adalah efektivitas perintah, maka tak ada kekuasaan yang lebih besar daripada kekuasaan yang tumbuh dari laras pistol, dan akan sukar untuk mengatakan dengan ‘cara apa perintah yang diberikan oleh seorang polisi berbeda dari perintah yang diberikan oleh seseorang yang memiliki senjata’ (Arendt, 2020, p. 48)”

Humanity's long history of treating violence as manifestation of power has obscured our understanding of one of politics most fundamental errors. For Arendt, power, as the foundation of political life, is fundamentally distinct from violence. Modernity radicalizes this misconception; through the grandeur of its rational systems, violence often appears in forms that are difficult to recognize. Violence frequently presents itself through ideas of change, and many revolution have assumed it to be the

sole means of creating a better world. The collapse of the authority of truth and traditional morality has also contributed to the growing appeal of violent movements in the modern age. This is one reason why modernity experiences a profound crisis. Ontologically, the modern age signifies absolute novelty and the courage to introduce sweeping transformation, including transformations that are, in an essential sense, rooted in nothingness.

Hannah Arendt, a philosopher and political theorist, endured the traumatic experience of living under the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany, a regime that systematically constructed its logic of power upon nothingness. Critiques of nothingness consistently emerge as a central theme throughout Arendt's thought. The condition of nothingness presupposes destructive actions directed against the common world that actually exists. In *Tentang Kekerasan*,¹ the theme of nothingness as negative force appears through the very principles of violence. Violence is inherently destructive; it seeks to destroy and kill, and its effects are as real as life itself. Violence also gives rise to unforeseen consequences, it becomes polarized and generates forms of power grounded in control. Moreover, violence reduces itself to the status of a tool or instrument that can be employed for various purposes. As an instrument, violence comes to assume priority over what had previously constituted the essence of politics. Arendt (2020) further explains this point in the same work:

“Sebagai kesimpulan: secara politik, tidak memadai mengatakan bahwa kekuasaan dan kekerasan itu tidak sama. Kekuasaan dan kekerasan itu berlawanan; saat yang satu memerintah secara absolut, yang lainnya tidak hadir. ... Kekerasan bisa menghancurkan kekuasaan; ia sama sekali tidak mampu untuk menciptakannya (p. 79).”

The most pressing question of this century may therefore be “how is it possible that modernity, built upon the rationalization of reason, has instead perpetuated violence?” The problem lies precisely here. Modernity was not founded upon traditional moral principles such as religion, God, or myth. Rather, it rests upon the assumption that progress is a fundamental value, placing greater emphasis on life and living itself. Vitalism, the distinctly modern conviction regarding the primacy of life, has been examined by Swift (2013) in *Hannah Arendt, Violence, and Vitality*, where he identifies a profound connection in Arendt's thought between modernity, violence, and life. Arendt argues that the alienation produced by modernity conceals itself within the narratives of the masses. Through the artificialization of the world, modernity employs imagination in ways that draw human beings into becoming strangers within their own world. Paradoxically, violence often appears ambiguous and is frequently romanticized as a form of spontaneity or an eruption of vital energy supposedly capable of destroying the corruption of the status quo. This is the paradox of modernity and of what it means to be modern.

Tentang Kekerasan, one of the last essays written by Arendt, does not in fact introduce an entirely new theme. Rather, it represents the culmination and conclusion of her reflection on violence, a concept that had already appeared throughout several of her

¹ *Tentang Kekerasan* is the Indonesian translation of Hannah Arendt's *On Violence*, published by CV Jalan Baru. This edition is used in the present study to facilitate a more in-depth interpretation, as reading the text in the researcher's native language enables a closer and more nuanced with Arendt's ideas.

earlier works, including *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*,² *The Human Condition*, and *On Revolution*. Arendt is widely recognized as a fragmentary thinker, she neither attempted nor aspired to construct a systematic metaphysics or political theory. It was precisely through this intellectual spontaneity that she sought to defend the authenticity of human experiences in the world. For Arendt, attentive engagement with the quiet and unpredictable dimensions of everyday life often provides a clearer understanding of reality. Conversely, ideas constructed through rigid logical systems and all-encompassing metaphysical harmonies deserves critical suspicion. Arendt argues that the Platonic tendency to conceive political government as a process directed toward an ideal end has, in the modern age, contributed to the rise of totalitarian ideologies that seek to mobilize and transform society through violence (Backman, 2020).

