

Between Nature and Artifice: Hannah Arendt and Environmental Politics

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines Hannah Arendt's phenomenological theory of action (*vita activa*) to assess its capacity to accommodate environmental politics within its conception of the public sphere. Critics have argued that *vita activa*'s triadic structure excludes social questions—in which Arendt includes environmental concerns—from political action. In fact, her writings explicitly seek to shield politics from social incursions—a phenomenon she terms “the rise of the social.” However, this criticism overlooks the distinction Arendt draws between politics and governance, politics being a manifestation of freedom and governance the management of necessity. By arguing for *vita activa*'s ability to accommodate contemporary environmental concerns, this reading seeks to promote Arendt's conception of freedom within the emerging green political tradition, for her understanding of politics recognizes its existential function in creating identities for both communities and individuals. To pose an environmental challenge to Arendt's thought, this thesis employs some of the key themes and conceptions from four prominent green theorists: John Dryzek, Robyn Eckersley, Andrew Dobson, and John Meyer. In relation to these theorists, it will be argued that *vita activa*'s form of politics carries the possibility of allowing environmentalism to appear within the public sphere's political *contents* without contradicting its triadic boundaries. To develop an environmentally sustainable society, political communities must create new narratives for bridging the divide between their built and natural environments, a process that requires the existential power of Arendtian politics.

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The inspiration for this thesis comes from Dr. Mark Blackell from Vancouver Island University. Through a directed reading course, Dr. Blackell guided me through Hannah Arendt's thought and raised the question of Arendtian environmentalism. Since then, my thinking has been heavily influenced by her writings, and I am grateful for the insights this has provided me throughout my academic journey. Thank you Dr. Blackell.

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Dedication

To Nadine and Kierstyn Butler for their love and support.

Between Nature and Artifice

It is quite conceivable that the modern age—which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity—may end in the deadliest, more sterile passivity history has ever known.

— Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Introduction

As humanity enters the Anthropocene, we are witnessing the end of Nature. Bill McKibben forcefully makes this argument by pointing to the environmental impacts of industrial societies—via greenhouse gas emissions, waste-water pollutants, toxic fertilizers, *et cetera*—which have seeped into every remaining region of the wilderness.¹ Consequently, untrammelled ecosystems no longer exist and nature invariably bears anthropogenic scars. In aggregate, these industrial effects have produced the global phenomenon of climate change,² which now constitutes humanity's greatest existential threat, for unlike the threat of nuclear warfare, this crisis is inevitable. In addition to endangering humanity's material conditions, the associated environmental effects of climate change threaten to undermine longstanding societal forms, such as state sovereignty, national borders, and political citizenship. In response, western political thought has begun grappling with the fallibility of its foundational assumptions regarding human/nature relations. Of these, the environmental theorist John Dryzek persuasively articulates two of the most problematic with reference to our inheritance from the ancient Greeks: The Cornucopian and the Promethean assumptions. The Cornucopian is the belief that nature constitutes an unlimited resource pool for human consumption since its content is self-correcting

¹ Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006), 26.

² Hereinafter, climate change is understood as “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.” United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (New York: *United Nations, General Assembly*, 1992), PDF, 7.

against human interference.³ The Promethean assumption follows from Greek mythology wherein Prometheus enabled human progress by stealing fire from the gods. In its contemporary application, adherents point to history to assert that human ingenuity has and continues to find substitutes whenever confronted with resource scarcity.⁴ The Anthropocene era reveals the fallibility of these assumptions and undermines the foundation of western political thought.

Without the stability of nature, does the political lose its orientation? Western political theory has predominantly presupposed these two worldviews of self-correction and persistent ingenuity. Societal forms have largely been conceptualized as progressing within an infinitely abundant context, where—according to various theories, such as Locke’s, Montesquieu’s, and Marx’s—one’s labour confers ownership over whatever materials were freely drawn from the wilderness. In this regard, societies are humanity’s manifestation of its cumulative distinction *from* nature, and politics serves as this distinction’s guiding force. How can politics guide societal progress, though, when its material foundations are mutable? Can technological innovation, for instance, constitute progress when its fabrication and disposal processes are environmentally detrimental and threaten human security? The green political theorist Andrew Dobson argues that, no, such innovations cannot be regarded as progress without introducing a contradiction at the foundations of the industrialist ethos. From his ecological position, he writes that “industrialism suffers from the contradiction of undermining the very conditions in which it is possible, by unsustainably consuming a finite stock of resources in a world that does not have a limitless capacity to absorb the waste produced by the industrial process.”⁵ On similar grounds,

³ John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵ Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 27.

green political theory has generally criticized liberalism's capitalist commitment to perpetual economic growth.

The contemporary discovery of Nature's perishability follows the modern collapse of western metaphysics. Without the authority of absolute truths or divine beings, humanity is discovering its non-privileged position as one among many animal species. Although potentially liberating—insofar as people escape the potential restraints of traditional divine ordinances—this modern discovery simultaneously invites doubt about our societies' normative frameworks, as Descartes famously discovered. On this enigma of modernity Jürgen Habermas writes:

A modernity that is freed of images of authority, that is open to the future, and addicted to continuous self-renewal can only create itself the criteria to judge itself by. Thus, the principle of subjectivity emerges as the only origin of normativity itself.⁶

To secure itself against the fluidity of nature, in other words, Habermas suggests that humanity must establish its own standards for self-evaluation. Yet, the subjective basis of these standards undermines their stability, for what prevents their continuous adaptation to changing circumstances or private interests? This breakdown of the authority within western political tradition has created what Hannah Arendt conceptualizes as an experiential gap between the past and the future, wherein politics must re-orientate itself because its traditions are rendered inapplicable, irrelevant.⁷ Climate change has emerged within this gap and affirms the bankruptcy of the previous normative frameworks that underpinned Western industrial societies. Like metaphysical authority, Nature no longer serves as our material guarantor for continual societal progress. “This transformation has culminated,” Robyn Eckersley writes, “in the development of new political cleavages, the formation of green political parties and the review of old political

⁶ Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.

⁷ Marie Luise Knott, *Unlearning with Hannah Arendt*, trans. David B. Dollenmayer (New York: Other Press, 2013), 59.

platforms by existing parties.”⁸ We must, in short, re-evaluate our relationship with Nature. In response to this normative gap between past and future, this thesis argues that Arendt’s theory of action (*vita activa*) offers a valuable framework for grappling with the current climate crisis by affirming the ontological importance of politics; this importance is often undervalued by contemporary green political theories that generally advocate for various forms of environmental management through the extension of government’s administrative authority.

Arendt’s Environmental Silence

Within the green theoretical milieu, Hannah Arendt is seldom referenced.⁹ And when cited, she is regularly criticized for remaining largely silent on social questions—in which she believes environmental management is included—by relegating them to the private sphere of the household.¹⁰ As Kerry Whiteside writes, “[Arendt] denigrates any politics that takes its concerns from the private household, and ecological politics...seems to do precisely that.”¹¹ Theorists of feminism and race relations have offered similar criticisms of the hard-line Arendt draws between public politics and private problems. Mary Dietz, for instance, notes *The Human Condition*’s lack of “any commentary on the historical status of women as second-class citizens and their systematic exclusion...from electoral politics.”¹² Likewise, Kathryn Gines argues that “Arendt sees the Negro question as a Negro problem rather than a white problem,” insofar as her theory seemingly excludes social questions from politics.¹³ On environmental concerns, Simon

⁸ Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach* (London: UCL Press, 1992), 7.

⁹ Save Joel Jay Kassiola’s *The Death of Industrial Civilization*.

¹⁰ Hans Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 228.

¹¹ Kerry H. Whiteside, "Hannah Arendt and Ecological Politics," *Environmental Ethics* 16, no. 4 (1994): 339, doi:10.5840/enviroethics19941642.

¹² Mary G. Dietz, *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 107.

¹³ Kathryn T. Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 123.

Swift believes her theory is fundamentally “out of sorts with the consciousness of impending ecological catastrophe that defines our times.”¹⁴ Han Sluga also criticizes Arendt for remaining silent on the increasing environmental impact of both population growth and technological expansion.¹⁵ Others have questioned whether there is any content at all within Arendt’s conception of politics, for if it excludes social questions and private matters, as she insists, what other topics could arise in a community’s public discourse? From such an interpretation, environmental questions would appear to be just a matter good housekeeping.

Arendt’s regular readers will find her absence from green political theory unsurprising since her corpus principally responds to the horrors of totalitarianism and the maladies she observed in modern mass-society. Contemporary readers should, however, give some accommodation for her silence on environmental issues since Arendt died in 1975, missing our current understanding of anthropogenic climate change. “The notion that there might be ecological limits to economic growth that could not be overcome by human technological ingenuity and better planning,” writes Eckersley, “was not seriously entertained until after the much publicized ‘limits to growth’ debate of the early 1970’s.”¹⁶ Notwithstanding this historical context, Arendt’s critics are correct in arguing that her political theory *appears* antithetical to conventional environmental politics. It provides few avenues for addressing nature beyond its utility as a *standing reserve* of resources. While “political ecologists argue that we should live with, rather than against, the natural world,”¹⁷ Arendt applauds the world’s artificiality. It should be noted here that the world, for her, means “the man-made artifice that separates human

¹⁴ Simon Swift, *Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 2009), 136.

¹⁵ Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, 229.

¹⁶ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 8.

¹⁷ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 25.

existence from all merely natural environments.”¹⁸ⁱ Why does she celebrate this separation? Because only outside of nature can humanity fully flourish and realize its highest good: freedom.

