The Location of Freedom: Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault

by

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Abstract

In the thesis, I discuss Hannah Arendt's conception of freedom. More particularly, I discuss her restriction of freedom to the public realm, and argue, using some of Michel Foucault's analyses of power and freedom, that this very restriction is problematic. But just as Foucault's analyses render Arendt's categories problematic, so they point to ways in which her analysis of freedom may be enriched or revised. It is this revision that I undertake in the thesis. I argue, through a comparison of Arendt's discussion of freedom with Jürgen Habermas's historical analysis of the public realm, that Arendt's categories can be read as temporal categories (instead of the somewhat standard interpretation of them as spatial categories), and that by so 'temporalizing' her categories, one 'liberates' Arendtian freedom from its restriction to the public realm.

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Introduction: Nihilism and Arendtian Freedom

> And the blindness of the blind and their seeking and groping shall yet bear witness to the power of the sun, into which they have looked. Did you know that? (Nietzsche, 1968, p.216)

Hannah Arendt's conception of political freedom is one that, it seems, takes seriously Friedrich Nietzsche's diagnosis of the root cause of nihilism. According to Nietzsche, the seeds of what was ultimately to become the 'great nausea' (Nietzsche, 1989, p.96) could be found in Plato's turning away from 'this' world of appearances and becoming for the sake of the world of Being that stands in some way beyond or behind appearances. This prioritization of Being over becoming ultimately led to a complete loss of meaning in the world because, according to Nietzsche, it had to 'overcome' itself: the prioritization of some 'true' world beyond the world of appearances naturally led to the question about how one could ever 'know' the Truth. As a consequence, the quest for the knowledge of Being was valued as the highest undertaking. In other words, the will to truth was born out of the Platonic devaluation of this world.[1] But this will to truth ultimately led to the discovery that all supra-natural purposes and sources of meaning were but chimeras. Nietzsche writes: "Unconditional honest atheism…is the awe-inspiring *catastrophe* of two thousand years of training in truthfulness that finally forbids itself the *lie involved in the belief in God*" (1989, p.160).

Having renounced 'this' world of becoming, and in doing so having 'placed our bets,' so to speak, on the world of Being, which was ultimately found to be a

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[1] On the will to truth as "the latest and noblest form of [the ascetic ideal]" (Nietzsche, 1989, p.147), see Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, sections 23-27, where, for example, he writes: "That which constrains these men [of knowledge], however, this unconditional will to truth, is *faith in the ascetic*

chimera by the will to truth itself, we were left with nothing, with no possible source for meaning.[2] Nietzsche's solution to the nihilism inherent in the Platonic turning away from this world of 'affects and blood' (ibid., p.131) is precisely to turn *back* to this world as the source for meaning: "Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes!" (Nietzsche, 1968, p.125). In other words, Nietzsche's solution is to preach the so-called 'overman' who would be strong enough to invert the ascetic (Platonic) relationship between 'bad conscience' and the 'natural'/ 'unnatural' inclinations (Nietzsche, 1989, p.95): the overman would be the one for whom bad conscience is associated with all that is *against* the world/ natural inclinations. Thus, he would be the one to re-value "appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing,...longing" (ibid., p.163).

In some important respects, I think Hannah Arendt's conception of political freedom is one that takes this world of appearance and change seriously. For Arendt, freedom belongs to the public realm because it is in this realm that action can be unpredictable, the processes begun by action irreversible, and the authors of the actions anonymous. But these three characteristics of action constitute precisely what

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ideal itself, even if as an unconscious imperative – don't be deceived about that – it is the faith in a *metaphysical* value, the absolute value of *truth*, sanctioned by this ideal alone" (ibid., p.151).

[2] For another, more detailed diagnosis of how science led to the loss of meaning, see Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation":

> Whereas civilized man, placed in the midst of the continuous enrichment of culture by ideas, knowledge, and problems, may become 'tired of life' but not 'satiated with life.' He catches only the most minute part of what the life of the spirit brings forth ever anew, and what he seizes is always something provisional and not definitive, and therefore death for him is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life is meaningless; by its very 'progressiveness' it gives death an imprint of meaninglessness. (p.140)

Arendt calls the 'threefold frustration of action' (Arendt, 1958, p.220): it is precisely because of the contingency, non-sovereignty and anonymity of action in public that, Arendt claims, political philosophy since Plato has attempted to "escape from politics altogether" (ibid., p.222). By developing her conception of freedom as an explicitly *political* conception – that is, as a conception that accepts, indeed, *embraces*, the non-sovereignty and contingency of politics – Arendt re-values one of the fundamental aspects of our being-in-the-world, namely our being-with-others.[3] Arendt's conception of freedom, in other words, is a reversal of the Platonic turning away from this world of intersubjectivity and politics.

In order to conceive of freedom as a 'this-worldly' reality, Arendt attaches it, even *restricts* it, to the public realm. For Hannah Arendt, the freedom of action lies in the boundlessness of the processes begun by action, a boundlessness that makes the consequences of action unforeseeable. But this boundlessness, she claims, is only possible if actions are performed under conditions of plurality, where there are others to witness, take up, and react to these actions. Arendt further claims that the plurality that makes this boundlessness possible is itself only possible within a clearly defined public realm. But this restriction of freedom to the public realm is problematic.

In this essay, I will attempt to problematize Hannah Arendt's rigid public/ private distinction by drawing on Michel Foucault's analyses of power and freedom. But while her categories can be problematized by drawing on some of Foucault's insights, I will attempt to show how this very problematization suggests ways in which Arendt's analysis can be extended or revised. Thus, this essay is divided into

[3] For a good discussion of Hannah Arendt's critique of Martin Heidegger's failure to take the *Mitsein* (being-with-others) of *dasein* seriously, see Benhabib, 1996, pp.104-107, and Barash, 1996, pp. 251-

five chapters: in the first, I attempt to make clear what Arendt's conception of freedom is, and how and why she restricts it to the public-political realm. In the second chapter, I take up another theorist for whom the public/ private distinction is important for locating freedom, namely Jürgen Habermas. The comparison between Habermas and Arendt is interesting because there is an inversion, between them, of the relationship between freedom and the public sphere: for Habermas, freedom is a reality that exists prior to the sphere of intersubjective relations, and as such it becomes a matter for the intimate sphere, while the public sphere becomes the sphere of public authority. But this Habermasian inversion of the categories is itself problematic. In the first place, by making freedom independent of the realm of intersubjectivity, Habermas seems to be falling back into that Platonic suspicion of politics. That is, by defining freedom as some independent, 'inner' reality, Habermas is making that 'fatal' equation of freedom with will power (Arendt, 1993, p.162), and therefore with sovereignty. Secondly (which is essentially a more specific reformulation of the first concern), Habermas's conception of freedom as an 'inner' reality seems to be an instance of what Foucault calls the 'repressive hypothesis,' the very hypothesis that Foucault goes to great lengths to argue against.

In the third chapter, I define what I call a Foucauldian freedom critique of Arendt's categories. In this chapter, I discuss some of Michel Foucault's analyses of power and freedom, and try to see what consequences they have for Arendt's categories. It is also in this chapter that I take up the question raised above concerning how Habermas's definition of freedom operates as an independent reality. I then go on, in chapter four, to analyze some secondary literature on Arendt from the

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perspective of this Foucauldian freedom critique, in order to see if this literature offers possible ways to revise or extend her categories such that they might take Foucault's analyses of power and freedom into consideration.

In the fifth and final chapter, taking my cue from Bonnie Honig's interpretation of Arendt, I attempt a revision of Arendt's categories using her own thought as material for this revision. Thus, I attempt a redefinition of her categories as temporal categories instead of the somewhat standard interpretation of them as spatial categories. This temporal interpretation, I argue, opens up possibilities for a relocation of Arendtian freedom. Indeed, I argue that this interpretation invites us to conceive freedom as a much more ubiquitous reality than Arendt herself thought it to be.

Chapter 1: Hannah Arendt and the Public-Political Realm

Introduction

The question I will set out to answer here is the following: What is Hannah Arendt's conception of political freedom? As such, this chapter will be, for the most part, an exercise in exposition. In order to get clear on what freedom is for Arendt, it is important to get clear on what the 'public realm' is that she places such emphasis on, as freedom and the public-political realm are, for Arendt, very closely related. So in this examination of freedom and the public realm, I will turn to three of Arendt's major works: her *The Human Condition, On Revolution,* and "What is Freedom?."

My starting point will be the final chapter of Arendt's *On Revolution*, where she discusses what she sees as the 'lost treasure' of the revolutionary tradition. This 'treasure' is, for Arendt, the space wherein direct political action is possible. For example, in the French revolution, this 'treasure' took the form of the *sociétés populaires* (Arendt, 1990, p. 240) that "regarded it as their main, if not their sole task to discuss all matters pertaining to public affairs, to talk about them and to exchange opinions without necessarily arriving at propositions, petitions, addresses, and the like" (ibid., p.243). These were the immediate, spontaneous aftermath or result of the revolution. In the context of the American Revolution, the political space took the form of the town-hall meetings, which, Arendt argues, were not so much the aftermath or result of revolution, but rather its conditions of possibility. Indeed, these political spaces appeared prior to American independence in the form of the subdivision of New England into townships. These townships were marked by town-hall meetings, where the colonists would have a share in 'public business.' By so

engaging in public affairs, the colonists experienced what they called public happiness/ public freedom (ibid., p.119). In other words, the people of the colonies would attend these town assemblies "neither exclusively because of duty nor, and even less, to serve their own interests but most of all because they enjoyed the discussions, the deliberations, and the making of decisions" (ibid., p.119).

Arendt considers these constituent assemblies as treasures because they are the only spaces wherein freedom can be practiced. Arendt's emphasis on the constituent assembly as the space wherein freedom is practiced highlights a certain tension between her conception of political freedom and the conventional liberal conception of freedom and government. It is this tension that I would like to explore here.

1(i) The Public and the Private (Freedom and Civil Liberties)

The differences between Hannah Arendt's conception of freedom and the conventional liberal conception of freedom come to light in Arendt's discussion of the revolutionary spirit of the American revolutionists. Arendt argues that the revolutionary spirit was of a twofold character: in the first instance, the revolutionary spirit was marked by what she calls the 'pathos of novelty' (ibid., p.34), which is the insistence on the importance or dignity of starting something entirely new. This pathos of novelty was always connected with the idea of freedom: "Only where this pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom are we entitled to speak of revolution" (ibid., p.34). The second aspect of the revolutionary spirit was the concern with foundation/ constitution: Having experienced the happiness that came with starting something entirely new, the

revolutionists wanted to lay the foundation of a new body politic that would enable others of future generations to also experience novelty and freedom. In other words, the revolutionists wanted to lay down a foundation in order to "assure the survival of the spirit out of which the act of foundation sprang" (ibid., p.126).

But now there seems to arise a paradox: by laying the foundations of a new body politic, were not the revolutionists limiting the possibilities for future generations' experiences of novelty? Arendt herself makes allusion to this seeming paradox: "...we may find it difficult to understand that revolution on the one hand, and constitution and foundation on the other, are like correlative conjunctions" (ibid., p.126). This difficulty, however, arises only when we understand the relationship between freedom and constitution/ foundation in the conventional liberal sense.

According to the liberal tradition, the realm of freedom is the private realm. Freedom, on this understanding, is a potentiality inherent in 'man,' one that needs no external institutions for its actualization. As a consequence, the political is assigned but instrumental value: the function of government becomes the protection of the private realm and the 'freedom' that occurs in it (the function of government, in other words, becomes security). Indeed, the political becomes *antithetical* to freedom. Alluding to this conception of the relation of freedom to the political, Arendt asks, in an ironic tone: "Was not the liberal credo, 'the less politics the more freedom,' right after all?...Is it not true, as we all somehow believe, that politics is compatible with freedom only because and insofar as it guarantees a possible freedom *from* politics?" (1993b, p.149; emphasis in text). This freedom from politics requires some mechanism by which it can be guaranteed. The constitution becomes this mechanism,

and as such its main purpose turns into the limiting of government in such a way that it will not encroach upon the private realm of freedom. From a conventional liberal perspective, then, the constitution is seen as institutionalizing or reinforcing the public-private split, where the private is the realm of freedom and the public is the realm of power.

One of the oft-cited justifications or sources for this liberal understanding of constitutionalism is the idea of the balance of powers contained in the American Constitution. According to the liberal understanding, the balance of powers in the Constitution is meant to be a mechanism by which the different powers of government act as checks on each other such that their power and ambition are limited. However, Arendt argues that the balance of powers contained in the Constitution is meant to accomplish precisely the opposite: it is meant to *increase* power. She argues that the original intention in institutionalizing this balance of powers was to combine the thirteen 'sovereign' states in such a way that they would enjoy the benefits of monarchy (unified action) with respect to foreign affairs without in so doing destroying the power of each individual republic (Arendt, 1990, p.152). Thus, she writes: "And in this task of the Constitution there was no longer any question of constitutionalism in the sense of civil rights…but of erecting a system of powers that would check and balance in such a way that the power neither of the union nor of its parts, the duly constituted states, would decrease or destroy one another" (ibid., p.152). Arendt also refers to this balance of power for the purposes of the increase of power as the 'federal principle,' or the principle of a 'Commonwealth for increase' (ibid., p.171).

What Arendt wants to point out with this 'federal principle' is that there is a way of conceiving of the public-private distinction (and the role of the Constitution with respect to this distinction) that is different from the liberal understanding of it, and that, indeed, the 'Founding Fathers' themselves did not conceive of the Constitution as simply serving the purpose of limiting governmental powers. This different conception of the private/ public split inverts the relationship between the public and the private vis-à-vis freedom: according to this reformulation, freedom only occurs in the public realm. The private realm – the realm of the household – is the realm of the materiality of the body, of 'man' *qua* organic, natural being who is caught up in the ever-recurring, natural cycles of generation and decay. Characterized in this way, the private realm leaves no space for freedom. Why Arendt thinks this is so becomes clear in her discussion of the activity associated with the realm of the household, namely labor.

One of the defining characteristics of the laboring activity is its futility. Labor, as the activity of the private realm, sustains life. Since life is only sustainable through consumption, then what follows is that labor leaves nothing behind; what it produces is immediately consumed: "It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent. And yet this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends on it" (Arendt, 1958, p.87). Because it leaves nothing behind, labor becomes, in a sense, circular: labor does not end with the coming into the world of some product of its efforts (as is the case with work), as there is no such product since life consumes what labor

produces. And given that life requires continuous consumption, then labor is caught up in a recurring cycle of production and consumption. This circularity ends when the life of the organism comes to an end. Thus, Arendt writes: "*laboring* always moves in the same circle, which is prescribed by the biological process of the living organism and the end of its 'toil and trouble' comes with the death of this organism" (ibid., p.98; emphasis in text). So, laboring occurs for no other purpose, for no other end or end product, but the sustenance of life. When it is viewed in this light, we see that there is no place for freedom in the laboring activity: labor is completely determined by the life processes of 'man' *qua* natural, organic being (*qua* animal (ibid., p.84)).

1(ii) Freedom

It is by viewing the private realm as the realm of freedom that one encounters what Arendt calls the 'age-old contradictions and antinomies' that mine the question of freedom (Arendt, 1993b, p.143). The private realm is the realm of necessity. Everything we do in this realm is determined by biological/ natural processes. Thus, although our conscience tells us that "we are free and hence responsible" (ibid., p.143), and although in political as well as moral matters we operate on the 'axiomatic assumption' of human freedom (ibid., p.143), nevertheless in our everyday existence in the private realm "we orient ourselves according to the principle of causality" (ibid., p.143). By viewing freedom as residing in the private realm, we are forced to concede that freedom is, in fact, but a chimera: "...thought itself, in its theoretical as well as its pre-theoretical form, makes freedom disappear" (ibid., p.145).

Arendt argues that this freedom that occurs outside the political realm, this anti-political 'inner-freedom,' is in fact derivative of public freedom (ibid., p.146). She argues that "we first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in our intercourse with ourselves" (ibid., p.148), and that the retreat to an inner freedom – where no other has access – occurs when 'outer' freedom is denied (ibid., p.146). So intersubjectivity becomes crucial to the question of freedom. But what does this mean?

Recall that the private realm is the realm of life and its necessities: it is the realm of the materiality of the body. Intersubjectivity, on the other hand, is 'external,' if you will: it deals with appearances. Action in the public realm, then, deals with externalities, and as such is not bound by the limits and necessities of the body. Indeed, Arendt points out that not only is action in the public realm not bound by the limits of the body, but that moreover, just by virtue of the plurality inherent in the public realm, this action is not bound by *any* limits: it is bound*less* (Arendt, 1958, p.190). Actions in the public realm occur among and between a plurality of actors who themselves act. Thus, any given action can and is taken up by a variety of actors, who then react/ re-act: "Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others. Thus action and reaction among men never move in a closed circle and can never be reliably confined to two partners" (ibid., p.190). This very boundlessness of the processes begun by action means that actions necessarily transcend the actor's motives: no matter what the actor's motives, intentions, or aims

were in acting, the action itself inevitably leads to other actions and reactions that the actor herself could not have foretold.

That actions, by virtue of their boundlessness, transcend the motives of the actors is crucial. Arendt writes: "Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other. This is not to say that motives and aims are not important factors in every single act, but they are its determining factors, and action is free to the extent that it is able to transcend them" (ibid., p.151). Since actions are free only insofar as they transcend motives, and since this transcendence is only possible where there is a plurality of actors who can take up, interpret, and react to these actions, then it seems that freedom is only possible where intersubjective interactions occur.

But the intersubjectivity/ plurality that is required for freedom is not straight-forward. I think it might be useful to introduce a distinction here between 'meaningful' and 'simple' pluralities. A 'simple' plurality would be the simple numerical plurality that occurs even in the private realm. This kind of plurality is not 'meaningful,' because people *qua* laborers are essentially united by the commonality of the drive for the sustenance of life: "...for what urged them on was the cry for bread, and the cry for bread will always be uttered with one voice" (Arendt, 1990, p.94). In other words, people *qua* laborers, *qua* organic beings, are not distinct. A 'meaningful' plurality, on the other hand, would be the plurality that occurs in the realm of appearances.

The realm of appearances is the realm of externalities. As such, it is 'liberated' from the biological necessities that determine the private realm: people are

no longer united by the commonality of their drives. Instead, they are united by the commonality of the world. The 'world,' as Arendt is here using the term, is the set of tangible objects that are produced through the activity of 'work.' These objects are 'tangible' in the sense that various different people have a common experience of them: objects are tangible in that they bind people together. However, at the same time as they bind, they separate: although different people have a common experience of worldly objects, nevertheless these people approach the world from different perspectives: "For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects" (Arendt, 1958, p.57). To illustrate the mediation of the realm of appearances by the world, Arendt uses the metaphor of a table (ibid., p.52): just as the table relates and separates those sitting around it, so the world relates and separates people in the public realm. It is due to this perspectival experience of the world that each individual human being can be said to be distinct: from the perspectival experience of the world arises a diversity of opinions as well as a multiplicity of interests. And it is from this distinctness that the need for speech arises: "If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough" (ibid., p.176). Speech, then, is the mark of individual distinctness: speech becomes the act of disclosure by which people "reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (ibid., p.179).

And so the plurality of the realm of appearances, as the realm that is liberated from the necessities of life and the drives that accrue to those necessities, is 'meaningful' in that not only does it refer to the mere fact that there is a number of people in this realm, but moreover it refers to the diversity of perspectives, and to the diversity of interests that emerges from these various perspectives. And given that such a plurality is only possible in the realm of appearances/ the public realm, then freedom itself is only possible in the public realm. Indeed, Arendt argues that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (1993b, p.146): that freedom is only possible in the public/political realm is the very reason why this realm even exists. And so, from the discussion above on freedom, we can derive the various aspects of the public/ political realm.