Through a reading of *Tentang Kekerasan*, this study seeks to understand Arendt's central conception of violence as an instrument. This issue is significant because the same concern consistently appears throughout her other works; violence is deceptive not because it is essential, but because it is banal. For Arendt, thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Georges Sorel, and Karl Marx made important contribution to the ways in which modernity has come to understand violence. Fanon is criticized for leading violence to be understood as a medium of a society's existential liberation. Sorel, meanwhile, draws Arendt's criticism because of his romantic myth of social purity achieved through the forging of a revolutionary world. Marx is likewise not exempt from criticism due to the ambiguities in his understanding of history. Indeed, Marx's claim to scientific objectivity carried profound implications for human history, particularly in legitimizing the use of violence within modern states shaped by Marxist ideologies. This study becomes meaningful by placing Arendt's works prior to *Tentang Kekerasan* into dialogue with one another, treating them as a continuity of thought that can be interpreted without betraying either her insights or her own acknowledgment of herself as a fragmentary thinker. The objective is straightforward; to understand Arendt's conception of the manifestation of violence as a symptom of the crisis of power in modernity.

▪ METHOD

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is employed not as a method, but rather as a way of reading texts. As with the elements developed within the boarder hermeneutic tradition, the primary aim of this study is to provide an interpretation of Arendt's text, namely the essay published as *Tentang Kekerasan*. Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is utilized to uncover the deeper meaning of the text through an appreciation of both the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader. In *Kebenaran dan Metode*, Gadamer (2024) argues that meaning cannot be understood in an arbitrary manner. Meaning lies before us, yet it cannot be attained solely through the instrumentation of method; ultimately, meaning reveals itself as part of our own being. The emphasis on rehabilitating the reader's prejudices in the process of

² The complete title of the Indonesian edition is *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme: (Jilid 3) Totalitarisme*. It is the Indonesian translation of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, published by Yayasan Obor Indonesia as part of a translation project aimed at making Arendt's major works accessible to Indonesian readers. Due to the breadth and complexity of the original work, the Indonesian edition was published in three volumes. The translated edition is utilized in this study because of its availability and its capacity to facilitate the processes of reading and interpretation. Furthermore, this work serves as a dialogical text that enriches the understanding of the primary focus of the philosophical hermeneutic inquiry, namely *Tentang Kekerasan*.

understanding a text also entails a reconciliation with the myth of the existence of the text's meaning *an sich* (in itself).

The author consciously employs Gadamerian hermeneutics not as a method, but as an approach to reading. Without dismissing the framework of modern academic research, this approach offers an alternative mode of inquiry through which profound philosophical interpretation can be incorporated into contemporary studies in the humanities, political theory, and philosophy. Gadamer emphasizes not only *verstehen* or understanding as the aim of hermeneutics, but also *auskennen*, which denotes a through and intimate knowledge of something (Binding & Tapp, 2008). Through the fusion of horizons between the reader and the text of *Tentang Kekerasan*, as well as Arendt's other works such as *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*, *The Human Condition*, and *On Revolution*, a richer reading becomes possible, generating horizons of reflection and understanding in the form of new and meaningful interpretive insights. Violence, as a concept in philosophy and political theory, is thus explored in a more holistic manner, not by dissecting it word by word in the manner characteristic of semiotics, but by placing it into dialogue with ourselves, with Arendt's broader corpus, and with the interpretation of scholarly commentators.

This study is, of course, a legitimate form of inquiry, particularly within the tradition of philosophical research developed in academic philosophy. The position is supported by Bakker & Zubair (2022) in *Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat*, where they argue that philosophical research both exist and ought to fulfill philosophy's role within the broader sphere of knowledge through the heuristic character of its inquiry. Heuristics in philosophy refers to the continual, ongoing, and open-ended actualization of thought. Admittedly, this approach is not identical to the positivist research tradition, which emphasizes methodological procedures and empirical validity. Nevertheless, this form of inquiry remains valuable to modern scholarship because of its openness and deeply human character. This is especially true of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, which place greater emphasis on dialogue between text and reader through a rhetorical and playful engagement. The insights it generates are rich in reflective content and posses the capacity to illuminate contemporary human concern in a profound and meaningful way.

▪ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The development of reason and rationality has by no means led humanity toward a genuinely humane civilization. Instead, the modern state has become a kind of concentration camp in which violence is not only normalized as part of everyday life but is also regarded as morally justified. Morality itself, which was once rooted in the human conscience, has gradually shifted toward the calculation of rational reason, while neglecting one of the central problems of modernity: reason's profound betrayal of the human body. This condition has made contemporary human beings the first generation and all subsequent generations to live under the constant threat of unprecedented death and destruction, embodied most clearly in the atomic bomb, which has radically altered moral judgement and political purpose alike. We find it increasingly difficult to imagine a form of violence greater than the annihilation of humanity itself. As consequence, our moral sensibilities have become obscured, rendering us less capable of recognizing the many forms of violence that human beings continue to endure today.