Despite this anti-environmentalist appearance, Arendt’s theory of action does provide space for integrating the principle of ecological sustainability into its radical form of politics when interpreted appropriately. Green political theory has largely undervalued her potential contribution to environmental questions, of which her greatest contribution is likely her novel conceptualization of freedom. Whereas the Western liberal tradition often situates freedom outside political structures—*e.g.* in Rousseau’s, Hobbes’, and Locke’s state of nature allegories—Arendt situates freedom within politics itself. This freedom is conditional, only achieved when an individual transcends the material and biological requirements of life. People may experience autonomy prior to this state of overcoming, insofar as they select from various means for securing their ends, but their choices are ultimately directed by necessity. One of Rousseau’s nascent people may temporarily satisfy their essential needs, for instance, but within the state of nature, what actions could they alone undertake to experience freedom? None. Freedom cannot be experienced in isolation; at most, the experience of overcoming necessity would manifest as a dull passivity. Freedom, instead, requires that people recognize each other’s actions. So, a nascent person cannot overcome necessity because this possibility is foreign to their inherently instrumentalist logic that continuously encourages an atomistic pursuit of essential power.ⁱⁱ They seek, as Hobbes claims, “power after power unto death.” Arendt’s conception of freedom, by contrast, redirects the liberal emphasis from the individual *I* to the collective *we*. To be realized, freedom requires opportunities for public expression, for a public

¹⁸ Michael H. McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 69.

appearance. When grappling with the complexity of climate change, this collectivist conceptualization of freedom enables a non-instrumental response that seeks to re-imagine human/nature relations by encouraging a green public sphere where a new collective narrative can emerge.

Arendtian action differs from conventional political action insofar as its goals are intrinsic. Its objective is self-referential and performative: action strives to act. The plurality of human experiences that emerge through a collective's participation within the public sphere reveals and guarantees a community's sense of reality, including its associated cultural meanings.¹⁹ Concomitantly, action enables the individual participant to secure his or her identity amongst others. In aggregate, this existential development sustains the collective's ethos.²⁰ Considering the complexity of ecological systems, this alternative understanding of political freedom encourages theorists to recognize the merits of such a communitarian response to the problems of environmental degradation since no single person, whatever their expertise, can re-orientate the character of human/nature relations. Instead, this requires a collective re-construction of a community's identity. To grapple with climate change, then, theorists cannot jeopardize the freedom of politics with technocratic or administrative systems of eco-social management.

This communitarian insight draws from Arendt's rejection of the Platonic Schism that she observed in the foundations of Western political thought, a schism that denigrates the plurality of the *polis* in favour of the authority of "philosopher kings." In theorizing about the human faculty

¹⁹ Kimberley Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 82.

²⁰ This narrative, of course, continuously reflects socio-political changes. Like Durkheim's "collective consciousness," however, Arendt believes the narratives of tradition endure beyond the tumultuousness of administrative discourse (Torgerson, 1999, 122).

for action, Arendt seeks to secure politics against the totalitarian potential of the authoritarianism that can emerge through this schism. As Dryzek observes, this privileging of expertise continues within green politics, where the knowledge necessary for environmental assessments elevates some perspectives over others and instrumental rationalism is lauded over experiential or artistic narratives. Where green political theory does advocate for democratic forms of governance, like Arendt's communitarian focus, Torgerson suggests there remains a transcendent instrumental rationality of eco-social management due to its emphasis on creating *social* movements.²¹

This instrumentalism is broadly split between reformist and radical theorizing, *i.e.* between ameliorative initiatives *within* and wholesale transformations *of* industrial societies. Some reformers advance alterations to existing public policies, such as carbon taxes or cap-and-trade pollution markets, whereas radicals advocate for the wholesale dismantling of industrial societies. Often these latter approaches advance a return-to-nature discourse that encourages bucolic societal forms that mimic ecological systems, *e.g.* Lyle Estill's *The Small is Possible*. Other radicals have advocated for misanthropic solutions—which due to their morally dubious consequences are here regarded as non-starters. Garrett Hardin's neo-Malthusian lifeboat ethic, for instance, advocates for abandoning support for all populations that exceed the earth's (lifeboat's) carrying capacity. The assumption is that the natural force of famine will curb population growth. Dobson argues that this is a position explicitly condemned but implicitly supported by several variants of environmental activism. For instance, Earth First! Co-founder Dave Foreman has advocated for strict immigration policies, saying “letting the USA be an overflow vale for problems in Latin America is not solving a thing.”²² Prominent

²¹ Douglas Torgerson, "Farewell to the Green Movement? Political Action and the Green Public Sphere," *Environmental Politics* 9, no. 4 (2000): 7, accessed June 13, 2016, doi:10.1080/09644010008414548.

²² Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 83.

environmentalists Jonathon Porritt and Edward Goldsmith have each espoused a similar sentiment.²³ But, on what moral foundations could anyone decide which populations deserve to be aboard the boat? And on what authority could they make this decision? Any answer provided, it seems, would be arbitrary.

In either case, green theorizing broadly echoes the Hegelian historicism found throughout modern Western thought by conceptualizing eco-politics as a movement towards the ultimate ideal of an environmentally sustainable society.ⁱⁱⁱ At issue between the reformers and radicals, then, is determining this ideal and its corresponding means-ends calculation. By contrast, theorists like Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves and Douglas Torgerson convincingly read Arendt's theory of action as asserting a non-instrumental conception of politics, whereby its value is endogenous to the process itself—like performance art which only realizes its meaning through its enactment before others.²⁴ Radically understood, this form of politics is non-teleological insofar as it does not presuppose a progression of human understanding, development, wealth, *et cetera* beneath the aggregate and accumulative effects of human actions. Only those “high principles” that a community self-selects are their guiding norms, *i.e.* the self-evaluative standards Habermas was quoted as describing above.²⁵ In this sense, action is a continuous enactment of a people's existential becoming. The linearity of history, here, is only perceived upon reflection, when the political community's guiding narratives are observable. “Action,” Arendt writes, “reveals itself fully only to the storytellers, that is, to the backwards glance of the

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 70; Douglas Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics: Environmentalism and the Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 154.

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. P. R. Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 301.

historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants.”²⁶ Unlike Hegel, and later Marx, Arendt does not politicize this backwards glance, for she believes that human history is linear but aimless. In other words, a community cannot derive its political future by referencing the perceived patterns within its political past.

This account also differs drastically with those green theories that strive to either reform and transform conventional politics, for Arendt’s performativity never addresses the functional or constitutive practicalities of governance.²⁷ This is because she conceives of these practicalities as administrative issues, which are properly handled within the social/private realm as matters of necessity. For Torgerson, this non-instrumental politics is precisely why green theorists ought to read Arendt. Administrative systems cannot generate meaning; instead, this emerges through the narratives generated by deliberative communicative action, which grapples with questions of individual and collective identities. Torgerson follows Arendt in considering that this meaning-making process is a performative politics that ought not commit itself to historicist ambitions but maintain the “arguability” of public discourse. In so doing, this maintains the possibility for novelty from the plurality of human experience.²⁸

Arendt’s theory of action offers an ontological framework for distinguishing between action and governance, *i.e.* between politics and policies. This distinction was the principal purpose behind Arendt’s account of the *Human Condition* as she believed modern politics was becoming dominated by the social questions related to the governance of mass society. As she writes,

The world’s central problems today are the political organization of mass societies and the political integration of technical power. The bigness of bureaucracies is stifling

²⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 192.

²⁷ Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics*, 154.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

authentic sources of power, the people themselves, and creates a curious new brand of nationalism, usually understood as a swing to the Right, but more probably an indication of a growing, world-wide resentment against the ‘bigness’ as such.²⁹

In response to climate change, this domination only appears to be advancing as Western societies become consumed, in every sense of the term, by their industrial processes. Green political theory is not immune from this conflation between policies and politics, as its theorists primarily offer socio-political frameworks for environmental governance—*i.e.* natural resource management, pollution controls, green consumerism, *et cetera*. The environmentalist reading of Arendt presented in this thesis strives to maintain her conception of politics lest its insights regarding human freedom become neglected within this emerging milieu of ecological-administration. To bring Arendt’s theory of action to bear on the contemporary climate crisis, however, it is necessary to first bring environmentalism to bear on Arendt’s theory.

Arendtian Environmental Literature

There exists an emerging literature on Arendtian environmentalism; however, its theorists have only applied specific aspects of her thought to various issues; they have not offered a theoretical justification for their reliance on or application of Arendt’s work. Can *vita activa* even accommodate contemporary eco-politics, or does this possibility contradict its categorical boundaries between the private, social, and public spheres? To begin, Paul Voice writes that Arendt’s *vita activa* allows for an ontological justification for “constraining consumption” and “unconstraining public deliberation” [*sic.*],³⁰ for frivolous consumption usurps opportunities for public participation and thereby denies consumers the existential development afforded to them through the process of deliberation. Kerry Whiteside makes a similar point in stating that “action,

²⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 84.

³⁰ Paul Voice, "Consuming the World: Hannah Arendt on Politics and the Environment," *Journal of International Political Theory*, 9, no. 2 (2013): 179.

and the storytelling that follows, creates meaning which gives a point to life and which establishes a final purpose for the world of *homo faber*.³¹ But with the increasing loss of wilderness, action is losing its point of reference—that awesome unknown natural space of Being, what Plato referred to as *thaumazein*.³² According to both Voice and Whiteside, human freedom only acquires its significance against this enduring backdrop; likewise, nature only becomes an object for human consideration when it is distinguished from our artificial world.³³ As Arendt writes, “we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else.”³⁴ If otherwise, the individual would remain a constituent feature of their natural surroundings and, like Rousseau’s nascent people, they would anonymously roam the wilderness as “stupid animals.”³⁵ As Arendt writes, “without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity.”³⁶ Constructing this artificial world is a necessary but, according to Paul Voice, an insufficient condition for humanity’s existential development. Beyond consumption and fabrication, people *must* collectively reflect on their plurality of experiences to develop a meaningful understanding of reality, an understanding of their distinction from and dependence on Nature.

Whiteside’s reading of Arendt further asserts that the modern primacy of instrumental reason, necessary within a consumerist society, reduces both Nature and Humanity to mutable material resources. She writes, “the price of the end of nature is not only the loss of awe before what is natural, but also the devaluation of our own non-natural accomplishments.”³⁷ In re-

³¹ Whiteside, "Hannah Arendt and Ecological Politics," 348.

³² *Ibid.*, 356.

³³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 179.

³⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

³⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. G. D. H. Cole (New York, NY: Cosimo Classics, 2008),

27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁷ Whiteside, "Hannah Arendt and Ecological Politics," 356.

evaluating humanity's relationship to nature, she argues that we cannot slide into the nihilism that accompanies bio-centric egalitarian theories, wherein every species is granted equal significance. However biologically accurate, these radical forms of eco-egalitarianism remain politically meaningless because only people can appear within the public realm, and only people need to re-evaluate their relationship to their environment.

Marianne Constable echoes Whiteside's concern for green political theories that erode the distinction between the world and the wilderness (nature). She writes, "the possibility for human freedom...is threatened not only by totalitarian government or nuclear destruction, but also when human practices become only instrumental means to further ends or automatic behaviours conforming to an administered environment."³⁸ That is, freedom is threatened when fabrication extends beyond worldly necessity. To illustrate this administering phenomenon, she references how humanity "reaches into nature" for environmentalist ends by drawing on the example of intervention efforts made into the looming extinction of the Californian Condor. Here, captive breeding blurs the distinction between humanity and nature since these now captive-breed birds have lost some important natural behaviours. Constable's point is that such interventions disrupt natural cycles. When looking around in nature, humanity begins to see only itself, to the extent that these birds become its own productions. Rather than curbing production to ameliorate its detrimental effect on these birds, captive breeding merely pushed the fabrication process further into nature.

Here, Constable is highlighting an ecological instance of what Arendt terms "earth alienation," a modern situation where humanity increasingly only encounters itself, having

³⁸ Marianne Constable, "The Rhetoric of Sustainability: Human, All Too Human," *HA* 1 (2012): 33, accessed June 25, 2016, https://issuu.com/bardcollege/docs/2012_ha_journal-vol1?e=7312888/9941082.

pushed its instrumentalism into nature and history alike.³⁹ Because nature serves as the ontological backdrop for humanity's existential self-realization, when nature loses its critical otherness action loses its revelatory power in turn. On this insight, Whiteside and Constable each advance an Arendtian environmental principle. Akin to fabricated worlds, they argue that the natural environment also requires a duty-of-care to preserve this *otherness*. The modern aggrandizement of human industriousness has encouraged *some* political communities to "act into nature," whereby one's productions—like public actions—destabilize environmental processes by introducing unpredictable novelty, for these undertakings are not guided by necessity but human ambition to further our knowledge or strength. Finn Bowring summarizes this point in writing that "when nuclear physicists and molecular biologists initiate natural processes that the earth had never previously known, science began to undermine the predictability of nature."⁴⁰ Under these conditions, how might nature serve as the foundation for a political ethos or principle, *e.g.* the presumed natural laws which underpin liberalism and human rights respectively? Alienation from earthly wilderness, it seems, accompanies an alienation from the world.

"One could indeed argue," Anne Chapman writes, "that in building a world of lasting human artefacts we are attempting to emulate [the] immortality of nature."⁴¹ That is, nature's persistence ties generations together by providing a shared environmental experience, as Montesquieu once observed. To fabricate an enduring dwelling, people must grapple with their mortality; unlike nature, human history is rectilinear insofar as individuals are given a sense of ontic individuality: the self. To secure the human world against generational divides, Chapman

³⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 89.

⁴⁰ Finn Bowring, "Arendt after Marx: Rethinking the Dualism of Nature and World," *Rethinking Marxism* 26, no. 2 (2014): 283.

⁴¹ Chapman, *The Ways That Nature Matters*, 439.

points towards Arendt's commitment to constitutional laws. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt argues, for instance, that such positive laws "guarantee the pre-existence of a common world, the reality of some continuity which transcends the individual lifespan of each generation."⁴² People must, in other words, sanctify their collectively fabricated world to ensure that it persists against natural processes of decay and justify its continual maintenance and care. In Chapman's reading, this material emulation provides an avenue for extending Arendt's constitutional claims to Nature, for it too transcends generational divides.

Moreover, a society's surrounding landscape often carries a cultural significance *like* artefacts. Arendt recognized this symbolic connection between culture and nature in her essay, "The Crisis of Culture." Here, she writes:

The word 'culture' derives from *colere*—to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve—and it relates primarily to the intercourse of man with nature in the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation. As such, it indicates an attitude of loving care and stands in sharp contrast to all efforts to subject nature to the domination of man.

Chapman cites this passage to suggest that Arendt understands the boundary between the built and natural environment as being perceptibly vague since care as the cultivation of nature is self-referential. To sustain oneself, one must sustain nature. Arendt's distinction between Nature and Artifice is, then understood as, mainly analytic. Pointing to animal welfare advocates, Chapman demonstrates this ambiguity by asserting that whenever an animal is individualized, humanity symbolically pulls it into its world, into its culture. "Whatever touches or enters into the sustained relationship with human life," writes Arendt, "immediately assumes the character of the human existence."⁴³ Yet, Chapman's interpretation is not a form of post-modern social constructivism wherein Nature is ultimately subjective; she recognizes the ontological

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1976), 465.

⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

independence of nature from human experience or knowledge. Rather, her account observes the multidimensionality of our relationship with nature across the three aspects of Arendt's *vita activa* (these aspects are discussed below). In other words, our perception of nature and its cultural contribution differs across our ontological categories of being. Given this complexity, her reading extends Arendt's emphasis on "gratitude for the beauty for the [artificial] world"⁴⁴ to encompass Nature. Once humanity has secured itself against life's necessities, this ethic "involves recognising the non-human origins of nature and the value of earth as it is, unmodified by human work."⁴⁵ Unlike Whiteside and Constable, Chapman is arguing that Nature's otherness is inherently restricted to humanity's political experience. Only from this detached perspective can humanity find "gratitude" for nature and subsequently ascribe it cultural value.⁴⁶ Prior to politics, nature cannot be separated from the labouring individual nor from the fabricator's resources. Practically, then, *vita activa*'s boundaries are perceptively vague but analytically significant; they signal a strict stratification in humanity's ontological experience of Nature.

Like Chapman, Paul Ott interprets a practical ambiguity within the analytic categories of *vita activa*.⁴⁷ In practice, agricultural tools demonstrate this multi-modal character of human undertakings. On this reading, Ott cautions against any environmentalism which advances an anti-political return-to-nature solution, for these frameworks amount to monistic forms of eco-fascism which bar public action. His proposal for eco-politics, instead, encourages "keeping humans a good distance away from nature, retaining human unnaturalness, which means away

⁴⁴ Anne Chapman, "The Ways That Nature Matters: The World and the Earth in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Environmental Values* 16, no. 4 (2007): 442, doi:10.3197/096327107x243222.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 442.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Paul Ott, "World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature," *Ethics, Place & Environment* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3, accessed June 17, 2016, doi:10.1080/13668790902752999.

from an exclusive focus on labour.”⁴⁸ To construct non-instrumental values, people must stand outside nature to reflect on and judge its significance. Finn Bowring offers a similar interpretation by drawing from Arendt’s essay, “The Crisis of Culture,” to argue that initiating an Arendtian environmental principle requires a political emphasis on *taste*, for this faculty “de-barbarises the world of beautiful things by not being overwhelmed by it.”⁴⁹ As Arendt writes,

The activity of taste decides how this world, independent of its utility and our vital interests in it, is to look and sound, what men will see and what they will hear in it. Taste judges the world in its appearance and its worldliness; its interest in the world is purely ‘disinterested,’ and that means that neither the life interests of the individual nor the moral interests of the self are involved here. For judgement of taste, the world is the primary thing, not man, neither man’s life nor his self.⁵⁰

In other words, it creates the subjective normative framework that Habermas encourages communities to construct for self-judgement under the fluid conditions of modernity, as discussed above. Without taste people would struggle to justify one form of consumption or fabrication over another beyond their competing measures of efficiency. Vegetarianism, for example, requires a judgement of *taste* because its value cannot be measured in utilitarian terms, but rather, derives from constructed ethical commitments. Together, Ott and Bowring encourage a re-invigoration of politics, which aims to pass judgement on the insatiable tastes of industrialism for promoting a new cultural ethos of environmentalism.

Moving away from humanity’s ontological experience of nature, Mick Smith draws from Arendt to problematize the hegemony and ubiquity of the sustainability discourse, a discourse that appears in government policies, international agreements, corporate strategies, community programs, *et cetera*. Akin to Walter Benjamin’s observations on wartime propaganda, Smith

⁴⁸ Paul Ott, “World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature,” *Ethics, Place & Environment* 12, no. 1 (2009): 13, accessed June 17, 2016, doi:10.1080/13668790902752999.

⁴⁹ Arendt, as cited in Finn Bowring, “Arendt after Marx: Rethinking the Dualism of Nature and World,” 228.

⁵⁰ As cited in Bowring, *Arendt After Marx*, 285.

asserts that the sustainability discourse generally asserts a paradoxical claim of historical inevitability and individual agency, whereby climate change has arisen as the inevitable cost of humanity's enlightenment, yet its amelioration requires individual action. From this perspective, environmental culpability is diluted since humanity at large is positioned as the benefactor of western industrialized progress, obfuscating the inequalities in welfare this process creates and maintains. Simultaneously, the sustainability discourse asserts that ameliorating the threats associated with climate change will require "ecological citizenship."⁵¹ That is, individual initiatives, such as recycling, ethical consumption, composting, *et cetera*. Smith notes that "these 'acts' are, in fact, largely apolitical in an Arendtian sense, since they bear more resemblance to forms of labour or work" than political action.⁵² However beneficial these avenues for environmental citizenship are, they typically stem from paternalistic forms of governance. Smith's interpretation of Arendtian environmental politics occurs, by contrast, during the initial public discourse that advocated for such civic initiatives. Here, the political aspect beneath everyday life is revealed as people negotiate new meanings for their built and natural environments. According to Smith's reading, Arendt's theory rejects top-down administrative models and advocates for public activism rather than private obligations, for the one is politics and the other is policy.

Taken together, the literature on environmentalism and Arendt offers several applications of her concepts to contemporary environmental issues. No theorist seems to provide the theoretical underpinning needed to support their application, however. The literature's general assumption is that Arendt's concepts are environmentally applicable, even though other readings

⁵¹ Mick Smith, "Environmental Risks and Ethical Responsibilities," *Environmental Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2006): 33, accessed June 14, 2016, doi:10.5840/enviroethics200628315.

