# THE ONTOLOGIZATION OF PRACTICAL MAN: THE POLITICAL THEORIES OF MARX AND ARENDT AS A RESPONSE TO THE 'PROBLEM OF FREEDOM' IN HUME AND KANT

STUART MacDONALD

# THE ONTOLOGIZATION OF PRACTICAL MAN:

# THE POLITICAL THEORIES OF MARX AND ARENDT AS A RESPONSE TO THE 'PROBLEM OF FREEDOM' IN HUME AND KANT

by

© Stuart MacDonald

A thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

Memorial University Newfoundland

May 2011

St. John's Newfoundland

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that the political theories of Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt can be interpreted as responses to Kant who, in attempting to conceive of how freedom could be possible in the face of Humean scepticism, concluded that freedom was only possible outside of the phenomenal world. I argue that they share a foundation in that their political theories are ultimately responses to Kant, both of them rejecting the ontological precedence given by Kant and the majority of the thinkers throughout the history of philosophy to the abstract properties of *reason* and *thought* in humanity, and instead ontologizing the *practical*. From this ontological shift, Marx and Arendt ultimately grounded humanness in the *practical* and the *worldly*, by showing that although Hume's scepticism about freedom with respect to *necessity* may be correct, freedom is, at base, a *practical* question with respect to *constraint*, and it is only by considering it in this light that freedom can be adequately 'brought back' to the 'phenomenal' world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must extend my gratitude first and foremost to Dr. James Bradley for accepting me into the M.A. Philosophy program at Memorial University. In addition, his guidance throughout in issues great and small, and the many interesting conversations and debates on matters of philosophy or anything else made for a truly unforgettable experience. In the end, this thesis was possible thanks to the supervision of Dr. Natalie Oman, and the tireless work that she put into not only helping me with the content of the thesis itself, but also with respect to discussing and familiarizing me with main historical works of political philosophy. I must also thank my assessors, Dr. Walter Okshevsky, Dr. Suma Rajiva, and especially Dr. Peter Trnka who acted as my supervisor for the final push, for the time they put into reading my submissions and providing many helpful criticisms that eventually allowed me to put together a thesis that is (hopefully) both accurate and insightful for the reader.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

To look for my happiness in the happiness of others, for my own worth in the worth of all those around me, to be free in the freedom of others—that is my whole faith, the aspiration of my whole life.

—Mikhail Bakunin

# INTRODUCTION

## I: Hume, Kant, and the Problem of Freedom

The socio-political notion of freedom—its characterization and the subsequent conceptions of how best to achieve it—has been a major topic of philosophical inquiry dealt with by most political theorists, one of the earliest and most exhaustive treatments having been given by Plato and summarized in his cave allegory in *The Republic*. Yet although there may be different schools of thought (conservatism, liberalism, dialecticism) within which theorists generally agree, it is fair to say that a universally accepted conception of freedom is very far away, if it could be conceived of at all.[1] Moreover, like most topics that are outside the scope of the natural sciences, it is not clear how any conception of socio-political freedom could be established and defended based on a definite and generally agreed upon scientific method, as could, for example, the structure of DNA or the escape velocity of the Earth's gravitational field. Hence, establishing and defending a theoretical treatment of freedom and/or attacking such a

[1]Arendt opens her essay "What is Freedom?" by alluding to precisely this point: "To raise the question, what is freedom? seems to be a hopeless enterprise. It is as though age-old contradictions and antimonies were lying in wait to force the mind into dilemmas of logical impossibility so that, depending on which horn of the dilemma you are holding on to, it becomes as impossible to conceive of freedom or its opposite as it is to realize the notion of a square circle" (Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. with an introduction by Peter Baehr [New York: Penguin, 2000], 438).

treatment's validity must be substantiated upon rational argumentation.

> If there exists on any subject a philosophy (that is, a system of rational knowledge based on concepts), then there must also be for this philosophy a system of pure rational concepts, independent of any condition of intuition, in other words, a metaphysic. It may be asked whether metaphysical elements are required also for every practical philosophy.... As regards pure jurisprudence, no one will question this requirement...[2]

So begins Kant's preface to his 1780 piece *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*. Of course, by 'practical philosophy', it is evident that Kant was more concerned with ethics. Yet it is also evident that politics and political theory is also a practical philosophy with a long tradition largely starting with Plato's *Republic* and evolving over the course of nearly 2500 years. It should thus be important that the metaphysical elements of politics should not be completely forgotten within modern day political thought. The central idea of my thesis is to explore one such 'metaphysical element' of political thought—namely human ontology (a concept that will be defined below)—and substantiate its importance to political freedom within the political theories of Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt. Yet this is not the whole story, nor, indeed, can the 'story' yet depart from Kant.

When "the remembrance of *David Hume* was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted [Kant's] dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to [his] researches in the field of speculative philosophy,"[3] what Kant immediately had in

---

[2]Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*, tr. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, (Arc Manor: Rockville, 2008), 7.

[3]Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. and ed.

mind was the manner in which Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 'proves' that the concept of cause and effect "is really nothing but a bastard of the imagination, which, impregnated by experience, and having brought certain representations under the law of association, passes off the resulting subjective necessity (i.e., habit) for an objective necessity (from insight)."[4] What is important for the purposes of the present thesis, however, is not the manner in which Kant disentangles reason from this 'Humean problem', but rather the repercussions that Kant's analysis has in dealing with the seemingly mortal blow that Hume's analysis in the *Enquiry* deals to "the long disputed question concerning liberty and necessity ... [which] has been so much canvassed on all hands, and has led philosophers into such a labyrinth of obscure sophistry."[5] Hume contends,

> Whatever definition we may give to liberty, we should be careful to observe two requisite circumstances; first, that it be consistent with plain matter of fact; secondly, that it be consistent with itself. If we observe these circumstances, and render our definition intelligible, I am persuaded that all mankind will be found of one opinion with regard to it[:] ... liberty, when opposed to necessity, not to constraint, is the same thing with chance; which is universally allowed to have no existence.[6]

The manner in which Kant "saved freedom from this twofold assault upon it [the causality of inner motivation on the one hand and of the causal principle which rules the outer world on the other] by distinguishing between a 'pure' theoretical reason and a

---

Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 10 [original pagination: 260].

[4]Ibid, 7 [258].

[5]David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2000), 56.

[6]Ibid., 66.

'practical reason' whose center is free will"[7] has had a major influence on philosophy since, especially with regard to its immediate effect on the period of German idealism that ensued. This immediately subsequent period of German idealism and the form of the critiques of Kant advanced by Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, et al. forms the jumping off point for the present thesis, namely the manner in which Kant's many successors, beginning with Fichte, attempted to "reconcile freedom with necessity, or, more specifically, to explain how freely willing, morally responsible agents can at the same time be considered part of a world of causally conditioned material objects in space and time."[8] I argue that the political theories of both Marx and Arendt can be understood as an attempt to solve this Kantian problem of 'practical, worldly' (specifically socio-political) freedom, and they both do so using a method that I will refer to as *the ontologization of practical man*. I will return to this characterization subsequently.

## II: 'Ontology' and 'Freedom'

The philosophical subdiscipline of ontology deals with existence. In its 'purest' form, it is (arguably) equivalent to attempting to answer the question "what, precisely, does it mean for something to exist?" or, considered from a slightly different point of view, "what *properties* do all existent things/objects/beings, etc. share?" Since I am interested in

---

[7]Arendt, "What is Freedom?", 439.

[8]Dan Breazeale, "Johann Gottlieb Fichte", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, available from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/johann-fichte/, accessed June 21, 2010. Kant's 'solution' is summarized in note 30, Chapter II.

ontology within a socio-political context, the type of ontology that I am concerned with here is, of course, *human* ontology (I will refer to it simply as 'ontology' from this point on); that is, an inquiry analogous to those just mentioned above, except that it should be *specific to human existence*. That is, it should deal with questions such as "what, precisely, does it mean for something to exist *as a human being*?" or "what properties *define one to be a human being*?" It is, of course, possible to appeal to a scientific characterization of human beings, for example genetically in terms of DNA structure or morphologically in terms of skeletal structure, but such characterizations are largely useless to philosophy, since they are a philosophical dead end: they provide few, if any, clues as to *what* such a 'bag of DNA' or 'bag of bones' should be capable of *doing* or *how* it should *act*.[9]

The other concept that is central to my thesis is 'freedom', wherein I am, of course, concerned with *human socio-political* freedom (as opposed to, for example, more metaphysical notions of freedom, such as 'freedom of will'). Thus, I wish to consider the question of how one defines the freedom of a *human* (as opposed to, e.g. another animal) in terms of *the dynamic between individual and society and/or polis*. As I have already

[9]Since the term 'human' can be used as singular or plural—a 'human' ontology could refer to the ontological qualities of the individual human or the species of humans *en masse*—there is a danger of ambiguity; the primary intention of my thesis is to explore the ontological qualities of the *individual*, thus my use of 'human' is singular. This may be seen as paradoxical, since the nature of the theories of both Marx and Arendt are meaningless outside of a socio-political milieu. However, it will become apparent that the development of a robust ontology of the individual will fundamentally depend on the existing social context. Moreover, it should be pointed out that a social (political) ontology, i.e. one concerning humanity *en masse*, is dependent on individuals: social relations occur *between individuals*, and political exchange occurs *between individuals*. Thus, without the active participation of individuals, a social ontology is equally meaningless, since if individuals do not act, there cannot be a notion of 'social'.

mentioned above, it is difficult to conceive of precisely what such a notion of freedom entails. An example of one notion of freedom in a very general form would be a standard liberal[10] definition, i.e. a state of being wherein the actions of an individual maintain a certain amount of autonomy or independence from the control[11] of others; the variation in specific notions of freedom is based on the form and extent[12] of this autonomy. To briefly

---

[10]It is necessary to qualify this as a 'liberal' definition; as such a definition based on *individuation* would not be in keeping with either Marx or Arendt. For example: "The liberty of egoistic man, and the recognition of this liberty, is rather the recognition of the *frenzied* movement of the cultural and material elements which form the content of his life. Thus man was not liberated from religion; he received religious liberty. He was not liberated from property; he received the liberty to own property. He was not liberated from the egoism of business; he received the liberty to engage in business" (Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 45), or, indeed: "If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality" (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; 1989], 234).

[11]This control may be direct or indirect. For example, if I am imprisoned, the possible acts that I can physically carry out are severely restricted. On the other hand, even if I am not imprisoned the *threat* of being imprisoned as a consequence of an act may also restrict the acts that I am capable of by restricting my *impetus* to carry them out.

[12]One such categorization of 'forms' of freedom is that of Isaiah Berlin, who conceived of freedom as being divided into categories of 'positive' and 'negative' liberty, e.g.: "The first of these political senses of freedom or liberty … which … I shall call the 'negative' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject — a person or group of persons — is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' The second, which I shall call the 'positive' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?' The two questions are clearly different, even though the answers to them may overlap" (Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty: Incorporating 'Four Essays on Liberty'*, ed. Henry Hardy [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 169). Gould's characterization of Marx's theory of freedom, as cited at the end of Chapter I (p. 44), incorporates this idea: "real freedom, or concrete freedom as [Marx] calls it, consists in the unity of these two (positive and negative) aspects" (Carol Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality* [MIT Press:

bring ontology into context with political freedom in an entirely general sense, one may consider freedom as describing a possible *telos* (i.e. a 'goal') that we, as humans, may feel inclined to pursue (or, if we consider ourselves to already be free, it may be seen as something to uphold). Since one may assume that humanity is not content to remain in a society that is developmentally static, one must appeal to some form of evolution of its capabilities. Yet the very observation that human beings are 'progressive animals,' is itself an ontological claim, and if one agrees with this assessment, and agrees that freedom is a desirable teleological goal, one would then be inclined to inquire as to what such a 'freedom' should consist of.

The idea that humans are 'animals' and had, at one stage, lived largely independent of one another at some point in time before coming together in structured social environments is a tempting starting point for the interpretation and analysis of human ontology. If one begins with such a conception, an appeal can conceivably be made to define freedom as a return to such a 'natural' state if one is willing to hold fast to this 'primitive' ontology. Of course, most (if not all) theorists would consider such a prospect as inconceivable, and those that do begin by considering such an 'animalistic' conception of humanity will expectedly repudiate it, and appeal to the necessity of an alternative (i.e. socio-political) state of affairs.[13] A few notable examples of critiques of

---

Cambridge, Mass], 110).

With regard to extent, one who has one's actions controlled *completely* by an external course must be considered to be unfree, yet, to have complete social anarchy and lawlessness is, arguably, also undesirable.

[13]E.g., "[the classical English political philosophers] supposed that [freedom] could not, as things were, be unlimited, because if it were, it would entail a state in which

'freedom as human savagery' arise in Hobbes,[14] Rousseau, and Hegel, and lead them to maintain the necessity of the socio-political state and its connection to freedom. Hobbes' idea of apolitical human nature realized as the *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all) provides the grounds for his demanding the existence of a political state and its sovereign, whose role is solely bound up in preventing the reversion from the existing political structure to this pre-political anarchic state.[15] Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* begins from conceiving of man in such a natural state (though given that he sets the argument up as a critical thought experiment, he acknowledges that such a

---

all men could boundlessly interfere with all other men; and this kind of 'natural' freedom would lead to social chaos in which men's minimum needs would not be satisfied; or else the liberties of the weak would be suppressed by the strong" (Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 170).

[14]Hobbes' contribution to modern philosophy and political theory cannot be underestimated, e.g. Arendt declares "one of the reasons for Hobbes' break with traditional philosophy was that while all previous metaphysics had followed Aristotle in holding that the inquiry into the first causes of everything that is comprises the chief task of philosophy, it was Hobbes' contention that, on the contrary, the task of philosophy was to guide purposes and aims and to establish a reasonable teleology of action" (Arendt, "The Concept of History" in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 300). The treatment of (political) philosophy as a guide to "purposes and aims and to establish a reasonable teleology of action" is of utmost importance to the theories of both Marx and Arendt, as will become clear.

[15]"It cannot be denied but that the natural state of men, before they entered into society, was a mere war, and that not simply, but a war of all men against all men" (Hobbes, *De Cive or The Citizen*, ed. with an introduction by Sterling P. Lamprecht [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949], 29). Further, "since therefore the conspiring of many wills to the same end doth not suffice to preserve peace, and to make a lasting defence, it is requisite that, in those necessary matters which concern peace and self-defence … every man will so subject his will to some other one, to wit, either man or council" (Ibid., 66).

state of affairs might never have existed[16]) and maintaining that even if man did begin in such an asocial state, it would likely be impossible and even undesirable to return to such a state.[17] His notion of freedom takes into account the necessity of this socio-political context, eventually defining freedom in *The Social Contract* in terms of an agreement of the majority being reflective of the 'general will', "which tends to the preservation and welfare of the whole and every part, and is the source of the laws, constitutes for all members of the State, in their relations to one another and to it, the rule of what is just or unjust."[18] Finally, in *Reason in History*, Hegel maintains that images of the 'noble savage' exist only if we consider 'freedom' abstractly, i.e. in association with preconceived notions of what the concept of freedom engenders in our personal belief system. A more robust conception of the natural state of humanity is that in which it is on course towards its *telos*, which in Hegel's case amounts to the self-realization of Spirit

---

[16]"I confess that the events I am going to describe might have happened in various ways, I have nothing to determine my choice but conjectures: but such conjectures become reasons when they are the most probable that can be drawn from the nature of things, and the only means of discovering the truth" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on a Subject Proposed by the Academy of Dijon: What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?* in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, tr. G.D.H. Cole. rev. J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall [New York: Everyman's Library, 1913; 1978], 74).

[17]"Must societies be totally abolished?... This is a deduction in the manner of my adversaries.... As for men like me, whose passions have destroyed their original simplicity, who can no longer subsist on plants or acorns...all these will endeavour to merit the eternal prize they are to expect from the practice of those virtues, which they make themselves follow in learning to know them. They will respect the sacred bonds of their respective communities; they will love their fellow citizens, and serve them with all their might" (Ibid., 113).

[18]Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, 120.

through the development of the State.[19] Indeed, if one were to conceive of an ontology that would correspond to the *telos* of the abolition of the entire social realm and a return to the 'noble savage', one would be painting man as nothing more than a pre-historical animal. It is this idea, namely that 'abstract freedom' is theoretically insufficient to establish and/or justify the merits of a political theory, that gives added credence to the contention that the 'metaphysical element' of ontology should play a crucial role in putting political theory on a firm footing.

### III: Summary of Contents

The approach that I take in my thesis is to consider the political theories of Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt as theories that derive their respective notions of freedom in a manner that is inextricably dependent on their respective conceptions of ontology, yet the manner in which they conceive of their ontologies is of primary importance. If one looks at the examples given above, those of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hegel, they are, in essence, based on an abstractly conceived underlying metaphysic that is grounded in *reason*, rather than a practical consideration of the intimate physical discourse between humanity and its worldly context. In contrast to this, as mentioned above, the political theories of Marx and Arendt are grounded in a *practical, worldly ontologization of humanity*. By this I mean that their ontologies attempt to overcome the problems associated with Kant's[20]

---

[19]See, for example, p. 26.