Violence and the Crisis of Political Power

In *Tentang Kekerasan*, Arendt's central argument is the distinction between violence and power. This distinction serves as the starting point and conceptual foundation for understanding the modern tendency to justify violence through appeals to power. Arendt's position is unequivocal, presenting the two concept in sharp contrast (Menge, 2022). Violence is not the primary foundation of politics. Although it must be acknowledged that violence is at times employed within political practice, the accumulation and maintenance of power can never derive legitimacy from violence. For Arendt, what constitutes power in politics is built upon the communicative capacities and collective actions of citizens rather than upon violence, which is inherently destructive in nature.

“Tidak pernah ada pemerintahan yang hanya didasarkan pada alat kekerasan. Bahkan penguasa totaliter, yang instrumen kuasanya yang utama adalah penyiksaan, membutuhkan satu dasar kekuasaan, yakni polisi rahasia dan jaringan para informannya (Arendt, 2020, p. 69).”

Modernity, with its bureaucracies, state apparatuses, and increasingly sophisticated weapons, has succeeded in distorting popular perceptions of violence. Many people assume that the success of a state can be measured by the effectiveness of its military power, its capacity to dominate other states, and its ability to control its own citizen. Arendt's analytical sharpness in constructing a stark dualism between power and violence makes a significant contribution to clarifying the boundaries between the private and the public spheres (Herzog, 2017). This distinction is crucial because it enables a more precise understanding of violence as a phenomenon of the modern political crisis. Violence is employed to undermine and violate what belongs to the private realm, while simultaneously seeking to impose public values upon the most personal dimension of human existence; the body and the mind.

The bitterness experienced by modern humanity extends beyond a mere crisis of legitimacy to encompass a transcendence, or surpassing, of political ends through the technological development of violence. The diminishing role of human beings in the evolution of military technology represent perhaps the clearest manifestation of the normalization of violence in the modern world (Archambault, 2018). Human beings have possessed essentially the same biological bodies for hundreds of thousand of years, yet as creators of tools we have transformed this terrifying potential into reality through the invention of super-destructive weapons such as the atomic bomb, as well as non-human instruments of warfare including drones and military robots. The reality of violence has become not only alien to us but has also surpassed the very political purposes it was once intended to serve. A profound bewilderment characterizes modern humanity: the present generation finds itself confronted with the prospect of destruction before its very eyes, yet without any clear path of retreat. There appears to be no means of repairing a modern world haunted by the tangible possibility of humanity's annihilation. Indeed, Arendt (2020) opens *Tentang Kekerasan* with the following observation:

“Perkembangan teknis alat-alat kekerasan kini sudah mencapai titik di mana tidak ada tujuan politik yang bisa dimungkinkan sesuai dengan potensi destruktif mereka atau menjustifikasi penggunaan aktual mereka dalam konflik bersenjata. Karenanya, peperangan yang dari zaman dahulu kala merupakan wasit terakhir tanpa ampun

dalam perselisihan internasional telah kehilangan sebagian besar efektivitasnya dan hampir semua daya tariknya (p. 1-2)."

The extreme culmination of the use of violence in politics had already been analyzed by the young Arendt in *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*. Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union stand as the most striking examples in human history of regimes in which rule was driven by an unending cycle of violence. Terror and propaganda were manifested through systematic massacres, arrest, and continuous torture. From Arendt's perspective, such regimes did not truly possess of power. Politically, they were profoundly fragile, for their reliance on violence alone negated the very essence of politics: human plurality and freedom, including the freedom to live without being subjected to state persecution and torture. In *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme: (Jilid 3) Totalitarisme* Arendt (1995) writes that "... dalam politik pemerintahan totaliter, tempat hukum positif diambil oleh teror total yang direncanakan untuk menerjemahkan hukum gerakan atau hukum alam ke dalam realitas politik (p. 264)". In doing so, totalitarianism produced an unprecedented phenomenon in human history: a lawless regime devoid of any genuine political legitimacy.