⁵² *Ibid.*

of Arendt suggest the opposite, as aforementioned. Paul Voice, for instance, advocates for constrained consumption and unconstrained deliberation; this argues for a re-allocation of human capital from apolitical to political endeavours on the basis of Arendt's praise for action—the environmental benefits of which are believed to be epiphenomenal. Similarly, Whiteside, Constable, Chapman, and Ott all caution against the political consequences of bureaucratic environmentalism, which introduces eco-administrations and espouses principles of ecological equality. Again, these theorists strive to continue Arendt's ambition to shield the public realm from exogenous distortions related to matters of necessity, whether biological or material. In general, their response to the environmental crisis is to extend Arendt's duty-of-care principle from humanity's artificial world to the natural environment. Finally, Smith demonstrates the apolitical character of “ecological citizenship” in contrast with the action of *vita activa*. These Arendtian scholars, again, each presuppose the applicability of Arendt's theory to the contemporary environmental crisis. But, is this correct?

Vita Activa's triadic structure distinguishes humanity's private labour and social work from public action on the basis that whatever emerges by necessity is inherently unfree. When grappling with these biological and material necessities, labourers and workers, respectively, draw from the natural environment; in particular, the labourer (our *animal laborans* self) seeks a condition of sustainability since their appetites are never fully abated, necessitating a balance with environmental limits. In this sense, they embody the ever-reoccurring movement that Arendt observes in nature itself. As she writes, “the common characteristic of both, the biological process in man and the process of growth and decay in the world, is that they are part of the cyclical movement of nature and therefore endlessly repetitive.”⁵³ The worker's

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 98.

fabrications will decay as well; however, their objects' material endurance slows this effect. By contrast, action arises inside the public realm, where freedom enables people to discover novelties and create shared meaning. This space is, by definition, beyond necessity and, therefore, distinct from Nature. Whereas the labourer and worker have direct interactions with and dependency on the natural environment, actors only achieve their status by entirely removing themselves from such relations. Environmental politics appears to be, in Arendt's theory, a contradiction in terms because action cannot be externally determined or directed without undermining its foundational freedom. Environmental politics appears to be one instance of the broader phenomenon she described as the "rise of the social," insofar as apolitical concerns regarding environmental management are—with the support of ecological science—increasingly pushing into the public sphere, a phenomenon that decreases the sphere's plurality of participants by elevating bureaucratic and expert positions.⁵⁴ How might Arendtian environmental action arise, then, without appearing contradictory or becoming administrative?

Applying Arendt thought to environmental politics first requires an immanent critique to search for potential avenues for environmentalism within her theory. Unlike the existing literature that pre-supposes the applicability of *vita activa* to contemporary green political theory, this reading recognizes the anti-environmental appearance of Arendt's theory and strives to elaborate where environmental matters may enter its triadic structure. The principal objective in offering this environmentalist reading is not to green-wash Arendt's theory, *i.e.* not to imagine that environmentalism can simply substitute for its conceptual touchstone. The principal objective is instead the opposite, to bring its original conceptual touchstone, freedom, to bear on environmental politics. Certainly, Arendt overlooked the possibility for environmental politics

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

and relegated environmental management to the apolitical social sphere, but this oversight and this relegation does not necessarily make *vita activa* an anti-environmentalist theory. By arguing for its ability to accommodate contemporary environmental concerns, this reading seeks to promote Arendt's conception of freedom within the emerging green political tradition. Like the threats she observed in totalitarianism and nuclear war, the enormity of climate change and its detrimental effects seems to encourage the privileging of administrative rationalism over public deliberation. This response would suppress the existential power of public action, and thereby, it would distort any efforts to reorient human/nature relations. This is because reorientation requires collective judgement regarding a community's *taste* not elite evaluations of sustainable utility. Contrary to some of existing literature on Arendtian environmentalism, this reading offers the theoretical foundation for applying *vita activa* to environmental politics not by addressing any specific environmental problem through her theory but by examining its conceptualization of the relationship between Nature and Artifice in general. Through this theoretical justification, Arendt's concern for the political can be brought to bear on green political theory.

Overview of Thesis Chapters

This thesis will be organized into three chapters that respectively explain the essential features of Arendt's theory of action, discuss the major themes within contemporary green political theories, and highlight the points of resonance between this emerging tradition and Arendt's theory to demonstrate avenues for incorporating environmentalism into *vita activa*'s original structure. The first chapter outlines the essential features of Arendt's understanding of the human condition, by which she means a person's existential position of being-within-the-

world.⁵⁵ Again, this encompasses three fundamental activities: labour, work, and action.

Together these comprise humanity's life of action, *vita activa*—as opposed to humanity's life of contemplation, *vita contemplativa*. Since this theoretical analysis concerns the possibility for environmental politics within Arendt's theory, it exclusively considers this active realm wherein people experience and contend with their material conditions. As discussed above, labour comprises those activities necessary to fulfil life's biological requirements—*e.g.* sustenance and reproduction—that unceasingly confront every being. This aspect of humanity, Arendt terms the *animal laborans*, for within this regard we remain a species among species. While animals frequently engage in collective labouring, fulfilling life's essential requirements is ultimately the individual's concern since a being's demise is never shared. Arendt situates these concerns within the private sphere of the household (*oikos*) where families secure their life-process.⁵⁶ Next, work primarily comprises those activities necessary to fulfil life's material requirements — *i.e.* the *oikos* itself. This aspect of the human condition Arendt terms *homo faber*, man the fabricator. Here, we instrumentally draw from nature to construct our artificial world of dwellings and commodities. This process is inherently violent towards nature insofar as the process of fabrication destroys natural objects and its fabrications endure against nature's cyclical movement. In other words, this endurance allows for what John Bellamy Foster draws on Marx to term a “metabolic rift,” a concentration of artificial materials.⁵⁷ Since fabrications as commodities are not immediately consumed, they create the possibility for exchange markets

⁵⁵ Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 120.

⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 33.

⁵⁷ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 141.

within a social sphere.⁵⁸ Finally, humanity grapples to understand its own plurality of experiences by assembling public spheres where participants can construct meanings through their mutually observed and remembered actions—*i.e.* through story-telling.^{iv} Although Arendt never termed this aspect of the human condition, an apt characterization would be *homo fictus*, man the storyteller, for politics ultimately establishes a people's self-guiding narrative.⁵⁹ By outlining these constitute elements of *vita activa*, this chapter seeks to establish the foundation of Arendt's political theory before raising the possibility for environmental politics, for this questioning requires a prior understanding of her separation between the world (human artifice) and Nature (earth).

To provide an environmentalist reading of Arendt's politics, the second chapter examines four major texts within the green political tradition to exemplify some significant theoretical trends and concepts. The texts examined include Andrew Dobson's *Green Political Thought*, Robyn Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach*, John Dryzek's *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, and John Meyer's *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Thought*. Given Arendt's distinction between nature and artifice, this section is principally being guided by the question: what, if anything, distinguishes humanity from nature? Conflation theorists, for instance, collapse this separation by asserting that humanity cannot escape its animalism. Whatever it constructs is by extension natural since humanity itself is natural. Here, this position is regarded as conceptually inadequate because it eliminates the problem of climate change altogether by collapsing the distinction between Nature and Artifice.^v Environmental destruction

⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 29 & 162.

⁵⁹ Julia Kristeva and Frank Collins, *Hannah Arendt: Life Is a Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 7-8.

cannot be problematized through such a framework because nature cannot destroy nature. Consequently, this chapter is limited to select green theories that problematize contemporary western industrialism by distinguishing between artificial and natural environments.

Among the theorists selected, John Dryzek suggests that the green political tradition has three dominant discursive categories: survivalism, environmentalism, and green radicalism. This typology provides an overall framework for the chapter by initially orientating its discussion. Survivalists point toward the potentially devastating effects of climate change and advocate for immediate and fundamental transformations to western society. Given the required rapidity of these changes, survivalists often advocate authoritarian forms of government; they claim that democratic structures are inherently encumbered by representative measures and consequently sluggish.⁶⁰ For instance, Robert Heilbroner takes this position, suggesting that humanity's only hope resides in an eco-monasticism characterized by a "religious orientation with a military discipline."⁶¹ By contrast, environmentalism encompasses a wide range of reform theorists who generally strive to preserve the fundamental character of Western socio-political institutions while curbing their dependence on industrialisms, *e.g.* wilderness conservationists, animal-welfare advocates, ecological preservationists, *et cetera*. Politically, environmentalists advocate for democracy to varying degrees from conventional representative liberalism to participatory republicanism. Lastly, green radicalism encompasses those approaches that stand on the extreme participatory-side of the democratic continuum, such as Murray Bookchin's Social Ecology or Andrew Dobson's Ecologism. They characteristically re-orientate liberal individualism towards communitarian collectivism. Robyn Eckersley further expands Dryzek's typology by highlighting the meta-theoretical justifications for greening politics, which span between

⁶⁰ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 17.

⁶¹ As cited in Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 36.

anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.^{vi} Justifications for adopting a green framework, in other words, may be narrowly directed by human interests or holistically directed by ecological interests.

The third chapter draws from the themes and concepts emphasized by Dryzek, Eckersley, Dobson, and Meyer to help raise the environmental challenge of human/nature relations in Arendt's theory. This chapter explores the general points of resonance and difference between *vita activa* and the green tradition. Yet, Arendt's thought is divided between theory and analysis, *i.e.* between an idealized conception of *vita activa* and its application in critiquing modernity. This chapter principally challenges her phenomenological theory of the human conditions, as opposed to the analyses of conventional politics, *e.g.* *Eichmann In Jerusalem* or *The Jewish Writings*. This is because our purpose is to establish a theoretical space within *vita activa* for the accommodation of environmental politics, not to assess her analytic ability to foresee the environmental degradation that accompanies industrialism. For instance, this chapter examines how Arendt applauds the American Revolution's town-hall politics and conceptualizes a similar political council system for the ideal realization of *vita activa*. This form of communal politics strongly resembles those advocated by green radicals.⁶² Despite this resonance with eco-anarchism and bio-regionalists, however, Arendt's theory differs to the extent that she never endorses the complete abolition of conventional governments (systems of administration) since, she believes, these institutions help secure a people's essential rights *in* citizenship. Nevertheless, this point of resonance suggests that Arendt's politics carries potential avenues for green democracy.