[20]Marx's connection to Kant is, of course, predominantly seen through Hegel's influence. Even so, a very early letter to his father provides evidence that Marx's link to

condemning of freedom to 'otherworldliness' by conceiving of human ontology not with regard to what may be inductively assumed—a summarization of human attributes centred around abstract thought and reason[21]—but instead with respect to what is observable and actual, i.e. *the capabilities of humanity with respect to how it observably and actively partakes and participates in the dynamic shaping of the phenomenal world (i.e. material for Marx, political for Arendt) and humanity's relation to the world and to each other.*[22] At first glance it may seem that Marx and Arendt are odd bedfellows to put

---

Kant is even more direct: "From the idealism which, by the way, I had compared and nourished with the idealism of Kant and Fichte, I arrived at the point of seeking the idea in reality itself. If previously the gods had dwelt above the earth, now they became its centre" (Marx, "Discovering Hegel," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 7). Arendt's interest in and indebtedness to Kant is well evinced at the very least by her expansive set of lectures published as *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, wherein she admits: "To talk about and inquire into Kant's political philosophy has its difficulties. Unlike so many other philosophers … he never wrote a political philosophy" (Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. with an interpretive essay by Ronald Beiner [Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1992], 7), yet she is clearly undeterred.

[21]By 'inductively assumed', I simply mean that there is no means to conclude the existence of the reasoning ability of others except through induction on ones own reasoning ability, and/or deduction from others' observable actions.

[22]This approach may be deemed 'unphilosophical'. For example, one may consider Henry George's criticism of socialism: "Mankind is here; how, it does not state; and must proceed to make a world for itself, as disorderly as that which Alice in Wonderland confronted. It has no system of individual rights whereby it can define the extent to which the individual is entitled to liberty or to which the state may go in restraining it. And so long as no individual has any principle of guidance it is impossible that society itself should have any" Henry George, *The Science of Political Economy: a reconstruction of its principles in clear and systematic form*, (New York: Schalkenbach Foundation, 1980; 1981), 198. (It is interesting to note, however, that in *Progress and Poverty*, George states "However man may have originated, all we know of him is as man—just as he is now found" (Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: an inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth: the remedy*, [New York: Schalkenbach Foundation, 1985; 2008], 476)). It is likely that any charge of being 'unphilosophical' would have had little effect on either thinker, since

side-by-side within such a project. Yet a closer examination within the context of the project that I have undertaken evinces that they are, on the contrary, well-suited to it.

The effect that Marx's political theories have had on the shaping of the political world since they were conceived is unquestionable: even if one limits one's consideration to the fundamental role that Marx's ideas played in (at the very least *justifying*[23]) the events that culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the eventual formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922,[24] the shadow that Marx has cast over the past century is arguably unparalleled in modern political thought. The formation of the Soviet Union alone spawned the rapid industrialization and modernization of Russia and Eastern Europe, which in turn led to dramatic confrontations between the United States and Russia that have persisted even to this day[25]: highlights include the Space Race, the Cold War, and the rise of McCarthyism in the United States. Yet, the rapid evolution of

---

neither openly purported to being 'philosophers' in the classical sense, often openly criticizing philosophy as too abstract and limiting.

[23]Indeed, the tension between the Russian aristocracy and the peasants may have in some sense *necessitated* some *sort* of revolutionary upheaval, but Marx's theories laid the foundations for the direction in which Lenin, Stalin, et al., would eventually take the Russian Revolution and the subsequently formed Soviet Union.

[24]Leaving aside, e.g., the influence that the ideas of Marx had on the formation of the Cuban regime, the development of French existentialist thought in thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, the FLN liberation movement in Algeria, etc.

[25]Arendt writes, for example: "Surely no one now doubts that, as the logical outcome of such possibilities [total destruction in the form of atomic bombs, etc.], a third world war can hardly end in anything but the annihilation of the loser. We are already so in the thrall of total war that we can scarcely imagine a war between Russia and America in which the American Constitution or the current Russian regime would survive defeat" (Arendt, "Introduction *into* Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn, [New York: Schocken Books, 2005], 159). The editor notes that "when Arendt wrote this, the threat of war between the United States and the Soviet Union was grave" (Ibid.).

Russia politically and economically has also come at a price: the tension between 'the West' and 'the Eastern Bloc' has been fueled in part by political exchanges arising from Western governments criticizing the Eastern bloc for being 'undeomcratic' and/or 'flagrantly violating human rights'.[26]

On the other hand, Marx's theories themselves are open to an array of interpretations that have resulted in an equally vast array of Marxist schools—e.g. Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Neo-Marxism, Post-Marxism, etc.—that emphasize different fundamental points and/or apply Marx's ideas in slightly different ways. One merely needs to look at the manner in which recent theorists such as Antonio Negri in *Marx Beyond Marx* and Carol Gould in *Marx's Social Ontology* have turned to Marx's *Grundrisse* to paint a more 'social' picture of Marxist theory that is different from the 'classical' theories of Marxism that see the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, *Das Kapital*, and *The Communist Manifesto* as being of primary importance. In the concluding remarks to his critical essay "'The Continued Relevance of Marxism' as a Question", for example, Kenneth Surin argues:

> Marxism has also to be recast at a more purely theoretical level. In particular, it is now evident that the dialectic is too simple and clumsy an instrument to account

[26]In his book *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After*, for example, Crampton speaks of how Romanian president Ceaucescu "was reported to have dreamed of establishing an electric monitoring system so complex that every family in the land would be subject to periodic and if necessary constant surveillance; Ceaucescu told the scientists involved in the project: 'it is too bad that we cannot tell our working people how the communist party is looking out for them, comrades. Wouldn't the miners go out and dig more coal, if they could just be sure that the party knew exactly what their wives were doing every single instant? They would, comrades, but we cannot talk about our system today. The western press might accuse us of being a police state'" (R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After* [New York: Routledge, 1997]), 248.

> for the kinds of antagonism which prevail in contemporary capitalism. Here the work of Negri, Deleuze and Guattari is very significant in its efforts to provide a new and more productive theoretical armature for the description and analysis of late capitalism.[27]

Hence, although *my* focus is on a textual analysis of Marx from an ontological point of view, and thus is not concerned with contextualizing it in terms of, e.g. 'contemporary capitalism'; it is evident that the breadth and depth of Marx's influence can hardly be questioned.

Yet the main reason that it is natural to begin with Marx—and, if I may say, a justification for the extent of the reverberations his ideas have had throughout the political world—is that Marx may be seen as a (or, indeed, perhaps *the*) founder of this 'ontologization of the practical'. If one considers the canon of political theory before him, it is difficult to find an example where *practice* takes ontological precedence over *reason*. A quick glance will provide justification for this claim: Plato's timocracy and the rule of the philosopher-kings was based on their superior faculty of reason; in *The Politics*, Aristotle makes his intent known almost immediately, claiming: "For he that can by his intelligence foresee things needed is by nature ruler and master, while he whose bodily strength enables him to perform them is by nature a slave";[28] those theories that have conceived of politics within a theistic context starting with Augustine are clearly 'otherworldly' and hence must give primacy to 'thought', 'faith', etc.; and even those such as can be found in Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc., that maintained

---

[27]Kenneth Surin "'The Continued Relevance of Marxism' as a Question: Some Propositions" in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, ed. S. Makdisi, C. Casarino, and R. Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996), 205.

[28]Aristotle, *The Politics* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1962), 26.

something of a 'separation of church and state' within their politics largely give primary credence and precedence of social rank to those with superior faculties of reason. In contrast to this tradition (as will be seen in the chapter on Marx), reason/thinking is 'useful' for Marx only insofar as it can be externalizable in practice.

Arendt provides a more than adequate foil to Marx for the present project. Outside of the context of the present thesis, her political thought, although far more recent than Marx's, has had a lasting effect on Western democratic theory, notably through her critiques of 'undemocratic' regimes. She is one of the first to attempt to draw similarities between the Soviet and Nazi regimes in her first major work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which was written only a few years after the Second World War. In addition, she is well known for her coverage of the 1961 trial of the Nazi Adolf Eichmann in which she appealed to the idea of 'the banality of evil'. Her ideas, especially her conception of 'political action' (derived from Aristotelian *praxis*) have influenced a host of modern political theorists, including Charles Taylor, Giorgio Agamben, Seyla Benhabib, and Jürgen Habermas.[29] With regard to the present thesis, Arendt was also writing in part in response to Marx—underlining his importance to political theory and defending him in the face of growing scrutiny, yet ultimately criticizing his materialist

---

[29]"In an address delivered at the New School for Social Research in 1980, Habermas acknowledged a profound intellectual debt to Hannah Arendt, and particularly to *The Human Condition*. It was Arendt, he said, who had revived the forgotten Aristotelian distinction between 'praxis' and 'poesis,' thereby providing a much more adequate understanding of political action than those otherwise available" (Margaret Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt," *Political Theory* 11 [February 1983]: 106).

approach[30]—thus there exists a dynamic between Marx and Arendt that provides ready-made comparisons and contrasts that further help to emphasize the primary characteristics of their respective ontologies and how they each come to characterize such diverse ideals of human freedom.

The first two chapters deal with how ontology and freedom are connected within the theories of Marx and Arendt. In the first chapter, I follow Marx's thought from its most important roots—in Hegel's dialecticism and its materialistic interpretation of Hegel's self-other relationship[31] on the one hand, and its critique of capitalism and the theories of political economy found in Adam Smith, and, later, Lassalle and Proudhon on the other—to justify the ontological precedence that he gives to notions of labour and production within the human species, and how his ideas of freedom are concerned with liberating humans from ontological impoverishment via the alienation of labour. In the second chapter, I primarily analyze Arendt's major work *The Human Condition*,

---

[30]For example "all three [John Locke, Adam Smith, and Marx], though Marx with greatest force and consistency, held that labour was considered to be the supreme world-building capacity of man, and since labour actually is the most natural and least worldly of man's activities, each of them, and again none more than Marx, found himself in the grip of certain genuine contradictions" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 101).

[31]Of course, this self-other relationship was first conceived of by Fichte in his attempts to solve these same difficulties in Kant's metaphysics. One editor describes it thus: "the *Wissenschaftslehre* allows Fichte to unify and to integrate into a comprehensive philosophical system elements and disciplines that remain disparate and disjointed in Kant.... Whereas Kant had insisted on the irreducibility of theoretical reason ... and practical reason ... to each other, Fichte reveals their hidden common ground in the necessary structure of self-positing self-hood" (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The System of Ethics: according to the principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], xi). This "self-positing self-hood" is based on the idea that one can posit one's own existence only in relation to another, see p. 25.

beginning with her presentation of the *vita activa* and her division of human activities into 'labour', 'work', and 'action', and her justifications for treating 'action' as ontologically fundamental. From here, I show how her notion of freedom directly reflects the precedence she gives to action in that it is characterized by a freedom for action within a public sphere.

It should be noted that rather than simply give an in-depth 'summary' of the key points of both theories, my presentation in both chapters is much more novel. Each is presented as a critical monologue from the point of view of each of Marx and Arendt as a response to an individual in today's 'liberal' society asking the question 'why am I not free?' As should be evident at this point, my main argument is that it is a question of how one interprets oneself and one's primary ontological characteristics. The 'liberal' definition of freedom quoted above, wherein an individual enjoys a certain amount of freedom and autonomy from the control of others, is itself based on a certain idea of ontology that neither Marx nor Arendt would agree with.[32] Because of this approach, I begin by examining how such a 'liberal' society is lacking for the individual with respect to their ability to flourish as put forward by the theorist in question: for Marx, it is related to the alienation of labour found in capitalism, while for Arendt it has to do with a lack of opportunity for the individual to engage in genuine political action. Of course, both of these theories are dependent on a larger social context: Marx's materialist theory maintains that individuals are the result of the social relations in which they find themselves; for Arendt, political action requires discourse within a larger social milieu.

---

[32]See note 9 above.

However, from a critical point of view, materialism must hold that social relations occur in any society, Marxist or not; while discourse between individuals must occur in everyday situations whether a society embraces Arendt's notion of political action or not. Hence the question 'why am I not free?' cannot be answered adequately by simply presenting and appealing to a broader social ontology; it must begin with a *critical* assessment of the *individual's* ontological needs according to each theorist, before developing these ontological considerations within a broader social context. Only after this framework is in place and there is a complete characterization of the individual's needs and place within the social sphere will it be possible to adequately address this question of personal freedom (and, transitively, socio-political freedom in its entirety). Thus, in a sense I am not only offering an interpretation of freedom within Marx and Arendt as being intimately connected to a practical ontology in response to Kant, I am attempting to present it with a certain level of intimacy that might be lacking in a general presentation in order to make it more plausible to consider the viability of actually bringing about and/or realizing such notions of freedom within the world.[33]

---

[33]In addition to the above material, I have included an appendix wherein I attempt to deal with some of the anomalies that arise in the material of the first two chapters. I begin by arguing that there is a fundamental discrepancy between Arendt's conception of 'labour' in her *vita activa*, and Marx's own (though she attempts to argue that they are indeed the same). I then maintain that these apparent discrepancies (and the subsequent criticisms that are grounded in her assessment of Marx's notion of 'labour') can be explained by the manner in which she appeals solely to 'the young Marx' in her thought, and fails to understand his later material in which, arguably, he was forced to abandon some of the apparent conclusions that he had conceived of in his earlier works.

# CHAPTER I:

# MARX: LABOUR, ONTOLOGY, FREEDOM

In *Marx's Social Ontology*, Carol Gould writes: "The reconstruction of the ontological foundations of Marx's social theory allows us to approach in a new way a fundamental question of his work, namely, the relation of the individual to the community."[1] Gould's primary text is the *Grundrisse*, presenting Marx's work as "a systematic philosophical theory of the nature of social reality."[2] Indeed, the most natural place to begin a presentation of Marx's thought is by giving an in-depth analysis of his materialist social ontology: explaining the manner in which individuals arise from their social relations which evolve naturally through a dialectical procession within history. However, as explained in the introduction, I have presented the material in this chapter (and the next) in such a way as to (hopefully) appeal more directly to the reader. That is, I begin by considering the ontological needs of the *individual*, i.e. the manner in which Marx holds that consciousness arises through *practice*, and his criticism of capitalism and the manner in which it alienates the individual. It is only then that I discuss the broader 'social reality' that contextualizes the individual[3] and justifies the manner in which freedom

---

[1]Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology*, xii.

[2]Ibid., xv.

[3]Since historical materialism makes the stronger claim that the individual in isolation is a vacuous concept, i.e. social relations define the individual as much as they

arises within a Marxian society. Hence the 'ontological reconstruction' that I present differs markedly from Gould's, yet the importance of such a reconstruction is also a motivation for the subject matter of the present chapter and overall thesis.

The starting point for understanding Marx's ontological foundations lies in worldly *practice*. This approach is in contrast to the primacy of the ontological repercussions centred upon the realm of *reason* and *thought*, and, as was discussed in the introduction, this presents a very radical shift with respect to the canon of political theory before him, especially if one considers Hegel, and, transitively, the fundamental role Hegel's idealism plays in the foundations of Marx's theories.[4] By 'worldly', I do not mean that all practice of importance for Marx is physical (i.e. done with the hands), and it will become evident from the present chapter that mental/intellectual labour has a very fundamental role to play for Marx, especially with respect to his notions of freedom. Rather, my intention is to say that such labour is motivated by—and judged according to—*its repercussions in the material world.*[5]

---

are in turn defined by the social interactions of the individual, (see p. 30ff), to consider the individual *before* considering the broader social context may be considered problematic. Yet even Gould, who underlines a *social* ontology, is willing to admit: "In giving [ontological] priority to the activity of real individuals, Marx introduces a strongly Aristotelian element" (see note 71).

[4]"To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject [e.g., note 20, below], is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought" (Marx, "Capital, Volume One," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 301).

[5]"Social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this

The most fundamental form of practice, for Marx, is termed 'labour'.[6] Yet a problem with Marx's conception of labour (and part of the reason why Arendt attempts to argue the Marx upholds a certain conception labour which he actually may not) is that it is difficult to find an explicit definition of labour and what precisely it encompasses though this understanding is presupposed in several of his works.[7] *Capital*, for example, begins with a discussion of commodities and money, describing a commodity as "in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another … it is an assemblage of many properties and therefore may be of use in various ways."[8] Labour then enters within the context of commodities: "[use-value] of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities."[9] From a 'classical' economic point of view (e.g. Locke, Smith, Ricardo, etc), this may be seen as sufficient: labour is what goes into providing 'a commodity'

---

practice" (Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 145).

[6]I present Arendt's idea of 'labour' here merely for comparative purposes: "Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7). Although Arendt argues that her notion of labour as conceived in the *vita activa* is in keeping with Marx, I have shown in the Appendix that this claim is rather dubious, though one that may be justified from a certain reading of Marx.

[7]E.g.: the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* simply begins: "We have proceeded from the premises of political economy. We have accepted its language and its laws. We presupposed private property, the separation of labour, capital and land, and of wages, profit of capital and rent of land—likewise division of labour, competition, the concept of exchange value, etc." Marx's criticisms of these 'premises' of capitalism, especially division of labour, are very important and are dealt with later (see p. 35).

[8]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 303.

[9]Ibid.

with 'useful properties' that 'satisfy human wants'. However, from an ontological point of view, this characterization provides no insight with respect to the fundamental importance of labour within the context of economics.

Two passages from *Capital* provide a means to conceive of an ample ontological characterization of 'labour': "Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature.... By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature,"[10] and: "By labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description."[11] Labour for Marx is thus an overarching structure that encompasses most acts in which a human being may create something and/or bring about a change within his external context, i.e. nature. Yet this vague characterization is also insufficient for the purposes of this thesis. As noted above, classical notions of 'use-value' are not directly related to an ontological conception of labour and production as a form of personal expression. Instead, their worth tends to be reduced to the monetary value and/or usefulness of the final product.[12] Thus, Marx's idea of political economy

---

[10]Ibid., 344.