By drawing upon the example of totalitarian regimes, regimes that lacked genuine legitimacy and relied solely on violence to sustain their existence, the author argues that Arendt's thought should be understood as a continuous intellectual project. Indeed, to fully grasp Arendt's thesis on violence in *Tentang Kekerasan*, one must also engage with her arguments in *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*, where the concrete manifestation of violence underlying her later conceptual reflections are extensively explored. Totalitarian regimes, for Arendt, are fundamentally lawless forms of government that operate as totalitarian movements within the state itself. In such political systems, constitutions may continue to exist, but only as symbolic ornaments or remnants of a traditional authority that predates the rise of the totalitarian movement. Nevertheless, Arendt's claim that power exercised through violence is inherently fragile has not been without criticism. For example, in his article *Political Violence and Race: A Critique of Hannah Arendt*, Kautzer (2019) argues that Arendt's analysis remains incomplete, particularly because she remains largely silent regarding forms of constitutional violence. In *Tentang Kekerasan* itself, Arendt rejects the Black Power movement as a positive progressive force, viewing it instead as a form of political defiance. This position reveals a gap within her analysis, one that may be addressed by political theorist and philosophers seeking to examine contemporary political phenomena and movements of resistance more comprehensively.

More importantly, however, Arendt arrives at the critical conclusion that manifestations of violence are symptoms of a crisis of power in modernity. For Arendt, the crisis of power in modernity emerges at those moments when freedom is placed directly upon the shoulders of human beings, whether they recognize it or not, and when a much needed space for decision making opens up, whether that space is consciously acknowledged or not (Antaki, 2006). The problem is that violence has become embedded in the very way modern human beings perceive and evaluate the world. This is not the failure of a single generation; rather, humanity as a whole bears the consequences of the Enlightenment, a point emphasized at the outset of this study. The *Aufklärung* did not merely shift our focus from the *theos* to the *anthropos*; it also introduced a new paradigm of thought, one grounded in the expectation of limitless progress. It is precisely this passion for progress that has propelled humanity down a

radical path from which there appears to be neither retreat nor correction. The emergences of increasingly sophisticated instruments of destruction has accompanied modernity itself. As a result, we are compelled to rethink modernity as an age in which the total and potentially endless instrumentation of violence has become possible.

The Instrumentality of Violence and Modern Humanity

Violence can only be understood as an instrument or tool of politics. The defining characteristic of any instrument is its function and utility in achieving a particular end. This is precisely why violence is closely aligned with the logic of modernity, which emphasizes effectiveness, productivity, and work. For Arendt, human beings possess an ontological basis for their existence in the world: the capacity to act (Walsh, 2011). Violence, by its very nature, negates action; it is coercive and injures the existence of free human beings. Its effects are not limited to the physical body. Violence often targets the human mind as well, employing mechanisms of torture carefully designed for that purpose. Modern states have a long history relying upon violence, making it entirely understandable that contemporary political theory tends to focus its critiques on modernity itself, approaching it with suspicion and seeking ways to revise or rethink its foundations.

“Beralih sebentar ke bahasa konseptual: Kekuasaan memang merupakan esensi dari seluruh pemerintahan, tetapi kekerasan tidak. Kekerasan secara natural itu bersifat instrumental; sebagaimana semua alat, ia selalu membutuhkan tuntunan dan justifikasi melalui tujuan yang dikejarinya (Arendt, 2020, p. 71).”

Under modern conditions, human beings are compelled to submit to large-scale systems that diminish their own humanity. Rather than being regarded as individuals, *in-dividuum*, authentic existences that cannot be divided, they become absorbed into the administrative language employed by the modern state to classify, monitor, and utilize them merely as resources. This tendency is especially evident in bureaucracy, which Arendt understands as form of political system that inherits a culture of tyranny without a tyrant (Spector, 2018). Consequently, politics ceases to be understood as a medium of human liberation or as the space in which individuals act freely to shape themselves and their world. Instead, through the administrative paradigm, human beings are forcibly reduced to mere data devoid of intrinsic value, or, at best, valued not as persons but as product of power and the market.

Modernity contains within it an extraordinarily dangerous tendency: the technologization of violence. To be modern is closely associated with the spirit and ambition of constructing a scientific civilization whose primary product is technology. The technical orientation of technology has also profoundly affected political life. Its massive and far-reaching development has intensified another dimension of human civilization, the tendency of humanity to alienate itself. This is particularly evident in the evolution of military technologies, including atomic bombs, drones, military robots, and unmanned aircraft and submarines. The increasingly sophisticated development of military technology distances human consciousness from awareness of its own destructive potential. In earlier times, killing was experienced as a tragedy because the sense confronted the reality of death directly, often troubling the conscience of the perpetrator. Technological limitations required one human being to kill another through relatively simple means. Today, however, remotely operated unmanned aircraft and AI-assisted weapons systems do not necessarily burden individuals with a sense of guilt

regarding the destruction they inflict. According to Brunet (2025), the use of unmanned weapon systems will become increasingly widespread in the future, as they reduce the cost of warfare while simultaneously increasing the scale of devastation inflicted upon civilian populations. This is what Arendt (2020) refers to in *Tentang Kekerasan* as the power of ‘distance’ in the development of humanity’s destructive artifacts:

“Kekerasan, harus kita ingat, tidak tergantung pada jumlah maupun pendapat, melainkan pada alat-alat kekerasan, sebagaimana semua alat yang lain, meningkatkan dan menggandakan kekuatan manusia. Mereka yang melawan kekerasan dengan kekuasaan belaka dengan segera akan menemukan bahwa mereka bukan berhadapan dengan manusia melainkan dengan artefak-artefak manusia, yang efektivitas kekejaman dan destruktifnya meningkat proporsinya seiring dengan ‘jarak’ yang memisahkan para lawan (p. 74).”

Arendt summarizes the reduction of life characteristic of modernity through the important concept of *homo faber*, which she develops in another of her major works. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) describes *homo faber* as the fabricating human being who believes that “man’s products may be more and essentially greater than himself (p. 210)”. Understanding violence in *Tentang Kekerasan* is therefore closely connected to Arendt’s earlier analyses. Human beings do indeed possess a dimension of existence as makers of tools, a notion reflected in the Latin word *faber*, meaning craftsman or artisan. However, the absolutization and expansion of this mode of consciousness result in an impoverishment of meaning within the human world, particularly in the political realm, which is inherently plural. The perspective generated by our tendency to create and employ tools gives rise to a serious problem: violence itself comes to be understood instrumentally. In such a framework, virtually any objective, whether effectiveness, ideological victory, public order, national stability, or similar ends can be invoked to justify the use of violence as a means of achieving a desired goal. This is the instrumental logic inherited by and haunting modern humanity.

The instrumental logic embraced by modern humanity is regarded by Arendt as a fundamental cause of the dehumanization that marked the twentieth century. The emergence of totalitarian regimes, the immense destruction of the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War, with its ever-present threat of humanity’s annihilation revealed dimensions of modernity that demand sustained criticism. For this reason, Arendt argues that violence is not the same as power, precisely because of its instrumental character, which places means before political ends (Finlay, 2009). Power is generated through human legitimacy and is realized through political plurality and respect for freedom within the public sphere. Violence, by contrast, can only be justified; it can never generate legitimacy, since its foundation rests solely upon the criterion of effectiveness or ineffectiveness. This stands in sharp contrast to power, which depends upon the voluntary cooperation and collective support of political actors acting together.

The violence that characterized the twentieth century cannot be separated from the instrumental logic of modern humanity. Throughout *Tentang Kekerasan*, Arendt repeatedly emphasizes that the instrumentalization of violence can never substitute for the political legitimacy generated by power. Violence lacks what Arendt, drawing upon the Aristotelian tradition, understands as action, the capacity for collective human initiative associated with the concept of *δύναμις* (Iurina, 2023). Because of its coercive nature, violence is deprived of a certain vital energy inherent in genuine political action.

Awareness of the dangers posed by violence within the common world, the only world shared by human beings, should lead us towards preventive efforts aimed at resisting the rise of tyrannical and totalitarian regimes. A human civilization may be considered authentic and truly existent only when it cultivates respect for action and for the plural condition of politics, rather than relying upon violence and the instrumental logic it carries within itself. For Arendt, these fragments of thought, the genuinely human achievement of the *Aufklärung* must be preserved against the collapse of tradition and the loss of memory (D'Entrèves, 2003). At times, what appears mysterious within the *pas* conceals profound insights for understanding ourselves, preventing modern history from descending into a destructive form of nothingness. This is why revolutionary projects that promise to transform the world instantaneously and with great speed must also be approached with suspicion. It is entirely possible that, in pursuing such ambitions, we find ourselves once again trapped within the very paradox of modernity discussed earlier.