1(iii) The Public Realm

First, there needs to be a "politically organized world...into which each of the free men could insert himself by word and deed" (ibid., p.148): there needs to be a tangible worldly space that both relates and separates the actors in the public realm. When such a space is provided and/ or guaranteed, a 'meaningful' plurality ensues, and the actions and speech of the actors are viewed/ experienced from various perspectives. This multiply situated experience of actions and speech gives them a certain degree of worldly reality. Freedom as a 'demonstrable fact' (ibid., p.148) needs a common worldly space where people can meet and act/ speak: "wherever the man-made world does not become the scene for action or speech – as in despotically ruled communities which banish their subjects into the narrowness of the home and

thus prevent the rise of the public realm – freedom has no reality" (ibid., pp.148, 149).

Second, people must meet in this space primarily in order to disclose themselves, to distinguish themselves and to start new processes (to practice their freedom). For if this self-disclosure, quest for distinction, and the beginning of new processes is overshadowed by the instrumental requirement to arrive at some end-goal, or by some other ulterior motive (other than to practice their freedom), then their actions are not free, but determined by this ulterior motive. What Arendt calls the 'emancipation of labor' or the 'rise of the social' is precisely the instrumentalization of the public realm for the sake of "securing the necessities of life and providing for their abundance" (Arendt, 1958, p.126).

We get two slightly different stories about the rise of the social, depending on whether we turn to *On Revolution* or *The Human Condition.* In *On Revolution*, Arendt discusses how, in the context of the American Revolution, this instrumentalization of the public realm occurred when the founders shifted their attention away from the concern for direct democracy to the question of representation. Arendt points out that the purpose of representational government can be understood in two ways (1990, p.237): (1) As "a mere substitute for direct action of the people;" and (2) as "a popularly controlled rule of the people's representatives over the people." In the first case, the representatives essentially become "the paid agents of people who, for whatever reasons, are not able, or do not wish, to attend to public business." The representatives, as those who are in the public realm, do not act in their own interests as public actors, but act in the name of others whose interests

can only be private. The public realm is taken over by government as administration of private concerns, and consequently the public realm as the realm of freedom is eliminated. In the second instance, voters surrender their power between elections. The "age-old distinction between ruler and ruled" reasserts itself, and "once more, the people are not admitted to the public realm." In either case, the power of government and the freedom of the people are no longer coextensive. This separation of power and freedom was marked, in the context of the American Revolution, by the shift in emphasis from 'the contents of the Constitution' – that is, from "the creation and partition of power, and the rise of a new realm" (ibid., p.135) – to the Bill of Rights, which guaranteed that "the pursuit of private happiness would be protected and furthered by public power" (ibid., p.135). The Constitution, instead of providing the framework within which freedom could be practiced, came to be seen as the mechanism by which the power of government was limited. The political, instead of being affirmed as the realm of freedom, came to be seen as a necessary evil, and public business as a burden.

In the context of the French Revolution, the emancipation of labor, or the invasion of the public realm by social concerns, occurred not after, but during the actual revolution. One of the important characteristics of the French Revolution – one of the characteristics that differentiated it from the American Revolution – was that it took place amidst the great poverty of the (French) people.[4] The revolutionists,

[4] Strangely enough, Arendt seems to bracket the issue of slavery in America, and the possible role the misery/obscurity of the slaves played in the American revolution. Her only allusion to slavery is in *On Revolution*, p.70, where she writes:

> And the fact that John Adams was so deeply moved by [the issue of obscurity], more deeply than he or anyone else of the Founding Fathers was ever moved by sheer misery, must strike us as very strange indeed when we remind ourselves that the absence of the social question from the American scene was, after all, quite

surrounded by poverty and misery, could not help but feel compassion for the poor. And, although the French revolutionists were initially inspired by the hatred of tyranny (ibid., p.73), compassion soon became the driving force of the revolution (ibid., p.75). What had initially been a struggle for the liberation from tyranny soon became a struggle for the liberation from "the yoke of necessity" (ibid., p.74), since the poor, by virtue of being in a state of constant want, were "under the absolute dictate of their bodies, that is, under the absolute dictate of necessity" (ibid., p.60). As such, they necessarily remained excluded from "the light of the public realm where excellence could shine" (ibid., p.69): the liberation from tyranny, given the poverty of the many in France, meant freedom only for the few. What followed from this was that a special effort was needed to unite the interests of the freed revolutionists and the interests of the poor who were still under the yoke of necessity. For this, the revolutionists drew on Rousseau's *volonté générale* (ibid., p.76).

What is significant about the general will, as opposed to the 'will of all' (consent), is that the general will must be one and indivisible if it is to function at all (ibid., p.76). This oneness and indivisibility of the general will was constructed out of the many wills of the individuals by the postulation of a common enemy (ibid., p.77), which turned out to be the particular wills and interests of the individuals: "The common enemy within the nation is the sum total of the particular interests of all citizens" (ibid., p.78). The introduction of the social question into the public realm, which took the form of the domination of compassion over all other of the sentiments

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deceptive, and that abject and degrading misery was present everywhere in the form of slavery and Negro labour.

This would seem to be a significant fact, but Arendt does not go on to discuss it.

of the revolutionists, meant that the 'meaningful' plurality of the citizens had to be eliminated:

> Virtue has indeed been equated with selflessness ever since Robespierre preached a virtue that was borrowed from Rousseau, and it is the equation which has put, as it were, its indelible stamp upon the revolutionary man and his innermost conviction that the value of a policy may be gauged by the extent to which it will contradict all particular interests, and that the value of a man may be judged by the extent to which he acts against his own interest and against his own will. (ibid., p.79)

Thus, not only was freedom eliminated in the French Revolution because necessity entered the public realm, but also because the social question required that the space between citizens be eliminated – that space that was required for actions to be boundless and for freedom to acquire tangible reality.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt discusses the so-called 'rise of the social' in more general terms. Thus, she traces this phenomenon to the emergence of modernity generally: "but the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state" (Arendt, 1958, p.28).

According to the story offered in *The Human Condition*, modernity was marked by the introduction into the public realm of "housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family" (ibid., p.33). What this entailed was the subversion of the conditions of possibility of action. Recall that in the private realm there exists at most but a 'simple' plurality: in the private realm, we may be faced with a numerical plurality of people, but these people, *qua* private individuals, are united by the commonality of their biological needs and drives. Thus,

once 'housekeeping,' or "the activities connected with sheer survival" (ibid., p.46), enters and takes over the public realm, then individuation must give way to conformism, and disclosure through spontaneous action must cede its privileged status to rule-governed behaviour (ibid., p.41). Through this discussion of the 'rise of the social,' we see emphasized the importance that Arendt places on the public-private distinction. For Arendt, this public realm wherein freedom is possible must be a public realm *completely* emancipated from private concerns. The distinction, then, that Arendt draws between public and private is a very sharp one. And she offers such a negative valuation of modernity precisely because the rise of the modern era marked the blurring of that distinction.

Conclusion

So, the public realm must satisfy at least two conditions if it is to fulfill its function as the realm of freedom: it must first have some degree of worldly reality. That is, there must be some worldly space where people can come together, from various perspectives, to speak and act. In addition to this, the primary purpose for coming together cannot be the resolution of some or other social question: the actions of citizens cannot be determined by private concerns. From these fundamental conditions others follow. For example, we have seen above that the form of government best suited for this public realm is the republic, where people engage directly in the decision-making process (as opposed to representative democracy). And what seems to follow from this is that there must be a radical de-centering of governmental powers and institutions if freedom is to be at all possible. This radical de-centering is what happened prior to the American revolution in the form of the

town-hall meetings, and immediately following the French revolution in the form of the *sociétés populaires*, where the citizens met and exchanged reasons and acted – not necessarily, or primarily for the sake of arriving at some final resolution, but rather simply in order to experience the 'happiness' that followed from engaging in public affairs.

But the question then arises: although Arendt's claim that the '*raison d'être* of politics is freedom' is in many ways enabling, to what extent is freedom really restricted to the public/ political realm? Foucault, for example, argues that freedom appears wherever there are relations of power, and that furthermore relations of power are not restricted to the political sphere. For Foucault, in other words, there are practices of freedom almost everywhere we look. How would Arendt respond to this?

It seems important to examine how Arendt might take Foucault's insights about power and freedom into consideration for two main reasons. First, Foucault's analyses point to a possible limitation of Arendt's analyses: if Foucault is right about power and freedom, then it seems that Arendt, by restricting freedom to the public realm, is missing too much of the actual phenomenon of freedom. Second, by restricting freedom to the public realm, and in doing so defining the private realm as the realm of necessity, it would seem that Arendt subverts any possibility of problematizing and/ or redefining the roles that we are assigned in the private realm. Or, to put it in Foucauldian terms, it would seem that Arendt's narrow conception of freedom leaves very little space (if any at all) for the problematization of the limits of our subjectivity.

In what follows, I will discuss Jürgen Habermas's discussion of the public realm in order to try to bring the distinctiveness of Arendt's analysis into greater relief. For although it may seem that both Arendt and Habermas share a great deal with respect to their analyses of the public realm, I want to argue that it is precisely on the basis of those points of departure between the two that Arendtian freedom can be read as being more akin to Foucauldian freedom.

Chapter 2: Habermas and the Public Sphere: A Comparison with Hannah Arendt

Introduction

For Habermas, the public sphere is a historically specific category. And indeed, his purpose in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* seems to be to offer an historical analysis of the emergence of this category and the transformations it has undergone in order to discover the possibilities for reviving the now empty assumptions that representative democracy rests on. As Thomas McCarthy writes in his introduction to the English translation of Habermas's book, the question Habermas attempts to answer is: "can the public sphere be effectively reconstituted under radically different socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions? In short, is democracy possible?" (Habermas, p.xii).

For Hannah Arendt as well, the public-political realm in particular and democracy in general are today empty, meaningless categories whose enabling conditions, due to the 'rise of the social,' have disappeared. In this respect, both Habermas and Arendt are in agreement. But this agreement ends here: whereas Arendt equates the 'rise of the social,' and hence the decline of freedom and democracy, with modernity, Habermas traces the emergence of the public sphere precisely *in* modernity. So, while Arendt goes back to the ancient Greeks in search for the possibilities for reviving the public sphere – and in this sense can be seen as an 'anti-modernist' – Habermas turns to the project of modernity itself, and argues that democracy and freedom are possible if that project is completed, not rejected. In what follows, I want to examine in some detail Jürgen Habermas's historical analysis of the

emergence of the public realm in order to compare the conception of freedom that comes out of this analysis and particular valuation of modernity to Arendt's conception of freedom.

2(i). The Emergence of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Habermas traces the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere to the mercantilist phase of capitalist development in the sixteenth century (ibid., pp.17,18). Whereas prior to the mercantilist phase public authority was vested in the hands of estates in the form of the manorial lord's feudal authority, mercantilism itself led to the consolidation of power into a centralized state apparatus. Power was no longer identified with the person of the prince or manorial lord; it was, in other words, depersonalized. There arose, as a consequence, a continuous, national state apparatus, and public authority took on the form of a unified 'thing'. Public authority was objectified.

Over and against this consolidated, continuous state authority, there arose civil society. Habermas points out two aspects of the process through which civil society came into being. First, due to the dismantling of the feudal system, the 'supraindividual' frameworks that "harnessed the whole person" into 'systems of purpose' (ibid., p.19) became the domain of the family: "...each family's individual economy had become the center of its existence" (Schumpeter quoted in Habermas, p.19). In other words, the concern for economic reproduction fell out of the hands of the public authority and into the hands of the household. At the same time, this economic activity of the family had to be oriented towards the (suprafamilial)

commodity market: economic activity, while undergoing a process of privatization, also went through a process of 'socialization'. Habermas writes: "...the economic conditions under which this [household economic] activity now took place lay outside the confines of the single household; for the first time they were of general interest" (ibid., p.19).

And so, during the mercantilist phase, there emerged a particular conception of the public/private distinction: the public was the sphere of public authority and was equated with the state; the private was the sphere of economic reproduction and included both the household as well as the 'in-between' sphere, if you will, that was suprafamilial and yet was not the state.

The very 'in-betweenness' of the public sphere of the private realm[5] made of this sphere a zone of tension between public authority and private initiative (ibid., p.24). What resulted from this tension was that private people came together to problematize state regulation, and to "compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion" (ibid., pp.25, 26). Thus, this in-between zone became a 'critical zone' in that it "provoked the critical judgement of a public making use of its reason" (ibid., p.24). It is precisely this critical zone that Habermas calls the bourgeois public sphere.

This public sphere of private people was a specifically bourgeois category for essentially two reasons. Recall that the post-absolutist-state conception of the private sphere included the realm of the household and the realm of social reproduction (which resulted from what I called above the 'socialization' of household economic

activity). The tension that arose in the sphere of social reproduction – which tension gave rise to the critical public sphere of private people – existed only between private people as commodity owners and public authority. Not only was it commodity owners' interests (namely, their autonomy as participants in the market of commodity exchange) that were being voiced in the critical sphere of social reproduction, but it was the bourgeoisie that was best equipped to take on the task of compelling public authority to legitimate itself: the bourgeoisie had already developed its public use of reason by engaging in rational-critical debate in the public sphere of the world of letters. Thus, engaging in rational-critical debate about public authority was simply a question of "functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters already equipped with institutions of the public and with forums for discussion" (ibid., p.51).

As Habermas points out, the public sphere in the world of letters was not "autochtonously bourgeois," for it "preserved a certain continuity with the publicity involved in the representation enacted at the prince's court" (p.29). Nevertheless, the experiences about which the public debated, as they were represented in literary works, once these works were released from the patronage of the court (ibid., p.38), sprang from a specifically bourgeois subjectivity that was oriented towards an audience (ibid., pp.43, 49). This subjectivity was specifically bourgeois because it arose out of the bourgeois experience of the patriarchal conjugal family (ibid., p.43). The privatization of economic activity that followed from the mercantilist phase, and the subsequent 'socialization' of this activity, led the bourgeois family to interpret its intimate realm as the realm emancipated from economic concerns: the intimate realm

[5] The public realm in the private sphere is to be distinguished from the public sphere of public authority. See Habermas, p.30, for a graphic representation of the post-absolutist-state public/private

was the realm of 'pure' subjectivity. This 'pure' subjectivity was expressed through letters (or the diary, which was essentially a letter addressed to the sender) (ibid., pp.48, 49): there was always an addressee in the subjectivity of the bourgeois family. The 'typical' literary genre of that time was the psychological autobiographical novel, wherein this subjectivity strove for self-clarification (ibid., p.49). The relationship between author, work, and public changed (ibid., p.50): the public 'identified' with the work and the author (in that this work reflected in some sense this 'pure' subjectivity), and would gather to discuss what they had read.

And so the bourgeoisie engaged in rational-critical debate about literary works in the *salons* and coffee-houses (ibid., pp.31-36). This debate was marked by the assumed parity of the participants (which ensured that one's social condition did not become a coercive factor in the debate), by an unprecedented openness to issues to be discussed (which guaranteed that no particular issues were unduly excluded in order to protect particular interests), and by universality – that is, the in-principle universal inclusiveness of the debate (which was an – albeit imperfect – guarantee that the debate, since it was in accord with all empirical consciousnesses, was in accord with reason) (ibid., p.36). These three characteristics of the public realm of the world of letters are the presuppositions of rational-critical debate in that it is only when these conditions are satisfied that there is a guarantee that the force of the better argument, and not coercion of any kind, shall prevail. It was these three characteristics of the public sphere in the world of letters, once they were transposed to the political public sphere, that could enable the public to compel public authority to legitimate itself: it was the bourgeoisie, because of its experiences in the public sphere in the world of

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distinction.

letters, that was best equipped for the (in principle) transformation of domination (which is the defining characteristic of public authority) into reason (or *voluntas* into *ratio*) (ibid., p.81).

2(ii). The Contradiction of the Bourgeois Public Sphere and Its Transformation

Habermas goes on to discuss how this bourgeois public sphere, as it was institutionalized in the constitutional liberal state, was beset with a contradiction (ibid., pp.81-88). Recall that the liberal constitutional state was predicated on the transformation of domination into a rational order, which implied the universality of the public sphere (for universality was the guarantee of rationality). However, as was mentioned above, the public sphere reflected and defended only the interests of the bourgeoisie (property owners). This contradiction could remain 'hidden,' so to speak, during the liberal era because the assumption that was predominant then was that the market/ civil society functioned according to laws that were inherent to it – that it was an *ordre naturel* (ibid., p.80) – and that these laws were inherently just in the sense that, if left alone, they would lead to an equilibration, and thus neutralization, of power. Thus, on this assumption, everyone could potentially be a bourgeois, and, as such, a citizen. As long as this assumption seemed to hold true, i.e. was not contradicted, then "the interest of the bourgeois class could be identified with the general interest" (ibid., p.87). This was the case during the liberal phase of capitalism, and consequently "the public sphere as the organizational principle of the bourgeois constitutional state had credibility" (ibid., p.87).

This state of affairs did not last long. From the late nineteenth century on, societal power became increasingly concentrated in private hands (ibid., pp. 143, 144). Due to this concentration of power in society, the assumption/ fiction of an inherently just *ordre naturel* was rendered obsolete: "Processes of concentration and crisis pulled the veil of an exchange of equivalents off the antagonistic structure of society" (ibid., p.144). Hegel (in his critique of Kant), Marx (in his critique of Hegel), and Mill and Tocqueville (in their critiques of socialism) had already diagnosed this contradiction inherent in the bourgeois interpretation of civil society.

Kant wanted to subsume politics to morality (ibid., p.102): politics, in order to be just, had to harmonize "with the freedom of every single person" (ibid., p.103). The medium by which this harmony was to be achieved was through a process of rationalization: politics had to be in accord with reason, for only when the coercive measures of the state were rationalized by the subjects could the subjects be free. Furthermore, "reason in its historical process of becoming actual required a union of empirical consciousnesses as a corollary to the intelligible unity of consciousness as such" (ibid., p.116). Reason could only be guaranteed through a consensus arrived at through public deliberation. Although this consensus, in order to really represent reason, had to be universal, Kant believed that admission into the public sphere had to be limited to property-owning private people. He thought this because only they were truly autonomous (ibid., p.109, 110), and so only they could arrive at a truly rational (i.e. non-coerced) consensus. He could reconcile this factual exclusiveness of the public sphere with the in-principle universality of it because he assumed that there was inherent justice in civil society and the market. Indeed, he went further to argue

that history was progressing towards the situation wherein what Habermas calls the 'juridical condition' (ibid., p.108) – that is, the condition of possibility for the generalization of bourgeois autonomy – could emerge. On this assumption, commodity ownership was potentially open to all, a potential that was in fact, according to Kant, soon to be actualized as the end of History (Enlightenment) (ibid., p.111). Thus, Kant embraced the bourgeois public sphere because he shared the assumption of the inherent justice of civil society.

Hegel, according to Habermas, criticized Kant's celebration of the public sphere because the universality of public opinion was only a matter of contingency; it rested on forces external to it. According to Hegel, society was 'anarchic and antagonistic' (ibid., p.118). Hegel diagnosed a 'conflict of interest' within society between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (ibid., pp.118, 119). What followed from this was that the interests of the bourgeoisie could no longer be expected to represent the interests of everyone. Consequently, "the public opinion of the private people assembled to form a public no longer retained a basis of unity and truth; it degenerated to the level of a subjective opining of the many" (ibid., p.119). Rational-critical debate within the bourgeois public sphere, according to this diagnosis, could not be the medium through which political authority could be transformed into rational authority, since the consensus that would come out of this debate would be but a consensus of some particular interests among many. For Hegel, the solution was a return to the estate based system:

> Even civil society could not dispense with domination; indeed, to the extent to which it naturally tended toward disorganization, it had a special need for integration by political force. Hegel's construction of a state organized on the basis of estates reacted to contradictions which

> he certainly had already noticed in the reality of the constitutional state predicated on civil rights in its British and French versions. (ibid., p.122).