[11]Ibid, 336.

[12]"It was an immense step forward for Adam Smith to throw out every limiting specification of wealth-creating activity—not only manufacturing, or commercial, or agricultural labour, but one as well as the others, labour in general. With the abstract universality of wealth-creating activity we now have the universality of the object defined as wealth, the product as such or again labour as such, but labour as past objectified

contains a much more symbiotic relationship between labour and value, which is in contrast to the political economy theories that began with Smith and were later taken up by (amongst others) David Ricardo.

Adam Smith opens *The Wealth of Nations* with the declaration: "The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consists always, either in the immediate produce of that labour, or what is purchased with that produce from other nations."[13] This seems to imply that in Smith's theory of political economy, 'labour' is treated *entirely* as a means to the sustenance of a given polis; that is, labour does not appear to have any sort of intrinsic value to it outside of its value in terms of either exchange or consumption. For Smith (unlike for Marx, where labour is intimately connected with the created use-value), the actual *creating* or the *doing* involved in production is assessed entirely with respect to the manner in which what is created can eventually be *consumed* or *exchanged* and has no real intrinsic value.

To a certain extent the above conception, a process by which something is produced that may be exchanged or consumed, appears to fit with Marx's conception of what acts may be termed labour. It should be remembered, however, that his response is a *critical* one, and although he may acknowledge the above as the existing state of affairs, he does not believe this is how it *should* be. It is evident, for example, that the essence of this definition, and this rather negative aspect of the objectification of labour within the

---

labour" (Marx, "The *Grundrisse*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 240).

[13]Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. K. Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.

product that is created and its value either as something to be consumed or exchanged, misses the mark. Yes, labour produces material objects that may be consumed, but this potential for the products of labour to be consumed is a byproduct of the fundamental 'thinghood' of the created object: the object is not only a commodity, it is also an external representation of a certain capability of the individual or individuals who produce it. This additional function of the *object* of labour is tantamount to Marx's labour-based ontology: "Human labour-power in motion, or human labour, creates value, but is not itself value. It becomes value only in its congealed state, when embodied in the form of some object."[14]

In his discussion of Hegel in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, for example, he speaks of Hegel's grasp—albeit one-sided—of the ontological importance of labour: "He grasps *labour* as the *essence* of man—as man's essence in the act of proving itself," yet in contrast to the materialist nature of Marx's philosophy, Hegel was writing as an idealist; thus Marx writes that "the only labour which Hegel knows and recognizes is *abstractly mental* labour."[15] It is here that Marx 'turns Hegel on his head', rejecting Hegel's idealist philosophy and reinterpreting it in a materialist form[16] by giving ontological precedence to *practical, worldly* labour, because, as will be explained subsequently, for Marx it is external, worldly *practice* that *establishes* and *confirms* the

---

[14]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 316: "A thing can be a use-value without having value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not due to labour. Such are air, virgin soil, natural meadows, &c." (Ibid., 307).

[15]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 112.

[16]See note 3.

thinking being. This is in contrast to Hegel who—following from Kant's assertion that necessity rules and precludes freedom within the practical world—maintains that any development that occurs has true importance only when its repercussions are felt within the realm of thought (i.e. with respect to Spirit).

Briefly, Hegel's idea of the subject-object relationship of self-consciousness, namely that for one to exist one must have something to exist in relation to, originates in Fichte: "The rational being cannot posit itself as a rational being with self-consciousness without positing itself as an *individual*, as one among several rational beings that it assumes to exist outside itself, just as it takes itself to exist."[17] However, Fichte's presentation, again, is clearly an ontological claim in the 'traditional' sense, i.e. it gives precedence to the *rational* being, rather than the *practical* being. Instead of the need for reciprocity in *reason*, Marx's ontology makes a fundamental shift to an *external*, *practical* exchange: "He creates or establishes only objects, because he is established by objects—because at bottom he is nature. In the act of establishing, therefore, this objective being does not fall from his state of 'pure activity' into a creating of the object; on the contrary, his *objective* product only confirms his objective activity, establishing his activity as the activity of an objective, natural being."[18] Consider his critique of the *abstract* nature of Hegel's dialectical idealism:

---

[17]Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right: according to the principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. F. Neuhouser, trans. M. Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

[18]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 115. "A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its *object*; i.e. it is not objectively related. Its being in not objective. An unobjective being is a *nullity*—an *un-being*" (Ibid. 116).

> ... because the human essence is taken to be only an *abstract, thinking essence*, conceived merely as self-consciousness ... the subject knowing itself as absolute self-consciousness—is therefore *God—absolute Spirit—the self-knowing and self-manifesting Idea*. Real man and real nature become mere predicates—symbols of this esoteric, unreal man and of this unreal nature...[19]

One sees that Hegel's idealism cannot help but imply that it is *reason* that establishes *practice*: Hegel's teleology revolves around the 'otherworldly' Spirit realizing itself via practice in the objective world, yet as already mentioned, this practice is *abstract* and *mental*, the external *practical* world remains antithetical; any connection between self-consciousness and Spirit can only, at best, be *implied* within the external world.[20] Marx's notion of labour is not dichotomized as physical versus non-physical activity, but rather as *external versus internal* activity, i.e. *practice* that develops *reason*, rather than the other way around. Fundamentally for Marx, the products of labour must be *externalized* so that they can be *acknowledged* and *affirmed* by the subject. It is this ontological dynamic between the subject and the *physicality* of the act of creating that gives rise to the essential dynamic between the individual and society: "subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and suffering, only lose their antithetical character, and thus their existence, as such antitheses in the social condition; ... the resolution of the *theoretical* antitheses is *only* possible *in a practical* way, by virtue of the practical energy

---

[19]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 121.

[20]"But the Spirit whose self is an absolutely discrete unit has its content confronting it as an equally hard unyielding reality, and here the world has the character of being something external, the negative of self-consciousness" (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A. V. Miller with analysis of the text and foreword by J. N. Findlay [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], 294). This 'direct empirical representation' is the starting point for the materialist critique of idealism. This contrast is developed on page 31ff.

of man."[21] As will be seen, the main difference between Marx and the 'barrack communism' theories of Proudhon, Lassalle, et al. that he detested is that although these theories are also based around 'the practical', production remains devoid of ontological content.[22] Moreover, it is a testament to the acceptance of 'classical' economic theories that critics of Marx (deliberately or not) often fail to properly grasp this organic idea of labour (considering it only in terms of its purely extrinsic (capitalistic) use- and exchange-value) is also, arguably, at the basis of a whole host of problems that arise in conceptions of Marxism and communism.[23]

Yet if it is the case that labour, i.e. *production* in a *worldly* manner is an ontological fundament of 'humanness', the question of freedom remains: from a Kantian

---

[21]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 89.

[22]See p. 40.

[23]One example of this includes Arendt's interpretation of Marx's notion of labour as *physiological* and *metabolic*, as I argue in the Appendix. Another example arises in the naïve understanding of Marxist communism in contrast to *democracy* rather than *capitalism*. Such a belief is clearly flawed, since Marx himself accepts the value of democracy e.g.: "Democracy is the solved *riddle* of all constitutions. Here, not merely *implicitly* and in essence but *existing* in reality, the constitution is constantly brought back to its actual basis, the *actual human being*, the *actual people*, and established as the people's *own* work. The constitution appears as it is, a free product of man" (Marx, "Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 20). Though this in itself does not necessary imply that Marx would contend that democracy (or indeed any 'political system') is something to be achieved as an 'absolute end' (see note 59, for example), it is possible that this may have been the case at an early point in his theory (see, for example, Loewenstein's contentions about the contrast between the 'young Marx' and the 'mature Marx' in the Appendix, p. 98). Indeed, there are those Marxist thinkers that provide 'democracy' with a much greater place in Marxist theory, e.g. "Once man has comprehended himself and has established his own domain in real democracy, without depersonalization and alienation, something arises in the world which all men have glimpsed in childhood: a place and a state in which no one has yet been. And the name of this something is home or homeland" (Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1971], 44).

point of view, freedom is not possible in the material world due to the stringent necessity of causality, and yet, according to Marx, it is only through practice that 'real man' in the context of 'real nature' can flourish. I will return to Marx's conception of freedom later, simply noting that Marx's 'solution' to this apparent impasse is that it is only an *apparent* one: "[The] resolution [of these antitheses] is therefore by no means merely a problem of knowledge but a *real* problem of life, which *philosophy* could not solve precisely because it conceived of this problem as *merely* a theoretical one."[24] Marx's theory of historical materialism is, in a certain sense, an acceptance of Hume's claim that "liberty, when opposed to necessity … is universally allowed to have no existence,"[25] since it is founded upon deterministic notions such as dialecticism and historicism. This is, for example, exemplified by his discussion in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of the inevitability of the downfall of capitalism due to its internal contradictions (as will be seen). Indeed, his notion of freedom is entirely *with respect to constraint*, namely the constraints imposed by capitalism on the social and ontological value of labour.

Before I turn to the relationship between individual and community, it is necessary to mention two notions that are very important with respect to Marx, namely *history* and *dialectic*. For the purposes of the present thesis, history must be considered most notably because of the manner in which it implies the interdependency between the development of the individual and of society: the social relations that define the materialist interpretation of the world are at the same the result of, and contribute to, the

---

[24]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 89.

[25]See p. 3.

unfolding of history. On the other hand, the manner in which history is not simply a sequence of events, but rather takes an *active* role in this evolution is through a *dialectical* process.[26] In accordance with the active (and, it must be said, deterministic) role that history takes in the evolution of mankind, historical dialecticism has direct implications to Marx's notions of freedom, and thus a discussion of both history and dialectic is required to properly understand the individual and its connection to freedom within a Marxian framework.[27]

I have mentioned the problem that Marx sees in Hegel with regard to external vs. internal, and this is seen to an even greater extent in the entire last section of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in which he declares that Hegel "has only found the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression for the movement of history; and this

---

[26]The manner in which dialecticism presents itself as a historical process of overcoming (in a materialist form as opposed to Hegel's idealist form) and the importance of both in Marx's thought is clearly exemplified by, e.g. Engels: "An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the methods of dialectics with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive and retrogressive changes" (Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 697).

[27]These two components are also at the forefront of the overarching historical procession in which Marx depicts, for example, the downfall of capitalism due to its internal contradictions, e.g.: "The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 483. And, indeed, Gould notes that "Marx characterizes the three social stages of pre-capitalist societies, capitalism, and communal society in terms of the degree to which freedom is realized in each … these stages are marked by the progressive overcoming of natural necessity and of forms of social domination…" (Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology*, 119). Although these implications of the dialectical process are interesting and, indeed, very important to Marx's thought, they have little bearing on the present treatment, and will generally be avoided.

historical process is not yet the *real* history of man."[28] As mentioned earlier, Marx takes the diametrically opposite approach to Hegel, since "ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought."[29] Nowhere is "this material world reflected by the human" more telling than in Marx's concept of history and the manner wherein "this conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production … and to show it in its action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc., and trace their origins and growth from that basis…"[30]

Indeed, in accordance with materialism, it is not only the case that individuals construct the society in which they live (an element that arises within most classical theories); the historical process by which societies ebb and flow, rise and fall, completely defines many of the more important traits found in any individual: society is the contextualization of the individual within a history of *social relations*: "Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.... To be a slave, to be a citizen, are social characteristics, relations between human beings."[31] And it is clear that these relationships are established by history: abstracting from a social context to a completely objective view of humanity, there is nothing to say that one man shall be king and another a slave. Rather, this has

---

[28]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 108.

[29]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 301.

[30]Marx, *The German Ideology*, 164.

[31]Marx, "The *Grundrisse*," 247.

been established through historical events: a king is such because of his relation to the subjects whom he rules over, and royalty and rulership are established historically perhaps through acts of bravery, diplomacy, leadership, and/or conquest; familial and ancestral claims then occur through ties that exist via births, marriages, and deaths; and finally the question of which subjects this king has power over is established through further wars, conquests, etc. Meanwhile, the slave is such because others have power and influence over her, perhaps through her being raised, purchased, abducted, or influenced in some way or other. Without these social relations and the historical means by which they came about, the king and slave are only two different human beings. Indeed, it is impossible to give a proper account of the place of the *individual* within a Marxian framework without a thorough treatment of the social aspect of his theory, simply because so many aspects of the individual are dependent on a larger socio-historical context.[32] In fact, even the presentation of the individual with respect to *labour* is incomplete without this socio-historical context.[33]

A mention of dialecticism is also important for an accurate depiction of Marx, since it is only through an understanding of dialecticism that the manner in which history

---

[32]This is the main difficulty with a treatment of an 'ontology of the individual', as mentioned in, e.g. note 3.

[33]"What is society, whatever its form may be? The product of men's reciprocal action. Are men free to choose this or that form of society? By no means. Assume a particular state of development in the productive faculties of man and you will get a particular form of commerce and consumption. Assume particular stages of development in production, commerce, and consumption and you will have a corresponding social constitution, a corresponding organization of the family, or orders or of classes, in a word, a corresponding civil society" (Marx, "Society and Economy in History," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 136).

takes an active role in the evolution of society (i.e. the 'historical process') can be properly understood.[34] However, since a large part of dialecticism tends to be seen in more 'large-scale' events (a main one for Marx being the fall of capitalism), I feel justified in being fairly brief in my exposition. I have mentioned below that one of Ludwig Feuerbach's major contributions to Marx's theory is providing the basis for Marx's notion of *species-being*, yet Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (and its subsequent re-interpretation in the *Theses on Feuerbach*), according to Marx, is also the "*critical* form of [the abstract, logical, speculative expression of the movement of history, which] in Hegel [is] still [an] uncritical process" yet "Feuerbach thus conceives of the negation of the negation *only* as contradiction of philosophy with itself."[35] This 'negation of the negation' is a dialectical idea: an imperfect historical reality appears in form, a negative aspect is itself negated (antithesis), producing a new 'improved' historical reality (synthesis) devoid of this particular negative aspect; so society evolves. For example: "If we characterize *communism* itself because of its character as negation of the

---

[34]"Of course, the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction" (Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 301).

[35]Ibid, 108. The transition that occurs in Feuerbach from idealism to a 'materialist slant' is mentioned also in *The German Ideology*, e.g.: "Certainly Feuerbach ... realizes how man too is an 'object of the senses' ... but not as 'sensuous activity,' because he still remains in the realm of theory ... he never arrives at the really existing active men, but stops at the abstraction 'man'" (Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 171). In *On Karl Marx*, Ernst Bloch devotes an entire chapter entitled ""Changing the World: Marx's Theses on Feuerbach," to presenting and interpreting the influence of Feuerbach on Marx's thought.

negation, as the appropriation of the human essence which mediates itself with itself through the negation of private property—as begin not yet the *true*, self-originating position but rather a position originating from private property, [...]"[36] Of course, historical dialecticism arises in Hegel, and the fundamental problem for Marx, as mentioned above, is that Hegel's treatment is entirely 'speculative', rather than considering the 'real history of man', and this is where the main break between Hegel and Marx actually originates (though there is a clear correlation between this and Hegel's 'abstract' treatment of labour mentioned earlier). Hegel's primary focus is on the self-realization of Spirit, an *abstract* form of human reality, i.e, the perfection of man lies in the self-realization of Spirit; Spirit has not realized itself yet, hence there must be some negative aspect to the present socio-historical state of affairs, an aspect which must be negated in order for the desired outcome to be realized. Yet this is not a *real* state of affairs; it rests entirely one's ability to speculate on an alternate reality that cannot be directly perceived, whereas it is clear from the development thus far, i.e. the manner in which Marx places labour at the forefront of both his individual and social ontologies (as will be seen, see also note 33, above), that such an abstract approach is, for Marx, inherently deficient. Moreover, it is only by understanding this 'negation of the negation' that one can fully appreciate any notions of freedom found in Marx, for it must be a reality where all negations have been negated: "Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the *human* being. And as everything

[36]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 99. Note that the quote in the original manuscript is incomplete, i.e. the editor explains "In the manuscript the lower left corner of the page is torn off. Just the right-hand endings of the last six lines remain, making restorations of the text impossible" (Ibid).

natural has to have its *beginning*, *man* too has his act of coming-to-be—history—which, however, is for him a known history [i.e., man is conscious of it, as opposed to, for example, animals], and hence as an act of coming-to-be it is a conscious self-transcending act of coming-to-be. History is the true natural history of man."[37] It is no wonder, then, that he, in accordance with Hegel (accordance, that is, in form, not in substance) was able to conceive of 'an end of history'.

Marx's conception of the importance of humanity as a *species-being* arises first in Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. In accordance with Fichte and Hegel, and picked up on by Marx, Feuerbach also underlines the fundamental importance of consciousness as distinguishing man from animal.[38] However, for Feuerbach, consciousness as an isolated phenomenon is insufficient: "Consciousness in the strictest sense is present only in a being to whom his species, his essential nature, is an object of thought. The brute is indeed conscious of himself as an individual—and he has accordingly the feeling of self as the common centre of successive sensations—but not as species."[39] Marx, in turn, underlines this notion of the human as a 'species-being' living a

---

[37]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 116.