Revolution and the Limits of Violence in Politics

Many readers misunderstand Arendt. An adequate interpretation of her work must not stop at her apparent commitment to nonviolence. While Arendt is highly critical of violence, she nevertheless maintains that revolution and even violence may possess value insofar as they remain subordinate to the fundamental aim of politics: human freedom. Arendt was not pacifist; she remained optimistic about revolutionary movements. At the same time, however, she harbored profound suspicion and sorrow, particularly regarding revolutions that culminated in endless violence and tyranny, such as the French Revolution (Fine, 2014). This reveals an important ambivalence within Arendt's political theory, especially concerning the political limits of violence. On the one hand, Arendt supports revolution insofar as it serves the cause of liberation. On the other hand, she criticizes forms of revolutionary violence that contain tyrannical tendencies and give rise to injustice. Consequently, her position cannot be reduced either to an unconditional endorsement of revolution or to an absolute rejection of violence: rather, it is defined by a constant effort to determine the limits beyond which violence ceases to serve freedom and begins to undermine it.

Arendt's critique of violence is highly coherent, for her thought consistently seeks to define politics as the sphere in which human beings are able to realize their freedom. Violent movement often inherits peculiar myths of liberation, dreaming of destroying the old world in order to create a new and just one for all humanity. From the outset, however, revolutions grounded in such revolutionary violence tend to carry primarily destructive elements, standing in opposition to the constructive dimensions that politics ought to cultivate. Efforts to overturn history and dismantle traditional institutions that function as oppressive authorities or defenders of the status quo frequently contain an excessive degree of ideological romanticism. A historicist perspective offers a more compelling account of revolution, revealing how revolutionary upheavals are often fueled not only by aspirations for justice but also by humanity's untamed passions, resentments, and even radical desires of revenge. In *Tentang Kekerasan*, Arendt (2020) further suggests that the destructive impulses of revolutionary actors may sometimes be discerned in their desire to acquire wealth and property previously controlled by the oppressors who dominated the old order throughout the pre-revolutionary past. As she writes:

“Siapakah yang meragukan bahwa mimpi kekerasan yang dilanggar, bahwa mereka yang ditindas ‘bermimpi sekurang-kurangnya sekali dalam sehari menempatkan’ diri mereka sendiri menggantikan penindas, bahwa mimpi si miskin terhadap harta benda si kaya, dia yang dianiaya menukar ‘peranan sebagai mangsa menjadi pemburu’ dan kerajaan terakhir dimana ‘yang terakhir akan menjadi yang pertama, dan yang pertama akan menjadi yang terakhir’ (p. 28-29).”

Violence will ultimately remain an instrument that can never create power. Revolutionary movements ground themselves in political objectives articulated through revolutionary ideas whose central aim is the transformation of the world. As discussed earlier, figures such as Fanon, Sorel, and even Marx are often understood merely as theorist of revolution whose writings provide revolutionary movements with theoretical legitimacy. Yet neither the idea of violence nor violence itself is capable of generating political legitimacy. This issue therefore demands serious consideration: what comes after revolution? From Arendt’s perspective, the answer is straightforward, one must return to the fundamental purpose of politics as collective action (Torres, 2007). Throughout human history, revolutions have never been able, by themselves, to create power, for power presuppose what Arendt considers the primary synonym of politics: freedom. For Arendt, political freedom can only be achieved through legitimacy, something that cannot emerge from sustained violence or from the destruction of traditional political institutions by revolutionary movements, let alone through violence itself. Power always requires the spirit of the polis, a theme frequently invoked by Arendt in her admiration for the political vitality of ancient Athenian civilization. Such a spirit, however, is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible to recover within the condition of modernity.

The crisis of modern politics and power arises, in part, because the overthrow of the oppressor has come to be regarded as just as important as the political goal itself. In *On Revolution*, Arendt (1973) argues that liberation and freedom are, as a truism, fundamentally distinct concept. She writes that “liberation may be the condition of freedom, but by no means leads automatically to it; that the notion of liberty implied in liberation can only be negative, and hence, that even the intention of liberating is not identical with the desire for freedom (p. 22)”. Arendt’s suspicion reaches its peak in this work, particularly with regard to revolutions whose primary objective is the eradication of poverty (King, 2011). In her view, revolutions motivated chiefly by the pursuit of material welfare do not necessarily embody a genuine commitment to freedom. For Arendt, freedom as the defining principle of politics is fundamentally different from welfare. Revolutions driven by aspirations for economic redistribution, the improvement of material conditions for the oppressed, or similar objectives often fail to establish a genuinely political world. To illustrate this distinction, Arendt contrast the French Revolution with the American Revolution, arguing that they differed both in substance and in outcome. The French Revolution was, from its inception, propelled by hostility toward monarchy. Although it succeeded in overthrowing the existing regime, it ultimately failed politically, as evidenced by the emergence of the Reign of Terror in the aftermath of the revolution. By contrast, the American Revolution was characterized by a greater concern for constitutional design and republican principles than for determining an ideal economic order. For this reason, Arendt regards it as a more successful example of a revolution that sought to establish and preserve political freedom.