Marx criticized Hegel's return to the estates based system as an "impotent attempt of turning back the clock, an attempt 'within the political sphere itself to plunge man back into the limitations of his private sphere'" (ibid., pp.122, 123). The fact of the matter was that civil society had achieved a certain amount of independence from the state. The solution, for Marx, was not to return to a past when this separation was not complete, but to deal with the present situation. So Marx embraced the bourgeois public sphere, but wanted "to confront it...with the social conditions for the possibility of its utterly unbourgeois realization" (ibid., p.124). Marx, like Hegel, did not see civil society as a realm emancipated from domination and power. Indeed, within civil society, "new relationships of power, especially between owners and wage earners, were created" (ibid., p.124). And so, like Hegel, he saw the consensus that would come about through rational-critical debate in the bourgeois public sphere as 'mere ideology' (ibid., p.125). However, contrary to Hegel, what Marx wanted to see happen was not the abolition of the public sphere (in the form of a return to a pre-public sphere political situation), but rather the transformation of the structure of the public sphere itself. The rational-critical debate of the socialist public sphere, as Marx had conceptualized it, would have to transform into a rational order not only political domination, but also societal domination. Thus, the public sphere had to admit, as subjects of rational-critical debate, issues that hitherto had been left to be resolved by private persons in their capacity as private, autonomous owners of commodities: "In this counter-model, criticism and control by

the public were extended to that portion of the private sphere of civil society which had been granted to private persons by virtue of their power of control over the means of production – to the domain of socially necessary labor" (ibid., p.128). Marx called for the regulation of civil society by public authority.

Mill and Tocqueville rejected the assumption that both the classic model of the bourgeois public sphere as well as the socialist counter-model shared: the assumption of an *ordre naturel.* They were responding to a situation around them, wherein the public sphere was overcome by divided interests. The public was marked by compromises, and conformity to the "currently dominant opinion" (ibid., p.133). Mill's and Tocqueville's response was to call for a new public sphere, one that was more restricted. Their suggestion was that government be representative, where representation would act as a filter through which the 'passions' of the masses would be 'purified' (ibid., p.136). While they recognized the antagonistic nature of society, and in this sense shared some of Marx's insights, they were nevertheless rejecting the socialist proposition of an absolutist public authority. They rejected this proposition because they rejected the view that public authority, once emancipated from political authority, would operate according to the laws of political economy "without extended controversies" (ibid., p.140).

And so these thinkers had diagnosed, to a certain extent, the contradiction inherent in the classic bourgeois model of the public sphere. But, according to Habermas, there were two processes that led to the breakdown of the bourgeois public sphere. First, there was the neomercantilism that followed from the recognition that civil society was not an *ordre naturel.* The concentration of power in society led

those who had lost economically to call on the state to intervene: "On the basis of this formally conceded possibility of a voice in political affairs, both the pauperized strata and the classes threatened by them tried to gain an influence that was to compensate politically for the violation of equality of opportunity in the economic realm (if, indeed, it had ever existed at all)" (ibid., p.145). It was this part of the first process of the dialectical unfolding of the public sphere that these thinkers had diagnosed. But this was not the whole story: the process of neomercantilism was more far-reaching than this. Furthermore, there was a second process to consider, that of the refeudalization of society. These two processes together that subverted the public/private distinction upon which the bourgeois public sphere rested.

According to Habermas, hand in hand with the concentration of societal power and wealth into private hands came the objectification of control over large enterprises: these enterprises, due mostly to their size, became, to a certain degree, independent of their owners', shareholders', and/ or executives' control (ibid., p.152). As a consequence, the sphere of commodity exchange lost its character as a sphere of private individual autonomy (ibid., p.153). Since the private was still associated with autonomy, then the sphere of commodity exchange lost its character as a private sphere: the occupational sphere generally became deprivatized. And so the sphere of private individual autonomy shrank to include only the family: the family "drew back upon itself" (ibid., p.154). The intimate sphere of the family was seen as the last preserve of freedom, while the social sphere of economic reproduction became the sphere of necessity and obligation. But this self-interpretation of the intensified privacy of the family was, in fact, an illusion (ibid., p.156).

The fact of the matter was that the same objectification/ deprivatization of the occupational sphere that was supposed to have led to the intensified privacy of the household led to what Habermas calls the "hollowing out of the intimate sphere" (ibid., p.57). A corollary of the concentration of societal powers and wealth was that family property was replaced by individual incomes. This, in turn, meant that the bourgeois family could no longer be a self-sufficient, self-supporting framework for the individual. Instead, the functions of support in cases of emergency and old-age were taken on by the state (ibid., p.155). These protective measures were soon extended to include preventive measures (ibid., p.155), such as " upbringing and education, protection, care, and guidance – indeed,...the transmission of elementary tradition and frameworks of orientation" (ibid., p.155). Thus, not only did the state intervene in the market, on behalf of the economically weaker strata, in order to counter-act the tendencies towards concentration – this kind of increased state activity could still be consistent with the public-private distinction in that in this case the state only took over some functions in the sphere of commerce and social labor (ibid., p.231) for the purposes of ultimately preserving the autonomy of the private realm by (in principle) neutralizing societal power – but, moreover, the state, as an indirect consequence of the objectification of control of the occupational sphere, took on many of the formative functions hitherto limited to the intimate sphere of the bourgeois family. It was when the state took on these formative functions that the public (as the sphere of power and control), and the private (as the sphere of autonomy) became blurred.

The subversion of the public-private distinction was consummated by the 'delegation of jurisdictional competences of state organs to societal organizations' (ibid., p.198). With the introduction into the public sphere of competing private interests (those interests that had during the liberal era, remained private), consensus could no longer take the form of parliamentary agreement (ibid., p.198). Instead, the settling of conflicts had to take the form it did in the market; political decisions were made through a process of 'bargaining' (ibid., p.198). Since parliament was not equipped to institutionalize this kind of compromise formation, this 'bargaining' had to move to extra-parliamentary sites. Bargaining, unlike rational-critical debate (at least as construed by Habermas), is a contest of strength and power. Competing interests, in order to be competitive at all, had to be collectivized, and these collective interests were represented by special interest groups and parties. Thus, compromise and agreements between the competing interests in society and the state were no longer made by the public itself (or by its representatives in parliament). Instead, these compromises were hammered out by 'the circle of bureaucracies, special-interest associations, and parties' (ibid., p.199). These intermediate organizations were taking on many of the 'bridging' functions of the public sphere. What was happening, then, was what Habermas calls the 'disorganization of the public sphere' (ibid., p.177). Furthermore, the public was becoming increasingly excluded from the exercise of public authority in that decisions and agreements became intra-organizational and between these organizations and the state bureaucracies. As Habermas writes:

> The process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies,

> special interest associations, parties and public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation. (ibid., p.176)

In short, according to Habermas's historical analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere, the introduction into the public sphere of the 'unpropertied masses' led to the disorganization of the public sphere into these intermediate organizations – or the refeudalization of society – and the subsequent transformation of the principle of publicity – publicity for acclamation (arranged from the top down) as opposed to publicity for legitimation (arranged from the bottom up) – which in turn eliminated the forums for the rational-critical debate about public authority by the public itself.

So, the question now becomes: given this transformation of society and the public sphere, what are the possibilities for a renewal of rational-critical debate by the public? Or, more precisely, under what conditions can rational-critical debate be renewed? These transformations have brought about certain reactive suggestions, suggestions aimed at limiting the 'plebiscitarily expanded form of the public realm' such that "internally haggled out resolutions" do not devolve into "party grandstanding," or, similarly, such that criminal trials do not become show trials "for the entertainment of consumers who, strictly speaking, are indifferent" (ibid., p.207).

Habermas argues against such reactive suggestions: "Any attempt at restoring the public sphere through the reduction of its plebiscitarily expanded form will only serve to weaken even more the residual functions genuinely remaining within it" (ibid., p.208). Instead, Habermas suggests that the restoration of the public sphere can

only be done if there is a more far-reaching publicity: publicity, Habermas says, must be expanded to include parties, politically influential mass media, and special interest groups. These organizations must be organized internally in a democratic fashion "to allow for unhampered communication and public rational-critical debate" (ibid., p.209). Furthermore, they have to make their internal proceedings public, as well as their activities, namely, "their pressure on the state apparatus and their use of power against one another, as well as the manifold relations of dependency and of economic intertwining" (ibid., p.209). In short, Habermas's suggestion is to treat these in-between societal organizations as if they were organs of the state about which there needs to be rational-critical debate: thus, Habermas is here calling for the rationalization not only of political, but also of societal power.

This more far-reaching publicity is possible only within the context of the social-welfare state. Recall that the liberal constitutional state was based on the assumption of the inherent justice of society/ the market. Once it became clear that society was not emancipated from domination, the state was called upon to intervene: "Substantive guarantees subjecting compromises between interests to the programmatic rules of *justicia distributiva* had to replace the formal ones [characteristic of the liberal constitutional state]" (ibid., p.225). Thus, there was in principle a strong element of continuity between the liberal constitutional state and the social-welfare state: insofar as the transition to the welfare state was meant as a move to guarantee a certain amount of 'justice' in civil society, both the welfare state and the liberal constitutional state wanted to see the normative ideals of "equality-guaranteeing universality and rightness" (ibid., p.225) actualized. 'Distributive

justice,' as Habermas characterizes it here, cashes itself out, then, as the guarantee of a certain amount of "equality of opportunity in the sharing of social recompenses and in participating in political institutions" (ibid., p.226). Under the changed circumstances of civil society (viz. the concentration of societal wealth and power into private hands), the basic liberal constitutional rights that were meant to guarantee this equality – such as, freedom of speech, or freedom of association (ibid., p.227) – had to be actively promoted by the state: the concentration of societal power meant that such publicist institutions as the media, instead of promoting freedom of speech, became instruments through which certain private interests were given privileged status and others boycotted (ibid., p.227). Without some kind of intervention, freedom of speech in these institutions was seriously curtailed. Ironically enough, then, the state had to intervene in order to ensure that there be at least some parity/ freedom of opinion(s) in the press. The more far-reaching publicity that Habermas claims is a necessary condition for a renewed rational-critical debate is possible only through state intervention: the social-welfare state, in Habermas's sense, is a proposition that stands in opposition to the (factual) refeudalization of society – which refeudalization, as was seen above, led to a change in the principle of publicity and the subsequent exclusion of the public in the compromises of the circle of societal powers and state bureaucracies.

2(iii). Habermas on Arendt

One interesting observation that can be made when comparing Habermas's and Arendt's views on the public sphere is that there is an inversion of categories that

occurs between the two. For Habermas, the private realm is essentially the realm of autonomy: the public-private distinction, as we have inherited it, Habermas claims, arose during the mercantilist phase of capitalist development, where public authority was consolidated into the state, and civil society began to conceive of itself in opposition to this newly objectified, national state authority. Civil society began to define itself as the realm of private autonomy that was confronted with state control.

Moreover, as I mentioned above, the emergence of this particular self-interpretation of civil society was the result of a twofold process: (1) the privatization, and (2) the 'socialization,' of economic reproduction. The private sphere was thus divided into the sphere of the market/ society, and the intimate sphere that was, in principle at least, emancipated from society (ibid., p.55). What followed from this was what Habermas calls the 'doubling of the private sphere' (ibid., p.29): there arose a distinction between the person as '*bourgeois*' and the person as '*homme.*' That is, there emerged a distinction between the person in his capacity as owner of goods and participant in the market and society, and the person in his capacity as human being – in his capacity as everything *but* owner of commodities. And so, the bourgeois intimate sphere, according to its self-interpretation, was the sphere of human relations emancipated from economic activity; it was the realm of "purely human relations" (ibid., p.48).

Habermas traces this self-interpretation to that particular situation that the bourgeois, as owner of commodities, found himself in during the 'liberal phase' at the close of the eighteenth century: the owners of commodities enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy from the state in their activity in the market; they made decisions in the

market freely. Thus, "[i]n this regard they owed obedience to no one and were subject only to the anonymous laws functioning in accord with an economic rationality immanent, so it appeared, in the market" (ibid., p.46). This autonomy was transposed to the intimate sphere: the bourgeois family's self-interpretation was that it was "established voluntarily and by free individuals…[and was] maintained without coercion" (ibid., p.46). Its basis, then, was supposed to be the love between the two spouses, and its function was the "non-instrumental development of all faculties that mark[ed] the cultivated personality" (ibid., pp.46, 47).

Of course, as Habermas points out, in reality the bourgeois family played a precisely defined role in the reproduction of capital. Factually, then, the voluntariness of the family was but an 'illusion,' its basis in love a fiction, and the cultivation of the family members was always informed by occupational requirements (ibid., pp.47, 48). Nevertheless, from these experiences of autonomy in the market, there emerged a conception of humanity "that was supposed to inhere in humankind as such and truly to constitute its absoluteness: the emancipation (still resonating with talk of 'pure' or 'common' humanity) of an inner realm, following its own laws, from extrinsic purposes of any sort" (ibid., p.47). 'Purely human relations' – that is to say, truly 'free' or voluntary relations that are emancipated from economic concerns – were the domain of the intimate sphere: by virtue of being located thus, humanity acquired certain connotations of purity, and freedom took on certain connotations of innateness.

This is, according to Habermas's analysis, a historically specific conception of freedom and humanity, one whose heyday was the liberal era. However, this

conception becomes normative in Habermas. His suggestion for the revival of rational-critical debate is that the continuity between the liberal constitutional state and the social welfare state be preserved: the virtues of the social welfare state lie precisely in the fact that its express purpose is to counteract, to a certain degree, societal powers in order to reestablish the private realm as the realm of autonomy.[6]

It should be noted that in his "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," published some 30 years after *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas amends somewhat the normative role he assigns to the bourgeois public sphere in his earlier work. Thus, by introducing, in his later works, his theory of communicative action, he "...prepares the way for a social science that proceeds reconstructively, identifies *the entire spectrum* of cultural and societal rationalization processes, and also traces them back beyond the threshold of modern societies" (Habermas, 1992, p.442; emphasis in text). He continues:

> Such a track no longer restricts the search for normative potentials to a formation of the public sphere that was specific to a single epoch. It removes the necessity for stylizing particular prototypical manifestations of an institutionally embodied communicative rationality in favor of an empirical approach... (ibid., pp.442, 443)

What Habermas points out here is that his approach to rational-critical debate has changed somewhat: instead of turning to the bourgeois public sphere of the liberal era as the ideal of rational-critical debate, he now turns to the "everyday communicative practices" (ibid., p.442) in order to draw from them those 'inescapable presuppositions' (Habermas, 1990, p.84) that everyone makes just by virtue of

[6] To be sure, Habermas's emphasis, in his later writings, shifts towards a more intersubjective conception of freedom, which shift is embodied in his theory of communicative action. Although this new approach is problematic in its own way, nevertheless, for the purposes of this argument, I want to

engaging in argumentative speech. It is from these presuppositions – that is, from this 'empirical approach' – and not from a 'stylized prototypical manifestation' of rational-critical debate, that Habermas puts together his theory of communicative action. Notice, however, that in his "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," Habermas does not reject the overall project of his earlier book, which was to "demonstrate how it may be possible, in our type of society, for 'the public...to set in motion a *critical* process of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it'" (Habermas, 1992, p.441; emphasis in text). Instead, he simply responds to the criticism of having over-stylized the social reality of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century bourgeois experience of the public sphere (ibid., pp.422, 423). Thus, he wants to downplay the role that the idealization of the bourgeois public sphere plays for his theory of communicative action (although he does maintain that the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century experience associational life in England, France, and Germany "...provide[d] the training ground for what were to become a future society's norms of political activity" (ibid., p.424)) by stressing his newer 'empirical approach.' But the normative conclusions that he draws from his historical analysis in *The Structural Transformation...* are the same that he draws later from the pragmatic presuppositions of argumentative speech. And so, in the context of this discussion, those aspects of freedom that follow from its being located in the private realm – those connotations of innateness, for example – are present as much in the late Habermas as they are in the early Habermas.

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limit myself to a discussion of his (for the most part earlier) works on the public sphere. (I thank Jocelyn Maclure for reminding me of Habermas's later focus on intersubjectivity).

For Arendt, on the other hand, the private realm is the realm of the materiality of the body: in the private realm, we are concerned with our own survival and reproduction, with our generation and decay. It is the realm, in other words, of that activity Arendt calls 'labor,' that futile yet necessary activity that sustains life (Arendt, 1958, p.87). As the activity that sustains life, labor is driven by necessity: our activity in the private realm is solely concerned with the biological necessities of life, and, as such, is determined by them. There is no space for freedom in the private realm.

Freedom can only occur, according to Arendt, in the public realm. One of the more important defining characteristics of the public realm is that it is the realm of intersubjectivity. As such, it is the realm of externalities. It is precisely because of this intersubjective character of the public realm that freedom is possible: action in the public, because it deals with externalities, is no longer bound by the limits of the body. Moreover, because of the plurality inherent in the public realm, actions become limit*less*: the presence of others who can react/re-act ensures that actions necessarily transcend the motives of the actor. This is crucial since, according to Arendt, actions are only free insofar as they are not determined by the aims and motives of the actor (Arendt, 1993, p.151). For Arendt, then, freedom exists only in the public realm, and this precisely because the public realm is the realm of intersubjectivity, and thus of externalities: freedom does not inhere in the person, it is not prior to the public. Freedom is, instead, a surface reality.

This inversion of the categories helps to explain, to a certain degree, the differences in the role that the so-called 'rise of the social' plays in both Arendt's and

Habermas's accounts.[7] For Habermas, the rise of the social was a condition of possibility for the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere: the economic activity of the household had to be directed towards the commodity market, and as such became of general (public) interest. It was within this suprafamilial sphere of economic reproduction that the 'critical zone' emerged which provoked the public use of reason. The public sphere, for Habermas, emerged out of the tension between public authority and private initiative in commodity exchange (autonomy), and that about which the public debated was the management of civil society and the market: the rise of the social, in other words, meant the rise of autonomy out of the household, which led to an inevitable confrontation between private, autonomous people and the state, which in turn led to the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere.

For Arendt, the rise of the social was precisely what subverted the public-private distinction, which in turn eliminated the public realm altogether. Recall that the private, according to Arendt, was the realm of biological necessities; the private was guided by the principle of causality. The public, on the other hand, was the realm of freedom; the public was guided by the principle of spontaneity/ new beginnings. The rise of the social – the introduction into the public realm of private concerns – meant that necessity entered the realm of freedom. The public realm was, consequently, demoted: it became one among many means to securing the necessities of life. And the private was no longer private, as the concerns of economic reproduction became public concerns.

[7] Habermas himself uses Arendt's term to designate more or less the same phenomenon (see Habermas, 1991, p.19).

So it seems that both Habermas and Arendt have somewhat contradictory ideas about the rise of the social and modernity. To be sure, Habermas shares, to a certain extent, some of Arendt's insights. For Habermas later argues that it was the introduction of the unpropertied masses and their economic concerns into the public realm that ultimately led to the subversion of the public/private distinction: "...the occupation of the political public sphere by the unpropertied masses led to an interlocking of state and society which removed from the public sphere its former basis without supplying a new one" (Habermas, p.177). What is interesting to note is that, like Arendt, he makes this observation about the consequences of introducing the economic concerns of the unpropertied masses into the political public sphere in the context of his critique of Marx, who thought that "the masses would employ the platform of the public sphere, institutionalized in the constitutional state, not to destroy it but to make it into what, according to liberal pretense, it had always claimed to be" (ibid., p.177). Habermas, then, subscribes to a conception of the rise of the social that both contradicts and is compatible with Arendt's conception of the rise of the social as this phenomenon relates to the political public sphere.