[38]"But what constitutes the essential difference between man and the brute? The most simple, general, and also the most popular answer to this question is—consciousness" (Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, with a foreword by H. Richard Niebuhr, and introduction by Karl Barth [New York: Harper & Row, 1957], 1).

[39]Ibid. Of course, this is a direct example of the difficulty mentioned earlier with respect to an 'ontology of the individual' (see note 3). However, Marx's caution here is against society as an *abstraction*, i.e. as a 'collection of individuals', and throughout the present chapter I have stressed the materialist interdependency between individual and society. Again, even Gould speaks of 'active existing individuals' (see note 71).

'species-life' with 'species-consciousness': "What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of 'Society' as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual *is the social being*. His life, even if it may not appear in the direct form of a *communal* life carried out together with others—is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*."[40] Adding this notion of 'species-consciousness' to the fundamental importance of consciousness as begotten by the externalization of one's own powers through labour (discussed previously), one understands that what is implied as ontologically necessary is the collective substantiation of human capabilities through communal acts of labour. What is of importance is the realization of the capabilities of the *species* through this cooperative *practical* effort: "The labour, however, that forms the substance of value, is homogeneous human labour, expenditure of one uniform labour-power."[41] It is evident that if one characterizes the realization of species-consciousness as ontologically fundamental, then capitalism, which aims for the profit of the individual, is contradictory to such an aim.

Indeed, one of the major criticisms of capitalism in Marx is its method of 'division of labour', i.e. the manner in which labour tasks are seen as 'specialized' and

---

[40]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 86.

[41]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 306. Again one can see echoes of Hegel, since for him as well, the teleological 'success' of self-realization of Spirit is dependent on a general politico-historical evolution of the human *species* rather than that of discrete individuals: "What counts in a state is the practice of acting according to a common will and adopting universal aims ... whims, lusts [of the individual's particular will] are not valid" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. with an introduction by Robert S. Hartman, [New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953], 50). Of course, the expression of this 'common will' is, according to Hegel, only important within an abstract theoretical milieu.

thus individuated: "These productive forces received under the system of private property a one-sided development only, and became for the majority destructive forces; moreover, a great multitude of such forces could find no application at all within this system."[42] Since capitalism favours profit above all else, it is in reality a form of exploitation of the market of 'living labour'. Those who are able to do one task constantly and repetitively are going to be more proficient (i.e. reduce production time) at that one task than another who is proficient in a multitude of tasks. Therefore, these 'one-sided' individuals are looked upon more favourably by capitalists, whose aim is to fill niches in their production scheme in such a way that output is as large as possible. The laws of supply-and-demand then cause individuals to streamline the multitude of talents that they may possess down to one or two specialized tasks in order to compete for jobs in the marketplace.[43] Yet not only does capitalism force individuals to limit themselves in terms of exercising a range of capabilities, it leaves them completely out in the cold when these skills become completely obsolete; the appeal of a 'well-rounded' development is thus stymied, and, moreover, the manner in which one may choose to develop one's talents is severely restricted by such a system. A major point of contention for Marx thus lies in this individuation and the manner in which such individuation tends to be presupposed as necessary in theories of political philosophy: "The *political revolution* dissolves civil

---

[42]Marx, *The German Ideology*, 185.

[43]"The greater the labour army among whom labour is divided, the more gigantic the scale on which machinery is introduced, the more does the cost of production proportionately decrease, the more fruitful is labour. Hence, a greater rivalry arises among the capitalists to increase the division of labour and machinery and to exploit them on the greatest possible scale" (Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 212).

society into its elements without *revolutionizing* these elements themselves or subjecting them to criticism. This revolution regards civil society, the sphere of human needs, labour, private interests and civil law, as the *basis of its own existence*, as a self-subsistent *precondition*, and thus as its *natural basis*."[44] He subjects the liberal theories of political economy, especially their presupposition of private property, competition, etc., and its links to capitalism, to a similar critique,[45] since the 'liberation' that is supposed to be engendered by capitalism turns out to be an illusion: the division of labour necessitated by the desire for increased profits forces individuals into a 'one-sided' approach in order to compete in the marketplace, severely limiting their ability to choose the manner in which they may otherwise wish to grow and develop their powers.

Within the theoretical realm of political economy, it is also *practice* rather than reason that is of primary importance. Hence, the target of Marx's critique of the political economy of Smith, Ricardo, et al. shifts to the manner in which this practical labour manifests itself within the capitalistic milieu, which encourages competition rather than cooperation, and, most importantly, alienates the worker through the medium of wage labour. The whole notion of wage labour is that the bourgeois owner should legitimately acquire the externalized objectification of labour in order to sell the object for profit, and

---

[44]Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 46.

[45]"Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us.... When, for example, it defines the relationship of wages to profit, it takes the interests of the capitalists to be the ultimate cause; i.e. it takes for granted what it is supposed to evolve. Similarly, competition comes in everywhere. It is explained from external circumstances. As to how far these external and apparently fortuitous circumstances are but the expression of a necessary course of development, political economy teaches us nothing" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 70).

in exchange, the labourer who works to produce it is given a wage. Yet the wage is not the objectification of labour, it is only something given in exchange for the object, hence Marx characterizes such a state of affairs as a 'loss of reality' since "the worker is robbed of the objects most necessary not only for his life but for his work."[46] What was once an expression of the powers of the individual (and therefore of the species) becomes estranged from her. The more the individual creates and externalizes her consciousness in the objects that she creates (which are then immediately taken from her), the more her consciousness is alienated from her, to the point where labour, which is supposed to be at the crux of the validation of humanness, actually forms the individual's undoing. She is losing her objects and hence inherently losing a fundamental part of herself to an alien world of egoistic individuals: "[Labour's] alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague."[47] Of course, Marx does not expect that everything that an individual produces will be consumed by her, and hence it appears that she must resign herself to 'losing' part of herself no matter what economic state of affairs is realized in a given society. Yet this critique presupposes capitalism, individuation, and egoism, which, in turn, precludes a proper understanding and treatment of the notion of common property. Within a Marxian context, the object does not go from a group of working individuals to an external

[46]Ibid., 72.

[47]Ibid., 74. Moreover, according to Marx, the individual can *only* be undone by this 'torment' and this occurs only through discord within the human species: "If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, this can only be because it belongs to some *other man than the worker*. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must be *delight* and his life's joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man" (Ibid., 78).

individual whose motive is to sell it on for profit; rather, the fact that it has been produced through 'one uniform labour-power' gives it value, and, true to materialism it is the modification of the *social relations* within it that provides the means to understand the nature of the resultant commodities: "When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that has changed. It loses its class-character."[48]

I have thus far established that Marx's human ontology (which, being materialist, characterizes the broader social context as a fundamental characteristic of the individual) is indeed a *practical* one, inspired by and dependent on the idea that we become aware of ourselves through the *externalization* of our powers through the modification of the exterior context in which humans live, i.e. nature, the resultant state of affairs affirms powers that the individual (and, transitively, the species) must possess, namely those that are required to make said modifications. I will turn now to my analysis of Marx's resultant conception of a 'free' society where individuals inhabiting such a society would not only be allowed to express their powers freely but, moreover, that they would be *inspired* to do so, i.e. that it would no longer be the case that labour is 'shunned like the plague' (a state of affairs that is brought about, Marx argues, by capitalism). Moreover, such a future social conception should also convey the highest form of collective cooperation because of the importance Marx gives to the species and *species-consciousness* as a whole. This notion of 'species-consciousness' is key to Marx's

---

[48]Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 485.

conception of 'freedom', for he was one of the strongest critics of communism as being merely an egalitarian society based on equal dispersion of resources. The understanding of these theories of what Marx termed 'barrack' or 'crude' communism provides important contrasts to Marx's own thought, especially with regard to what is *not*, for Marx, considered 'freedom'. Thus, I discuss them briefly below.

Two primary targets of Marx's criticisms were the political ideologies of the French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and the German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* he criticizes Proudhon for seeing the fundamental problem of political economy merely as the unequal distribution of goods and being unaware of or disregarding the estrangement of labour underlying it: "even the *equality of wages* demanded by Proudhon only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labour into the relationship of all men to labour. Society is then conceived as an abstract capitalist."[49] In his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx dismisses Lassalle for, amongst other things, a similar conception of 'equal right' and 'fair distribution,'[50] which he criticizes because "one man is superior to another physically or mentally and so supplies more labour in the same time, or can labour for a longer time.... Thus, with an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal share in

---

[49]Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 80.

[50]Marx describes Lassalle's system of distribution thus: "The social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labour time of the individual is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour, and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another" (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 530).

the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on."[51] I have already mentioned Marx's other problem with this oversimplification found in 'vulgar communism' in the first chapter: wages may reimburse the worker for the *material* labour that he puts into the project, but they cannot compensate him for the *ontological* diminution that occurs from the part of his externalized consciousness within the object that is being forcibly taken from him.

In traditional capitalist conceptions of value, the value of the externalized object, when considered in the form of a commodity, is divided into use-value and exchange-value (which correspond to consumption and exchange, respectively, as mentioned briefly above). Yet while use-values may take on many forms (e.g. scissors cut, stoves heat, clothes are worn, etc), exchange-values have only one form, namely the exchange itself: "as use-values, commodities are above all, of different qualities, but as exchange-values they are merely different quantities, and consequently do not contain an atom of use-value."[52] Moreover, it is difficult to justify the act of exchanging itself unless it is eventually done so for its utility, i.e. use-value,[53] so with respect to commodities, any notion of 'value' should conceivably be reducible to use-value. Where the importance of

---

[51]Ibid., 531.

[52]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 305.

[53]"Nothing can have value, without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value" (Ibid., 308). One of the few conceivable examples when an object might have a 'utility' without a 'use-value' is if its utility lies entirely in its ability to be exchanged, e.g. a stock. However, one must remember that (i) no labour has gone into its production and (ii) such a commodity only makes sense within a capitalistic milieu where speculating and exchanging solely for profit makes sense.

the underlying ontological commitments held by Marx makes itself known is in the fact that "if we leave out of consideration the use-value of commodities, they have only one common property left, that of being products of labour.... All that these things now tell us is, that human labour-power has been expended in their production, that human labour is embodied in them."[54] The problem in capitalistic society and in, (amongst others) a Proudhonian conception of socialism, is that this abstract intrinsic valuation is present solely as something that can be completely compensated relative to the amount of time and materials it took to produce the object; there is no conception of the ontological ties the object maintains to the producer as the externalization of consciousness. If this reduction is justified, then one can equally justify equality of wages as reflecting an equality of workers, since wages can be universally exchanged to 'buy back' the time and materials invested in the product in the form of another product that one does not have to use time and materials to create.

Wage-labour appears to be, to a great extent, deemed an acceptable means of recompense, but where does this justification come from? Custom, replies Marx:

> Even the best spokesmen of classical economy remain more or less in the grip of the world of illusion which their criticism had dissolved as cannot be otherwise from a bourgeois standpoint.... On the other hand, it is just as natural for the actual agents of production to feel completely at home in these estranged and irrational forms of capital—interest, land—rent, labour—wages, since these are precisely the forms of illusion in which they move about and find their daily occupation.[55]

In particular, bourgeois 'custom' has a devastating effect on the ontological nature of

---

[54]Ibid.

[55]Marx, *Capital; a critique of political economy*, vol. III, ed. Friedrich Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 830.

labour, and contributes to the estrangement of labour and its products: "The characters that stamp products as commodities, and whose establishment is a necessary preliminary to the circulation of commodities, have already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life, before man seeks to decipher, not their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but their meaning."[56] Thus, when we see shoes, coats, houses, etc. that we wish to attain through exchange, we are already preconditioned by the existing social bias to accept them uncritically as already having been deciphered and positioned within the hierarchy of commodities. The bias that contributes to this oversimplification includes the uncritical acceptance that in most cases, (a) the product is estranged from its producer(s) (especially if it is the product of a mechanical routine, like that found in an assembly line); thus the anonymity of the producer necessarily implies the unexceptional nature of *that particular* manifestation of the product; and (b) there exists an externally pre-determined standardization of the valuation of the product; thus, it is seen primarily as reflecting a *means* for the *consumer* rather than the *powers* of the *producer*.

As alluded to previously, Kant's conception of freedom was inspired by the problem that causality and necessity posed to the phenomenal world. Thus, approaching the problem from the ontological vantage point of *reason*, he surmised: "all actions of rational beings, insofar as they are appearances (are encountered in some experience or other), are subject to natural necessity; but the very same actions, with respect only to the

---

[56]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 324.

rational subject and its faculty of acting in accordance with bare reason, are free."[57] Thus for Kant, freedom exists and is achievable *through reason* (the fundamental ontological quality of humans, according to him) *alone*. Yet the very nature of this solution, being that it is completely *theoretical*, and, moreover, makes the *material* subordinate to the *ideal*, is obviously problematic to Marx. According to Marx, it is not a question of overcoming the restrictions that *necessity* poses; rather, freedom can only come about by overcoming the restrictions that the *bourgeois control of production* poses: "the bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production.... This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close."[58] Free society (i.e. emphasizing the *social* rather than the *political*[59]), then, as it *emerges* from the capitalistic chains that have hindered society, according to Marx, must be grounded in a *practical*, *physical* revolution, rather than a *theoretical*, *intellectual* one.

We can turn now to the conception of free society in contrast to the current capitalist state of affairs:

> Let us now picture to ourselves, by way of change, a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour-power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as

---

[57]Kant, *Prolegomena*, 97 [345].

[58](Marx, "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 5).

[59]Marx rejects statism as necessary to a free society: "Free state—what is this?... Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it" (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 537). However, he does see the value of 'political emancipation' as a stepping-stone to free society: "*Political* emancipation certainly represents a great progress. It is not, indeed, the final form of human emancipation, but it the final form of human emancipation *within* the framework of the prevailing social order" (Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 35).

> the labour-power of the community. All the characteristics of Robinson's labour are here repeated, but with this difference, that they are social, instead of individual. Everything produced by him was exclusively the result of his own personal labour, and therefore simply on object of use for himself. The total product of our community is a social product.[60]

We have, summarized here, the two most important conceptions of Marx's ontology of the individual: *conscious* labour and *communal* labour. First, there is a 'Robinsonian' conception of conscious labour wherein the products of the labour remain in immediate relation to the producer: the individual either uses or exchanges it himself. As was touched on earlier, this form of exchanging products is, in some sense, a certain form of alienation of a part of oneself. Yet the *conscious* exchange of such products allows one to still behold this consciousness in the form of the product exchanged *for*, since the direct link between products is still maintained.[61] This is in contrast to capitalistic or 'crude' communistic practices where the producer is estranged from his labour and given something foreign (e.g. wages or resources from a pooled supply of labour) that maintains the anonymity of the producer.[62] Complementing this conscious labour is its

---

[60]Ibid., 326. The reference here is to the protagonist in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, its significance relating to the individual nature of his labours. The passage in question is preceded by a discussion of Robinson Crusoe since it is "a favourite theme with political economists": "Let us now transport ourselves from Robinson's island bathed in light to the European middle ages shrouded in darkness ... what we may think of the parts played by the different classes of people themselves in this society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour, appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labour" (Ibid., 325).

[61]"The social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labour and to its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible, and that with regard not only to production but also to distribution" (Ibid.).

[62]This is not so difficult to see if one considers idealized *familial* conceptions of

*social, communal* aspect. The banishment of a competitive spirit allows each producer to contribute his externalized consciousness to the *species-consciousness*, with the intention of promoting the communal consciousness towards realizing its full potential. The community in turn represents the collective consciousness of its members, and the community is able to exchange with other communities based on its needs and surplus, yet with the intention of developing each community in tandem as opposed to one community having power over the other: "The life process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan."[63] It is through the process of cooperative communal production that the species-consciousness is developed and realized.[64]

---

exchange in present society. If one works for another family member or a close friend, one is alienated from one's labour because it is in the 'possession' of someone else, yet one still maintains the direct link to one's work and it is contributed *willingly* for the good of another. It is only because capitalism and *competition* is common (and has been socially accepted) that it appears that any form of exchange must be alienating: "The only wheels which political economy sets in motion are *avarice* and the *war amongst the avaricious—competition*" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 71).

[63]Marx, "Capital, Volume One," 327. The supposition that "the life process of society is based on the process of material production" follows from his materialism: "The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged" (Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 700).

[64]"In a higher phase of communist society ... only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 531).

I have thus far characterized the *emergent* communist society and the freeing of the individual from bourgeois capitalism, but I have yet to consider what happens after this, and to what end. The ontological presuppositions (for Marx) of *production* within the context of the potentiality of the human *species-consciousness* through its externalization in labour is necessary for the realization of human freedom, but thus far I have only spoken of the manner in which the species can *begin* to demonstrate this potentiality through the establishment of cooperative, conscious, non-alienating labour.

Yet, for Marx, this cooperative labour still includes (and must include, see below) acts of necessity where we as a species remain tied to nature. Because the basis of his philosophy is a critique of theories of political economy and their relationship to capitalistic modes of production, Marx says little about the development of the future communist society once it has been established. However, he gives a glimpse into the development of this free society near the end of Volume III of *Capital*:

> In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under the conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a necessity. Beyond it being that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.[65]

---

[65]Marx, "Capital, Volume Three," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 443.