⁶² David Macauley, *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 124.

Following Eckersley's typology, this chapter proceeds with the question: what ethical justifications could Arendt's theory support for green politics? Conceptually, *vita activa* is anthropocentric. If otherwise, who could possibly enter the public sphere and represent any non-human interest? Because humanity is universally dependent on nature, each member carries an equal interest in its healthful condition. John Dryzek terms this a "generalizable interest," of which climate change is example par excellence.⁶³ No person may claim to politically represent any natural aspect *a priori*. Instead, representing eco-centric interests is a sociological undertaking that requires political authority to acquire legitimacy. This chapter examines this authority and its limits, for green political theory often privileges such expertise.

Eckersley's claim still poses a challenge to Arendt's theory regarding humanity's relationship to nature. Readers could interpret Arendt's equating freedom with politics as evidence of her anthropocentric viewpoint. They could surmise that she implicitly supports capitalism's paradigm of exponential growth because it lowers the material threshold for freedom.⁶⁴ This understanding would be mistaken. Arendt recognizes the limits of the instrumental reasoning that underpins industrialism; as she writes, "economic growth may one day turn out to be a curse rather than a good, and under no conditions can it either lead into freedom or constitute a proof for its existence."⁶⁵ Getting beyond necessity is not a sufficient condition for the realization of freedom, in other words. Unmitigated industrial growth not only cannot secure freedom, it impedes its realization by failing to recognize the point of satisfaction and, thereby, the moment for political engagement. That said, Arendt's critique of modernity—including its effects in world and earth alienation—appears to support Paul Voice's interpretation

⁶³ John Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 55.

⁶⁴ Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics*, 172, n72.

⁶⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 209.

for constrained consumption and unconstrained deliberation. Eckersley's ethical claim persists however. Would such constraints be motivated by an anthropocentric drive towards the realization of human freedom? Or, could constraints stem from a broader eco-centric appeal that advocates for intrinsic value in the flourishing of non-human beings? Arendt cannot answer this question, for her theory conceptualizes the conditions for politics, not politics itself. A political community's commitment to environmental values and their justification for embracing such a position cannot be established outside the politics of the public sphere, for politics depends on collective judgment. This chapter concludes by building on Fin Bowering's discussion of Arendtian political taste to argue that responding to climate change requires aesthetic judgment for the construction of a new societal narrative.

End Notes

ⁱ Arendt's "world" follows the phenomenological tradition begun by Husserl and Heidegger. Specifically, she draws from their respective concepts of *Lebenswelt* and *Dasein* to position Nature as everything given, *i.e.* that which emerges autonomously *from nowhere* (McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 104n11).

ⁱⁱ Unlike Arendt's original use of male pronouns for a universal signifier of the human individual, this thesis will strive towards gender neutrality by using non-specific pronouns, such as theirs, them, one, *et cetera*. Quotation will, however, keep this original form to preserve Arendt's own voice.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Society" for Arendt refers to a "modern post-Industrial Revolution realm, neither public nor private, in which labour and work were evolving into activities for supplying not the necessities of life but an unprecedented superfluity of goods and techniques for making more goods, including destructive goods" (Elisabeth Young-Bruhl, *Why Arendt Matters*, 151). However, this thesis the term is mostly used in its proverbial sense of a the sum of human relations within a territory.

^{iv} For Arendt, story-telling is humanity's most characteristic quality, for it alone secures meaning to actions, a meaning which gradually forms into an identity for both individuals and collectives.

^v Arendt's distinction derives from the difference between the German terms, *welt* and *umwelt*. The latter term constitutes the world produced from and within the former.

^{vi} Anthropocentrism is, according to Hayward, "the mistake of giving exclusive or arbitrary preferential consideration to human interests as opposed to the interests of other beings" (*Anthropocentrism, a Misunderstood Problem*, 51).

Chapter One: The Active Life (Vita Activa)

The Human Condition

According to Arendt, the individual secures their essential “being-in-the-world” through labour and work.¹ As illustrated above, these are not uniquely human characteristics, and Arendt signals this by respectively conceptualizing these activities with the Latin terms: *animal laborans* and *homo faber*. In this, she emphasizes labour as that instinctual response to life’s essential requirements, something observed in all living creatures, *i.e.* sustenance, procreation, *et cetera*. Next, Arendt positions work as a process of fabrication, or production. It encompasses animals’ continuous drive to fabricate their world (which encompasses the communities’ immaterial social and civic institutions) from their surrounding natural environment.² Yet, whatever humanity shares with other animals cannot be its distinguishing characteristic.³ Instead, our unique quality is our capacity for action. As Arendt writes, “action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man: neither a beast nor a god is capable of it.”⁴ It requires the in-between space created by a plurality of equal participants, *i.e.* a public sphere. Here, a political community interprets their worldly orientation by developing an existential awareness for both the individual participants and the collective. For the latter, their self-conception gradually emerges through their public actions. When acting before others, the individual’s identity is reflected by their audience. For the former, actions secure a collective’s ontological foundation by accumulating shared principles, as these are manifested through common narratives. “The whole factual world of human affairs,” writes Arendt, “depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon

¹ Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 32.

² Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 108.

³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 84.

⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 22.

the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.”⁵ This should not be interpreted as asserting a radical social constructionist paradigm. This current reading understands Arendt as drawing a distinction between Nature—constituting what Aristotle termed *Physis*, that which independently grows—and our human World—constituting our *nomos*, those entities which we produced, fabricated, and enact.⁶ The following sections will elaborate on *vita activa*’s constituent parts of labour, work, and action.

Labour

“To be enslaved by necessity... [is] inherent in the conditions of human life.”⁷ When labouring through this condition, humanity is engaging in its most rudimentary activity. Contrary to Marx, Arendt restricts her conception of labour to those activities concerned with one’s biological necessity, *i.e.* “the force of the life process that—unyieldingly—bears down on all living creatures insofar as they are creatures of the earth.”⁸ As such, it remains a cyclical activity, for “[it] 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 only with the death of this organism.”⁹ In such toil, one directly confronts their natural environment to fulfil bodily and familial needs. Since this activity concerns the individual, and potentially their dependants, Arendt associates it with the private sphere, metaphorically symbolized by the household (*oikos*). Here, the family unit serves as a mutual benefit for its members in securing their survival.¹⁰ Only when one’s

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶ Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, 47.

⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 84.

⁸ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 42.

⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 98.

¹⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 30.

biological requirements are sufficiently abated may they step into other social relations. On early anthropological studies of tribal people, for instance, Arendt writes:

What made them different from other [groups of] human beings was not the colour of their skin but the fact that they behaved like a part of nature, that they treated nature as the undisputed, that they had not created a human world, a human reality, and that therefore nature had remained...the only overwhelming reality.^{11 i}

Here, she signals the universality of labour, as our ontologically most vital and most natural activity. It follows, as Montesquieu observed in the *Spirit of the Laws*, that a natural environment's level of fecundity significantly influences a people's political capacity by affecting the viability of various institutional forms against the pressure of necessity.

Within the immediacy of this private sphere, the relationship between humanity and nature is inherently harsh. To secure or defend their survival, the individual always engages in moments of violence—either against nature or potential usurpers. As Arendt argues, “human activities...do violence to nature because they disturb what, in the absence of mortals, would be the eternal quiet of being-forever that rests or swings within itself.”¹² Nature's various forces would equally inflict violence against the individual, hastening their demise, should they forgo this essential disturbance. Arendt's reference to nature's eternal swing marks this as an important ontological divide between social and natural realms. Consecutive generations of beings must rise against and eventually fall into Nature—interpreted here as the ever-present condition of Being, in the Heideggerian sense of existence. Thus, Arendt's conception of our essential violence in labour signals a metabolism of humanity *in* Nature, not metabolism of humanity with

¹¹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 192.

¹² Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 2006, 42.

nature.¹³ In other words, as labouring beings our violence is, itself, a manifestation of nature's cyclical movement.

Humanity's labour process is therefore not necessarily unsustainable, *i.e.* asymmetrical with nature's reproductive capacity. When its purpose is maintained, labour's metabolic impact should correspond with its surrounding natural environment. "The common characteristic of both, the biological process in man and the process of growth and decay in the world, is that they are part of the cyclical movement of nature and therefore endlessly repetitive."¹⁴ This repetitive characterization is not an allusion to Nietzsche's demon and its moral imposition through a gift of eternal return. Arendt is emphasizing the opposite: the impermanence of being. Earth alone witnesses the cyclical movement of its organic matter.¹⁵ By contrast, the human experience of being is rectilinear because we understand our own inevitable mortality; consequently, we can imagine a liner progression through birth (rise) and death (fall). Time and narrative become conceivable between these definitive points of being/non-being. In sustaining life, then, the labour process maintains the individual and temporarily allows them to escape nature's cyclical movement as an autonomous being—even if this autonomy is limited to a *brutish* existential awareness.

"Individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movements, which, so to speak, *cuts* through the circular movements of biological life."¹⁶ Because labour itself is insurmountable, our access to the means of subsistence simultaneously carries biological and existential consequences. Alone, labour provides individuals with nothing beyond their own being. With adequate means, however—whether by acquiring tools or

¹³ Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 167.

¹⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁶ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42 (Emphasis added).

discovering a fertile region—the individual’s horizon for existential development broadens. Rousseau’s conjectural history of humanity’s emergence from its original state of nature illustrates this development. For him, civic relations enable people to escape humanity’s natural ineptitude.¹⁷ While tools derive from work, we must remember that Arendt’s distinction between these activities is analytic—a point that is reaffirmed throughout the following chapters. Individuals never emerge *ex nihilo* but arise within a social environment provided by antecedent generations. To observe the effect of these antecedent conditions, however, requires a consideration of work, for labour’s output is materially inconsequential. Due to its consumptive function, its products never accumulate in a substantial manner for future generations. To “cut through the circular movements of biological life,” by contrast, requires the production of durable objects.