Conclusion

Both Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt agree that the public-political realm is but an empty shell of what it used to be,[8] and they both examine the possibilities for reviving this 'lost treasure' (Arendt). Nevertheless, despite their similarities, their

[8] Both Arendt and Habermas hold different ideas about when and where there was an 'authentic' public-political realm: for Arendt, it was the ancient Greek experience, as well as the French and American revolutionary experiences of the public realm that were the authentic ones; for Habermas, it was the early bourgeois experience that was the true one.

conceptions of the public sphere are radically different: Habermas's project is to see the actualization of the promises of the Enlightenment (Reason, universalism, and Kantian freedom). What he wants, in other words, is to 'complete' the project of modernity. Arendt, on the other hand (especially in *The Human Condition*, but also to some extent in *On Revolution*), seems to be an anti-modernist. So, whereas Habermas sees the public realm as a creation of modernity (a creation that seems to hold the key to the promises of the Enlightenment), and its salvation as the salvation of modernity, Arendt looks back to the Greek polis for the 'true' experience of public freedom, and sees modernity, in the form of what she calls the 'rise of the social' or the 'emancipation of labor,' as the death of this freedom. And this different valuation of modernity leads them each to conceive of freedom in very different ways: for the first, freedom is conceived of as a pre-societal reality – a reality that takes on neo-Kantian connotations of innateness – while for the second it is conceived of as a relational, surface reality. As we will see in the next chapter, it is precisely on the basis of Arendtian freedom's 'superficiality' that I believe it can be read as in some ways more akin to Foucauldian freedom.

Chapter 3: A Foucauldian Freedom Critique of Public Realm Theories

Introduction

In the conclusion to chapter 1, I asked a question with regards to Hannah Arendt's conception of the public realm, namely: To what extent is the practice of freedom really restricted to the political public realm? Having discussed in some detail Jürgen Habermas's analysis of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere and the inversion of categories that occurs between him and Arendt, we must now add to the above question the following: Is Habermas's conception of freedom, by virtue of the fact that he locates it differently than Arendt, immune to a Foucauldian freedom critique?

By comparing both Hannah Arendt's and Jürgen Habermas's public realm theories, especially with respect to this question, we can get a clearer understanding of what their respective conceptions of freedom are. In this chapter, I want to discuss in greater detail this question and how it might apply to Arendt and Habermas, and in what ways Arendt and Habermas differ with respect to the application of this question.

3 (i). Foucauldian Power and Freedom

One of many of Michel Foucault's important contributions to how we think about our present is his analysis of power. For Foucault, the traditional conception of power is inadequate in that it has been, for the most part, sterile (if it has not been completely sterile, at least, he argues, it has by now run its course) (Foucault, 1994b, p.232). The reason for this is that the history of thought on the subject has, since the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries, focused on a juridical conception of power (ibid., p.231) – that is, on a conception of power as that which forbids and says 'no,' with "toute une kyrielle d'effets négatifs: exclusions, rejet, barrage, dénégations, occultations..." (ibid., p.229). This juridical conception of power is, for Foucault, inadequate for an analysis of the dynamics of power because it misses or brackets too much of the actual phenomenon of power.

In "Les rapports de pouvoir passent a l'interieur des corps," Foucault maps the move from a juridical conception of power to a more comprehensive conception onto the progression of his own thought as it is reflected in the move from *Histoire de la folie* to *Surveiller et punir* and *Histoire de la sexualité.* He explains that in *Histoire de la folie*, the juridical conception of power was adequate for his purposes in analyzing madness since, as he puts it, "la folie est un cas privilegié": as it turned out, during the classical period, power was exercised on madness as a negative force of exclusion (ibid., p.229). But as he moved on to examine the penal system, he realized that power did not only work as a negative mechanism, but instead took the form of productive technologies: "Le cas de la pénalité m'a convaincu que ce n'était pas tellement en termes de droit mais en termes de technologie, en termes de tactique et de stratégie, et c'est cette substitution d'une grille technique et stratégique à une grille juridique et négative que j'ai essayé de mettre en place dans *Surveiller et punir*, puis d'utiliser dans l'*Histoire de la sexualité*" (ibid., p.229). What he noticed while working on his study of the penal system was that power was much more pervasive than any juridical conception would have it, and he uses Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon' to illustrate this. The panopticon was an architectural design for a prison

where asymmetrical relations of visibility were concretized through a particular organization of space: all the cells were arranged as a ring that surrounded a central tower such that those in the central tower could have complete visual access to each and every cell, while those in the cells could not see inside the tower (Foucault, 1975, pp.233-235; 1994a, p. 191). The genius of this design, for Foucault, was that a prison so designed required a minimal investment but offered an amazing return: those in the cells did not know when or if they were being watched, which meant that, in the end, they had to assume that they were always being watched. Thus, what happened was that the prisoner internalized this surveilling glance, and acted accordingly:

> En revanche, on a le regard qui, lui, va demander très peu de dépenses. Pas besoin d'armes, de violences physique, de contraintes matérielles. Mais un regard. Un regard qui surveille et que chacun, en le sentant peser sur lui, finira par intérioriser au point de s'observer lui même; chacun, ainsi, exercera cette surveillance sur et contre lui-même. (Foucault, 1994a, p.198)

The panopticon is significant for Foucault in that it represents the way spaces generally, from the school and the military barracks, to the spatial organization of the home, beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, were organized in response to the need for a more detailed and pervasive exercise of power and accumulation of knowledge that arose out of a new set of political and economic problems: the problems associated with a new entity called the 'population' (Foucault, 1994a, pp. 194, 195).

Beyond this spatial organization of power, Foucault discusses how these new problems associated with the emergence of the 'population' led the state to adopt a form of power analogous to the pastoral power of the church. This new pastoral power of the state, like that of the church, had as its objective the 'salvation' of the

people. But this salvation was not to be attained in the next world, but rather in this one, and had to do with the production of "health, well-being (that is, sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection against accidents" (Foucault, 1983, p.215) in the population. A consequence of this was the explosion of the agents of power: the exercise of power was no longer restricted to the state apparatus, but was taken on by "private ventures, welfare societies, benefactors and generally by philanthropists" (ibid., p.215). The family, as well as public and private institutions of medicine, were also mobilized for this purpose of population control (ibid., pp.215). Thus, as a result of this new constellation of political and economic problems associated with the emergence of the 'population' as an independent entity that operated according to rules intrinsic to it, power was no longer a purely negative, consolidated, reifiable/ reified mechanism/ thing. Instead, it became positive, diverse, detailed and complex (see ibid., pp.216-219). The exercise of power was no longer limited to the state, and its purposes were no longer purely negative.

Given that power is so pervasive and complex, Foucault argues, to limit analyses of power to legitimation discourses, to discourses about whether or not the exercise of power by the state is legitimate, or whether or not such-and-such an instance of the state's exercise of power is legitimate, misses, and indeed obfuscates, the real phenomena of power: "L'idée que la source où le point de cumul du pouvoir étant l'État, c'est à lui qu'il faut demander compte de tous les dispositifs de pouvoir, me paraît sans grande fécondité historique" (Foucault, 1994b, p.232).

Foucault then goes on to argue that a consequence of the pervasiveness of power is the ubiquity of freedom. He makes this argument in the context of the

differentiation between relations of power and violence (Foucault, 1983, p.220): relations of power, in contradistinction to violence, act not upon bodies or things, but rather upon actions. What this entails is that relations of power presuppose that the actor whose conduct (*conduite*) is conducted (*conduite*) is faced with a "field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" (ibid., p.221). In other words, what power so defined entails is that wherever there is a relation of power there is freedom, and vice-versa. What Foucault's analyses of power show is that the freedom that is presupposed by relations of power takes on a peculiar meaning: instead of meaning some kind of essential quality that inheres in human beings and exists prior to or outside of relations of power – which essential freedom is itself a construct of the productive pastoral power of the church and state (see Foucault, 1976, p.45) – freedom comes to mean what Foucault calls the taking of an 'agonic' stance towards these power relations (Foucault, 1983, pp. 221, 222). This is different from a conception of essential freedom that posits some transcendental subject in that this 'agonism,' or agonic freedom, consists in, on the one hand, recognizing that one is always already situated in these relations of power, while, on the other hand, taking a critical stance vis-à-vis these relations, that is, examining them, and, if necessary, resisting and re-imagining them. As James Tully puts it, agonism, for Foucault, comes to mean

> any form of activity or language game in which the coordination of action is potentially open to dispute, as a 'permanent provocation,' and, within these manifold games, to any form of reciprocal interplay, or 'incitation and struggle,' disputation takes… (p.13)

3(ii). Foucauldian Freedom and Arendtian Categories

Foucault's insights on power and freedom seem to throw many of Hannah Arendt's insights about freedom into a new and perhaps even damaging light. Recall that freedom, for Arendt, is possible only within the public realm. But if it is true that practices of freedom are as ubiquitous and multiple as Foucault's analyses show them to be, then what can we make of Arendt's restriction of freedom to the public realm? And further, since Arendt's restriction of freedom to the public realm is the basis of her sharp distinction between the public and the private, doesn't questioning her restriction of freedom suggest the need to deconstruct her categories generally? In other words, the question about freedom seems to become: to what extent is Arendt's 'phenomenological essentialism,' as Benhabib calls it (1996, p.123), viable, or useful, or even desirable?

James Tully, in "The Agonic Freedom of Citizens," discusses this freedom critique of Arendtian categories, but he approaches it from a different angle. Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of language games and rule-following, Tully argues that Arendtian spontaneity/ freedom remains bound within the limits imposed by the 'rules of the game.' Wittgenstein emphasizes that the actual playing of the language game cannot be reduced to some "theory of the game in question (which is another game with signs) nor [to] an explanation of an underlying structure that determines the play" (Tully, p.4). A description of the playing of the game cannot be reduced to an explanation of the rules that govern the play because the rules are inevitably modified in the very playing of the game. And this is true of even the most

'routine' of language games (ibid., p.6): all language games are ultimately un-rule-bounded.

To a certain extent, as Tully points out, Arendt's conception of political freedom and spontaneity can be construed as such an un-bounded game: freedom, for Arendt, is the capacity to begin something entirely new. And this, by definition, means that political activity is not determined by the rules of the game. Tully writes: "It [political action] is never 'rule governed' in the normative or causal sense required by theory or explanation. Indeed, if it were so rule-governed, then, by definition, it would be unfree, an 'automatic process' in the realm of labour or work, not action" (p.6). But this is, in a sense, a first-order freedom: a second-order freedom – the freedom to contest the rules of the game – is precluded, it seems, by Arendt. Recall that for Arendt, action is only possible within the confines of a clearly defined public realm. According to Arendt, in other words, the rules of the political game, or, what's the same, the boundaries of the public realm, cannot be contested in the playing of the game. Thus, Tully writes: "For Arendt and Huizinga, political activity involves agonic contests for recognition and rule, but the agonic element of the game has nothing to do with modifying the rules. It has to do with challenging an opponent and gaining recognition in accord with the rules" (ibid., p.12). So Arendt allows for a certain amount of indeterminacy in the playing of the (political) game, which indeterminacy she calls freedom. But this indeterminacy must remain within the limits, or are bound by the boundaries, she imposes on the public realm, and cannot be applied to those boundaries.

Foucault, Tully argues, takes this indeterminacy one step further than Arendt: for Foucault, freedom consists not only of an indeterminacy within a well defined public sphere, but also of the capacity to modify the rules, to modify the boundaries. We are now in a position to see in what ways Tully's interpretation of the Foucauldian freedom critique differs from mine: following Tully's reading of the Foucauldian freedom critique, the problematization of Arendt's categories itself becomes a practice of freedom. As such, these categories or rules are in a sense given, even if they are transgressed and/ or modified, for one cannot modify what is not there. In other words, practices of freedom occur within and against the boundaries of the categories. According to this interpretation, then, Arendt's categories (public/ private; labour/ work/ action) are not completely liquified.

Compare this with the freedom critique I laid out above: according to Foucault as I have interpreted him, the boundaries of the public-political realm are *de facto* transgressed by practices of freedom. Let us suppose, for the sake of this argument, that Foucault is right about power and freedom.[9] If we do this, then what follows is that Arendt's neat distinctions are thrown into disarray. Indeed, if we assume Foucault's analyses, then what follows, it seems, is that the public-private distinction is *already* at most an illegitimate, at least an obfuscatory dichotomy, one that needs not only to be modified, but instead to be rejected for the sake of more true analyses of the phenomena of power. To put it differently, the boundaries that Arendt sets up around her public realm are, according to Foucault, constantly transgressed by

[9] My point here is not so much to argue *for* Foucault *against* Arendt. Instead, my point is only to show how Arendt's categories *might* be problematized, and how they might be supplemented. Although the issue concerning whether or not (and how) Foucault's analyses ought to be supplemented is very interesting, it is not one that I will take up here.

practices of (agonic) freedom, regardless of whether or not the practitioners of this freedom expressly set out to question these boundaries. This is so because practices of freedom can irrupt whenever and wherever there are relations of power (indeed, as I discussed above, these relations of power *presuppose*, to a certain extent, freedom), and there are relations of power everywhere we turn, whether this is within or without the public-political sphere. Indeed, this *de facto* transgression by the practices of freedom of the boundaries of the public realm suggests that the whole distinction between public and private in terms of the location of freedom makes no real sense.

The difference, then, between Tully's reading and my reading of the Foucauldian freedom critique is that for Tully, the limits of the public realm (or the rules of the political game) are problematized when the practitioner of freedom expressly problematizes them. According to my reading, on the other hand, the actual problematization of the limits or rules by the practitioner of freedom is not necessary, for this problematization occurs simply as a result of the fact that practices of freedom are as ubiquitous as they are.

3(iii). Foucauldian Freedom and Habermasian Categories

It seems that, by inverting the categories, Habermas offers a possible answer to the question about the problematic restriction of freedom to the public realm. For Habermas, freedom is not restricted to the political public realm precisely because the private, the core of which is the intimate realm of the household, is the realm of freedom. Freedom, on this account, is more pervasive,[10] for, presumably, the private

[10] To be sure, Habermas does go to some lengths to discuss the 'hollowing out' of the intimate sphere, where freedom becomes only the freedom to consume (Habermas, p.156). Thus, it seems, Habermas

realm encompasses a far greater proportion of the human reality. Indeed, on Habermas's account, the private encompasses so much of our reality that the public becomes equated simply with the minuscule sphere of public authority or government (see, for ex., the graphic representation of the public-private distinction in Habermas, 1991, p.30).

But this answer comes at what cost? Habermas's answer rests on his assumption that freedom is a sub-surface reality. Freedom, as one of the defining characteristics of the private, or, more specifically, of the intimate sphere, is prior to society. In other words, freedom does not belong to the intersubjective realm of appearances, but rather belongs to the private realm of inner truths. Freedom, so defined, is therefore a quality that must inhere in the person. So, to accept Habermas's answers is to accept his conception of an inherent freedom. But if we do this, then another of Foucault's insights/ critiques about freedom applies.

In *Histoire de la sexualité, Vol. 1*, Foucault goes to great lengths to argue against what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis.' The repressive hypothesis is, basically, that there is some essential, or true self that stands outside discourse or power structures, and that is obscured or repressed by the dominant structures of power/ knowledge. Through various techniques of confession and/ or self-knowledge, one frees oneself/ one's self of this repression and only then can one be one's authentic self. The problem with this, Foucault argues, is that the repressive hypothesis – that there is a (sexual) self that stands outside or prior to power relations – is precisely the *product of* the structures of power. Indeed, Foucault traces the 'mise

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makes the distinction between a true freedom and the illusion of freedom, where true freedom becomes to engage in rational-critical debate in the public sphere.

en discours' of sex from the seventeenth century Christian pastoral imperative to confess the flesh (Foucault, 1976, p.27), through both the rise to prominence of the problem of the population in the eighteenth century (ibid., p.35), and the pedagogical practices of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries (ibid., pp. 39-41), through to medecine, psychiatry, criminal justice, and finally the 'contrôles sociaux' of the nineteenth century, "qui filtrent la sexualité des couples, des parents et des enfants, des adolescents dangereux et en danger..." (ibid., p.43). Foucault argues that these discourses on sex "ne se sont pas multipliés hors du pouvoir ou contre lui; mais là même où il s'exercait et comme moyen de son exercice" (ibid., p.45). Thus, Foucault argues that, for example, the pastoral imperative to confess was meant to produce "des effets multiples de déplacements, d'intensification, de réorientation, de modification sur le désir lui-même" (ibid., p.33). Likewise, the rise, in the eighteenth century, of the problem of population made it necessary to analyze and control the sexual conduct of the population, as sex was "[a]u coeur de ce problème économique et politique de la population" (ibid., p.36). Moreover, sex was regulatable, Foucault explains, through "des discours utiles et publics" (ibid., p.35): the control of the population was achieved through the 'mise en discours' of sex.

Thus, this discourse on sex does not, as the repressive hypothesis would have it, reveal, in spite of the structures of power, some repressed sexuality/ subjectivity. Instead, the idea that there is some sexuality as substratum is precisely a product of this 'mise en discours': this sexuality/ subjectivity that is prior to power/ knowledge is a chimera, if you will, that operates within and for the purposes of the power structures.

Foucault's argument against the repressive hypothesis is applicable to Habermas's relegation of freedom to the intimate sphere – to the sphere of 'purely human relations.' For by so relegating freedom to this sphere, Habermas is situating freedom as being prior to society, where society is construed as the sphere of power relations. In other words, freedom becomes for Habermas something that exists outside of, or prior to, power relations. So even if we were to grant Habermas that his modernist conception of freedom provides at least a potential (albeit partial) answer to Foucault's insights about the ubiquity of practices of freedom,[11] nevertheless this particular conception of freedom suffers from other, equally problematic assumptions about the nature of freedom.

Conclusion

So the question becomes: To what extent can either Hannah Arendt's or Jürgen Habermas's conceptions of political freedom be refurbished in order to take Foucault's analyses about power and freedom into consideration?

Just as Foucault's analyses point to some problematic features of Arendt's categories, so, I think, they point to a way in which these categories may be enriched. Of particular interest is, I think, Foucault's anti-essentialist insistence on freedom as a relational, surface reality – that is, on freedom as existing only whenever and wherever there are relations of power (and vice-versa). Notice, then, that it is precisely on the basis of that which I have interpreted as one of the main points of

[11] An answer that, to be sure, is not completely satisfactory, for Habermas does not admit the same extent of ubiquity of freedom as Foucault, in the sense that freedom for Habermas is still *restricted* to the intimate sphere, even if this sphere encompasses more, according to Habermas, than the public sphere.

Arendt's disagreement with Habermas – viz. Arendt's conception of freedom as a surface reality vs. Habermas's understanding of it as a sub-surface, independent reality – that I think that Arendt's categories may be salvaged. Thus, for the rest of this paper, I will focus my attention on how we might be able to revise Arendt's categories using the 'superficiality,' if you will, of Arendtian freedom as my cue, or starting point.

Chapter 4: Hannah Arendt's Interpreters: A Review of the Secondary Literature

Introduction

In chapter 1, I discussed Hannah Arendt's conception of political freedom. Out of that discussion arose the set of questions discussed in chapter 3, viz. the set of questions concerning the application of some of Michel Foucault's analyses about power and freedom to Arendt's analysis. In this chapter, I would like to focus on how some of the secondary literature on Arendt has attempted to grapple with this set of questions or issues related to it.

Although most of the secondary literature on Hannah Arendt's thought does not deal directly with what I have called the Foucauldian freedom critique, nevertheless most, if not all, deals in some way or other with the question about the viability, usefulness or desirability of Arendt's categories. It is the literature's treatment of this question that I will examine here, as I believe that this literature offers a way into a possible Arendtian response to the Foucauldian critique.