This characterization of humanity in contradistinction to nature is bound up in a myriad of ways with the ontology that has been stressed throughout the section. Human beings are the only creatures able to transcend nature through complex forms of production,[66] so once the problems arising from the alienation of labour are alleviated by the development of a society where humans labour freely and cooperatively, the free society can embrace the transcendent production capabilities of human beings through the development of increasingly innovative labouring practices that seek to optimize the harvesting and use of the materials that are reaped from humanity's 'larder' and 'tool house', Nature. With greater control over this interchange and less energy spent on the labour that is required merely for perpetuating the 'survival of the species', a greater proportion of human energy and productivity can be developed 'as an end in itself':

> Production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis [and allows for] free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them. [67]

Subsequently, the species-consciousness of humans evolves at a greater rate through the increasing proportion of labour as creative power rather than the proportion that is

---

[66]"Man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural *species-being*.... Therefore human objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is *human sense* as it immediately *is*—as it is objectively—*human* sensibility, human objectivity. Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the *human* being" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 116).

[67]Marx, "Grundrisse," 284.

devoted to farming, sanitation, disease control, etc.[68] The evolution of creative power not only provides humanity with more time to devote to creativity rather than necessity, thereby increasing consciousness of what it is capable of as a species, it also allows humanity to become further conscious of itself *qua* the *only* species that is capable of transcending nature.

It is with this that one sees the direct relationship between Marx's ontology grounded in *labour* (and, subsequently production), and his corresponding notion of freedom. His idea of freedom seeks both to liberate and empower within the context of labour and humanity's relationship to it. Yet unlike many criticisms of Marxism as resulting in a dreary collective of mass society, one must also keep in mind that, as evinced by Marx's claim about "the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them," the individual not only still maintains his or her identity, but is also, in a sense, invigorated to create and pursue a greater wealth of possibilities: "communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation [as bourgeois property and capital]";[69] this 'sociality', and the manner in which there must be a 'middle ground' between individuality and conformism within the social individual is summarized by Gramsci: "An individual is historically original when he gives maximum prominence to social

---

[68]The extent to which this conception of 'freedom' differs from what the 'young Marx' originally had in mind at the time of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* is a point of contention I deal with in the Appendix.

[69]Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 486.

being."[70] And, indeed, Gould maintains: "Although an individual cannot become free in isolation from others, nonetheless, it is only individuals who are free. This emphasis can be attributed to ... Marx's Aristotelian insistence on the ontological primacy of real individuals."[71] Gould sums up Marx's conception of freedom thus:

> It is, on the one hand, 'freedom from' in the sense of a process of overcoming obstacles or impediments [notably bourgeois control of production, see p. 32], and specifically, a process of freeing oneself from the external constraints of social domination and natural necessity by one's activity. Freedom is, on the other hand, 'freedom to' realize oneself through projecting possibilities and acting on them.... To put it more simply, freedom for Marx consists not only in free choice among the options available to one, but in the creation of new options for oneself (and for others).[72]

It is very useful to note how this characterization, when put against Kant's notion of freedom, precisely encompasses Marx's criticisms of philosophy and its treatment of the

---

[70]Antonio Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1988), 399. The presupposition that communism implies conformism is appropriate, yet not in terms of a group of 'docile followers' as naïve critics might envision, but in terms of active social involvement to achieve common goals. Gramsci maintains:

> It is too easy to be original by doing the opposite of what everyone else is doing; this is just mechanical. It is too easy to speak differently from others, to play with neologisms, whereas it is difficult to distinguish oneself from others without doing acrobatics. Today people try to be original and to have a personality on the cheap. Prisons and mental asylums are full of original men with strong personalities. What is really difficult is to put the stress on discipline and sociality and still profess sincerity, spontaneity, originality and personality (Ibid., 400).

[71]Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology*, 108. She develops this 'Aristotelian insistence' earlier, e.g.: "Marx gives ontological priority to such active existing individuals, whereas in Hegel these individuals emerge simply as vehicles or agents in the service of an autonomous and independent Idea. In giving priority to the activity of real individuals, Marx introduces a strongly Aristotelian element, which distinguishes his dialectic from Hegel's" (Ibid., 28).

[72]Ibid., 110.

problem of freedom as an entirely theoretical one: Kant's 'solution' was to overcome theoretical obstacles through theoretical argumentation. For Kant, the reality regarding causality within the context with which humans live in the phenomenal world cannot be 'changed' through human intervention; all that can be changed is the manner in which it is looked at and/or approached, yet making the metaphysical division between noumena and phenomena only provides a *theoretical means* to assuage fears surrounding the problem of freedom *with respect to necessity*, whilst the overall metaphysical state of affairs is unchanged. By developing human ontology in terms of *practice* rather than theory, and (historical) *materialism* and the importance it places on the meaningful (historically established) social relations between individuals, Marx not only provides a meaningful alternative to this 'problem of freedom', by appealing to and arguing for the overthrowing of what he sees as 'inhumane' socio-economic and ontological constraints imposed on labour by capitalism (the manner in which the desire for ever-increasing profit margins necessitates a division of labour being a primary example), but also a *means* with which to *bring about* this freedom through *human intervention*, rather than leaving humanity as an 'esoteric predicate'.[73] His eleventh and final "Thesis on Feuerbach" reflects exactly this transformation of *modus operandi*: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."[74]

---

[73]See p. 26.

[74]Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, 145.

## CHAPTER II:

## ARENDT: ACTION, ONTOLOGY, FREEDOM

Despite Arendt's praise of the manner in which Kant 'saved freedom,'[1] it is evident that Kant's inability to excise freedom from the realm of thought ultimately renders his conception of freedom inadequate for her. Moreover, she notes that the influence of this methodology—whereby freedom is derived from thought throughout the history of philosophy—contributes to stifling any idea of freedom through action: "Every attempt to derive the concept of freedom from experiences in the political realm sounds strange and startling because all our theories in these matters are dominated by the notion that freedom is an attribute of will and thought much rather than of action."[2] Arendt's ontological basis—the *vita activa*—is appealed to in direct contrast to the *vita contemplativa*; and this dynamic—active versus contemplative—is a direct and immediate challenge to the traditional ontological status of reason which, as explained in the introduction, begins with Plato: "the enormous superiority of contemplation … is not Christian in origin. We find it in Plato's political philosophy, where the whole utopian reorganization of *polis* life is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher

---

[1]See p. 3.

[2]Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 447.

but has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher's way of life."[3] Moreover, it is apparent that Arendt understands (and hence rejects) the manner in which this precedence given to reason implies a similar denigration of any notion that freedom could be bound up with the political realm since "our philosophical tradition is almost unanimous in holding that freedom begins where men have left the realm of political life inhabited by the many, and that it is not experienced in association with others but in intercourse with oneself."[4] Thus it is evident that the manner in which Kant banishes freedom to the noumenal realm is insufficient for Arendt's purposes. It is also evident that, like Marx, Arendt holds that freedom must be conceived of within a socio-political context; that is, she rejects the notion that the individual can experience freedom in isolation.[5]

Yet it is also apparent that Arendt does not wish to completely embrace the manner in which Marx has dealt with this same 'problem of freedom'. Marx's philosophy is conceived of as a critique of political economy and capitalism, specifically a response to what may be considered the denigration of labour. In contrast to this, and no doubt with Marx in mind, Arendt opens *The Human Condition* with what can aptly be considered a critique not only of political economy, but of Marx's subsequent critique.

---

[3]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 14.

[4]Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 449.

[5]In *The Human Condition*, Arendt declares: "Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the ability to act" (*The Human Condition*, 188). By placing it opposite to 'fabrication', she is also placing it opposite to 'work' and/or 'labour', and thus in opposition to Marx. Yet, as has been pointed out in the first chapter, Marx clearly rejects such an isolated 'Robinsonian' conception of fabrication as being devoid of ontological meaning.

She declares: "the modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labour and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a labouring society."[6] Of course, this critique is not only directed towards what she sees as the apparent 'failures' of materialism in the form of various communist regimes —most notably the Soviet Union—but also towards the rapid industrialization and mechanization of Western society. It is a critique of labour's emerging *apolitical* nature:[7] during the discord in the late eighteenth century that culminated in the American and French Revolutions, the labour movement personified 'the people' and their struggle against being oppressed by the monarchy. According to Arendt, modern society has marginalized politics so that it merely exists as a bureaucratic and administrative necessity for society. In contrast to this, Arendt wishes to treat 'politics' in terms of Aristotelian *praxis*,[8] a dynamic process whereby humans come together in a public space as political beings through "living deed

---

[6]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 4.

[7]"The political significance of the labour movement is now the same as that of any other pressure group; the time is past when ... it could represent the people as a whole.... The labour movement, equivocal in its content and aims from the beginning, lost this representation and hence its political role at once wherever the working class became an integral part of society, a social and economic power of its own as in the most developed economies of the Western world, or where it "succeeded" in transforming the whole population into a labour society as in Russia and as may happen elsewhere even under non-totalitarian conditions" (Ibid., 219).

[8]"Of all the activities necessary and present in human communities, only two were deemed to be political and to constitute what Aristotle called the *bios politikos*, namely action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*), out of which rises the realm of human affairs (*ta ton anthropon pragmata*, as Plato used to call it) from which everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded" (Ibid., 24).

and spoken word."[9] Because of this, and perhaps in some sense as a consequence of the 'glorification' of labour being touted as "the supreme world-building capacity of man,"[10] as it is criticized in *The Human Condition*, she maintains that political action is now regarded as merely 'the work of politicians', becoming denigrated through its assimilation with other 'professions' as a means to 'make a living.'[11] Arendt holds that at base politics must uphold its unique characteristic as that which moulds (or *should* mould) the socio-political context within which humans act.[12]

It is evident that Arendt does not deny the necessity of 'labour' and 'work' (as she defines them[13]); rather, she denies the that it should have any sort of higher ontological

---

[9]"It is this insistence on the living deed and the spoken word as the greatest achievements of which human beings are capable that was conceptualized in Aristotle's notion of *energeia* ('actuality'), with which he designated all activities that do not pursue an end (are *ateleis*) and leave no work behind (no *par' autas erga*), but exhaust their full meaning in the performance itself" (Ibid., 206).

[10]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 101. She continues: "since labour actually is the most natural and least worldly of man's activities, each of [Locke, Smith, and Marx], and again none more than Marx, found himself in the grip of certain genuine contradictions" (Ibid.).

[11]"Even presidents, kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living" (Ibid., 5).

[12]To say that action is important *solely* because it is the means for the genuine development of one's political environment is, admittedly, an oversimplification of Arendt, as will become clear.

[13]"Public life, obviously, was possible only after the much more urgent needs of life itself were taken care of. The means to take care of them was labour" (Arendt, *The Human Condition.*, 65).

meaning than simply the means by which they sustain human beings physiologically,[14] arguing that these facets are present in animal life as well.[15] Arendt begins by dividing human practice into the categories of labour, work, and action: they are the "three fundamental human activities" of her conception of the complete *vita activa* (active way of life).[16] She, like Marx, acknowledges historical 'divisions of labour', i.e., "we find first the distinction between productive and unproductive labour, then somewhat later the differentiation between skilled and unskilled work, and, finally, outranking both because seemingly of more elementary significance, the division of all activities into manual and intellectual labour";[17] yet she contends that a proper division of human practices should

---

[14]Comparing Arendt's definition of labour with Marx's idea of labour, Arendt's definitions of 'labour' and 'work' are, arguably, subcategories of Marx's more encompassing notion. Thus, Marx maintains what Arendt would refer to as 'labour' and 'work' as being ontologically relevant to freedom; Arendt, on the other hand, maintains that action, alone, is ontologically important for understanding and establishing freedom. In fact, she maintains that Marx conception is merely a different interpretation of the tradition that she herself espouses: "The term *vita activa* is loaded and overloaded with tradition.... [This tradition] eliminated many experiences of an earlier past that were irrelevant to its immediate political purposes and proceeded until its end, in the work of Karl Marx, in a highly selective manner" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 12). Arendt does not interpret this materialistically but instead maintains that it is through more abstractly qualified human interrelationships that individuals gain this validation. A more in-depth discussion of the contrast between the definitions of 'labour' found in Marx and in Arendt is provided in the Appendix.

[15]See p. 60.

[16]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

[17]Ibid., 85. In addition to this, Arendt maintains: "Of the three, however, only the distinction between productive and unproductive labour goes to the heart of the matter, and it is no accident that the two greatest theorists in the field, Adam Smith and Karl Marx, based the whole structure of their argument upon it." Moreover, "the distinction between productive and unproductive labour contains, albeit in a prejudicial manner, the more fundamental distinction between work and labour" (Ibid., 87).

not be based on what type of work is done, but rather on what the practice in itself accomplishes (and, ultimately, its 'permanence', or, in the case of action, lack thereof). According to Arendt, 'labour' pertains to whatever is necessary to human survival, i.e. eating, growing food, etc.,[18] whilst 'work' relates to anything built that is 'unnatural' such as art, artifacts, infrastructure, etc. Finally, action encompasses all that is political: "Labour assures…the life of the species. Work … bestows a measure of permanence and durability upon…the fleeting character of human time. Action … creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history."[19]

Since "the *polis*, strictly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; [rather] it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together,"[20] *politics* (which derives itself from the *polis*) solely in terms of governance[21] and/or as the arbiter of claims relating to ownership of property (which characterizes traditional theories of political economy[22]) is thus rejected by Arendt. She begins by

---

[18]A more direct and succinct characterization of Arendt's notion of labour has already been provided in Chapter I (note 6), and a discussion of its relationship to Marx is provided in the Appendix.

[19]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8. Of course, this is not a division that Marx would accept.

[20]Ibid., 198.

[21]"Ever since the rise of the nation-state, the prevailing opinion has been that it is the duty of the government to defend a society's freedom against internal and external enemies, with force if necessary" (Arendt, "Introduction *into* Politics," 143)

[22]"The acquisition of valuable and extensive property necessarily requires the establishment of civil government. Where there is no property, or at least none that exceeds the value of two or three days labour, civil government is not so necessary" (Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 408). Locke makes a similar claim in §121 of the Second

noting: "The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves."[23] Building from this premise, she characterizes the public domain not primarily as the place for political sparring and debate (though this does occur), but rather for the sharing and recording of interpersonal stories; a requirement for this is not only the presence of a social context (i.e. one cannot be free in isolation, as alluded to earlier), but one that exudes *variety* and *idiosyncracies* between individuals. This requirement of *plurality*, "the basic condition of both action and speech [which] has the twofold character of equality and distinction"[24] is clear, for "if men were not equal, they could neither understand each other … nor foresee the needs of those who will come after them [and] if men were not distinct … they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood"[25] (since they would already know each other). Whilst Marx's ontology is based on the manner in which we are able to externalize consciousness by recreating and reshaping the natural world, Arendt's view is that humans require *abstract communication* to reveal their unique traits, for it is the manner in which individual idiosyncrasies differentiate each human being from another that is

---

Treatise of Government, declaring "the Government has a direct Jurisdiction only over the Land" (John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, with an introduction and apparatus criticus by Peter Laslett, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963], 393). This is part of the basis of Marx's criticism and mistrust of the political state: "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affair of the whole bourgeoisie" (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 475).

[23]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.

[24]Ibid., 175.

[25]Ibid.

important to Arendt; thus, "the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: 'Who are you?' This disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his works and his deeds."[26]

Throughout *The Human Condition*, Arendt stresses the importance of *natality* as a key justification for her giving ontological precedence to action; hence the emphasis on the 'newcomer' is very important. At no time are we able to paint a precise portrait of our internal workings, so at every instance that stories are shared, something new comes to light, either through the sharing of new data about ourselves, or giving precedence to old data, and thus reflecting what is important to us; even if there existed the capacity to know oneself completely, at every moment we evolve as individuals: we behold new things, and have new thoughts and ideas. It is true that animals also 'change' and 'grow' in certain ways over time, trees and plants mature, rocks and earth erode, etc.; yet central to Arendt's philosophy is 'the human condition'. As opposed to every other object and species that exists, "men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence."[27] All objects and animals are perceived by humans as a 'part of nature', forming an *external* ontological component of humanity which we live in relation to. As an example of this, one can consider that 'history' is entirely anthropocentric: it is based upon how humans are affected by humans or by nature. Humans are the only beings that history is characterized *in relation to*. History, moreover, is all that prevents us from being 'memoryless' beings. Without

---

[26]Ibid., 178.

[27]Ibid., 9.

history, there can conceivably be no more than development solely within the generation in question: knowledge would be limited to what could be immediately demonstrated, and anything forgotten would be lost until independently rediscovered. It is through speech and action that we are able to conceive of humanity beyond such a primitive state. Moreover, it is only through the *recording* of speech and action throughout history that we can learn and evolve as *humanity* rather than simply exist as primitive beings with our knowledge being either completely isolated or, at best, limited to small communities.[28]

The manner in which Kant's metaphysics allows for freedom, as has been mentioned, is to circumvent determinism in the phenomenal world by arguing for a means to initiate a sequence of events that does not have an event immediately before it that determines it completely: "Should ... freedom be a property of certain causes of appearances, then that freedom must, in relation to the appearance as events, be a faculty of starting those events *from itself* (*sponte*), i.e. without the causality of the cause itself having to begin, and without need for any other ground to determine its beginning."[29] This, Kant argues, is only possible within the noumenal realm characterized by 'pure

[28]This state of affairs is characterized brilliantly in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*: "Let us conclude then that man in a state of nature, wandering up and down the forests, without industry, without speech, without home ... disregarded everything he did not think himself immediately concerned to notice, and that his understanding made no greater progress than his vanity... If by accident he made any discovery, he was the less able to communicate it to others, as he did not know even his own children. Every art would necessarily perish with its inventor ... generations succeeded generations without the least advance;... centuries must have elapsed in the barbarism of the first ages; when the race was already old, and man remained a child" (Rousseau, *A Discourse on a Subject Proposed by the Academy of Dijon: What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?* in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, 72).