Nothing necessary is free. Before considering work, we had better discuss the essential difference between Arendt’s and Marx’s understandings of labour. This is important because each theorist is responding to the Western liberal tradition, but they are doing so in significantly different manners. We can begin to understand this difference with their conceptions of labour. Marx distinguishes between alienated and non-alienated labour. Our present focus is on the latter, *free* labour. Accordingly, such labour corresponds with humanity’s “species being” and occurs wherever individuals engage in an “act of collectively determining the purpose of, and collectively enacting, actual, productive activity.”¹⁸ Such productivity draws from nature to sustain humanity’s innate physical requirements, similar to Arendt’s understanding. Yet, Marx additionally asserts that “man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, ed. Patrick Coleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 68.

¹⁸ Philip Walsh, *Arendt Contra Sociology* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 124.

produces in freedom therefrom.”¹⁹ In other words, we only labour towards the realization of species-being when we have overcome need and avoided coercion. Our freedom of agency, it seems, is situated within the productive process. This homogenizes human agency into a single activity, effectively collapsing the distinctions drawn in *vita activa*. Labour is conceptualized as all-encompassing, filling essential, social, and existential needs. This approach conflates private autonomy with public freedom. By contrast, Arendt restricts labour to the most rudimentary experience of being. This understanding means that labour is inherently *unfree* because it merely responds repetitiously to biological necessity. Consequently, her theory suggests that capitalism’s exploitation of the proletariat does not alienate them from freedom *per se*, since nothing necessary is free. Instead, it impedes the proletariat’s ontological development by barring them entry into society’s social and, subsequently, public spheres—where freedom ultimately resides. The following sections will elaborate this point by clarifying these higher ontological spheres.

Work

To construct a home amongst nature’s eternal cycles, one must work *on* nature. For Arendt work is one’s capacity to create objects of utility, *i.e.* tools, shelter, *et cetera*. Drawing from Locke, she writes that “the work of our hands, as distinguished from the labour of our bodies, . . . fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice.”²⁰ Through this faculty, we become *homo faber*, the fabricating man.²¹ Whereas labour consumes, work produces—what the Ancient Greeks termed *poiesis*. This requires a degree of separation or distinction between the fabricator and their fabrications, between humanity and

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik (Oakland: International Publishers, 1964), 113.

²⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 136.

²¹ *Ibid.*

nature. In this regard, the fabricator is unlike the *animal laborans* whose embodied experience makes his activity entirely natural. “As an activity, work can be stopped with no repercussions on the existence of the worker as a biological being.”²² It is ultimately non-essential.

As such, work constitutes a superseding over absolute biological necessity, and instead, it undertakes ancillary needs and relatively long-term projects, *e.g.* the building of a hammer, a table, or a house. This superseding enables humanity’s objectification of nature and application of time. From *homo faber*’s productive perspective “nature gives the material out of which the human artifice is erected.”²³ Compared to labour, which frames natural resources as means of subsistence, work broadens one’s horizon of possibilities for nature by introducing non-essential utilitarian ends. In other words, fabricators are seeking materials with use-values for things external to themselves, enduring artefacts. “The principal mark of difference between the realms of labour and fabrication/work...is the ‘thing-character’ of the result.”²⁴ Humanity’s things are what *initially* distinguish us from *the rest* of Nature.

Next, humanity’s temporal experience develops beyond the immediacy of labour through the fabrication process itself. Whereas labour follows nature’s repetitious cycles, the processes of work introduce “a definite beginning and a predictable end: it comes to an end with its end product, which not only outlasts the activity of fabrication but from then on has a kind of ‘life’ of its own.”²⁵ Labour’s consumptive character, by contrast, leaves nothing but the potential for further consumption. This makes time irrelevant to consumption as the future only brings a continuous stream of the present; whatever its temporal location, this activity never changes. By contrast, the products of humanity’s work enable one’s transcendence—albeit temporarily—of

²² Ott, "World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature," 4.

²³ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 59.

²⁴ Walsh, *Arendt Contra Sociology*, 33.

²⁵ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 59

nature's eternal cycle. These artefacts provide a foundation for the application of rectilinear time as their realization requires a clear moment of creation. Although artefacts themselves objectify this temporality of production, their fabricators also internalize it through the process of fabrication itself. First, work separates the fabricator from the materials of production in both form and content. A table's constitutive wood, for example, precedes the fabricator and the subsequent artefact. When working, then, one stands between nature and artifice. Second, fabricating creates reference points in one's past and future; these moments enable the suspension of nature's repetitious cycles by introducing unique *things*. I say suspension because everything drawn from nature inevitably decays. The fabrications of work merely preserve one's objects by drawing from the enduring qualities of natural materials. This means that humanity must continuously care for the world it creates, making work a constant feature of existence. This principle of care will feature strongly in the subsequent consideration of Arendt's openness to environmental politics.

Unlike the *animal laboran*, however, *Homo faber* works *on* not *in* nature. Through work, humanity constructs a home within which our subjectivity can become distinguished from and endure against our surrounding natural environment. In drawing from nature to construct the human artifice, Arendt asserts that "*homo faber* is inherently "a destroyer of nature."²⁶ Why? When fabricators take natural resources, for appropriating durable materials, they destroy the object's innate quality. Elaborating on this characteristic, she writes that "something is created, not out of nothing, but out of given material which must be violated in order to yield itself to the formative processes out of which a thing, a fabricated object, will arise."²⁷ In this interpretation, *homo faber's* taking constitutes humanity's most radical form of violence. That is, the violence

²⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition* 139.

²⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 200.

which accompanies our being-in-the-world. Humanity responds in kind to the harshness of the natural environment. Nothing nefarious underpins this response because *homo faber* operates only through the principle of utility; what use would he derive from gratuitous destruction? As such, this form of violence is “neither beastly nor irrational,”²⁸ but something instrumentally directed towards the construction of their material world. Dossa convincingly reads this aspect of Arendt’s theory as establishing an essential opposition between the human artifice and natural environment. “Unlike labour, which is non-objective and leaves nothing behind, work aims to leave a world behind.”²⁹ This enduring artifice requires some violence to stand against nature and provide a space where humanity can *dwell* —*i.e.* the Heideggerian sense of belonging within a mode of being.

To fabricate something, one requires a model. The origins of these models are outside our present focus, but their significance in fabrication cannot be overlooked. Functionally, they establish the endpoint from which the production process is organized, including: the acquisition materials, the order of production, and the management of participants.³⁰ As McCarthy asserts, “the fabricating life of *homo faber* is the closest approximating to the modern ideal of individual sovereignty.”³¹ Working in isolation, only their abilities and resources may impede the realization of their ideal model. Like the *animal laborans*, then, *homo faber*’s utilitarianism is directed towards the overcoming of necessities—albeit their ends spring from material rather than biological needs. Yet, the fabricated artefact never constitutes an end in itself, for immediately following its completion the object begins to function as a means for subsequent ends, according to the mentality of *homo faber*. Consider the hammer; when produced, it

²⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 63.

²⁹ Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 57.

³⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 140.

³¹ McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 98.

immediately transitions from a productive endpoint to productive means. So, what ultimately drives production? Arendt's theory suggests that it is humanity's ambition to fulfil their *situationally* understood necessities, *e.g.* tools for agriculture, transportation, defence, *et cetera*. Since work strives towards objects of utility, its artefacts' qualities are contextually defined. Again, Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* captures this environmental effect in arguing that climates affect a people's needs, dispositions, and politics. Republics, as he asserts, are best-suited to mountainous regions where the rugged environment compels people to cooperate. Ultimately, "the principle that *homo faber* serves is that of utility,"³² and since utility is contextually defined, we cannot undervalue Montesquieu's insights. Whatever their exact origins, the models which *homo faber* pursues are environmentally contingent since their value is rationalized through the principle of utility.

In application, the boundary Arendt draws between labour and work is permeable. Because *animal laborans* and *homo faber* each persist through necessity, their activities often overlap. The use-values of artefacts, for instance, are not entirely determined by the process of further fabrication but often derive from the process of labour. Consider Robinson Crusoe's wooden spade, for instance. Likewise, an "impulse towards a repetition [of production] comes from the craftsman's need to earn his means of subsistence, in which case his working coincides with his labouring."³³ When societal divisions of labour permit, *homo faber* can specialize in the production of commodities. Under these circumstances, work fulfils the function of labour. In capitalist societies, as Marx observed, such divisions often estrange fabricators from their means of production entirely. When the bourgeois own the factory, its workers are reduced to a

³² Shiraz Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self: The Political Theory of Hannah Arendt* (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 56.

³³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 143.

labouring mass of “jobholders.”³⁴ Without instrumental control over the process, the labourer merely toils for their subsistence, despite the fact they are fabricating objects. “The industrial revolution,” writes Arendt, “has replaced all workmanship with labour, and the result has been that the things of the modern world have become labour products whose natural fate is to be consumed, instead of work products which are there to be used.”³⁵ As this passage suggests, industrialism carries the potential for humanity to exceed the boundaries of ecological sustainability. But, this looming consequence and its associated “earth alienation,” as Arendt terms it, must be discussed later. Our present concern with this passage is to recognize the practical permeability in *vita activa*’s apolitical activities. By identifying this potential overlap of functions, we see Arendt’s analytical tactic, for here she addresses the practical ambiguities of production and, thereby, indicates that the differentiating quality between labour and work is strictly ontological, *i.e.* they relate to humanity’s fundamental conditions. In the experience of daily life, the distinction between labour and work is usually ambiguous. The following discussion will, however, continue to consider work as an ideal for consistency with her conceptual approach.