4(i). d'Entrèves and the Analytic of Arendt

In *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, Maurizio Passarin d'Entrèves provides a useful analytic framework according to which we can make sense of some of the tensions in Arendt's thought. Essentially, d'Entrèves sees the tensions in Arendt as falling along two axes: first, there is what he calls the 'expressive' Arendt, which is the Arendt prior to and including *The Human Condition*; second there is the 'communicative' Arendt, which is the Arendt of *On Revolution,* and *Crises of the Republic* (d'Entrèves, p.96). The expressive Arendt is the grecophile Arendt who

stresses the disclosure of the 'who' (as opposed to the 'what') of the actor in speech and action in the public realm. On this interpretation, action is only possible in the public realm because the person *qua animal laborans* or *homo faber* is not individuated: the person engaged in labor is simply one among many members of the human species, and as such "we do indeed 'behave', 'perform roles,' and 'fulfill functions,' since we all obey to the same imperatives" (ibid., p.72). In work, too, there is very little space for individuality in that although the end product of this activity may reveal *that* a particular person made it, and what her skills and abilities are, it nevertheless does not reveal the 'who' of that person (ibid., p.72). The emphasis here, then, is on individuation and distinction, which in turn hopefully leads to a certain degree of immortality through remembrance.

But, as d'Entrèves points out, this disclosure of identity and this immortality are dependent on plurality and solidarity (p.73): the plurality of the public is necessary in that it provides an audience for the performances of 'great deeds', which audience also acts as a community of remembrance. Moreover, in order for disclosure to be at all effective and remembrance at all possible, there needs to be some element of understanding and recognition amongst citizens. This understanding is possible because of the interelatedness of action and speech. D'Entrèves writes: "*Action entails speech*; by means of language we are in fact able to articulate the meaning of our actions and to coordinate the actions of a plurality of agents" (p.71). Thus, even though the emphasis is on individuation and distinction, there nevertheless is some communicative element.

D'Entrèves argues that the communicative dimension of Arendtian action acquires greater significance for Arendt's thought in her later works. In *On Revolution* and *Crises of the Republic*, she puts greater emphasis on the capacity of action to bring into being the public realm as the realm of appearances: "The space of appearance must therefore be continually recreated by action; its existence is secured whenever actors gather together for the purpose of discussing and deliberating about matters of public concern, and it disappears the moment these activities cease" (ibid., p.77). In other words, the emphasis is now placed on solidarity as opposed to distinction. Indeed d'Entrèves brings out this emphasis in even greater relief in his discussion of Arendt's conception of power. Power, as distinguished from (natural) force, (individual) strength, and (coercive) violence, arises out of, and is thus the creation of, the acting in concert of citizens, through deliberation and persuasion (ibid., pp.77, 78). Although d'Entrèves tries to synthesize both the so-called expressive and communicative elements, he ultimately draws the conclusion that the tension between these two elements is never really resolved.

It is with reference to this ambiguity that he sees in Arendt's expressive and communicative dimensions of action, that d'Entrèves interprets some of Arendt's commentators. For example, he interprets Margaret Canovan's critique of Arendt – that Arendt's thought contained contradictory democratic and elitist attitudes – as expressing the same thing as his observation that Arendtian action contains (often irreconcilable) communicative and expressive dimensions (ibid., pp.95, 96). Or again, he draws the parallel between his expressive/ communicative analytic of Arendt and Peter Fuss's critique that Arendt oscillates between an agonal and an accomodational

conception of politics, and Bhikhu Parekh's criticism that Arendt holds both a heroic and a participatory view of politics (ibid., pp.97, 98).

This analytic framework is useful because it seems that much of the recent literature on Arendt can be more or less accurately categorized as being sympathetic to either one or the other (communicative or expressive) interpretation.

4(ii). Habermasian, Reluctant Modernist or Nietzschean Anti-Platonist?

Jürgen Habermas, in his "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," places Arendt well within the communicative 'camp.' Focussing on her conception of power, Habermas claims that Arendt equates the political with an 'unimpaired intersubjectivity' (Habermas, p.215). His argument is as follows: Arendt makes a clear distinction between 'force' and 'power': 'force' is action that instrumentalizes intersubjectivity for the purpose of achieving the end for which the action was undertaken. 'Power' is action taken in concert with others for its own sake. Part of what 'action in concert for its own sake' entails is the valuation of the 'in-concertness' of intersubjectivity as intrinsically valuable. Thus action, when taken for its own sake, seeks to preserve and enhance both intersubjectivity and consensus: "Power serves to maintain the praxis from which it springs" (ibid., p.214). Habermas uses this differentiation between 'force' and 'power,' and all that (he thinks) it entails, in order to claim that Arendt's conception of the political is remarkably similar to his own conception of the ideal speech situation:

> The power of agreement-oriented communication to produce consensus is opposed to this force, because seriously intended agreement is an end in itself and cannot be instrumentalized for other ends...Let us attempt to clarify this. The strength of a consensus

> brought about in unconstrained communication is not measured against any success but against the claim to rational validity that is immanent in speech... (ibid., p.213)

Having brought Arendt that much closer to his own project, Habermas has but relatively harmless criticisms to make of her conception of the political. He calls into question Arendt's Aristotle-inspired strict separation of communicative action (praxis) from work and labor, since this separation leads, he claims, to an overly narrow conception of the political which, in this narrowness, becomes "inapplicable to modern conditions" (ibid., p.219). He claims that Arendt's is an overly restrictive conception of the political in that it does not account for strategic action in modern political systems (ibid., p.220).[12] In order to make this argument, Habermas differentiates between the generation of power and the acquisition and maintenance of power (ibid., p.221). He agrees with Arendt that the generation of power is communicatively-based, but, once power is so generated, the issue becomes one of acquisition/ allocation and maintenance of this power, which acquisition and maintenance are strategically-based actions. Thus, the means-end (strategic) mentality is not, in modern times, restricted or even restrictable to the activity of work, but is instead (according to Habermas) an integral part of the political realm and political action. By narrowing the political in the (Aristotelian) way that she does, Arendt cannot account for this strategic aspect of political action.

Habermas's interpretation of Arendt in this piece does not shed any light on how she might respond to a Foucauldian 'freedom critique.' Indeed, on this

[12] Habermas brings up two other objections, namely that (2) Arendt "removes politics from its relations to the economic and social environment in which it is embedded through the administrative system;" and (3) "she is unable to grasp structural violence" (ibid., p.220). However, he does not discuss these in any great detail: it seems that his main focus is on the 'strategic action' critique.

interpretation, it seems that Arendt is particularly vulnerable to such a Foucauldian critique in that her project is placed squarely within legitimation discourses. Recall that Habermas makes a distinction between the (communicatively-based) generation of power and the (strategically-based) acquisition and maintenance of power. This distinction assumes that, once power is generated, it becomes reified – it becomes a kind of independent entity – such that it can then be divided and/ or allocated. Once power is conceived in this way, it takes on connotations of original generation: "Power is a good *for* which political groups struggle and *with* which a political leadership manages things, but in a certain way both find this good *already at hand*" (ibid., p.224; last emphasis mine). Once the act of generation is a thing of the past, once power is 'already at hand,' communication can then only serve the sole purpose of legitimation: generation is reduced to legitimation.

It is only when Habermas's assumption of the reification of power is cashed out that the final comment of his essay makes sense: "...Hannah Arendt finally places more trust in the venerable figure of the contract than in her own concept of a praxis, which is grounded in the rationality of practical judgement. She retreats instead to the contract theory of natural law" (Habermas, p.225). Habermas's reading of how Arendt makes use of the contract (see Arendt, 1958, pp. 244, 245) is obviously informed by his interpretation of Arendtian power as a fixed entity, which entails some idea of an original act, or contract. But Arendt makes a point of arguing that power is in fact a very, if not the *most,* ephemeral of realities, one that can only come into being when people get together, and that necessarily disappears when they disperse. Once this ephemerality of power is taken seriously, we see that the contract

of which she speaks is not like those of the contract theory of natural law. Contracts, for Arendt, are the mutual promises that citizens make to each other. They make these promises primarily to counter-act the unpredictability of the processes set in motion by action (Arendt, 1958, p.243 ff). A secondary consequence of these contracts is that they constitute a 'force' that keeps these citizens together (ibid., pp.244, 245). Her use of the term 'force' here is significant: contracts in and of themselves do not constitute any kind of 'power' *per se*. All these contracts/ promises do is guarantee that these citizens will be together in the future: these contracts constitute the *conditions of possibility* for future instances of the generation of power, but they are not in and of themselves the bases of power.

Although Habermas does not offer any insight into the way Arendt might answer a Foucauldian freedom critique, the interpretation offered by another important Arendt scholar closely associated with Habermas, i.e. Seyla Benhabib, seems somewhat more promising.

Benhabib, in *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, argues that if we de-center *The Human Condition* in favor of Arendt's more marginal works, such as her *Rahel Varhagen* or her works on Jewish politics and Zionism – that is, if we read Arendt 'from margin to center' (Benhabib, 1996, p.4) – we would see that, contrary to the 'central' interpretation of Arendt as an anti-modernist, her thought was in fact "decidedly modernist and universalist" (ibid., p.45). In her chapter on Arendt's *Rahel Varnhagen*, Benhabib seems to want to bring Arendt's analysis of the public realm in modernity closer to Habermas's analysis (as this analysis is presented in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*). Whereas in *The Human Condition*

Arendt sees modernity as the ultimate cause for the destruction of the public realm, and consequently of genuine politics and freedom, in *Rahel Varnhagen,* claims Benhabib, Arendt sees in modernity the very conditions for the *emergence* of this public-political realm. Thus, Benhabib sees in this early work an "alternative genealogy of modernity" (ibid., p.22), a genealogy different from the one offered in *The Human Condition*: a genealogy where 'the rise of the social' no longer means the "the rise of commodity exchange relations in a burgeoning capitalist economy," but, instead, designates "the emergence of new forms of sociability, association, intimacy, friendship, speaking and writing habits, tastes in food, manners and arts, as well as hobbies, pastimes, and leisure activities" (ibid., p.22). These 'new forms of sociability' are distinctively modern, for Benhabib, in that the *salons* were predicated on the assumption that, despite all their social and/ or cultural differentiations, the members of the *salon* were equal by virtue of their common humanity. In other words, in the *salon* was actualized the Enlightenment idea of Man, of "the human being as such" (ibid., p.17).

By interpreting Arendt thus, it seems that Benhabib is more sympathetic to the 'communicative' interpretation of action. Notice, however, that Benhabib discusses d'Entrèves's 'communicative'/ 'expressive' distinction, and suggests that, instead of conceiving it thus, the distinction ought to be conceived of as a 'narrative'/ 'agonal' distinction (ibid., p.125). According to Benhabib, whereas communicative speech and action implies that these are directed towards some kind of consensus that has its basis in the "validity claims raised in speech acts" (ibid., p.125), 'narrative' speech and action is "embedded in a 'web of relationships and enacted stories.'" The

difference is that the 'rational core' of the consensus amongst citizens is much more transparent than that of the web of relationships, partly because this web of relationships combines both the communicative *as well as the expressive* dimensions of action: action and speech in the web of relationships does not always make explicit or implicit validity claims. Thus, for Benhabib, the resolution of the tension that d'Entrèves pointed out is possible if we focus on the embeddedness of action in the 'web of relationships and enacted stories.' However, this is not an uncontroversial interpretation of Arendt, nor is it necessarily a successful resolution of the tensions noted above. By focussing on this embeddedness in the particular way that she does – that is, by opposing the 'narrative' dimension of action to the 'agonal' one – Benhabib seems to lean more towards the communicative/ consensus model of action than towards the expressive model. In order to see how this particular bent may be problematic, compare this interpretation with the one offered by Dana Villa in his "Beyond Good and Evil."

Villa situates Arendt "within the broad Nietzschean project of overcoming Platonism" (Villa, 1992a, p.275).[13] In other words, Villa interprets Arendt's project as a revaluation of action and the contingency of plurality, appearance, and becoming (ibid., p.276). On this interpretation, then, Arendt's main goal is to 'emancipate,' if you will, action: she wants to reject the teleological model of action that instrumentalizes, and thus degrades it. This emancipation, or revaluation of action means that action must be given intrinsic value: action should not be judged according to intentions or consequences, nor ought it to be judged according to moral

[13] Dana Villa's interpretation of Arendt's project is somewhat parallel to the one I offered in my introductory chapter above.

standards, for to do so "inevitably degrades its autonomy, destroys 'the specific meaning of each deed'" (ibid., p.281). Action, in other words, is beyond good and evil (ibid., p.276). Instead of the instrumentalization of action for the sake of some normative ideal, action, in Arendt, is aestheticized, and the only standard by which it can be judged is the greatness of the performance itself. And so we see here the *rapprochement* that Villa is making between Arendt and Nietzsche. For both, according to Villa, Platonism sets in motion a twofold process of nihilism that ultimately leads to a complete loss of meaning (ibid., p.286): (1) Platonism gives ultimate value and real meaning to some 'true' world that is beyond this one and/or behind appearances. The immediate consequence of this is the devaluation of this world. (2) As a result of the 'will to truth' – that is, as a result of the will, set in motion by the Platonic world view, to uncover 'true' meaning behind appearances – the 'true' world of essences itself becomes a fable. We are, then, left with absolutely nothing. As a response to this loss of meaning, both Nietzsche and Arendt revalue this world through the deployment of aestheticism (ibid., p.282).

Hand in hand with this aestheticism is a revaluation of plurality as essential to freedom. For recall that the roots of the degradation (instrumentalization) of action can be found, according to Arendt, in Plato's 'frustration' with the contingency of action. Plato recognized that by acting among a plurality of actors, one could not be "master of what he had begun" (Arendt, quoted in ibid., p.278). In order to establish mastership of the agent over action, Plato reinterpreted action "as a kind of making or fabrication" (ibid., p.278). This reinterpretation gave the agent complete control over action because, first, the activity of making was not boundless in the way genuine

action is (in that it ends with the end product), and second this activity could be performed in isolation. So part and parcel of Arendt's anti-Platonic project to give this world meaning is a revaluation of plurality and the non-sovereignty of the actor that goes along with it.

We are now in a position to see how Villa's interpretation of Arendt differs from Benhabib's. Villa situates an Arendtian politics that takes plurality seriously over and against a Habermasian consensus-based politics. This opposition is based on the idea that, first, a consensus-based politics subsumes action as a *means to* consensus. Second, consensus is essentially, according to Villa, the negation of plurality (ibid., p.275). Thus, on this interpretation, a Habermasian politics remains within the spell of the Platonic devaluation of this world in that, first, action, as the means to an 'external' end, is degraded into a form of making. Second, this kind of politics, like Plato, seeks to neutralize plurality. As Benhabib herself writes: "At times, Habermas himself has overstated the case by insisting that the purpose of universalizability procedures in ethics must be the uncovering or discovering of some 'general interest' to which all could consent" (Benhabib, 1992, p.9).

In all fairness to Benhabib, though, it must be noted, as Morton Schoolman does in his introduction to Benhabib's *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, that her project is "to articulate a universalistic theory that as it is elaborated becomes increasingly rather than less sensitive to diversity" (Benhabib, 1996, p.xx). Benhabib wants to salvage, among the legacies of modernity:

> moral and political universalism, committed to the now 'old-fashioned' and suspect ideals of universal respect for each person in virtue of their humanity; the moral autonomy of the individual; economic and social justice and equality; democratic participation; the most extensive civil

> and political liberties compatible with principles of justice; and the formation of solidaristic human associations (Benhabib, 1992, p.2).

She wants to salvage these from a 'wholesale dismantling,' yet she does not in so doing want these salvaged without qualification, and this, I think, is crucial to an understanding of her project: these need to be, to use her term, 'reconstructed' (ibid., p.2). Thus, her central question becomes: "[W]hat is living and what is dead in universalist moral and political theories of the present...?" (ibid., p.2).

Benhabib wants to reject the Enlightenment's claims to a 'legislative reason,' its disembedded male ego and its indifference to contextual reasoning; she wants to reject the idea that these are necessary conditions for universalism (ibid., p.3). As a consequence of these rejections, she articulates a 'discourse ethic' that takes the particularity of the concrete other seriously – that is, a discourse ethic that 'radicalizes' its universalist aspects without being rationalistic (ibid., p.8). It is precisely with reference to this project of salvaging modernity through the reciprocal tempering of universalism and particularity that Benhabib interprets Arendt as a 'reluctant modernist.'

In contra-distinction to Villa, who situates Arendt within the Nietzschean anti-Platonic context, Benhabib situates Arendt's project as a response to both her immediate political context, and to her immediate philosophical context. In other words, on the one hand, her thought was a direct result of her experiences of Nazi Germany, of being a stateless, persecuted Jew, and of her work for and against Zionism (Benhabib, 1996, pp.35-47). It was as a response to these experiences that Arendt adopted a modernist, universalist outlook. Benhabib writes: "Arendt remained a political modernist insofar as she pleaded for the fulfillment of this basic principle

of political modernity, that is, one's recognition of *the right to have rights* simply because one was a member of the human species" (ibid., p.46). And, as was mentioned above, this political modernism came out in such works as *Rahel Varnhagen.*

On the other hand, Arendt's thought was also a response to German Existenz philosophy, or, more particularly, to Heidegger, her teacher. Benhabib discusses how Arendt thought Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* as essentially 'in-the-world,' opened up 'unprecedented' possibilities for investigation into the political realm (see ibid., pp.51-53). But Arendt also saw in Heidegger the failure to actualize these possibilities: "...at the same time, through his phenomenological account of what constitutes being-in-the-world, so Arendt claimed, Heidegger expressed the 'old prejudices of the philosopher against politics as such'" (ibid., p.51). Heidegger failed to actualize these possibilities of his analysis because he reduced the being-with-others (*Mitsein*) of being-in-the-world to a form of inauthentic existence (ibid., p.53), as existence in what he called '*das man*'. By degrading being-with-others thus, Heidegger essentially remained within the above-mentioned Platonic spell which held this world of plurality and contingency in contempt. Arendt responded to this by revaluating *Mitsein* – that is, plurality – as the condition that mitigated against the 'worldlessness' characteristic of totalitarianism: in other words, as a response to Heidegger, Arendt wanted to stress being-with-others as an authentic form of existence. Part and parcel of this response – of this revaluation of plurality – was a re-sensitization to particularity, which particularity Arendt sees as the *sine qua non* of plurality. And so we see here, from this two-pronged contextualization of Arendt's

thought, Benhabib's justification for interpreting Arendt as a thinker within whose work could be seen a modernist attempt to flush out the dialectic of universalism and particularity.

So the question now becomes: What possibilities do these different interpretations of Arendt's thought offer us for an Arendtian response to Foucauldian insights about power and freedom? The possibilities offered by a Benhabiban interpretation can be partially gleaned from her discussion of the relation between feminist theory and her 'discourse ethic' in *Situating the Self*. Benhabib frames the discussion thus: the 'contemporary women's movement' has, among other things, problematized the distinction between the public and the private upon which any theory of the public realm/ public dialogue is predicated (Benhabib, 1992, pp.107-109). This problematization is based on the idea that within the private sphere there is a whole constellation of power relations that remain unexamined as a result of the republican (Arendtian), liberal, as well as the Habermasian restriction of legitimation discourses to the public realm. Benhabib writes: "As with any modern liberation movement, the contemporary women's movement is making what were hitherto considered 'private' matters of the good life into 'public' issues of justice by thematizing the asymmetrical power relations on which the sexual division of labor between the genders has rested" (ibid., p.109). Benhabib's defense of her discourse ethic, which is itself also predicated on the public/ private distinction, against these critiques is that the actual substance of this split – decisions about where and how the line between the public and the private is to be drawn – are "'subsequent' and not prior to the process of discursive formation" (ibid., p.110). She continues: "As long as

these distinctions are renegotiated, reinterpreted and rearticulated as a result of a radically open and procedurally fair discourse, they can be drawn in any number of ways." Benhabib claims here that if public discourse is 'radically open' in the sense that participants can bring any subject matter into the discourse for public scrutiny, then there can be no fixed content to public discourse. Indeed, the content of the distinction between public and private – that is, what is to count as a matter for the public to discuss – itself becomes a matter of public discourse.