[29]Kant, *Prolegomena*, 95 [344].

thought,' since "*the cause*, as to its causality would not have to be subject to temporal determinations of its state, i.e., would *not* have to be *appearance* at all, i.e., would have to be taken for a thing in itself, and only the *effects* would have to be taken for *appearances*."[30] Since 'pure thought' is a capacity found only within 'intelligent beings', there is something of an appeal to a 'human condition' (i.e. that the external world is contextualized through the manner in which humans interact with it) in Kant's philosophy as well since humans initiate these *sponte* events from thought.[31] Arendt's interest in Kant's 'political philosophy' (which, she admits, he 'never wrote'[32]) has already been mentioned in the introduction, yet by and large she limits herself to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, maintaining a distance from 'pure reason'. Whether Kant's conception of freedom occurring in the 'sponte' nature of human reason can be used to justify the 'boundlessness' of Arendt's conception of action wherein "one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation"[33] is debatable: in *The Human Condition*, Arendt repeatedly cites the importance of *natality* in action,

---

[30]Ibid.

[31]"This faculty is called *reason*, and insofar as we are considering a being (the human being) solely as regards this objectively determinable reason, this being cannot be considered as a being of the senses; rather, the aforesaid property is the property of a thing in itself," (Kant, *Prolegomena*, 96 [345]. Thus, Kant 'solves' the Humean problem of freedom: "I can now say without contradiction: all actions of rational beings, insofar as they are appearances (are encountered in some experience or another), are subject to natural necessity; but the very same actions, with respect only to the rational subject and its faculty of acting in accordance with bare reason, are free," (Ibid., 97 [345]).

[32]See note 20, Introduction.

[33]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190.

maintaining, for example, that acting is synonymous with "starting processes of our own."[34] This transitive relationship, from *freedom* to *action* to *starting new processes*, contains echoes of Kant. However, Arendt leaves no doubt about her relationship to Kant, maintaining that, like Marx, Kant is unable to excise his philosophy from man as 'fabricator'. At first, this charge seems odd, since Kant's idea of freedom lies solely in the realm of pure thought. However, this apparent contradiction becomes clear when one considers his "inherently paradoxical interpretation of man's attitude toward the only objects that are not 'for use,' namely works of art, in which we take 'pleasure without any interest'."[35] Kant's idealism thus manifests in the physical world via the manner in which 'pure thought' and hence a glimpse into the noumenal realm is expressed in *objets d'art*.[36] Because freedom can only exist in the noumenal realm for Kant, the main repercussion of this for Arendt is that the pinnacle of humankind in the physical world is thus as creator of physical objects: "from the viewpoint of fabrication the finished product is as much an end in itself, an independent durable entity with an existence of its own, as man is an end in himself in Kant's political philosophy."[37]

Thus, as with Marx, Arendt rejects the idea that freedom can be conceived of only

---

[34]Ibid., 232.

[35]Ibid., 156.

[36]Arthur Schopenhauer, who rejected Fichte and his eventual followers (most notably Schelling and Hegel) and represents the other main branch of German idealism, builds his philosophy around the manner in which this idea of contemplation in art and music provides a 'back door' into the noumenal realm, and, ultimately, an 'escape from the will'.

[37]Ibid., 157.

in thought and reason, and instead placing freedom within the realm of *practice*. Where Arendt primarily differs from Marx is that she rejects the idea that freedom can be derived from labour as Marx would argue. In fact, Arendt can almost be seen to take a diametrically opposite stance to Marx with regard to the dynamic between production and politics; whereas Marx acknowledges political emancipation as an 'important step' in the process of achieving freedom[38] but ultimately sees the emancipation of labour as definitive, Arendt maintains: "The emancipation of labor and the concomitant emancipation of the laboring classes from oppression and exploitation certainly meant progress in the direction of non-violence. It is much less certain that it was also progress in the direction of freedom."[39] Ontological precedence, then, is given to action[40] since "of the three [labour, work, and action], 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."[41]

It should already be apparent that the multiplicity of the human species is an

---

[38]See note 59, Chapter I.

[39]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 129.

[40]Again, it is important to note that Marx would not oppose the important role that non-physical human interaction plays in human flourishing, but he would likely oppose Arendt's notion of action and the sharing of stories as being the sole type of act that carries *primary* ontological importance, which is what Arendt attests to. On the other hand, Arendt is very clear in maintaining that 'labour' and 'work' are required for human flourishing, but argues that, unlike action, these are not of primary ontological importance.

[41]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.

important underlying theme behind Arendt's theory of the ontological precedence of action. Moreover, it should also be clear from the previous discussion that the aspect of this multiplicity that is important to Arendt is somewhat different from Marx, e.g. "Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act"[42] in the sense that those deeds that may be done on a personal basis do not provide the essence of freedom that Arendt argues for. Merely requiring 'otherness' (in contrast to solipsism) is, of course, insufficient: plurality is what allows for the sharing and discussing of the stories that distinguish us from the ahistorical Rousseauan human being of the *Discourse on Inequality*.[43] Thus, in accordance with Arendt's division of the *vita activa*, 'labour' and 'work' alone are insufficient: "All human activies are conditioned by the fact that men live together…The activity of labour does not need the presence of others.... Man working and fabricating and building a world inhabited only by himself would still be a fabricator.... Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man, neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others."[44] It is evident thus that, in a similar manner to Marx's characterization of consciousness, action as ontologically precedent is dependent on the observation that only man is capable of it: "only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself

[42]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188. The social and 'species-conscious' nature of 'labour' in Marx would be espoused by this statement of 'non-isolation' as well yet, the manner in which Marx and Arendt see 'isolation' as problematic to 'freedom' is fundamentally different.

[43]See note 28.

[44]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22.

and not merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear."[45] Yet action must be distinguished from 'mere talk'; it will be seen that a particular form of action, namely *political* action, entirely encompasses Arendt's conception of freedom.[46]

Arendt's characterization of what *should* be, namely a society of individuals living the full *vita activa* by constantly practicing 'action'—particularly *political* action and discourse—in addition to the necessary practices of labour and work, is the basis for her criticisms of the current state of human affairs in the world. Arendt holds that action is of the highest ontological importance and, given its abstract nature, action cannot be conceived of properly except within a domain that is explicitly and solely for this purpose. The importance that Arendt gives to distinguishing the public and private domains, and her criticism of the impending disappearance of this distinction in the modern world[47] lies in what she describes as the unfree nature of the private realm. Within the household there is a general systematization that goes on in terms of what is expected from each family member and for the most part (except in very serious instances) the personal/familial nature of any 'political' ideas and grievances that might arise in the household are dealt with privately. Action is dependent on plurality and distinctiveness, two qualities that do not arise to a large extent in the private household

---

[45]Ibid., 176.

[46]"The answer to the question of the meaning of politics is so simple and so conclusive that one might think all others are utterly beside the point. The answer is: The meaning of politics is freedom" (Arendt, "Introduction *into* Politics," 108).

[47]"The disappearance of the gulf that the ancients had to cross daily to transcend the narrow realm of the household and 'rise' into the realm of politics is an essentially modern phenomenon" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 33).

where all members have goals that are largely held in common and are specific to their situation. As Arendt explains, "the distinctive trait of the household sphere was that in it men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs."[48] Although all households have wants and needs, the *precise* wants and needs of a specific household such as those regarding nourishment, sustenance, procreation, etc., are largely idiosyncratic in nature in relation to other households. If, in contrast to this, the wants and needs of the majority of households are common, then the plurality that action depends on is torn asunder: the public domain is common by definition, and if the private is largely common as well—that is, if all individuals experience a similar upbringing, hold similar values, etc.—then the sharing of stories will be rendered redundant by the fact that they will already be known since they will be the same stories experienced by other individuals. The existence of a public domain *distinct from the private household*,[49] a domain where stories can be shared and political discourse can go on (as opposed to

[48]Ibid., 30.

[49]Arendt laments 'the rise of the social', (see below) which, according to her, is 'based on the conformism inherent in society and possible only because behavior has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship" (*The Human Condition,* 41) in the modern age and this charge of 'conformism' is one point of attack against Marx: "What Marx did not—and, at his time could not—understand was that the germs of communistic society were present in the reality of a national household.... A complete victory of society will always produce some sort of 'communistic fiction,' whose outstanding political characteristic is that it is indeed ruled by an 'invisible hand,' namely by nobody" (Ibid., 44). It is easy to see what Arendt is getting at: Marx's notion of 'species-consciousness' implies a certain amount of 'universally shared' experiences and goals (such as, e.g. Marx's assertion of 'value' coming from 'one uniform labour-power', p. 35). What is problematic is that a proper understanding of Marx severely calls into question Arendt's apparent implication that the realization of Marxism in society would manifest itself as a 'dreary mass of conforming individuals,' as opposed to a 'happy medium between 'sociality' and 'originality'' as evinced by Gramsci (see note 70, Chapter I).

'mere talk'), is necessary for Arendt's conception of freedom.

Political action forms the basis of Arendt's idea of freedom. In contradistinction to Marx's political views, Arendt maintains that it is the abstract communicative and complex social aspect of public action that sets humans apart from animals,[50] and, whilst Marx argues that only a cooperative and more uniform set of goals will "lift society's mystical veil", the manner in which action engenders human freedom is precisely through its ability to distinguish each individual: "Unlike human behaviour ... action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*."[51] It has already been maintained above that Arendt's treatment of political 'action' is not associated with 'governance'. Rather, in a manner analogous to Marx's conceptions of labour and material production, action forms the basis of Arendt's ontology, and characterizes and distinguishes the abilities and personae of the individuals who practice it. Whilst Marx maintained that the material products of our labour characterize us by acting as an external representation of our consciousness, according to Arendt it is through action that the individual answers the question "who are you?"[52]

Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hegel all conceived that to consider freedom 'abstractly'

---

[50]"The distinction between man and animal runs right through the human species itself: only the best, who constantly prove themselves to be the best and who "prefer immortal fame to mortal things," are really human; the others content with whatever pleasures nature will yield them, live and die like animals" (Ibid., 19).

[51]Ibid., 205.

[52]See p. 26.

as some form of unbounded ability to do whatever one wishes—tempting as it may be—is, at the very least, ontologically suspect. Yet this 'abstract freedom' is commonly appealed to when one is faced with the prospect of realizing 'freedom' within a legislated realm: how can one be 'free' to pursue one's ends if there are certain means or ends that one is seemingly not free to pursue since their practice is punishable by law? As discussed briefly in the introduction, the three aforementioned thinkers gave an ontological justification to reject the 'noble savage' by conceiving of individuals as part of a larger sovereign body. Yet Arendt must go further than this if she wishes to justify *plurality*, *uniqueness*, and above all *natality* and the need for one to immortalize oneself, as fundamental to the realization of human freedom: "If we look upon freedom with the eyes of the tradition, identifying freedom with sovereignty, the simultaneous presence of freedom and non-sovereignty, of being able to begin something new and of not being able to control or even foretell its consequences, seems almost to force us to the conclusion that human existence is absurd."[53] Indeed, the fundamental teleological conceptions seen in Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, and, (from Arendt's assessment) Marx[54]

---

[53]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 235. This 'absurdity' does not arise in traditional thought, Arendt argues, because traditionally freedom is apolitical: "According to our tradition of conceptual thought, and its categories, freedom is equated with freedom of the will, and we understand freedom of the will to be a choice between givens.... Since the waning years of classical antiquity it has been extraordinarily reinforced by the widespread conviction that freedom not only does not lie in action and in politics, but, on the contrary, is possible only if man renounces action and withdraws from the world and into himself, avoiding politics altogether." ("Introduction *into* Politics," 113)

[54]Marx stresses *natality* in terms of the creative process that allows for the realization of the potential of the human species through the development of species-consciousness, but (as mentioned in note 49) his emphasis on species-consciousness may be seen as implying the establishment of a certain uniformity based on 'preset plans of

seem to imply a certain normalization process[55] amongst almost all individuals within a society (save, perhaps for the Sovereign, Legislator, or world-historical individuals, respectively) that render them largely interchangeable in terms of what they are expected to contribute to society as a whole. If Arendt wishes to stress the precedence of action, this uniformity cannot occur: "Action would be an unnecessary luxury ... if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model.... Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."[56] Earlier in this chapter, it was emphasized that Arendt's characterization of action in general and political action in particular should not be considered solely in terms of governance, as traditional political theory might tempt one to suppose. Instead, the 'sharing of stories' and the question of 'Who are you?' imply the importance of plurality amongst individuals. If individuals were nearly all interchangeable (save for Legislators, Sovereign, etc.), then the content of these stories would already be known, since the one who asked and the one who was expected to answer would have largely the same needs, beliefs, desires, etc.

---

production' amongst individuals. Arendt maintains "it is a hopeless enterprise to search for meaning in politics or significance in history when everything that is not everyday behaviour or automatic trends is ruled out as immaterial" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 42), and that in the political theories of Hobbes, Marx, et al., "Freedom is located in the realm of the social, and force or violence becomes the monopoly of government" (Ibid., 31).

[55]"Society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement" (Ibid., 40). See the discussion of Arendt's notion of the 'social realm' below.

[56]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8.

According to Arendt, this should not be the case; rather, the individual externalizes her unique characteristics through the unfolding of a correspondingly unique story conveyed through dialogue and action. This, in turn, is the means through which the individual realizes her humanness. Yet, as already mentioned, this dialogue and action must be discerned from 'mere talk': if it were the case that arbitrary verbal or somatic communication was considered ontologically relevant, there would be no real distinction between humans and other animals. Rather, it is important that these stories occur within a *public* domain and characterize the unique position from which the individual in question perceives and is perceived by the world: "Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation and multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives."[57] It is only through the amalgamation, or, at the very least, consideration of new opinions and perspectives that one is presented with in a public space that one's own bias is called into question, and this in turn paves the way for "the capacity of beginning something anew," which lies at the heart of the precedence given to action.[58] Indeed, it is only through beginning anew that the human species is able to transcend the bounds that nature sets for it—or at least the bounds that the human species has set for itself at any given time.[59]

---

[57]Ibid., 57

[58]This 'beginning anew' is Arendt's concept of *natality*.

[59]Examples of this phenomenon might include the French or American

In order to consider the opinions and stories of others, it is, of course, necessary that they should be available to others through some sort of externalization process (e.g. conversation, dictation, violence[60]), and also, as mentioned above, that others are available to perceive and comprehend these stories. This necessitates the existence of a public realm, where the sharing of information can occur: "Since our feeling for reality depends utterly upon the appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence, even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm."[61] Even practices that are limited to the private realm, i.e., the household, are based to some extent on publicly conceived practices, from the language that we use to the customs deemed socially acceptable. If this was not so, relations and communication within the private domain would break down, transporting us back to the pre-social human being of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*; herein lies the fundamental importance of the public realm.

Thus far, the discussion has seemingly made little distinction between types of action; that is, it has not been explained why Arendt emphasizes *political* action. Yet, the political, as conceived traditionally and as Arendt treats it, is that which relates to the

---

Revolutions, the First or Second World Wars, etc.; historical events that 're-shape' the human race collectively.

[60]Violence is form of externalization, but for Arendt, it is ultimately not a *productive* from of externalization since "while violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 202). Arendt's notion of 'power' and its importance is discussed below.

[61]Ibid., 51.

*polis*. In this sense, the public domain provides the space for political discourse, and thus the importance of the public realm implies the importance placed on the political. At the heart of Arendt's criticism of the modern era of politics, is the presence of a third domain, which overlaps both the public and the private, namely the social: "the collective of families organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call 'society,' and its political form of organization is called 'nation'."[62] Thus, the temptation to define 'politics' in terms of 'governance' and 'nation-states' is, according to Arendt, a relatively new phenomenon that has arisen in tandem with the rise of the social realm: "The distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms ... but the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon ... which found its political form in the nation-state."[63] In fact, for Arendt, political economy (which maintains an important position in Marx's philosophy) is entirely a manifestation of the emergence of the social: "according to ancient thought ... the very term 'political economy' would have been a contradiction in terms: whatever was 'economic,' related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition."[64] Political economy therefore has no place in Arendt's theory since political action is, by definition, action that occurs within the public domain and relates to public life.

---

[62]Ibid., 29.

[63]Ibid., 28.

[64]Ibid., 29.

Of course, it is necessary to understand the public realm as Arendt understands it: the precedence that Arendt gives to action implies a public realm that is different from, for example, a society of 'labourers' or 'workers'.[65] It has already been mentioned that Arendt sees 'humanness' in those who prefer immortal fame to mortal things, and this is rendered possible only through the existence of a public domain, namely the *polis*, where *political* action can be realized:

> The *polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win 'immortal fame,' that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique distinctness.... The second function of the *polis*, again closely connected with the hazards of action as experienced before its coming into being, was to offer a remedy for the futility of action and speech; for the chances that a deed would not be forgotten, that is actually would become 'immortal,' were not very good.[66]

The first important aspect of the polis alluded to is the manner in which it provides the *possibility* for immorality that Arendt's ontology appeals to, whilst the second is a manifestation of her rejection of Rousseau's ahistorical man. This public realm, therefore, should not be conceived and judged based on the static *appearances* of the products of human labour and their producers, but rather on dynamic *processes* and those who conceive of them, for "while the strength of the production process is entirely absorbed in and exhausted by the end product, the strength of the action process is never exhausted in

---

[65]"Both [the convictions of *homo faber* and *animal laborans*] are, strictly speaking, unpolitical, and will incline to denounce action and speech as idleness, idle busybodyness, and idle talk.... This, however, is not to say that they are free to dispense with a public realm altogether, for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one's self, of one's own identity, nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt" (Ibid., 208).