When specializing in commodity forms, *homo faber* must become sociable. Outside private fabrications, that is, the craftsman requires a commercial space for displaying their wares. This necessitates a degree of social interaction that is unknown to the *animal laborans*. Arendt conceptualizes this marketplace with reference to the *agora* of Ancient Greece, terming it the “the public realm.” To avoid confusion with the public sphere—the space of freedom and politics—I have elected to hereafter refer to the public realm as the social sphere. Within this sphere “[*homo faber*] can show the products of his hands and receive the esteem that is due to

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

him.”³⁶ Contrary to the hierarchy that governs family relations inside one’s private sphere, the instrumental rationality of production seeps into the *agora*. Here, people’s relations are ephemeral moments of exchange for mutual economic benefit. From the fabricator’s perspective, these are important because they confer social recognition onto their wares. As Arendt writes, “value is the quality a thing can never possess in privacy but acquires automatically the moment it appears in public.”³⁷ The judgements of others derive, in turn, from the product’s perceived utility for their own ends—of course, this contingency of value is inherent to exchange markets where no universal measure exists. Through an exchange, then, *homo faber* receives an affirmation of their efforts and the economic impetus to continue fabricating, while the consumer acquires the implements necessary for their own endeavours. The sociability encouraged through specialized work carries forward the instrumental rationale of work itself by regarding others as means towards further fabrication.

The principal of utility that underpins the social sphere is not reducible to a sheer maximization of use-values. If otherwise, work would persist in its simplest functional form. A table functions in equal manner, for instance, whether it is ornately finished or roughly hewn.³⁸ Such an austere instrumentalism is disinterested in aesthetics, encouraging instead a pragmatism that only seeks sufficient means—however rudimentary. This narrowly restricts the principle of care to one’s productive ends. Shiraz Dossa argues, however, that Arendt’s definition of work “does not exclude care and concern for the world.”³⁹ By seeking recognition, *homo faber* is compelled towards social aesthetic standards, for their products are reifications of themselves, *i.e.* signifiers of one’s distinction from nature. Because artefacts distinguish men *qua* men, these

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁹ Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 57.

standards exist independently and external to any individual producer but derive through humanity's publicly established self-understanding, *i.e.* its cultural narrative. "In other words, even use objects are judged not only according to the subjective needs of men but by the objective standards of the world where they will find their place, to last, to be seen, and to be used."⁴⁰ Here, *vita activa*'s triadic boundaries, once again, wane as action's capacity to produce meaning inform these aesthetic standards. As Fin Bowring observes, this aspect of non-instrumental judgement is what Arendt draws from Kant to conceptualize as *taste*.⁴¹ *Homo faber*'s products are therefore not private self-expressions as witnessed in artworks but the realization of "transcendental ideals into objects."⁴² In addition to their use-values, the objects that comprise the human artifice are valued as contributions to the community's material distinction from the obscurity of nature's eternal swing.

Without this influence of cultural taste, however, *homo faber*'s instrumental rationality is limited to the principle of utility. While the construction of a dwelling might justify their activities, fabricators cannot articulate the meaning within this ontological end itself. The human artifice, *writ large*, likely supersedes narrow productive interests, arising only in aggregate over both space and time. How does this limitation of instrumental thought in determining ultimate ends persist? The reason is that a utilitarian—the logic's most fervent adherents—cannot recognize themselves as such, for this presupposes a vantage point from which their activities can be interpreted outside instrumental categories. Obviously, this position exists, as Arendt's theory demonstrates. But, what internal feature of instrumentalism could compel the fabricator to seek their rationality's exit door? Because frameworks are constituted by distinctions between

⁴⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 173.

⁴¹ Bowring, *Arendt After Marx*, 284.

⁴² Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 58.

sense and non-sense, no endogenous feature could illuminate an exit without creating a foundational contradiction. In isolation, then, work is meaningless with the use-values of individual ends continuously sliding into the means for succeeding ends. Arendt recognizes *Homo Faber's* rational limitation by citing Lessing's famous question: "And what is the use of use?"⁴³ Answering this question requires politics.

Before turning to politics, however, it should be recognized that the social sphere created by work serves as the intermediary space between humanity's private and public spheres. Here, *homo faber* enters the marketplace where their social relations are expanded beyond household relations, which are predominately encompassed by family ties. This sociability resembles our political life insofar as one appears before others. The difference lies in our motivation. Whereas the fabricator seeks to exchange their wares with others, the political actor considers their public appearance as an end unto itself. Underlying this difference is Arendt's concept of freedom: simply stated, this constitutes one's overcoming the necessities of life, both the biological and the material, to reflect upon their existential condition. "In order to be free," she writes, "man must have liberated himself from the necessities of life."⁴⁴ *Homo faber's* public appearance within the social sphere ultimately derives from their material necessity, serving only that economic transitory stage between ends and means. Nonetheless, this appearance bridges their private and public life because—unlike labour and action—its characteristic activity produces the human artifice. Its tools facilitate labours, and its public squares enable politics. In superseding their fabricators, artefacts accrue like sedimentary levels of civilization upon their antecedents, serving as humanity's material heritage. Like a bridge over Heraclitus' ever-

⁴³ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

changing river, work's enduring artefacts help us navigate Nature.⁴⁵ Thus, the social sphere produces more than habitation; it embeds people within the intelligible social and cultural structures that permeate their society.

Although Humanity's natural environment necessitates work, it cannot fully determine its character. In this regard, Arendt's theory differs significantly from some variants of green political theory, as discussed below. Environmental forces can cause human fabrication, but they cannot fully determine its character. Their harsh imposition can help explain *why* but cannot explain *how* the human artifice develops. As Paul Ott states, "it is the 'how' of the human–nature relationship that is crucially important for addressing the ethical issues of the human destruction of the environment."⁴⁶ Green political theory draws heavily on this distinction between *why* and *how*, as discussed in Chapter Two. Regarding Arendt, I interpret the difference as arising through the ontological distinction between our political and apolitical activities. The explanation for *how* arises through action, where a political community creates a meaningful narrative for defining their overall character of *vita activa*.

Action

Within the animal kingdom, humanity alone defines itself through public actions. Whereas labour and work toil against nature's harsh and cyclical conditions, action occurs wherever individuals step beyond this necessity and appear amongst others. Arendt illustrates this in-between space of appearance—what she understands broadly as a society's public sphere—with the metaphor of a round-table, for it simultaneously joins people together in equal standing and separates them at an equal distance.⁴⁷ The metaphor breaks down, however, when

⁴⁵ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, 2001, 27.

⁴⁶ Ott, "World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature," 2.

⁴⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 53.

the participants leave the table, as it seems to suggest that politics persists as something external to its participants. This is incorrect. “Man is apolitical. Politics arises between men, and so quite outside of man. There is no real political substance.”⁴⁸ Without people interacting through action, the table vanishes.

Action within the public sphere constitutes an instance of speech or deed that introduces something novel, something unique to the community’s existential self-understanding.ⁱⁱ It opens a new possibility, either positive or negative, for the human experience. Whereas *thingness* distinguishes work from labour, novelty distinguishes action from both. Its unprecedented character means that it cannot emerge as a response to one’s given biological and material need but emerges autonomously for itself. That is, action is non-essential. Consider the hermit, such as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra or Rousseau’s nascent man: they successfully labour and work for their subsistence in isolation—like the bear. Only through public action, however, can the hermit become distinguished from the anonymity of natural processes. In colloquial terms, *what* someone does for labour and work in their respective private and social spheres is distinct from *who* they are publicly.⁴⁹ This *who* characteristic is distinctly human because “unlike animals [we] do not exist only as members of a species.”⁵⁰ Through public action, we create individual identities around mortal beings—giving them a rectilinear life-story. This process concomitantly defines the general character of those people assembled, *i.e.* the political community. Michael McCarthy terms this emphasis on drawing people together Arendt’s “political humanism.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 95.

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 86.

⁵⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 19.

⁵¹ McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 275.

It should be emphasized here that political action is not synonymous with democratic participation; the former is an ontological experience associated with human plurality, whereas the latter experience is an institution of governance. Although distinct, these two phenomena are not antagonistic either, as discussed in the final chapter.

“The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.”⁵² In Arendt’s final interview, Roger Errea asked whether freedom was restricted to intellectual elites capable of imagining something new, such as Arendt herself. She replied,

Non. [Freedom] rests only on the conviction that every human being is a thinking being and can reflect as well as I do and can therefore judge for himself, if he wants to. How I can make this wish arise in him, this I don’t know. The only thing that can help us, I think, is to *rèflèchir*. And to think is always to be hostile. Every thought actually undermines whatever there is of rigid rules, general convictions, *et cetera*. ... That is, there are no dangerous thoughts for the simple reason that thinking itself is such a dangerous enterprise, ... but I would say not thinking is even more dangerous.⁵³

Here, Arendt accentuates the fact that freedom is experienced in thought and, from *The Human condition*, is said to manifest in action. Thus, *vita activa* does not articulate ideal socio-political structures imagined from human nature. Rather, it attempts to conceptualize humanity’s fundamental activities as a being that persists, fabricates, and dwells. With regards to politics, then, Arendt’s theory encourages the question: how is politics experienced?

The public sphere enables identities by opening a space for mutual recognition. Because public participation is voluntary, one’s actions become a reflection of their character as a unique being. One’s identity gradually crystallizes around these reflections, with some contributing more than others. However, this process of identity formation cannot be self-assured. “Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech,

⁵² Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 145.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *Hannah Arendt the Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2013), 123.

nobody is the author or producer of his life story.”⁵⁴ In other words, a person is always the subject but never the author of their identity. This limitation is due to the public sphere’s position outside necessity where the established social roles that accompany one’s private and social positions are not applicable since they are constructions that require habituation and flourish under cyclical conditions. Consider, for example, the norms of etiquette that persist through established expectations that emerge in appropriate situations, *e.g.* religious ceremonies. Because public action concerns the unprecedented, one cannot govern their public appearance on pre-established social standards. This distinguishes Arendt’s conception of self from sociological accounts, such as Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theory, which does not adequately distinguish between social and political identities. “What matters here”, writes Arendt, “is that sociology...brings even ‘peak moments’ down to the level of *this* reality, making them subject to historical continuity and its laws.”⁵⁵ These “peak moments” are instances of novelty that are inherently unpredictable. By over-emphasizing social norms in explaining identity, sociological accounts obfuscate the genuine source of one’s distinction: those moments of unprecedented action. Sociology may correctly articulate our embodiment of social roles as labourers and producers, but these performances end when people enter the public sphere and appear socially unadorned.

History emerges through action for both the individual and the collective. “Through action,” writes Arendt, “men distinguish themselves instead of merely being distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua*

⁵⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 184.