It must be noted that in this discussion, Benhabib situates her discourse ethic over and against an Arendtian republicanism with its particular conception of the public/ private split, and this precisely on the basis of the former's ability to accommodate the above mentioned feminist critiques, and the latter's inability to do so. But as we have seen above, in Benhabib's *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Arendt is interpreted as much closer to discourse ethics than she is portrayed to be in *Situating the Self*. So it would seem that, given Benhabib's later interpretation, her defense of discourse ethics applies to Arendtian republicanism. And indeed, the radical openness is attested to by what Benhabib calls the 'ubiquitousness' of Arendtian narrative action:

> Private friendships and love, which Arendt says would be killed by the glare of the public light, are action in this [narrative] sense, but they may or may not be action in the emphatic Greek sense of the 'doing of great deeds.' Narrative action is ubiquitous, for it is the stuff out of which all human social life, all life together in the 'mode of speech and action,' is constituted. (Benhabib, 1996, p.127)

Narrative action, as that which occurs whenever people are together in the mode of action and speech, is prior to the public as understood in the institutional sense: the constitution of the institutional and formal 'public,' with its criteria as to what shall

count as the subject matter for public discourse, is subsequent to narrative action: "The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and *therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized*" (Arendt, quoted in ibid., p.129; emphasis added by Benhabib). In other words, the substance of the public/ private distinction is subsequent to public discourse. On this reading of Arendt, then, the line between the public and the private is itself subjected to public discourse, just as it is in Benhabib's discourse ethics.

Notice, however, that this defense of discourse ethics and Arendtian republicanism remains within the problematic of legitimation discourses: Benhabib's strategy is to allow the previously unexamined power relations of the traditional private sphere to enter into the public so that they too could be rationally examined and either legitimized or de-legitimized according to standards of justice. But, to a great extent, the strength of Foucault's insights about power comes from his argument that much of the phenomenon of power is bracketed and/ or missed altogether precisely by this focus on legitimation discourses. Thus, although it seems that the Arendtian public/ private distinction can accommodate certain feminist critiques about the restriction of legitimation discourses to the public realm (at least as these are characterized by Benhabib), when interpreted in Benhabiban terms – that is, by remaining within the scope of legitimation discourses – Arendtian republicanism cannot accommodate a Foucauldian critique.

4(iii). The Performativity of Freedom

4(iii(a)). 'Society' and Agonistic Subjectivity

Villa addresses the possibilities for an Arendtian response to Foucauldian insights about power in his "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere." In this article, Villa argues that Arendt and Foucault can be compared on the basis of their accounts of the normalizing power of society – what Arendt calls the 'rise of the social' and her conception of the state as a 'national household,' and what Foucault calls 'biopower' (Villa, 1992b, p.718). Villa, as mentioned above, focuses on the performativity and self-containedness of action: for Villa, Arendt's project is the 'emancipation' of action from the grips of a Platonic devaluation of 'this' world and its attendant instrumentalization of action. This emancipation of action entails that action must be viewed as an end in itself: the purpose of action must be its own performance. Tied with the self-referentiality of action is an ideal of agonistic subjectivity: once action is emancipated from its instrumentalization, the only standard left according to which it can be judged is the greatness of the performance, and the individualization of the actor that follows from this greatness: "The theory of political action presented in *The Human Condition* takes as its ideal an agonistic subjectivity that prizes the opportunity for individualizing action" (ibid., p.717).

Arendt's analysis of the normalizing and subjugating effect of the 'rise of the social' and her ideal of agonistic subjectivity are significant for Villa in that these differentiate Arendt from a Habermasian public realm theory, and it is precisely in this differentiation that Arendt is immune to what Villa calls the Foucauldian 'power objection' (ibid., p.717). Foucault's 'power objection' to Habermas's communicative

ethics is the following (ibid., pp.714, 715): communicative ethics conceives of the public realm – as the ideal speech situation – as a 'power-free zone.' The ideal speech situation is supposedly a 'power-free zone' in that it is predicated on relations of symmetry. But Foucault would argue that this idea of the symmetry of relations in the ideal speech situation ignores the "microtechniques for the production of docile bodies and self-surveilling subjects." It ignores, in other words, that asymmetry is in fact internalized; it ignores the productive, normalizing power of disciplinary practices. A consequence of this ignorance is that, as Villa puts it:

> ...while it is possible to imagine the realization of the ideal speech situation, this would be nothing more than the achievement of 'pseudoautonomy in the conditions of pseudosymmetry'...A Foucauldian would therefore insist that public realm theory deal with the normalizing character of communicative action. (p.715)

By situating the individualizing capacity of action over against the normalizing effect of society, Arendt, according to Villa, meets the Foucauldian challenge to 'deal' with the 'normalizing character of communicative action' in a way that a Habermasian communicative ethics cannot. But Villa's defense of Arendt is against what he calls Foucault's '*power* objection.' As such, it leaves the question open as to whether or not Arendt can accommodate what I call above Foucault's 'freedom critique': that the corollary of the exhaustive nature of power is the ubiquity of practices of freedom. Villa's interpretation of Arendt leaves it open to object that Arendt, by restricting freedom to the public realm, cannot account for this pervasiveness of freedom.

It is interesting to note that what Villa sees as a strength in Hannah Arendt's analysis, Hanna Pitkin sees as a weakness. In her "Conformism, Housekeeping, and

the Attack of the Blob," Pitkin argues that Arendt's project is "to teach us our powers" (Pitkin, p.53). According to Pitkin, 'freedom' in Arendt means our ability to collectively change the 'web of relationships,' (ibid., p.52) or, put differently, our ability to do something about "the mess we are in" (p.58). Having defined Arendt's project thus, the question then becomes, for Pitkin: Why does Arendt conceive of the 'social,' as the umbrella concept for everything that is wrong about 'the mess we are in,' as "the science-fiction vision of the...Blob" (ibid., p.53). That is, given that Arendt stressed our responsibility for the patterns by which we live (ibid., p.52), and therefore our freedom to change these patterns, then it seems counter-productive to conceive of the social, which is the result of these patterns of living, as an "irresistible force independent of human 'willful decisions and purposes'" (ibid., p.57) that has an "irresistible tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and the private" (Arendt, quoted in ibid., p.57). It seems counter-productive because, by conceiving the social as a 'thing' external to human 'willful decisions and purposes,' Arendt conceptually undermines our capacity to do anything about it: in her analysis of the social, she undermines our powers to change the web of relationships. And so, the question guiding Pitkin's article is: "When and how did Arendt come to think about society in a manner diametrically opposed to, and undermining, her best teaching?" (ibid., p.53).[14]

[14] For the purposes of this essay, it is not necessary to discuss what Pitkin came up with as an answer to this question.

4(iii(b)). Honig and the De-Stabilization of Identity

Bonnie Honig, in her "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," seems to take up something like what I called above Foucault's 'freedom critique.' One of the implications that we can draw from this essay is that we need not reject Arendt's categories even if we accept Foucault's insights about power and freedom – only if, however, Arendt's categories are conceived of in a particular way. Drawing on Hanna Pitkin's reading of Arendt, Honig suggests that we read Arendt's 'public realm' "not as a specific topos, like the ancient Greek agon, but as a metaphor for a variety of (agonistic) spaces, both topographical and conceptual, that might occasion action" (Honig, p.146).

Honig argues that one of the problematic features of the Greek polis – that only a particular class of people were allowed to be 'multiple' and free, while others were bound to the necessities of the 'univocal body' – is not necessarily transposable to Arendt. Instead, Honig argues that the activities of labor and work, rather than being objective attributes of a particular class or gender, should be construed as 'attitudes' (ibid., p. 143). What follows from construing her categories in this way is that they are then 'de-essentialized' and 'de-naturalized' (ibid., p.143): "...each would be understood as itself a performative production, not the expression of the authentic essence of a class, or a gender, but always the (sedimented) product of the actions, behaviors, norms, and institutional structures of individuals, societies, and political structures" (ibid., p.143). Notice that by conceiving of the categories as performatively enacted, there occurs a certain amount of cross-fertilization between them: performativity, which, according to Honig is the defining characteristic of

action, is now applied to the private realm (the realm of labor and work). Thus, it seems that the public can no longer be conceived of as a fixed topos that stands over against the private realm, since performativity is applied to all realms. The public realm, instead of being a fixed category, is a set of practices that can be applied in a number settings/ realms.

But now the question becomes: to what extent is this true to Arendt? For, clearly, Arendt believes in protecting the public from private matters. Recall, for example, her discussion of the 'emancipation of labor' in *On Revolution*, or of 'the rise of the social' in *The Human Condition*. Indeed, Honig herself points out that, for Arendt, the reason we cannot apply performativity to the body, or action to the private realm, is that we risk, in so doing, losing "the realm in which the actionable is vouchsafed" (ibid., p.146). Or, to use Nancy Fraser's terms, "when everything is political, the sense and specificity of the political recedes" (Fraser, quoted in ibid., p.147). Honig's response to this, however, is that "not everything *is* political in this (amended) account; it is simply the case that nothing is ontologically protected from politicization, that nothing is necessarily or naturally or ontologically *not* political" (ibid., p.147).

So what does all this mean? What does it mean to treat Arendt's 'public realm' not as a 'specific topos,' but as 'a metaphor for a variety of (agonistic) spaces that might occasion action'? What Honig is doing here is, to use Benhabib's terms, working "with Arendt against Arendt" (Benhabib, quoted in ibid., p.160): Honig wants to problematize Arendt's rigid public/ private split by using some of Arendt's own insights: "In spite of Arendt's insistent reliance on her public/ private distinction,

the resources for its politicization are present within her account of politics and action" (ibid., p.136). Thus, Honig draws the analogy between Arendt's problematization of the foundational character of the Declaration of Independence and her own (Honig's) problematization of the foundational character of Arendt's public/ private distinction (see ibid., p.147). By interpreting Arendt's public realm as she does, Honig hopes to be left "with a notion of action as an event, an agonistic disruption of the ordinary sequence of things that makes way for novelty and distinction, a site of resistance of the irresistible, a challenge to the normalizing rules that seek to constitute, govern, and control various behaviors" (ibid., p.147). She continues: "And we might then be in a position to identify sites of political action in a much broader array of constations, ranging from the self-evident truths of God, nature, technology, and capital to those of identity, of gender, race, and ethnicity. We might then be in a position to *act* – in the private realm" (ibid., p.147). Honig wants to politicize that which had been left unpoliticizable – that which had been relegated to the private realm – by Arendt, namely: the body.

Honig here draws on Judith Butler's problematization of the "construction and constitution of sex and gender" (ibid., p.148). Honig writes of Butler that she 'unmasks' the private realm's stable 'constations' (such as, or, indeed, *in particular* sex and/ or gender identities) by showing that they are in fact but 'performativities' (ibid., p.148). In the same way, Honig wants to turn Arendt's agonistic and performative conception of politics against the fixity and/ or determining character of private identities. She writes: "The strategy, then, is to unmask identities that aspire to successful constation, to deauthorize and redescribe them as performative productions

by identifying spaces that escape or resist identitarian administration, regulation, and expression" (ibid., p.148). It is from this perspective that Honig critiques Arendt's strategy in her (Arendt's) response to Gershom Scholem (ibid., pp.151-156). Basically, Scholem had criticized Arendt for not fulfilling her responsibilities as a Jew (ibid., pp.151, 152). Her response, as Honig characterizes it, is structured around two 'strategic refusals': (1) she contests the claim that her Jewishness ought to be the master trope of her identity; and (2) "she contests Scholem's assumption that Jewish identity is expressive, that it has public effects and carries with it certain clear responsibilities" (ibid., p.152).

Honig suggests that Arendt's response is marred by an assumption that she shares with Scholem – viz. her assumption of the fixity or 'constative-ness' of Jewish identity (ibid., p. 152). Indeed, Honig argues that a more effective response on Arendt's part would have been to challenge the univocality of identity, to 'unmask' it "as a performative production, fractured, fragmented, ill-fitting, and incomplete, the sedimented and not at all seemless product of a multitude of performances and behaviors, the naturalized product of innumerable repetitions and enforcements" (ibid., p.154). What follows from this is the "empowering discovery or insistence that there are many ways to do one's Jewishness, many ways to do one's gender" (ibid., p.155). And it is in this sense that Honig finds Arendt useful for a feminist politics.

To a certain extent, it seems that, in her refusal to engage in identity politics, Arendt understood this so-called 'empowering' potential in her conception of politics and action. For her, engaging in politics on the basis of some fixed, shared, prior identity threatened to "homogenize or repress the plurality and multiplicity that

political action postulates" (ibid., p.149). For this reason, she could never engage in politics solely as a woman, or as a Jew. She felt these identities had to remain private. And it is insofar as her insistence on the privacy of identity is a refusal to engage in identity politics that this privatization of identity is, to use Honig's terms, 'promising' (ibid., p.149).

The strengths of Honig's interpretation come out in greater relief if we consider the interpretation offered by Margaret Canovan in her "Hannah Arendt as Conservative Thinker," and in what ways it is flawed.

4(iii(c)). Arendt and a Politics of Limits

Due to Arendt's own refusal to be classified, and to the complexity of her thought, she has been interpreted and appropriated in many different, and often seemingly incompatible, ways. Canovan claims that, more often than not, it has been the radical democrats who have found in Arendt an ally. This, Canovan wants to argue, at the expense of some aspects of Arendt's thought that tend towards a particular brand of conservatism. Canovan's project, in her "Hannah Arendt as Conservative Thinker," is to bring out these so-called conservative aspects in Arendt.

The first thing Canovan does is to show, amongst the various strands of conservatism, which of these Arendt is not (Canovan, pp.11-14). The conservatism Canovan does, however, want to strap onto Arendt is conservatism as a 'politics of limits':

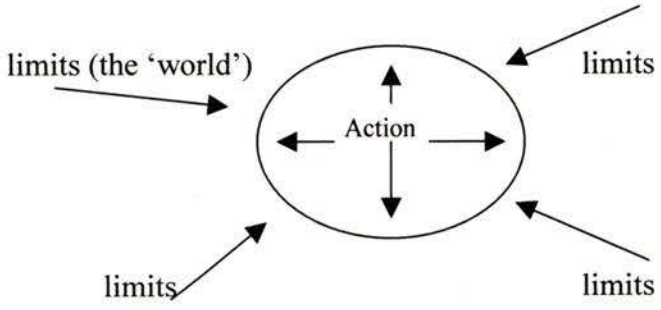
> In opposition to this hubristic faith [that animated the French revolution], conservative thinkers set out to show that the conditions under which we live are neither so simple to understand nor so easy to remold as the revolutionaries supposed, and that 'the world imposes limitations upon what either the individual or the state can hope to

> achieve without destroying the stability of society.' Given these limitations, only a limited style of politics makes sense. (pp.14, 15)

Canovan wants to argue that an Arendtian politics is also a politics of limits. So, she points to Arendt's conception of the 'world' as man-made and the opposition between the world and the earth (where the world necessarily entails 'violence' to the earth, since the world, through the activity of 'work,' 'halts,' or 'sets limits' to natural processes (ibid., p.16)). Thus, Canovan interprets Arendt's insistence on the necessity of the world for politics as an insistence on limits. But the problem with Canovan's interpretation is that she seems to conflate limits to natural processes with limits to politics. But placing limits on natural processes and placing limits on politics are two very different things, especially for Arendt, who claims that natural processes and politics are antithetical. And indeed, could it not be argued that the world, construed as essentially 'limiting' natural processes, is a 'buffer zone,' if you will, between nature and politics? The world, as limit, acts as the border that keeps the laboring attitude[15] out of the political realm by providing that space that separates yet binds people. In other words, the world, as a limit to natural processes, provides the enabling conditions for politics (that is, the world *enables* as opposed to limits politics).

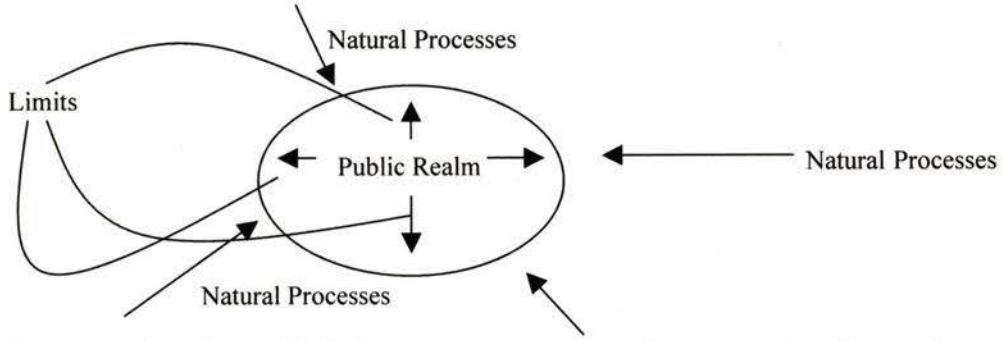
The difference, essentially, between Canovan's interpretation and mine is that Canovan reads Arendt's warning against a politics of perpetual motion (ibid., p.18) as a call to limit political action and its boundless consequences, and the world is to act as this limitation. In my interpretation, I want to emphasize to a greater extent the distinction between natural processes and the need to limit these, and political action.

Thus, the limits are around the public realm in order to protect it from procedural thinking/ attitudes, in order to safeguard freedom within that realm, which freedom rests on or presupposes the boundlessness of action. Thus, Canovan's interpretation of the role of limits in Arendt can be represented schematically in the following way:



According to Canovan, limits are meant to contain political action. Thus, the force of limits and the force of action are moving in opposite directions.

My interpretation can be represented thus:



On my interpretation, these 'limits' are meant not so much to *contain* action as they are to *keep out* natural processes/ the attitudes of *animal laborans* and *homo faber.* The difference is significant in that there is a complete inversion in the role of 'limits' in these two interpretations of Arendt: in the former interpretation, the limits are meant to limit action, whereas in the latter they meant to enable and protect it.

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[15] Which attitude entails 'behavior' and conformity – that is, it entails the subversion of the plurality

This latter interpretation seems to be supported by, for example, the Arendt of *On Revolution*. In *On Revolution,* Arendt is concerned both with the revolutionaries' capacities to start something new, but also with their capacity for laying foundations, or, as Canovan rightly points out, with founding 'lasting institutions' (ibid., p.19). But Canovan misunderstands the role of these institutions as setting limits to political action because she does not take seriously enough what the revolutionaries' original purpose in establishing these institutions was – and why Arendt saw these as important: namely to guarantee, for future generations, that they too could start new beginnings; these lasting institutions were meant to enable, not limit, political action.

We can now see, in this discussion of the shortcomings of Canovan's interpretation, some of the strengths of Honig's. According to Honig, Arendt's rigid public/ private distinction – that is, the limits that delineate both the public and private realms – is meant to provide political action with "a place to call home and she tells it to stay there, where it belongs" (Honig, p.145). Arendt restricts political action to the public realm because that is, she thinks, the only place wherein it is possible: her intention is not to *limit* political action by restricting it to this realm. On the contrary, she wants to ensure its *survival* and *perpetuation*. As it turns out, according to Honig, this restriction *is* in fact a limit because political action *is* possible in the private realm. As such, Honig shows that it is not inconsistent with many of Arendt's own insights about action that the public/ private split be transgressed; that is, that it is not inconsistent with Arendt's own insights that action transgress the boundaries she herself set up around it, once it becomes clear that these

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that is necessary for political action.

boundaries are not necessary for its survival. Arendt's politics, according to Honig (and myself), and contrary to Canovan, are *not* a politics of limits.

Phillip Hansen, in his *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History and Citizenship*, also argues that Arendt's politics are not a politics of limits. Hansen claims that in developing her conception of action, Arendt was responding to, or reacting against, two particular developments in twentieth-century political thought, namely (1) the 'scientization of politics' – the belief that human beings and human action can be subsumed simply as matter in motion, and consequently that politics is understandable and explainable with reference to the same laws that govern the motion of natural phenomena (Hansen, p.61) – and (2) 'political romanticism' (ibid., p.61). When action and politics are understood in these ways, says Arendt, the possibility for genuine politics is undermined in that (1) in the scientization of politics, the spontaneity, and consequently freedom, of action is eliminated, and (2) in its appeal to the 'command of the will' – in its equation of freedom and sovereignty – romanticism is hostile to plurality, and worldliness more generally, which are the enabling conditions for a genuine politics.