[66]Ibid., 197.

a single deed but, on the contrary, can grow while its consequences multiply."[67]

It is thus not surprising that the public realm is the realm of freedom for Arendt, though it provides only the *potential* for freedom, whereas the *manifestation* of freedom only exists within the process of the political *action* that is characterized by the sharing of stories and the disclosure of the individual. Arendt argues that the traditional conception of politics as the governance of a people by the nation-state is an aspect of the social rather than the political realm. The reason for this is that, in Arendt's conception of the public domain, "power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.... While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse."[68] The rationale behind Arendt's criticism of Hobbes, Hegel, and Marx is that within the social realm, power is secondary to strength, if power should exist at all: those in a position of strength—whether they be one or more feudal monarchs or an aristocratic body of philosopher-kings as conceived of by Plato[69]—desire the dispersal of the public domain, and the corresponding preclusion of political action: if

---

[67]Ibid., 233.

[68]Ibid., 200.

[69]"The society we have described can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, or ... of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers" (Plato, *The Republic*, 2d. ed. trans. with an introduction by Desmond Lee [Markham: Penguin Books Canada, Ltd., 1974], 263 [Stephanus pagination 473c-d]). Arendt maintains: "Plato's solution of the philosopher-king, whose 'wisdom' solves the perplexities of action as though they were solvable problems of cognition, is only one—and by no means the least tyrannical—of one man rule" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 221).

it is only by the joining together of the individuals within the polis in a solidarity of power that those who are in a position of 'strength', in that they hold sway over others can be usurped.[70] Clearly, if those who rule over others wish to maintain their position, they must prevent this take steps to prevent this (hence the political notion of 'divide and conquer'). Moreover, it is evident that a dictatorial framework flourishes insofar as the natality and plurality of human beings are stymied for just this reason. The loss of plurality and natality then renders the sharing of stories between individuals redundant, since these individuals merely exude 'otherness' rather than 'plurality' and are thus familiar to each other on most accounts already. For Arendt, the point of political action is to make the distinctness of ones deeds known and work to 'immortalize' oneself in history, yet in a dictatorship this immortality is reserved only for the few in a position of strength, since only they are capable of distinguishing themselves from a largely uniform group of citizens. On the other hand, "power, like action, is boundless.... Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with ... the interplay of powers with their checks and balances is even liable to generate more power, so long, at least, as the interplay is alive and has not resulted in a stalemate."[71] The interplay that Arendt appeals to is the perpetuation of political action within the public domain.

Having established that the perpetuation of action in the public sphere is fundamental to Arendt's ontological characterization of human beings and the

---

[70]"Strength can actually be ruined only by power and is therefore always in danger from the combined force of the many" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 203).[70]

[71]Ibid., 201.

development of her notion of freedom as political action, one is tempted to ask 'to what end is this action directed?' or 'what is it that is to be achieved through political action?' Indeed, Arendt is well aware of the temptation to ask such questions: "The extraordinarily narrow horizon of experience left open to us for the politics commensurate with the experiences of our century perhaps reveals itself nowhere more clearly than in the fact that we are automatically prepared to question the meaning of politics the moment we become convinced that action has neither an end nor a goal."[72] It is clear that Arendt sees the exercising of political action (in and of itself) as equivalent to freedom and hence it is *merely* this perpetuation that is necessitated by Arendt's notion of freedom. For Arendt, to ask for an end or finale that politics should bring us toward is a misunderstanding: "The goal is not contained within the action itself, but, unlike ends, neither does it lie in the future. If it is at all achievable, it must remain constantly in the present, and precisely during times when it is not yet achieved."[73] Moreover, Arendt's lamenting of this desire to seek a 'goal' also sheds some light on her criticism of modernity, e.g.: "The growing meaningless of the modern world is perhaps nowhere more clearly foreshadowed than in this identification of meaning and end;"[74] specifically Marxism: "What distinguishes Marx's own theory from all other sin which the notion of 'making history' has found a place is only that he alone realized that if one takes history to be the object of processes of fabrication or making, there must come a moment when

---

[72]Arendt, "Introduction *into* Politics," 197.

[73]Ibid., 198.

[74]Arendt, "The Concept of History," 302.

this 'object' is completed"[75]; and modern politics: "Whenever we hear of grandiose aims in politics, such as establishing a new society in which justice will be guaranteed forever, or fighting a war to end all wars or to make the whole world safe for democracy, we are moving in the realm of this kind of thinking."[76]

Hence, on the one hand political action is strictly the means by which political action is possible: if it should be the case that there can be no political action in a society (during war or under an autocracy, for example), it is the power of the multitude, realized through action, that can overcome the strength of the oppressor and make *unhindered* political action possible. On the other hand, if there *is* an 'ultimate' end to be reached by politics other than the freedom that lies therein, it is the manner by which it allows for humanity to maintain its own existence through political dialogue and negotiation: "It is in the nature of ends that they justify the means necessary to achieve them. But what ends can justify means that, under certain circumstances, could destroy humanity and organic life on earth?" Politics, for Arendt, is implicitly tied not just to freedom, but also to survival.[77]

---

[75]Ibid., 303.

[76]Ibid.

[77]The seeds of this 'rejection of ends' may have been sown very early in Arendt's philosophical development whilst she was still under the guidance of Karl Jaspers. In an essay that pre-dates much of her 'major' contributions to political theory entitled "What is Existenz Philosophy?" she notes: "Jaspers holds that in philosophy every ontology claiming it can say what Being really is, is a Slipping-away into the absolutizing of particular categories of Being. The existentiel [sic] meaning of such Slipping-away would be that such a philosophy robs Man of a freedom which can persist only so long as Man does not know what Being really is" (Arendt, "What is Existenz Philosophy," in *The*

It is apparent that, although there are some basic similarities between Kant's notion of *sponte* and Arendt's conception of *natality*, the worldly nature of *action* and the manner in which action alone, according to Arendt, allows freedom to be realizable cannot be brought into step with the ontological primacy given to *reason* and its corresponding otherworldly nature as found in Kant. Moreover, the only means by which Kant is able to establish a connection between these 'noumenal' and 'phenomenal' realms is through the 'fabrication' of *objets d'art*, and it is clear that the 'fleeting' and 'non-permanent' nature of action, combined with its socio-political nature (as opposed to the 'disinterested pleasure' that can be begot from art in isolation) renders Kant's narrow 'worldly freedom' solely as a certain manifestation of the *vita contemplativa* as ultimately unacceptable to Arendt. The very fact that Arendt underlines the important of the *political* within a *public space* where individuals purposively intermingle in order to share their personal idiosyncrasies, experiences, and 'stories' requires, at the very least, an *externalization* of the conceptions begotten by *thought* and *reason* in Kant's 'noumenal realm'.

Yet the final and perhaps most important aspect of Arendt's political theory that goes against a 'Kantian' conception of theory and practice is that Kant's resignation to determinism in the phenomenal world and corresponding relegation to freedom in the noumenal world imply a corresponding resignation of worldly affairs to whatever is dictated to it. To resign oneself to a conception of 'worldly' freedom that is solely defined in terms of its connection to this otherworldly noumenal realm (i.e. through

---

*Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney [New York: Routledge, 2002], 357).

contemplation, which *can* be done in isolation) allows for those in positions of 'strength' to arbitrarily exercise their control over others within the immediate socio-political framework. In a Kantian sense, this can be seen to justify the wholly otherworldly nature of freedom, since 'control', whether physically through others or metaphysically through determinism, is already implicit in the phenomenal realm and therefore is not a concern.[78] Given, for example, Arendt's writings on totalitarianism and the Eichmann trial, it would be fairly easy to assert that any theory that could imply the existence of such 'worldly control' must be rejected. Indeed, such a theory precludes the impetus to actively come together in a public space, allowing for 'strength', "the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation"[79] but precluding the 'power' that such a coming-together ordains on a given population. Because of the importance of 'power' and the manner in which Arendt argues for it as a requirement not only for freedom but also, perhaps, for survival, it is not surprising that Arendt should not be satisfied with the notion of 'freedom' found in Kant.

---

[78]This element of 'control' is at the forefront of Hegel's political philosophy, and is seen as something entirely positive, since, according to Hegel, "[everything in the State] is [the citizens'] possession just as they are possessed by it, for it constitutes their substance and being." (Hegel, *Reason and History*, 66). This led Mikhail Bakunin to decry the realization of Hegel's political philosophy as "an uninterrupted series of somnambulistic ideas and experiences" (Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, tr. M. Shatz [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 131).

[79]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 200.

# CONCLUSION

A simplistic conception of the distinction between the ideal 'free' worlds conceived by Marx and Arendt is that for Marx, individuals would tend towards achieving self-consciousness through the externalization of their ideas in material objects; while for Arendt, individuals would be attempting to 'immortalize themselves' through their story being documented and shared beyond their immediate familial relations. Yet I have argued throughout this thesis that the impetus for a *practical* and *externalizable* conception of freedom is derived from ontologies that reject the traditional precedence put on *internal* ontological qualities of humans, primarily thought and reason. As delineated in the introduction, the idea of freedom in the phenomenal world is not without its difficulties. The conclusions that Hume came to in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* with regard to determinism and the manner in which it apparently precludes the possibility of realizing freedom in the physical world are indeed disturbing, and eventually forced Kant to develop his metaphysics whereby, he argues, the apparent 'contradictions' in Hume could be resolved by a division of the metaphysical world into noumenal and phenomenal. These contradictions, according to Kant, were only so when one limited one's focus to the world of *appearance* which had to accord by the laws of determinism and hence could not be a domain containing freedom, whereas within the realm of the *noumena*, this contradiction disappeared, since the noumenal realm, by

Kant's definition contained metaphysical 'entities' that were capable of *sponte*, i.e. could be 'uncaused' and hence circumvent the yoke of determinism. As much as this provides a solution to Hume's 'problem of freedom', it is a disconcerting one. To conclude that freedom is realizable only outside of the physical world is problematic enough, for it implies that within the physical realm we must resign ourselves to this yoke of determinism, and that attempting to free ourselves from it is ultimately futile except, possibly, via the manner in which the 'disinterested pleasure' of *objets d'art* offer a means to approximate this noumenal realm of freedom.

Attempts to improve this 'Kantian' solution, which, amongst other things also implies an almost complete disjointedness between the noumenal and phenomenal realms and hence an inability to comprehend how freedom can even begin to manifest itself in the phenomenal realm, were made by a number of his followers, most notably Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel on the one hand, and Schopenhauer on the other. Arguably, the first break from this Kantian methodology came with the manner in which Marx 'turned Hegel on his head,'[1] concluding that it was not the realm of thought that held precedence over the physical world, but rather that thought was only a reflection of developments, requirements and, most importantly *social relations* in the physical world. Beginning with the physical and man's relationship to nature, Marx conceives of a *practical, social*

[1]See note 4, Chapter I. It is interesting to note that this is, in a very basic epistemological sense, a return to a sort of Lockean 'empiricism', wherein the realm of thought is ultimately a *tabula rasa* that is imprinted on by the physical realm. Arguably, there are some rudimentary parallels between Locke's empiricism as it arises from his rejection of the *a priori* knowledge that Leibniz's rationalism argued for, and Marx's re-interpretation of Hegel which itself is ultimately based on the importance that (synthetic) *a priori* knowledge plays in Kant's metaphysics. However, empiricism lacks the social aspect of Marx's materialism.

ontological primacy within humankind, rather than the *rational, non-physical* ontologies conceived of throughout much, if not all, of the history of philosophy. Arendt's political philosophy rooted in the *vita activa* is also a rejection of this 'ontology of reason', an ontology that, she argues, has manifested itself throughout philosophy as the diametrically opposite *vita contemplativa.* Yet although Arendt's philosophy is rooted in the physical 'world of appearances', she also rejects the idea that freedom should be rooted in *the physical* nature of the world itself. Instead, she maintains that freedom is ultimately found in the *non-physical* aspects of the physical world, i.e. action and speech, which "can result in an end product only on condition that its own authentic, non-tangible, and always utterly fragile meaning is destroyed."[2] In other words, the problem of necessity that led to Hume conclusions and held such importance for Kant and the idealists is not 'solved' in the sense that an improved or alternative means by which freedom from necessity can be realized in the physical world. Instead it is shown that this issue is *merely theoretical*, and its importance should be usurped by the question of *freedom from constraint* by establishing human ontology as being primarily a question of *practice* of what can and should be *done* within the physical world, and how this physical world should be interpreted, rather than worrying about metaphysical questions of the nature and ontological facets of *thought* and *reason.*

Ultimately, it should not be surprising that the methodological approaches taken by Marx and Arendt contain similarities, not least because large parts of *The Human*

---

[2]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 196.

*Condition* (e.g. the chapter on 'labour'[3]) have been written as a critical response to Marx. Both thinkers are similar in that they do not begin from a hypothetical pre-social state, as the social contract theorists did,[4] or from a theistic or historically biased characterization of the world[5] but instead consider what distinguishes the capabilities of human beings from those of other animal species. In both cases, their focus is on examining the difference between the externalized activity of humans and that of animals: the externalization of human capabilities and in the form of material production and the social relations that arise within the context of this production is of primary importance to Marx whilst Arendt gives precedence to political relationships that arise through speech and action. Although some of the things that humans do are also done by animals—for example most higher animals build shelters, and many, from lions to bees and ants, also have hierarchical and often highly complex social structures—each of Marx and Arendt maintains that humans are able to transcend the natural restrictions that limit other

---

[3]E.g., the chapter opens: "In the following chapter, Karl Marx will be criticized. This is unfortunate at a time when so many writers who once made their living by explicit or tacit borrowing form the great wealth of Marxian ideas and insights have decided to become professional anti-Marxists" (Ibid., 79).

[4]See p. 8.

[5]Marx criticizes the current situation thus: "History must … always be written according to an extraneous standard; the real production of life seems to be primeval history, while the truly historical appears to be separated from ordinary life, something extra-terrestrial. With this the relation of man to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created. The exponents of this conception of history have consequently only been able to see in history the political actions of princes and States, religious and all sorts of theoretical struggles, and in particular in each historical epoch have had to *share the illusion of that epoch*" (Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2d ed. [New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978], 165).

animals. In addition, Marx and Arendt strongly underline the importance of the multiplicity of humanity (i.e. the fundamental role that the 'other' plays) in establishing their ontologies.[6] Of course, the difference between the two is clear: Marx gives precedence to labour, and, transitively, to what he terms 'labour-power' and the socio-economic relations that it implies, and, while noting the importance of political emancipation as an "important step," he criticizes politics as a tool for bourgeois interests. In contrast, Arendt sees that 'labour'[7] is imperative to survival, but maintains that it does not provide any ontological meaning with regard to 'humanness'. She instead maintains that plurality and higher forms of abstract communication, which are not found in animals, should define humans ontologically.

Although I have limited my focus to providing, amongst other things, a critical summary of the role that a *practical* ontology plays in the political theories of Marx and Arendt and the manner in which they conceive of freedom, a primary motivation for choosing the topic in question is to give credence to the critical observation of Arendt's mentioned in Chapter II, namely that 'the practical' has in many respects been relegated

---

[6]One may note in passing that Marx and Arendt also share a critical view of the role religion should play in ontology, e.g. Marx notes: "What prevails in the so-called Christian state is not man but alienation. The only man who counts—the King—is specifically differentiated from other men and is still a religious being associated with heaven and with God" (Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 38); while Arendt observes that "the unpolitical, non-public character of the Christian community was early defined in the demand that it should form a *corpus*, a 'body,' whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family. The structure of communal life was modeled on the relationships between the members of a family because these were known to be non-political and even antipolitical" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 53). Note that Marx attacks religion because of its alienating nature, while Arendt attacks it due to its non-political/anti-political nature.

[7]Here, of course, I mean Arendt's definition of labour. See, e.g. the Appendix.

to the categories of 'jobs' and/or 'hobbies', whilst 'politics' has, at present, been reduced to the administrative and bureaucratic practice of governance.[8] Indeed, even one of the greatest proponents of Western liberty, John Stuart Mill, decried the lack of individual initiative and conviction from constituents of political communities:

> People more happily situated [than those, like royalty, who largely expect unlimited deference], who sometimes hear their opinions disputed, and are not wholly unused to be set right when they are wrong, place the same unbounded reliance only on such of their opinions as are shared by all who surround them, or to whom they habitually defer: for in proportion to a man's want of confidence in his own solitary judgment, does he usually repose, with implicit trust, on the infallibility of "the world" in general. And the world, to each individual, means the part of it with which he comes in contact; his party, his sect, his church, his class of society.[9]

Reversing this trend of passivity is evidently crucial to upholding the plurality of humanity that Arendt places so much importance on: if everybody only relies on the opinions that others share, then there are no different stories, since there is not one who will express herself from a viewpoint different than that which is shared by others. A lack of different stories, in turn, means no one is striving for their immortality, and hence, according to Arendt, these individuals are not 'ontologically human' but rather, "content with whatever pleasures nature will yield them, live and die like animals."[10]

Moreover, not only does political apathy stifle Arendt's program of political

---

[8]See note 11, Chapter II. Slavoj Zizek, for example, labels this modern movement as 'post-politics': "In our age of 'post-politics,' ... politics proper is progressively replaced by expert social administration" (Slavoj Zizek *The Parallax View*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, 379).