For Arendt, the revolutionary movements of the late 1960s fell prey to the rhetorical allure of revolutionary violence. The instrumental character of violence carries with it significant risks and the potential for profound damage to the human world. Violence operates according to a logic fundamentally different from that of politics; it is governed by the logic of coercion alone. This is precisely what Arendt feared about revolution: while it may embody a spirit of reform, it simultaneously bears the grave danger inherent in the use of violence. Drawing upon Hirsch's (2012) article, *The Promise of the Unforgiven*, the ambivalence within Arendt's theory of violence reaches its peak in a paradox that became evident during a public discussion with Susan Sontag and Noam Chomsky at New York's Theatre for Ideas, entitled *The Legitimacy of Violence*. At the beginning of the discussion, Arendt instead that "violence always arises out of impotence". Yet during the question-and-answer session, she complicated the debate by expressing a cautious optimism regarding violence as a possible catalyst for reform. The significance of Arendt's persistent theoretical ambivalence toward violence and revolution lies in her attempt to demonstrate that human beings are ultimately trapped within a tragic condition: the tension between the need to transform the world and the profound fear of losing that world altogether. This insight suggests that violence can never be approached without caution, even when it is invoked in the name of political change or reform. Consequently, human beings must remain vigilant toward calls for violence and toward ideologies that seek to justify it, whether they are advanced in the service of transformation, revolution, or any other political objective.

"... Selain itu, bahaya kekerasan, bahkan jika ia bergerak dengan sadar di dalam kerangka non-ekstremis dari tujuan jangka pendek, akan selalu menjadi situasi di mana alat meliputi tujuan. Jika tujuan tidak dicapai dengan cepat, maka hasilnya bukan hanya kekalahan melainkan juga pengenalan praktik kekerasan pada semua institusi politik. Tindakan tidak bisa diubah, dan satu gerak kembali ke status quo dalam kasus kekalahan selalu tidak mungkin. Praktik kekerasan, seperti semua tindakan, mengubah dunia, tetapi perubahan yang paling mungkin adalah menuju satu dunia yang lebih ganas (Arendt, 2020, p. 116)."

Arendt's recognition of the effectiveness of violence in destroying entrenched political structures and status quos that severely suppress freedom serves to define the fundamental limits of violence in politics. Although violence may be effective in dismantling oppressive political orders, Arendt insists that it can never become legitimate; violence is neither a source of freedom nor a permanent foundation for political life (Frazer & Hutchings, 2008). The failure of modernity, therefore, does not stem from violence alone. Rather, the problem lies in modernity itself. The pervasive emphasis on efficiency and instrumental reasoning characteristic of the modern age has invited violence into the realm of politics. Totalitarian regimes in the early twentieth century, as well as revolutionary movements and their successors, have demonstrated the effectiveness of violence in controlling masses, overthrowing established orders, and institutionalizing terror. Yet violence invariably fails in one crucial respect: it cannot create freedom, the fundamental basis of human politics. Violence may be employed to achieve particular political objectives, but it can never generate politics itself. For this reason, violence in the modern era must be regarded not only as a symptom of the crisis of modernity but also as a persistent danger, whether it appears in the form of political ideas, revolutionary movements, or other manifestations of collective action. From the author's perspective, maintaining vigilance against such tendencies is imperative for

anyone who seeks to avoid what may be considered the cardinal sins of modernity: the alienation and dehumanization of human beings through the habitual use of violence in political life.

▪ CONCLUSION

Through a philosophical hermeneutic study of Hannah Arendt's *Tentang Kekerasan*, a deeper interpretive insight emerges regarding the continuity of her reflections on violence throughout her intellectual oeuvre. The ambivalence that Arendt consistently expresses toward the use of violence constitutes a significant thesis, allowing for a rejection of violence without requiring a commitment to pacifism. Violence may be understood both as an instrument that can become intertwined with the political objectives of its users and as a source of destructive energy available to human beings. Its limits, however, are clear: violence possesses no genuinely political function beyond the destruction of an existing order. In this respect, violence lacks the capacity to establish a political realm, which for Arendt is synonymous with freedom and plurality. As a political theorist and as an individual who directly experienced the history of violence in the modern era, particularly during the Second World War, when violence reached unprecedented levels of prominence, Arendt repeatedly articulated the same underlying concern throughout her writings. This continuity is evident in the recurring theme of violence, which appears not only in *Tentang Kekerasan*, one of the final essays of her life, but also in earlier works such as *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*, *The Human Condition*, and *On Revolution*.