By positioning her in this way, Hansen emphasizes the unpredictability/ spontaneity, as well as the non-sovereignty (which follows from embeddedness of the actor and her actions in the plurality inherent in the public realm) of Arendtian action. As a corollary of this particular emphasis, Hansen interprets Arendt as distancing action from 'conventional morality' (ibid., p.62), since conventional morality seeks to make freedom an inherent quality in order to better control action through 'the judgement of the intellect' or the command of the will (ibid., p.61). And so, Hansen

writes: "[I]t seems that [Arendt] wilfully gives up the possibility and even the desirability of moral limits to political action" (ibid., p.58).

To be sure, Hansen argues that Arendtian action is not totally limit-less. That is, he argues that just because Arendt does not subject action to conventional morality and its limits, it does not follow that action can or will lead to the 'politically unconscionable.' Instead, Hansen claims that for Arendt, the limits that would inhibit free action from leading to the so-called 'politically unconscionable' inhere in action itself: "For Arendt these limits inhere in action itself and involve two powerful if difficult faculties: the power to make and keep promises and the power to forgive" (ibid., p.62). But to claim that action is limited by the powers to make promises and to forgive is not the same as saying with Canovan that an Arendtian politics is a politics of limits. For recall that according to Canovan's interpretation, limits were imposed on action from without: the 'world,' as that which gave human existence some form or semblance of stability, constituted a limit to the processes started by action. As a consequence, action was 'contained' by the world. According to Hansen, however, that that which limits action inheres in action itself means that it is *only* when action is 'unleashed,' if you will, that it can be limited:

> Indeed, where properly undertaken, action could provide the only bulwark – an admittedly tenuous one given modern circumstances, to be sure – *against* the politically unconscionable. The point is that in so far as it expresses both scientific rationality and romanticism (and they are surprisingly united in their hostility to worldliness), modern politics *has* produced unconscionable states of affairs. It is not action run wild but the absence and forcible suppression of any possibilities of it that are the hallmarks of political horrors such as totalitarianism. (ibid., p.62; emphasis in text)

So Hansen's interpretation stands in opposition to the one offered by Canovan in her "Hannah Arendt as Conservative Thinker." For Hansen, Arendtian action is not to be subjected to any external limits. And this leads him to another conclusion that is somewhat similar to one of Honig's conclusions: Arendt seeks to 'recover' the public realm because she thinks that it is only within the public realm that freedom as non-sovereignty is possible: the boundaries placed around the public realm are necessary in that they are the *enabling conditions* of action and freedom: "If Arendt's primary concern is the 'recovery' of the public world, this is because only where there is such a world can freedom as non-sovereignty and action as its necessary expression find its place in society. In other words, only if there is a public realm can there be a politics which is not simply the domination of one by another" (ibid., p.64). This conclusion in turn leads to the following question: What if, in fact, the boundaries around the public realm are *not* necessary conditions for action/ freedom? Hansen himself does not take this further step, but as we have seen above, Honig does, and her response is that if it is the case that action is possible outside the public realm (which Honig, drawing on Butler, argues that it is), then it would be consistent with Arendt's own insights about action and freedom that these boundaries be transgressed, and it seems that there is nothing in Hansen's interpretation that would oppose Honig on this count either.

Conclusion

Most of the secondary literature deals with some of the problematic features of what Seyla Benhabib calls Hannah Arendt's 'phenomenological essentialism.' But, as I think became clear in my discussion of the literature, it does not deal directly with

what I have called Foucault's freedom critique. However, some of this literature does suggest some ways in which one might revise Arendt's categories. Indeed, Bonnie Honig's reading of Arendt, through its focus on the performativity of Arendtian action, seems the most promising. For Honig, Arendt's categories (in particular, her distinction between the public and the private) can be deconstructed without in so doing losing the essential meaning of Arendt's project. In this sense, Honig can be read as 'working with Arendt against Arendt.' Like Honig, I want to see, in the next chapter, what the possibilities are for 'working with Arendt against Arendt:' I want to see if there is a way of re-conceptualizing her categories such that in doing so we do not loose the general gist of what she is trying to say.

Chapter 5: Hegel, Arendt and the Temporality of Freedom

Introduction

So Bonnie Honig's interpretation of Hannah Arendt offers some hints as to how we might respond, from an Arendtian perspective, to the Foucauldian freedom critique: Honig's suggestion, inspired by some of Margaret Canovan's insights, is that we conceive Arendt's categories not so much as spatial categories, but rather as 'attitudinal' categories. Taking my cue from this 'loosening' of the spatial conceptualization of Arendt's categories, I would like to suggest another way that these might be conceived such that an acceptance of Foucault's insights about power and freedom would not necessarily entail a complete rejection or deconstruction of her project.

My suggestion is that, instead of conceiving of her categories as spatial categories, we ought to conceive of them in temporal terms. By re-conceptualizing them in this way, I believe that we can emancipate Arendtian freedom from its restriction to the public sphere. Such a re-conceptualization of her categories, I want to further argue, can be supported if we position Arendt's thought as being at least in part a response to Kantian/ Hegelian philosophies of History.

5 (i). The Temporality of Labor, Work, and Action

When we think of Arendt's categories, or even of the public/ private split generally, more often than not, we think of these categories in spatial terms. Hence, we call the public either the public *realm* or the public *space*, and we refer to the private also as the private *realm*, which is associated with the household space. To be sure, even

Arendt (or rather *especially* Arendt) conceives of her categories in spatial terms. Take, for example, the importance of the 'world' for her: the 'world' is that which mediates intersubjective interactions in the sense that the objects of the world – that is, the 'human artifact' (Arendt, 1958, p.52) – constitute(s) the in-between (the *inter-est*) about which there can be a variety of perspectives (see ibid., pp.57, 182). There is clearly a spatial aspect to the importance of the world, which comes out most clearly in her use of the metaphor of the table – as that which separates yet binds those who are sitting around it (ibid., p.52). Looked at through the lens of the importance of the 'world,' the private realm (of the household) becomes the realm of spatially immediate intersubjective interactions – in the sense that this is the realm where there is but one perspective: that of biological necessity – while the public realm becomes the realm of spatially mediated intersubjectivity. In other words, one of the keys to the public/ private distinction is the existence or absence of spatial mediation.

My suggestion is that this is not the only way that these categories can or should be understood. Indeed, instead of focussing on the spatial aspect of these categories – even despite Hannah Arendt's own insistence on the spatiality of her public/ private distinction – I want to focus on their temporality. Thus, I want to focus on the distinction between labor, work and action as the distinction between cyclical, linear and spontaneous time. Labor, Arendt writes, 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" (ibid., p.7). As the activity that is associated with the biological necessities of the body and life, it is activity for the sake of consumption, which in

turn means that this activity has the particular quality of being unproductive: "It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent" (ibid., p.87). But this cycle of production and consumption must constantly repeat itself, until the death of the organism. In fact, 'man' *qua animal laborans,* is immortal in that *as* a laboring animal, 'man' is but a member of his species, "whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation" (ibid., p.19). Thus, labor is that which guarantees the immortality of the species through the unending circularity of the laboring activity. And this very circularity means that this activity is also marked by necessity: each individual instance of the laboring activity is part of the cycle of generation and decay and regeneration, and as such has occurred before and will forever occur again (and in this sense does not really have a beginning nor an end (ibid., p.98)). There is nothing new, in other words, about each and every individual instance of the laboring activity. As such, these individual instances are, in principle, predictable. The predictability of this laboring activity that follows from its circularity means that, ultimately, each instance is necessary, which in turn means that there can be no freedom in laboring. Thus, Arendt writes: "To labor meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life" (ibid., pp. 83, 84).

In contrast to the circular time of labor, work is linear. Work is the activity through which the 'human artifice' is brought into being. This activity breaks out of the circularity characteristic of the laboring activity in that the products of work are to a certain extent enduring (that is, there is an end-product that outlasts the effort

expended in creating it – indeed, that oftentimes outlasts the life of its creator). So, in contrast to labor, the defining characteristic of work is that it is productive. In that it is defined as a productive activity, work is end-directed in the double sense that it is, first, always guided by some kind of model (end) of that which it hopes to accomplish/ produce (ibid., p.140) (that is, it is teleological), but also in the sense that as an activity, work comes to an end when that end-product is produced (ibid., p.143). As a teleological activity, Arendt points out, "[t]he process of making is itself entirely determined by the categories of means and end" (ibid., p.143). And so, in contrast to labor, work has both a definite beginning and a definite end: work is linear. This linearity constitutes the temporality of work, and it is this linearity that precludes work from being a free activity: because it is guided by a model, everything that is done in work is presumably necessary for the coming about of that end (if it is not necessary, then it is superfluous). Moreover, this model, Arendt argues, is heteronomous to the maker:

> This model can be an image beheld by the eye of the mind or a blueprint in which the image has already found a tentative materialization through work. In either case, what guides the work of fabrication is outside the fabricator and precedes the actual work process in much the same way as the urgencies of the life process within the laborer precede the actual labor process. (ibid., pp.140, 141)

What this means, then, is that everything that is done in work is in some sense heteronomously determined: work is essentially not free.[16]

[16] Arendt points out that another of the defining characteristics of *homo faber* is that 'he' is "master of himself and his doings" (Arendt, 1958, p.144). But this mastership/ sovereignty should not be mistaken for freedom. For although the maker has complete control over what she is doing, and over what will come out of this doing (the end-product), this nevertheless does not take away from the fact that what she is doing is in some important sense necessitated by the need/ desire to bring about that very end-product. In other words, everything that the maker *qua homo faber* does is a necessary means to an end, which end itself becomes another means to a further end (on the infinite regress of the means-end chain, see Arendt's discussion of the 'perplexity of utilitarianism,' in ibid., pp.154-157).

Action, in contradistinction to both labor and work, is marked by freedom, and this because it is neither cyclical nor linear, but spontaneous. To act, Arendt writes, "means to take an initiative, to begin...to set something into motion" (ibid., p.177). Action, in other words, is defined by Arendt as the act of beginning new processes. But beginnings, she continues, are by definition unpredictable: "It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before" (ibid., pp.177, 178). Every action appears on the 'scene,' so-to-speak, as a 'miracle' (ibid., p.177). And by virtue of this miraculousness, action constitutes a break with the past.

This break with the past is supplemented by a break with the future: just as action, in its spontaneity, is not determined by what happened before, neither is it determined by some expected or desired end. In this sense, not only does action break out of the cyclical time of labor, but moreover it breaks out of the linearity of work: in its spontaneity, action breaks free of the means-end categorizations. What's left, then, is the 'self-containedness,' if you will, or self-referentiality, of action; what's left, in other words, is that action is performed for its own sake.

5 (ii). The Temporality of Freedom and the Transgression of Boundaries

The interpretation I offered above that focuses on the temporality of Hannah Arendt's categories may not seem, at first sight, particularly controversial nor, for that matter, particularly fruitful. In fact, much, if not most of the secondary literature seems to pass over this aspect of her categories: they seem to be, for the most part, 'captured' by the spatial interpretation. The most notable exception to this is Bonnie Honig, who

focuses on the attitudinal aspect of these categories. By focusing on labor, work and action as attitudes, Honig liquifies the boundaries separating the public and the private.

In much the same way, I think we can liquify these boundaries by construing labor, work and action as temporal categories. When the categories are conceived in temporal terms, then there is a kind of transgression, or cutting across, by the temporal categories, of the problematic spatial differentiation of the public/ private realms: freedom as spontaneity can occur in the space of the private just as it can in the space of the public, as long as there is some kind of intersubjective interaction/ relation, where the other(s) can take up and react/ re-act to the actions of the actor. Similarly, labor and/ or work, as necessary (cyclical or end-directed) activities, can just as well occur in the public as it can in the private, as it has, according to Arendt, since the emergence of the modern era. So in other words, once we re-conceptualize Arendt's categories as temporal rather than spatial categories, these categories can no longer be conveniently mapped onto the public/ private distinction. And thus, Arendt's thought (so interpreted) itself becomes a critique of the (spatially differentiated) public/ private split in the sense that the space of freedom, on this reading, is neither exclusively the public nor the private realm: the (spatial) public/ private distinction in terms of freedom makes no sense.

But now the question becomes: To what extent is this reading of Arendt-as-critique-of-the-spatially-conceived-public/ private-distinction even true to Arendt? For surely this seems to be a somewhat unorthodox interpretation. I think there are two questions that need to be addressed here: (a) To what extent is this focus on the

spontaneity of action (instead of the other elements of freedom, such as, for example, the self-disclosure of the actor in the action, or the agonic nature of action) justified? And, related to this first question, (b) what happens to these other elements of action when the focus is on spontaneity?

5 (ii)a. Hegel and the Spiral of History

I think that the importance of spontaneity for Arendt comes out most clearly in one of her critiques of Hegel. Arendt points out that "theoretically, the most far-reaching consequence of the French revolution was the birth of the modern concept of history in Hegel's philosophy" (Arendt, 1990, p.51). Hegel, in his writings, was responding to what was happening in France during the revolutionary period. What he saw was what Robespierre referred to as the *tempête révolutionnaire* or the *marche de la révolution* (ibid., p.49): what Hegel saw was that the revolution was sweeping the actors/ revolutionists away, as though they had no control over the course of events (ibid., p.51). He deduced from this situation that there was a force greater than man that was guiding history. He called this greater force *Geist*, and history became, for Hegel, the dialectical unfolding of this *Geist*.

According to Hegel, history is divided into three moments: the first is the 'immediate' moment, where 'man' and nature are in a state of unreflective unity. The second is the moment where 'man' makes the turn inward "to his own grasp of universal reason" (Taylor, p.92), and in so doing separates himself from nature: it is the moment of the radical freedom and autonomy of 'man' from nature contained in Kant's philosophy. The third moment is that of a mediated unity of man and nature. History is dialectical and spiral in that the first moment comes to an end when its

internal contradictions come to the fore, and require some kind of resolution. This resolution ushers in the second moment as the negation of the first moment. But this second moment also comes to an end when its internal contradictions become explicit. The third moment, then, is the negation of the second moment, which itself was the negation of the first. But the third moment is not a simple return to the primordial moment of unreflective harmony with nature. Instead, it is a progression to a 'new and improved' harmony, if you will: Hegel's conception of history is not that it moves in a circular path, but rather that it moves up in a spiral, where the third moment is a higher, better version of the first moment. Taylor writes:

> In keeping with the spiral view of history..., Hegel holds that each of these oppositions becomes initially sharper as man develops; but that when they reach their fullest development the terms come to reconciliation of themselves. And 'reconciliation' doesn't mean simply 'undoing'; there is no question of returning to our primitive condition before the separation of subject and nature. On the contrary, the aspiration is to retain the fruits of separation, free rational consciousness, while reconciling this with unity... (pp.14, 15)

The movement of history, from the lower end of the spiral to the higher end, is driven by G*eist*'s quest for its own actualization, or self-realization. *Geist*, in order to be fully actualized as the truly universal, must posit its own finitude, since to lack determination is precisely to lack something, and thus to not be truly universal. Hegel writes: "Through this positing of itself as something determinate, the ego steps in principle into determinate existence. This is the absolute moment, the finitude or particularization of the ego" (1967, p.22). This finite determination of *Geist* can only occur through 'man': the infinite potential of *Geist* can only be actualized through some finite determination if and only if that finite determination can itself be reconciled with the infinite. 'Man,' by virtue of his reason, can potentially be

reconciled with the infinite. The full realization of *Geist,* then, occurs when 'man' recognizes his own universality. Thus, 'man' is the vehicle for the self-realization of Spirit, and his history reflects this.

But Hegel writes: "The owl of minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk" (ibid., p.13). Hegel believes that the meaning of man's actions can only be known to him after the fact: man can only know that he was the vehicle for the actualization of *Geist after Geist* is actualized. Man cannot be fully aware of what he is doing (that is, that he is actualizing Spirit) since to be so aware would imply that he already, from the start, knows that he is the vehicle for this actualization, and thus recognizes from the start his own universality.

And so, Hegel saw the actors of the French Revolution as being caught up in the movement of history (as the actualization of *Geist*). More specifically, he saw the Terror of the French Revolution as the end marker of the second moment of separation. Recall that this second moment was the moment of radical autonomy as Kant described it in his philosophy. According to Kant, radical autonomy requires of us that we abide only by those laws that are derived from the formal requirements of rationality. The Hegelian criticism of Kantian morality is precisely that it is formal: as a purely formal morality, it has, by definition, no content. Furthermore, by its very internal logic, not only is this universal, formal morality empty, but it also *precludes* content. Hegel writes: "Universal freedom...can produce neither a positive work nor a deed; there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction" (1977, p.359; emphasis in text). This formal universal precludes, for example, any particular government from being formed (or, if formed, from lasting) since such a

government (indeed, *any* government) stands opposed to the universal will as a 'faction' of the formal universal, because this universal is a "flat, commonplace monosyllable" (ibid., p. 360) that "effaces all distinction and all continuance of distinction within it" (ibid., p.361). Being 'empty,' then, this moment could only destroy all institutions and social practices of the *ancien régime* without providing the possibility for reconstructing new institutions and practices (Taylor, p.103). Being necessarily caught in this purely negative motion, the ideal of radical freedom could not just stop at the destruction of the *ancien régime*, since to stop would require the creation of something new to replace the old. Once the *ancien régime* was destroyed, this 'fury of destruction' had to turn inward, and ultimately destroy itself. The French revolution embodied the 'fury of destruction' inherent in the second moment: the revolution was the enactment of the internal contradictions of the moment of separation, and the revolutionists, unbeknownst to themselves, were but the vehicles through which *geist* was realizing its own universality.

Arendt's criticism of Hegel is that he approaches the French revolution specifically, and history generally, from the perspective of the spectator: "the fallacy of this new and typically modern philosophy is relatively simple. It consists in describing and understanding the whole realm of human action, not in terms of the actor and agent, but from the standpoint of the spectator who watches a spectacle" (Arendt, 1990, p.52). From the perspective of the spectator who examines the actions of the actors *after the fact* – that is, from the perspective of the retrospective glance – these actions become part of a narrative, and as such are viewed as having been necessary for the coming about of the *dénouement*. But if we approach the actions

from the perspective of the actor, as Arendt does, then the interpretation of history as a narrative explodes.

Recall that every action, by virtue of occurring amongst a plurality of actors who react/ re-act, is boundless in its consequences. This very boundlessness of the processes begun by action means that actions necessarily transcend the actor's motives: no matter what the actor's motives, intentions, or aims may have been in acting, the action itself inevitably leads to other actions and reactions that the actor herself could never have foretold. It is by virtue of this boundless quality that actions are free:

> Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other. This is not to say that motives and aims are not important factors in every single act, but they are its determining factors, and action is free to the extent that it is able to transcend them. (Arendt, 1993b, p.151)

Since actions are free only insofar as they transcend motives, and since this transcendence is only possible where there is a plurality of actors who can take up, interpret, and react to these actions, then it seems that freedom is only possible where intersubjective interactions occur. This point is crucial: since freedom requires this intersubjectivity, then, in contradistinction to conventional liberal wisdom, freedom (for Arendt) does not exist as some *a priori,* inherent potentiality in 'man.'[17] In other words, the reality of freedom does not exist prior to its performance: actions, in order to be free, must occur in the realm of appearances, where they can be seen and heard by others, who in turn react/ re-act. The reality of freedom is constituted, then, in the very performance of it. Arendt writes:

> ...the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act. Men *are* free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same. (Arendt, 1993b, pp.152, 153; emphasis in text)

Arendt ties the performativity of freedom to Machiavelli's *virtù*, which she translates as 'virtuosity,' "an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished to the creative arts of making), where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it" (ibid., p.153). What Arendt is pointing out with this reference to Machiavelli's *virtù* and the performing arts is that the temporality of freedom, *from the perspective of the actor*, is self-referential: the subject constitutes the reality of what she is performing in the very performance. But that which is produced through this performance is no fixed reality. Indeed, it is the most ephemeral of realities, and exists only insofar as others pick up and react/ re-act to the actions of the actor. And this means that the reality that is constituted is *essentially* contingent and unpredictable, for there is no telling what others will in fact do with this reality. From the perspective of the actor, then, the freedom of actions is enabled by being situated between the past and the future without necessarily being related to them in any truly determinate way: the temporality of freedom is the present that disrupts any continuity between past and future. History, *from this perspective*, is not reducible to some narrative structure.