[9]John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, eds. David Bromwich and George Kateb, with essays by John Bethke Elshtain, Owen Fiss, Richard A. Posner, Jeremy Waldron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 88.

[10]See note 50, Chapter II.

action through a lack of different stories and opinions, it is also problematic with regard to the Marxian project, especially the manner in which Marx calls on the workers of the world to unite and revolutionize the means of production by bringing it under the control of the proletariat. If no one will challenge the status quo, or, equivalently, if no one will put forward an opinion that is different from the established socio-political order, no such revolution can take place. Indeed, although Marx dismisses politics as being biased towards the interests of bourgeois property owners, one must recall that he very clearly declares that political emancipation "represents a great progress" since it is "the final form of human emancipation *within* the framework of the prevailing social order." It is within the existing social order that individuals must act if they are to sow the seeds of the revolution that will eventually overthrow the current (bourgeois-ruled, Marx would argue) socio-political status quo.

Although it may seem that criticizing the lack of political motivation as it arises in reality has little to do with what I have said thus far about the importance of ontology in political theory, a lack of political conviction may be, in part, due to a lack of *practical ontological* conviction: if there is no concrete justification for acting, there is less of an impetus to act. As was discussed regarding the political theories of Marx and Arendt, a concrete ontological foundation was imperative to the development of their respective conceptions of freedom, and, in addition, provided justification as to why such a conception of freedom should be pursued. Moreover, these ontologies provided a break from historical treatments of philosophy in that they presented human ontology as wholly *practical*, appealing to the conception that humanness, rather than being bound up in our

ability to reason, is rather bound up in our ability to *act*. A criticism of modern politics and a reason why there is growing apathy towards political involvement may be that it is more concerned with enacting policies—which are justified by ambiguous phrases like 'for the good of the people' or 'for freedom' or 'for democracy'—than it is with creating an active socio-political community that genuinely strives toward some form of concrete vision. Indeed, there is arguably very little theoretical discussion that goes on in modern government—and certainly next to no considerations that have the theoretical magnitude of ontological arguments—to justify a given conception of such ideals as 'freedom' and 'equality'; they exist almost as mere buzzwords that *ought* to be talked about and/or offered, but their precise meaning remains ambiguous.

There can be little doubt that a very strong form of objection that can be made against any political theory is that which asks: "why should I take up this cause?" If one can genuinely reply to this question that it is in one's very nature as a human being to do so, and can provide ample justification for this declaration, it would not be out of the question to think that more individuals would be willing to become more politically active by taking up such a cause. Since it is often the case that many criticisms—especially those of a socio-political nature, given that the realization and/or implementation of a certain political ideology can have a significant impact on how one lives one's life—are wholly negative (i.e. purely deleterious and dismissive rather than constructive), it stands to reason that this ontological naiveté may indirectly contribute to political apathy and/or antipathy: the inability to ground any political vision whatsoever in a fundamental ideology that appeals to one's very nature as a human being may lead

one to dismiss all political policies or theories as merely arbitrary. In addition, such policies may be regarded with cynicism due to suspicions that their primary goals include hidden ulterior motives that are solely in the interest of a few and/or may turn out to be detrimental to the majority.

I have focused on the philosophies of Marx and Arendt precisely because of the *active* form that their respective ontologies take, and the manner in which they are in contrast to the treatments of human ontology throughout much of the history of philosophy that focus on thought and reason; and the manner in which this 'radical' conception of ontology translates to an equally radical departure from traditional conceptions of political freedom. In this sense, within my thesis is also an attempt to justify the importance of ontology (and thus a 'grounding of practical philosophy in metaphysics', as Kant accords) as a means towards developing theoretical rigour within political theory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arendt, Hannah. 1963. *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press.

_____. 1979. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. Original edition, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1951.

_____. 1989. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Original edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

_____. 1992. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Edited with an interpretive essay by Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

_____. 2000. "The Concept of History." In *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Edited with an introduction by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Books.

_____. 2000. "Labor, Work, Action." In *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Edited with an introduction by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Books.

_____. 2000. "What is Freedom?" In *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Edited with an introduction by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Books.

_____. 2002. "What is Existenz Philosophy?" In *The Phenomenology Reader*. Edited by Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney. New York: Routledge.

_____. 2005. "Introduction *into* Politics." In *The Promise of Politics*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books.

Aristotle. 1962. *The Politics*. Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc.

Bakunin, Mikhail. 1990. *Statism and Anarchy*. Translated by M. Shatz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berlin, Isaiah. 2002. "Two Concepts of Liberty." In *Liberty: Incorporating 'Four Essays on Liberty'*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bloch, Ernst. 1971. *On Karl Marx*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Breazeale, Dan. "Johann Gottlieb Fichte", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Available from

http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/johann-fichte/. Internet; accessed June 21, 2010.

Canovan, Margaret. 1979. A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt. *Political Theory* 11 (February): 105-16.

Crampton, R. J. 1997. *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After*. New York: Routledge.

Dupré, Louis. *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace &World Inc.

Engels, Friedrich. 1978. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. 1957. *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by George Eliot. With a foreword by H. Richard Niebuhr, and introduction by Karl Barth. New York: Harper & Row.

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. 2000. *Foundations of Natural Right: according to the principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*. Edited by F. Neuhouser. Translated by M. Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 2005 *The System of Ethics: according to the principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

George, Henry. 1981. *The Science of Political Economy: a reconstruction of its principles in clear and systematic form*. New York: Schalkenbach Foundation. Original edition, New York: Schalkenbach Foundation, 1980.

_____. 2008. *Progress and Poverty: an inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth: the remedy*. New York: Schalkenbach Foundation.

Gould, Carol. 1978. *Marx's Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1953. *Reason in History*. Translated with an introduction by Robert S. Hartman. New York: Liberal Arts Press.

_____. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. With analysis of the text and foreword by J. N. Findlay. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

_____. 2001. *The Philosophy of History*. With a preface by Charles Hegel. Translated with a preface by J. Sibree. Kitchener: Batoche Books.

Hobbes, Thomas. 1949. *De Cive or The Citizen*. Edited with an introduction by Sterling P. Lamprecht. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Hume, David. 2000. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Kitchener: Batoche Books.

Kant, Immanuel. 2004. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Gary Hatfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, Immanuel. 2008. *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*. Translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. Arc Manor: Rockville.

Locke, John. 1963. *Two Treatises of Government*. With an introduction and apparatus criticus by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Loewenstein, Julius. 1980. *Marx Against Marxism*. Translated by Harry Drost. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Marx, Karl. 1978. "Capital, Volume One." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. "Capital, Volume Three." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. *Critique of the Gotha Program*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. "Discovering Hegel." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. "Grundrisse." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. "The German Ideology." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. *On the Jewish Question*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____. 1978. "Society and Economy in History." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1978. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

Mill, John Stuart. 2003. *On Liberty*. Edited by David Bromwich and George Kateb. With essays by John Bethke Elshtain, Owen Fiss, Richard A. Posner, Jeremy Waldron. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Negri, Antonio. 1999. *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Translated by M. Boscagli. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

Plato. 1974. *The Republic*, 2d ed. Translated with an introduction by Desmond Lee. Markham: Penguin Books Canada, Ltd.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1978. *A Discourse on a Subject Proposed by the Academy of Dijon: What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?* In *The Social Contract and Discourses*. Translated by G.D.H. Cole. Revised by J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall, New York: Everyman's Library. Original edition, New York: Everyman's Library, 1913.

_____. 1978. *The Social Contract*. In *The Social Contract and Discourses*. Translated by G.D.H. Cole. Revised by J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall, New York: Everyman's Library. Original edition, New York: Everyman's Library, 1913.

Smith, Adam. 1993. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by K. Sutherland. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Surin, Kenneth. 1996. "'The Continued Relevance of Marxism' as a Question: Some Propositions," In *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. Edited by S. Makdisi, C. Casarino, and R. Karl. New York: Routledge.

Wolin, Richard. 2001. *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zizek, Slavoj. 2006. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

## APPENDIX:

## ARENDT ON LABOUR AND MARX ON FREEDOM

Throughout the two main chapters, I have scattered various references to Arendt's characterization of Marx's notion of 'labour' and the problems associated with it. Here, I intend to simply and briefly summarize these ideas and show how, on the one hand, they improperly handle Marx's ontology of labour,[1] yet, on the other hand, they imply the existence of certain difficulties and possible ambiguities within Marx's own thought.

In a lecture delivered by Arendt in 1964, she declares "it is obvious that labor is an activity which corresponds to the biological processes of the body, that it is, as the young Marx said, the metabolism between man and nature or the human mode of this metabolism which we share with all living organisms."[2] If this was a correct assessment of Marx, then it does indeed make for a rather peculiar assessment of Marx's notion of freedom, for Arendt is correct in citing that for Marx "'the realm of freedom begins only

[1]It should be evident to the reader that Arendt's theory of political action, though motivated in part by Marx's theory, is completely independently of it. Thus, even if Arendt's views of Marx are incorrect (which I argue they are), this should not detract from the merits of her own theory. Indeed, in *Insurgencies*, Negri, a modern 'radical Marxist', maintains: "it is exactly on this point, the radical fundamentality of political being, that Arendt is strongest. Constituent power, insofar as it constitutes the political from nothingness, is an expansive principle: it allows no room for either resentment or resistance; it is not selfish but supremely generous; it is not need but desire" (Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, tr. Maurizia Boscagli [Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 1999]. 15).

[2]Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 170.

where labor determined through want' and the immediacy of 'physical needs' ends," and yet concludes from this that "this emancipation, as we know now, to the extent that it is possible at all, occurs not by political emancipation—the equality of all classes of the citizenry—but through technology."[3] On the surface, it seems that the only plausible understanding of this is that it leads one to interpret Marx's notion of freedom as merely emancipation from e.g. primary industry such as farming, etc., yet she goes even further than this, for in *The Human Condition* she explains: "Emancipation from labor, in Marx's own terms, is emancipation from necessity, and this would ultimately mean emancipation from consumption as well, that is, from the metabolism with nature which is the very condition of human life"[4]: a very perplexing conundrum, indeed!

The problem arises, I argue, in Arendt's interpretation of the term *metabolism* and her 'mistaking' Nature (Marx) for nature: if one goes back to the presentation of Marx's notion of labour in the first chapter, one sees the misunderstanding immediately, namely that a *ontological* process is mistaken for an entirely *physiological* one.[5] For example, if it is true that labour can be characterized through "acting on the external world and changing it," as cited in Chapter I, Arendt would lead us to the peculiar conclusion that the only manner in which the world is changed through labour is in a *negative* manner by

---

[3]Ibid., 171.

[4]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 131.

[5]One way to bring this into a metaphysical context would be to look at it in the language of dialecticism: if one substitutes 'synthesis' for 'metabolism', one could contextualize labour as what is metabolized/synthesized by the antagonistic relationship between man and nature, since, as mentioned in Chapter I, Marx notes "Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the *human* being" (see p. 33).

depriving it through consumption. Yet, according to Marx by changing nature, "he at the same time changes his own nature," and to conclude that humankind moves forward insofar as nature moves backward seems to contradict the mutual relationship between man and nature. Moreover, her idea that Marx's aim is that consumption be subsumed is flagrantly contradicted by the *Grundrisse* passage cited at the end of Chapter I,[6] wherein it is evident that the only thing that may be *physiological* is *necessary* labour, and that when *this* is minimized, labour as a *creative* and *critical* process can flourish. This assessment is upheld by Richard Wolin, who argues for a similar ontological misunderstanding in response to Arendt's conception of Marxism as somehow giving rise to something akin to the 'dreary collective of mass society' alluded to at the end of Chapter I. This includes her claims of a certain 'normalization' process through the rise of the social: citing Arendt's claim in *The Human Condition* that Marxism can be lumped into the realm of the social, which maintains "a kind of 'collective housekeeping'; the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call 'society,' and its political form is the 'nation,'" Richard Wolin responds:

> Missing in this portrayal of 'the social' is Marx's brilliant, youthful description of the creative dimension of labor qua practical-critical 'human sensuous activity' [here he is citing Marx's first *Thesis on Feuerbach*]. Whereas the antidemocratic ontological tradition denies that self-fulfillment through praxis can ever be achieved by 'the many,' the Hegelian Marxist tradition refuses to rest content with a situation in which happiness was accessible only to the privileged few.[7]

---

[6]See p. 48.

[7]Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 64.

Indeed, it is clear from Wolin's view that Arendt's misconception hinges on her failure to fully conceive of Marx's notion of labour *as creative process*.

Yet placing the fault of any 'mistakes' and 'misinterpretations' solely at the foot of Arendt is not entirely justified. The very fact that Arendt appeals to 'the young Marx' exemplifies a certain confusion that, arguably, arises in the evolution of Marx's thought and his conception of freedom. The extent to which this conception of 'freedom' differs from what the 'young Marx' originally had in mind at the time of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* is a point of contention that may contribute to the somewhat ambiguous treatment of what, precisely, his notion of 'labour' encompasses, and, further, why Arendt interprets his conception of labour as an entirely physiological one. In *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*, Louis Dupré begins by echoing Arendt's 'physiological' assessment of labour, then concludes with a similar criticism, e.g.: "In the decisive stages of man's historical evolution—at the beginning (the mere satisfaction of physical needs) and at the end (the final crisis of capitalism)—only the time and means of execution depend on a free choice. There certainly is no place for goals other than the social-economic necessities. Freedom is an essential part of Marx's view of man, but no attempt was made to reconcile it with an equally essential social-economic determinism." Dupré then contends: "In the discussion of the division of labor in the *Manuscripts*, Marx himself calls [economic cooperation] a social form of individualism. To make human cooperation truly social, Marx should have described the original praxis in terms of *social*

*needs* as well as individual ones, and this cannot be done on a purely physical basis"[8] However, this assessment is entirely based on a rather naïve assessment that only takes into account the 'young Marx' (as well as a very 'deterministic' view of dialecticism, see, e.g. note 32 of Chapter I), and also directly contradicts Gould's analysis of Marx's 'social ontology'. In *Marx Against Marxism*, Loewenstein provides a much more robust and even-handed understanding of the situation: "Not in the goal [the conception of freedom] can inconsistencies be observed, only in the road towards it. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* he expected the emancipation from social labour itself, then in the *Grundrisse* in the free time reacting back upon production, and finally in volume three of *Capital* in a sphere of life that arises out of and moves away from the sphere of production." He elaborates:

> Once he had distinguished the freedom of human development from the necessity of hard economic labour, Marx hesitated to admit that there are indeed separate spheres of human life involved. Why? He was obviously troubled by the thought that the true realm of freedom is detached from the organization of production.... Marx was faced with a dilemma: either he had to change his politics (because they were wrong), or he had to eliminate the contradiction between higher activity and necessary labour. He did the latter. He believed he could overcome the discrepancy between the two realms by explaining that the realm of freedom could 'blossom forth only with this realm of necessity at its basis'.[9]

According to Loewenstein, this poses a problem alluded to by Surin in the introduction,[10] namely the emerging 'simple and clumsy' nature of the dialectic: "It only proves that the

---

[8]Louis Dupré, *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace &World Inc., 1966), 226.

[9]Julius Loewenstein, *Marx Against Marxism*, tr. Harry Drost (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 88.

[10]See p. 13.

material conditions *enable* the worker to change and establish the realm of freedom, not that it *compels* him to do so. The inexorability of the dialectical and historical laws that 'compel' mankind applies only to the development of the economic base and not to the development of man. Marx was never clear about the fact that this development is only a potential."[11] Indeed, this treatment of history in terms of *potentiality* rather than *inevitability* is rigourously developed only much later; for example, by Ernst Bloch and his conception of 'Front', i.e. the part of the future that is immediately conceivable, rather than 'far in the future': "For the unfinished world can be brought to an end, and the process pending in it can be brought to a result;... But not by premature hypostases or fixed determinations of essence which only block the way.... The real or the essence is that *which does not yet exist, which is in quest of itself in the core of things, and which is awaiting its genesis of the trend latency of the process.* It is in itself the just-founded, objectively real hope."[12]

Thus, one can see why Arendt's development of the notion of 'labour' and subsequent criticism of Marx maintains something of a narrow interpretation of labour. Arguably, Marx himself *did* to some extent originally espouse this view himself. It is only by considering his more mature thought, especially that which is found in his *Grundrisse* (which, likely not by coincidence, is appealed to by many of the more 'modern' Marxist theorists, such as Carol Gould, and Antonio Negri, whose *Marx Beyond Marx* is based almost entirely on the *Grundrisse*) that these apparent 'problems' can be dealt with properly. Arendt's 'mistake' is, ultimately, that she is unwavering in her appeals to 'the young Marx' rather than considering his mature thought; whether this was

---

[11]Ibid.

[12]Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, 41.

merely an 'oversight' or was deliberate in order to maintain her criticisms of Marx is unimportant. What *is* important, for the purposes of the present material, is to provide the reader with a clear explanation of these 'anomalies' in the theoretical dynamic between Marx and Arendt.