This study demonstrates that the crisis of modernity has contributed to the widespread use of violence within modern states. Modernity carries with it a form of instrumental rationality that encourages individuals to view both the world and human life primarily as mechanism of labor, efficiency, and survival. Effectiveness become a dominant value in this age, while anything perceived as ineffective, including public discourse and deliberation, comes to be regarded as an obstacle that must be overcome. In her earlier work, *Asal-Usul Totalitarisme*, Arendt likewise argues that the emergence of totalitarian regimes in the early and mid-twentieth century was one of the logical consequences of modernity. Administrative mechanism, including bureaucratic systems, reduces reality to abstract figures and calculations detached from lived human experience. The crisis of modernity reaches its most extreme form when instruments of violence are employed not only in warfare. Totalitarian regimes, themselves products of modernity, are particularly inclined to deploy violence in a continuous, systematic, and large-scale manner over an indefinite period of time. Such practices inflict profound harm upon humanity and generate lasting collective trauma. In doing so, they compel human beings to reconsider and redefine the true meaning of rationality and enlightenment themselves.

Through a dialogue between *Tentang Kekerasan* and Arendt's earlier works, particularly *The Human Condition*, this study finds that the reduction of the lifeworld intensifies the dangerous potential inherent in humanity as *homo faber*. As tool-making beings, human beings have not only succeeded in constructing an artificial world to sustain their existence but have also created instruments capable of destroying themselves. The invention of weapons has transformed what modern humanity confronts: no longer merely perpetrators of violence, but also inhuman artifacts of violence. The creation of nuclear weapons, whose destructive capacity surpasses

ordinary human imagination, has rendered violence increasingly alien and devoid of meaning. There is no longer any final arbiter capable of resolving humanity's conflicts, as the possibility of total war and absolute destruction undermines every positive conception previously associated with violence. Moreover, the rapid development of violent artifacts, including military robots, drones, unmanned submarines, and the integration of artificial intelligence into modern military systems, has progressively diminished the role of human agency while simultaneously distancing individuals from feelings of responsibility and guilt associated with the use of violent instrument. As violence becomes increasingly mediated through technology, the moral and existential consequences of destruction are obscured, further deepening the crisis of the modern world.

What is particularly compelling in Arendt's reflections on violence is that she was not a pacifist who categorically rejected violence. In *Tentang Kekerasan*, she repeatedly highlights the destructive potential of violence without denying its effectiveness in dismantling existing political order, including corrupt civilizational status quos. Consequently, she did not abandon her earlier view, developed in *On Revolution*, that violence may possess a liberatory potential within the context of major revolutions throughout human history. Rather than revising this position, Arendt became more critical of revolutionary movements that elevated theories of violence into the primary motive and foundation of political action. In her view, figures such as Fanon, Sorel, and Marx, often portrayed as prophets of violence, had been widely misunderstood by contemporary revolutionary movements. Such movements, Arendt argues, failed to recognize the instrumental character of violence. As an instrument, violence may indeed serve short-term purposes of liberation. However, she insists that the continuous use of violence as a means of maintaining power inevitably produces a form of politics devoid of legitimacy, marked by a systemic and pervasive reliance upon violence throughout political institutions. For Arendt, power is a political condition grounded in the human capacity, willingness, and collective commitment to create and sustain freedom. Violence possesses no such capacity. It cannot generate power, freedom, or legitimacy; it can only be retrospectively justified in relation to particular ends. For this reason, violence remains fundamentally distinct from power and can never serve as the enduring foundation of political life.

The use of violence in pursuit of any political objective ultimately inflicts damage upon the common world shared by human beings. Even when employed in the name of revolution, violence can never be genuinely constructive. Its continued use and especially the endorsement of violence as an acceptable instrument of social change, only invites greater risks for contemporary humanity. In the end, modernity, and the condition of being modern itself, places upon humanity the burden of preserving its human character while confronting an endless process of change. What is required, therefore, is a far more radical and humane effort to build and sustain a common world worthy of human existence. Arendt consistently reminds her readers of the importance of remembering the past, for the act of remembrance itself constitutes a rejection of the 'nothingness' that the future may otherwise impose upon civilization. The emergence of inhuman regimes that alienate and dehumanizes individuals demonstrates that forgetting, as a political act, is a profound mistake. In political life, we are never isolated beings; rather, we exist together with those who came before us and those who will come after us, sharing both the hopes and the burdens that human life places upon every generation.

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