Hegel's approach to history, Arendt claims, is one-sided: he views it but from the perspective of the *a posteriori* spectator, or story-teller. From this perspective,

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[17] Notice that this conception of freedom stands in opposition not only to conventional liberal wisdom, but also to Jürgen Habermas's conception of freedom as being prior to or outside society; that is, as

nothing is ever spontaneous, but determined by past events, and necessitated by the ultimate *dénouement* of History. It is only when history is viewed from this perspective that one can say with Hegel that "[w]hat is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" (Hegel, 1967, p.10). In contrast to this, Arendt, by focussing on the perspective of the actor, explodes the narrativity of history: history is no longer a continuous progression up a spiral (Hegel), or linear (Kant), path. Instead, history becomes a succession of discontinuous presents. And given this view of history as discontinuous, the events of the French Revolution can no longer be interpreted as one moment or stage in the progressive march of history (as one moment in the unfolding of *Geist*), and the actors of the revolution as the pawns of Reason.

So Arendt's critique of Hegel here is that his philosophy of History, in its one-sidedness, eliminates any possibility for spontaneity. Crucial to making sense of this critique is the focus on the self-referential time of freedom. Thus, if we situate Hannah Arendt's project as at least in part a response to Hegelian and/ or Kantian philosophies of History, then we must conceive of Arendtian freedom as in many important respects a temporal category. But the question now becomes: in this focus on the spontaneity/ self-referentiality of action, what becomes of the other elements of Arendtian freedom, such as, for example, her claim that freedom is only possible in the so-called 'public realm,' or her claim that the content of freedom is the self-disclosure of the actor?

5 (ii)b. Arendtian Self-Disclosure as an Ethics of Creativity

I mentioned above that if Arendt's categories were conceptualized in temporal terms, then we could read Arendt's thought as in some sense a critique of the spatially

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being exclusive domain of the intimate sphere of 'pure humanity' (see above, p. 33).

differentiated public/ private split: freedom, as self-referential, spontaneous *time*, is possible just as much in public as in private *spaces*. Likewise, the cyclical and/ or linear times of labor and work are possible in both the public and private realms. But what happens to Arendt's project of 'recovering the public world'? That is, what happens to Arendt's central claim that freedom is only possible in the public realm?

On my temporal interpretation of Arendt, the 'publicity' criterion of freedom becomes its relationality. Recall that the 'self-containedness' of freedom – that is, freedom's break with both the past and the future – is possible only in the company of others: actions are free only insofar as they transcend the motives of the actors, and this transcendence is possible only by virtue of the boundlessness of the consequences of actions. Furthermore, this boundlessness is possible only when and where there are others to take up and react/ re-act to the actions of the original actor. Thus, freedom does not exist where there are no (intersubjective) relations. But does this mean that freedom is only possible in the public realm (defined as a firmly bounded, organized *space* where 'public matters' are discussed)?

One source for Arendt's insistence on the recovery of the public realm is the importance she places on the mediating power of the 'world.' For recall that the 'world' is that which, according to Arendt, both separates and binds people. It separates by being that in-between (*inter-est*) about which people can have a variety of perspectives. At the same time, by virtue of being the in-between that separates, it is also that which binds by being the "common meeting ground of all" (Arendt, 1958, p.57). This play between plurality and commonality is crucial for Arendt: without this common world, there could be no agreement whatsoever, for in such circumstances

"[people] could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them" (ibid., p.175). On the other hand, without the multiplicity of perspectives that the world enables, everyone would "behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor" (ibid., p.58). In either case, people become "imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience" (ibid., p.58), either by being radically isolated one from the other, or by sharing this experience, "which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times" (ibid., p.58). So the mediation offered by the 'world' is crucial for any meaningful, or true plurality. This means that the 'world' is in turn necessary for the boundlessness, and consequently freedom, of action.

One implication that Arendt draws from the importance of the 'world' for action is the need for the recovery of the public realm: the recovery of the public realm means, for Arendt, the recovery of the only space wherein people can approach each other from a variety of perspectives. For recall that whereas work provides the world, it is essentially a lonely endeavor. People, *qua homo faber*, must necessarily be isolated from one another: "This isolation from others is the necessary life condition for every mastership which consists in being alone with the 'idea,' the mental image of the thing to be...Only when [*homo faber*] stops working and his product is finished can he abandon his isolation" (ibid., pp.161, 162). On the other hand, people, *qua animal laborans,* are united in an immediate way. And so they are united in a way that *homo faber* is not, but this unity is 'complete,' if you will, in the sense that this unity precludes any difference of perspectives. The public world, as, in

a sense, the 'third moment' after the behaviorism of labor and the solitude of work, offers just that play of unity and separation that Arendt sees as crucial for freedom: people come together, but this coming together is mediated by the objects of the world.

But the question now becomes: to what extent must the importance of the 'world' cash itself out as the need for the recovery of a firmly bounded public realm? For I want to argue that even if we grant Arendt that freedom is only possible among a plurality of actors, and that this plurality is possible only when and where intersubjective interactions are mediated by the 'world,' nevertheless we need not necessarily grant her that freedom is *only* possible in a firmly bounded, spatially differentiated public realm, such as Aristotle conceived of it, or such as emerged during the French and American Revolutions. For it seems possible that even outside the public realm, people could approach each other from a variety of perspectives.

To be sure, Arendt would argue that any intersubjective interaction that occurs outside the public realm necessarily falls within the economic realm (Aristotle). As such, the various subjects of these interactions all share the common perspective of the *animal laborans*: there can be, Arendt claims, no meaningful plurality, no "human distinctness" (ibid., p.176), outside the public realm. But this changes, I want to argue, when we conceive of Arendt's disclosure of the self as an ethics of the creativity of the self.

For Hannah Arendt, the importance of the disclosure of the agent through action and speech is that through it the 'who,' as opposed to the 'what,' of the agent is revealed (ibid., p.179). But one ought not to put too much stock in the term 'reveal,'

for the distinct, or unique 'who-ness' of the agent that is 'revealed' is not some essence that exists prior to the act of disclosure. Indeed, Arendt points out that the manifestation of the 'who' of the actor "retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression" (ibid., p.181). Even to the actor who is 'revealing' herself does that which is revealed retain that 'curious intangibility.' This intangibility of the 'who' that is disclosed follows from two somewhat inter-related aspects of self-disclosure through speech and action: the first is that because the disclosure of the 'who' of the actor occurs in the context of 'human togetherness' (ibid., p.180), it is marked by that "notorious uncertainty...of all affairs that go on between men [sic] directly" (ibid., p.182). How others receive and interpret the 'who' that the actor is disclosing is beyond that actor's control. Secondly, the unique personal identity of the person acquires some fixity, or tangibility only after the fact, that is, only "when life departs, leaving nothing behind but a story" (ibid., p.193), for as long as there is life, there is flux in the nature and interpretation of the 'who' that is disclosed. The actor, then, is not revealing some *thing* that exists prior to the act of revealing, but is creating that something, albeit oftentimes unwilfully, in the very act of self-disclosure. But notice, then, how the self-disclosure of the agent through action and speech, interpreted as the (self-) *creation* of the agent through speech and action, is in some ways analogous to what Foucault calls the 'ascétisme du dandy;' that asceticism that treats the self as an "oeuvre d'art" (Foucault, 1994c, p.571).

In his "Que'est-ce que les lumières?," Foucault takes up Kant's definition of the Enlightenment that is offered in his "Was ist Aufkläurung?." Foucault argues that, for Kant, the Enlightenment meant the process that liberated us from our state of

immaturity (*état de minorité*), which Kant defined as: "un certain état de notre volonté qui nous fait accepter l'autorité de quelqu'un d'autre pour nous conduire dans les domaines où il convient de faire usage de la raison" (ibid., p.564). Given this interpretation of the Enlightenment, Foucault argues, modernity ought not to be conceived as an 'époque' that can be situated on a timeline, between a 'pre-modern' period and a 'post-modern' period (ibid., p.568). Instead, he claims that it ought to be understood more as an 'attitude,' or, more specifically, as the attitude that embodies the motto (*devise*) of the Enlightenment (as Kant defined it), namely: "aie le courage, l'audace de savoir" (ibid., p.565). As an attitude, Foucault claims, modernity (and consequently the Enlightenment) ought not to be equated with the various humanisms that have sprung up since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: humanism, of whatever stock, is always guided by 'themes,' or substantive claims about what it is to be human, or what human dignity consists of: "L'humanisme sert à colorer et à justifier les conceptions de l'homme auxquelles il est bien obligé d'avoir recours" (ibid., p.573). But if humanism is defined by some authoritative, substantive conception of what it means to be human, then the attitude of modernity must be opposed to any such humanism. For in contrast to humanism, modernity (at least as Foucault is here using it) is defined not by any substantive claims about humanity, but rather by the quest for 'maturity,' which quest is cashed out, among other things, as the permanent critique of ourselves by ourselves (ibid., p.572). In other words, as beings that are historically determined by the Enlightenment, we are beings that have what David Owen calls a "general second-order interest in experiencing [our]selves as agents" (Owen, 1998): as moderns, we consider ourselves to have an interest in

being autonomous beings. But this autonomy, Foucault argues, ought not to be understood as a determination of the essence of who or what we are as human beings. Rather, it should be understood as a philosophical *ethos* that promotes the permanent problematization of the limits that are imposed upon us, which includes the limits of our subjectivity. Foucault writes:

> Il faut essayer de faire l'analyse de nous-mêmes en tant qu'êtres historiquement déterminés, pour une certaine part, par l'*Aufklärung*. Ce qui implique une série d'enquêtes historiques aussi précise que possible; et ces enquêtes ne seront pas orientées retrospectivement vers le «noyau essentiel de rationalité» qu'on peut trouver dans l'*Aufklärung* et qu'il faudrait sauver en tout état de cause; elles seront orientées vers «les limites actuelles du nécessaire»: c'est-à-dire vers ce qui n'est pas ou plus indispensable pour la constitution de nous-mêmes comme sujets autonomes. (ibid., p.572)

For Foucault, then, the attitude of modernity – this constant problematization of the limits of our subjectivity by ourselves – cashes itself out as an ethics of creativity: "Être moderne, ce n'est pas s'accepter soi-même tel qu'on est dans le flux de moments qui passent; c'est se prendre soi-même comme objet d'une élaboration complexe et dure" (ibid., p.570). In other words, the self, for us moderns, is not some fixed underlying 'thing,' or substratum that we seek to discover. Rather, it is something that is open to being problematized and re-invented.

But notice the similarities between this Foucauldian/ Baudelairean asceticism and Arendt's self-disclosure of the agent (as I have interpreted it above): both see the self not as a fixed thing whose limits are necessary, but as the product of the actions of the agent/ subject. What this in turn means is that both seem to see the creativity of the self – that is, the work on ourselves by ourselves – as a practice of freedom. And this work on ourselves by ourselves need not necessarily be a public activity. For

example, in his "L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté," Foucault attempts to show that the now dominant (Christian) forms of techniques of the self have not always been the dominant ones. In order to do this, he discusses the Greco-Roman forms of the techniques of the self. These techniques were, unlike the Christian, self*less* forms, in fact quite 'selfish,' if you will: their primary concern was the care of the self (*souci de soi*) – the care of others was but derivative of this care of the self (Foucault, 1994d, pp.714, 715). And this care of the self cashed itself out as both the imperative to 'know' the self, as well as the imperative to master the self by the self (ibid., p.712). In other words, for the Greeks, the care of the self meant, among other things, the work on the self by the self. And so we see, through Foucault's genealogy of the techniques of the self, that the creativity of the self was once the care of the self, which care was primarily a personal, 'selfish' endeavor. The point here is that although Arendt claims that the self-disclosure of the agent can occur only in the public realm, nevertheless if we conceive of this self-disclosure as in some ways analogous to a Foucauldian creativity of the self, then the requirement that it occur in the public realm is somewhat loosened. Indeed, self-disclosure as a creative individuating practice becomes possible both in the public and private realms.[18]

[18] Although this care of the self is a personal, 'selfish' endeavor, this does not mean that it occurs in a 'vacuum,' so-to-speak. For recall that freedom, according to Foucault's analyses, takes on a relational character: Foucault's analyses deny the existence of some transcendental, free subject that can stand apart from, or independent of, relations of power. Freedom exists only when and where there is 'government,' that is, only when and where the conduct of the subject is being conducted by others, be these 'others' the dominant discourses of the disciplines, or 'practical systems,' political authorities, or other authority figures, or even just colleagues, partners in a conversation, family members, etc.. And so, that self-disclosure, understood in terms analogous to Foucault's creativity of the self, is possible even in the private realm because it can be understood as in some ways a personal endeavor, does not mean that it is possible in complete loneliness. Self-disclosure, as I am interpreting it here, is relational in character: there needs to be 'others,' such as those listed above. By claiming that it is possible in the

But if this is so, then it seems that human distinctness can occur even in the private realm, for self-disclosure – that activity through which the 'who,' the distinct personal identity, of the agent, is disclosed – is possible in the private realm. And what this in turn means is that there need not necessarily be that particular play between unity and separation that is only possible in the public realm for there to be that 'meaningful' plurality that is required for the boundlessness of the processes begun by action, which boundlessness is itself required for actions to be free. Indeed, once self-disclosure is conceived in the way that I am suggesting, there arises a new play between unity and separation, where unity is provided by our commonality as 'laboring animals,' and mediation, or separation is provided by the individuating quality of self-disclosure/ self-creation. Thus, even in the private realm can people approach each other from a variety of perspectives. So if we bring this back to my discussion above about the temporality of Arendt's categories, we see that the 'self-containedness' of the time of freedom is possible within *as well as without* the public realm, since the intersubjectivity, or 'meaningful' plurality, that is required for this 'self-containedness' is possible even in the private realm.

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private realm, as we will see below, I am claiming that there need not be all the aspects of the public, as Arendt defines it, in order for this self-disclosure to occur.

Conclusion: On the Legislation of Freedom

So, can Hannah Arendt's categories be revised such that they can take some of Michel Foucault's analyses of power and freedom into consideration? And if so, then ought Arendt's conception of freedom to be taken as a definitive, or even just quasi-definitive determination of what freedom is or ought to be? It was the first of these questions that I had set out to examine in this paper. I tried to argue that while Foucault's insights on power and freedom undermined in some important respects Arendt's 'phenomenological essentialism,' nevertheless they also suggested ways in which Arendt's categories could be revised and/ or extended: I tried to argue that by focussing on the 'superficiality' and relationality of Arendtian freedom, and consequently on the temporality (spontaneity) of this freedom, we could 'liberate' it, if you will, from its restriction to the public realm. In the process of making this argument, I brought in Jürgen Habermas's historical analysis of the public realm in order to compare two somewhat different interpretations of the relationship between the public realm and the location of freedom. This comparison brought out into greater relief the relational quality of Arendtian freedom (*vis-à-vis* the independence of Habermassian freedom), which quality I seized upon as an opening into a possible revision, and consequently salvation, of her categories.

So in answer to the first question above: I believe that Arendt's categories can indeed be re-conceptualized from a Foucauldian perspective. But does this mean that the account I am offering of a re-furbished conception of Arendtian freedom should be understood as a definitive regulative ideal?

Referring to her essays collected in her *Between Past and Future*, Arendt writes:

> The following six essays are such exercises, and their only aim is to gain experience in *how* to think; they do not contain prescriptions on what to think or which truths to hold. Least of all do they intend to retie the broken thread of tradition or to invent some newfangled surrogates with which to fill the gap between past and future. Throughout these exercises the problem of truth is kept at abeyance; the concern is solely with how to move in this gap... (1993a, p.14)

I think it would be untrue to the spirit of Hannah Arendt's work, as it is expressed in this passage, to claim that my attempted revision of her conception of freedom is or ought to be in any way definitive or even prescriptive. Indeed, the most I think I can claim about the value of the work I have undertaken here is that it is but an attempt to 'draw the line somewhere,' that line that enables one to take a stance, to make a choice. But this line is always open to being further problematized, to being re-drawn. For, to use Arendt's terms, my revision of her categories has been but an exercise in thought, one that does not, *cannot* claim to prescribe what one ought to think what (or in this case, where) freedom is or ought to be. As an exercise in thought, this piece has been an instance of my so-called 'general second-order interest in experiencing myself as an agent' (Owen), and as such an instance, it must recognize this same second-order interest in others. But this recognition means that it must refuse to legislate for others how and what they are to think about freedom.

This distinction between my prescribing what one ought to think where freedom is located vs. my exercising my 'second-order interest in experiencing myself as an agent' is the one David Owen makes between 'acts of legislation' and 'acts of exemplification,' with respect to Foucault's genealogical project, in his

"Genealogy as Exemplary Critique." According to Owen, the commitment that genealogy makes to freedom and autonomy is grounded not in what it 'says,' but in the fact that it 'shows' this commitment. Owen's argument is something like this: since genealogy is a form of historical consciousness, and, moreover, since history – more specifically, Foucault's agonic conception of history – is enabled by autonomy (Owen, 1995, p.501), then "autonomy is the architectonic practical interest of the genealogical activity" (ibid., p.491). Autonomy is genealogy's practical (as opposed to theoretical) interest in that just by virtue of engaging in the genealogical project, one is *practicing* one's freedom/ autonomy in the sense that one is *engaging* in the *ethos* of ironic heroization of the present (ibid., p.499), and furthermore, just by virtue of so practicing one's autonomy, one is also producing and re-producing it. And so just by virtue of engaging in the genealogical project, one is perhaps recommending, through example, the exercise of autonomy, but in doing so one is not necessarily *legislating* this autonomy.

In the same way, by engaging in this exercise of thought, I hope to be exemplifying Arendtian freedom, for freedom and thought are closely related. Recall that freedom is self-referential:[19] the actor constitutes the reality of her freedom in the very performance/ exercise of that freedom. And this means that freedom constitutes a break with both the past (in that it is spontaneous, unforeseen) and the future (in that the consequences of actions are boundless and therefore unpredictable/ unforeseeable). But notice that the temporality of freedom so construed ties in nicely with what Arendt says about thought in her preface to *Between Past and Future*: thought is that 'slow and ordered movement' (Arendt, 1993a, p.12) along the

diagonal line that is the deflection caused by the clash between the forward pushing force of the past, and the backward pushing force of the future; thought is that 'umpire' that is "sufficiently removed from past and future" such that it can "judge the forces fighting with each other with an impartial eye" (ibid., p.12). Thought and freedom are here linked by their common temporality: they stand not unproblematically within time, nor outside of time, but within while at the same time *disrupting* time. Thought and freedom, in other words, are not escapes from the battle between past and future into some "region over and above the fighting-line" (ibid., p.11), for, as Arendt points out, "what else is this dream and this region but the old dream which Western metaphysics has dreamed from Parmenides to Hegel of a timeless, spaceless, suprasensuous realm as the proper realm of thought [and freedom]?" (ibid., p.11). True to her project of reversing the Platonic ordering of things, Arendt conceives of thought as rooted in this world – rooted in human time – and yet free. And it is this freedom that I hoped to discuss and 'show' in this essay.

[19] See p.99, above.

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