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem a Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 31 (emphasis added).

men.”⁵⁶ In other words, public sphere’s participants mutually recognize and remember each other’s actions. This remembrance opens the possibility for public identities through the creation of individual histories or narratives. Against the cyclical movement of the natural environment, politics provides a medium for historical remembrance, for self-understanding

History, stretching into the twofold infinity of the past and the future, can guarantee immortality on earth in much the same way as the Greek *polis* or Roman republic had guaranteed that human life and human deeds, insofar as they disclose something essential and something great, would receive a strictly human and earthly permanence in this world.⁵⁷

This capacity is humanity’s distinguishing characteristic. *Logos*, if understood as speech and reason, cannot alone separate us from other animals because many share this ability. Contra Aristotle, speech ultimately functions to communicate meaning. As such, what distinguishes the warning calls used by gregarious animals from humanity’s *logos*? In this reading, nothing functionally separates these two forms of communication. The distinction resides in humanity’s political application of *logos* for the establishment of individual and collective narratives that can offer a virtual immortality in history, in memory.

To clarify, speech must be deliberative to constitute as action. The *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, of course, use speech. However, Arendt’s theory draws a distinction between simple communication and public discourse, wherein the former serves instrumental ends and the latter concerns public matters. The human artifice does not inherently have an existential meaning by virtue of being a human product; rather, “we humanize what is going on in the world only by speaking about it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.”⁵⁸ To confer meaning, speech must escape the discourse of production to consider the broader implications of

⁵⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

⁵⁷ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 75.

⁵⁸ Arendt, as cited in Villa, 1996, 31.

the human world for its inhabitants. Political action acquires meaning by offering a contribution to humanity's existential awareness. Due to its immaterial quality, this awareness is manifested as narrative, stories that provide a person or a people with a sense of identity. Only within the public realm does the individual experience the possibility of developing their ontic self-understanding, for all their apolitical activities are ultimately directed towards the necessary. Moreover, these private and social activities are largely pre-determined by habituation and customs. Only through action does the individual move unassisted and undirected.

In aggregate, action sustains a political community's societal narrative. "Reality is different from, and more than, the totality of facts and event, which anyhow, is unascertainable. Who says what is...always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning."⁵⁹ Collective identity, then, constitutes a unifying story that describes the principles that a community has judged as definitive in its evaluation of action. This process of evaluation requires thinking, willing, and judging—the three fundamental features of *vita contemplativa*. This contemplative aspect of Arendt's thought exceeds the purpose of this discussion. The important point, however, is that a community's story preserves in memory and ascribes meaning to actions. This remembrance is critical for freedom. Without it, nothing new could ever emerge. As Curtis describes this point, "for something new to appear, the old must be gathered before us—complex and provoking—that we may be adequately responsive."⁶⁰ A community's narrative guides its apolitical activities by valuing some principles over others. Thus, it cannot determine public policies regarding specific issues—social, environmental, or otherwise—but it does influence how those involved respond to practical issues. For instance, does their mode of work accord with the community's

⁵⁹ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 262.

⁶⁰ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 123.

shared evaluation of animal welfare? It is this space between action and activity that allows environmentalism to appear within the public sphere, as elaborated on below.

Action is timeless. The origins of anything new are, by definition, unknowable. But, Arendt's theory enables us to assert that novelty begets novelty insofar as a unique actor acts. Through their "natality," as opposed to their morality, actors are themselves something new.⁶¹ On this point Knott writes,

Drawing a distinction between herself and Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt emphasized that man is not 'thrown' into the world, but rather *onto the earth*, since to begin with, he is born. Only later does he then appear *in the world*, able to manifest himself in speech and action and construct a world as his home on earth.⁶²

Whenever individuals emerge in existing societal conditions, their very presence opens the possibility for novelties by introducing a new interpretive perspective on the present.

Consequently, action always occurs *between the past and the future*. Temporally, this is self-evident. But, the timeless-quality of action encompasses one's material reality. Actors stand between what *is* and what *might* occur, making their actions a process of revealing, a process of becoming. For Arendt, freedom occurs wherever individuals realize their unique perspective by publicly exploring this in-between space. As she writes, "this freedom consists of what we call spontaneity, which, according to Kant, is based on the ability of every human being to initiate a sequence, to forge a new chain."⁶³ Are all actions, therefore, of equal value in the interactions of the public sphere? Does every action carry equal force within our "web of human affairs?"⁶⁴ No, equality of action would only produce nihilism—*viz.* when everything has equal value, nothing has value. Instead, novel acts must offer a significant existential contribution to attain an

⁶¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 178.

⁶² Marie Luise. Knott, *Unlearning with Hannah Arendt*, trans. David Dollenmayer (New York: Other Press, 2015), 90 (emphasise original).

⁶³ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 126.

⁶⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 204.

historical influence. These contributions offer an elaboration on or alternative to the community's existing "world-orientation"—*i.e.* "fundamental conditions that a group of people share, which move human beings to act."⁶⁵ Thus, the threshold for significance and the character of a valid contribution—good or bad—are judged by the actor's co-participants.

"Speaking out in the world means leaving one's private sphere and entering the public one, which puts the individual at risk."⁶⁶ The individualism associated with public identities requires that actions are freely undertaken and novel. Risk arises from the inherent unpredictability of an action's implications. Outside necessity, actors cannot rely upon the cyclical patterns maintained by natural laws or socio-cultural conventions to instrumentally rationalize their behaviour. Again, unlike Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, actors cannot manage their actions in accordance within an audience's expectations since they have none. Actions are unbounded and unpredictable. What, then, is an action's principal function? Ontologically, the individual confronts reality inside the public sphere, in which their actions transform a boundless potentiality into an actual phenomenon. Actors, without a predictable audience, risk receiving a poor identity from others should this unpredictable condition subsequently produce ill-effects. Had one acted differently, an alternative reality could have emerged. Although the public sphere is unpredictable, an agent cannot be completely absolved of responsibility. Accountability will inevitably wane in time, but during an act's immediate impression the actor must bear responsibility for its effects. This recognition is the foundation of the actor's identity and responsibility.

Yet without limits on actors' responsibility, the public sphere's unpredictability would crush some individual's willingness to participate by allowing for overwhelming risk. As such,

⁶⁵ Arendt as cited in Walsh, *Arendt Contra Sociology*, 36.

⁶⁶ Adrienne Clarkson, *Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2014), 60.

Arendt posits that politics depends upon both forgiveness and promise-making.⁶⁷ The first condition helps absolve actors of the unintended consequences of their actions, and the second condition creates spaces of certainty amongst uncertainty. By allowing forgiveness, politics reduces barriers to exploring unprecedented forms of organization and self-understanding. In response to existential threats, such as climate change, this forgiveness is essential for a people to explore alternatives to existing political structures. The Greek's practice of *iustitium*, the state of exception, illustrates this power of forgiveness albeit under extreme conditions. When confronting a tumult, "the *iustitium* suspends the law and, in this way, all legal prescriptions are put out of operation." Whatever the citizens' response to their collective threat, they can precede without impediment or enduring personal consequences. Under ordinary conditions, political forgiveness offers a similar limitation on one's accountability to encourage action. Next, what motivates political promise-making? Promises arise through the principles of a community's world-orientation. As Arendt writes, "there is an element of the world-building capacity of man in the human faculty of making and keeping promises."⁶⁸ Without these assurances, the public sphere would suffer from instability. To maintain a sense of "place," as Cannavo interprets Arendt, a community must maintain the public sphere's immaterial foundation between people.⁶⁹ Returning to Arendt's table metaphor, this maintenance does not concern the table itself but the participants' willingness to attend to the discourse and to their mutual promise to recognize each other.

The human world stands against the natural environment. As the process of fabrication demonstrates, Arendt draws a hard distinction between the natural environment and the human

⁶⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 240.

⁶⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 166.

⁶⁹ Cannavo, "Arendt: Place, World, and Earthly Nature," 255.

artifice. The latter realm encompasses those material and organic systems of the earth as they exist unto themselves—*viz.* everything captured within Wittgenstein’s claim that “the world is all that is the case...the totality of facts.”⁷⁰ Of course, this includes humanity itself. The former realm encompasses the material and social structures produced by labour, work, and action. Ontologically, humanity is perpetually situated between these realms, with each influencing the human condition. Contrary to conceptions of human nature, *vita activa* references this positionality of humanity within nature rather than the nature within humanity.⁷¹ In fact, Arendt argues that human nature will always remain an enigma because we cannot determine our own essential characteristics without stepping outside ourselves, just as one cannot “jump over their own shadow.”⁷² Instead, *vita activa* articulates those fundamental activities which humanity requires when bridging the divide between their given and their desired conditions of being. However, this abridgment is never completed for two reasons. First, humanity’s natality/mortality continually introduces new generations for whom the existing conditions are given and against which their desires will diverge. Second, the world’s material substratum inevitably decays, falling back into the impermanence of Nature. Thus, any abridgement—as in, any societal artifice—is never fully complete. However skilfully our fabrications are crafted, “the durability of the world of things is not absolute: we do not consume things but use them up, and if we don’t, they will simply decay, return into the overall natural process from which they were drawn and against which they were erected by us.”⁷³ Due to this impermanence, humanity’s ontological position is continuously situated between nature and world, as both animal and fabricator; to understand this positionality, we require political action.

⁷⁰ As cited in McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 65.

⁷¹ Dossa, *The Political Realm & The Public Self*, 49.

⁷² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 10.

⁷³ Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 173.

World Alienation

Hannah Arendt's corpus is divided between her theoretical frameworks (*vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*) and their analytic application. Of these applications, her most recognized texts examine totalitarianism, radical evil, and Jewish nationalism.ⁱⁱⁱ Our present focus, however, is Arendt's analysis of modern human/nature relations—an aspect of her thought that, again, has largely been neglected by green political theorists.⁷⁴ Specifically, Arendt contends that modernity—*i.e.* liberal-capitalism—has distorted the structure of *vita activa* by simultaneously privileging work and expanding labour. That is, contemporary scientific and technological advances have rapidly expanded the human artifice and its corresponding instrumentalism. This has collapsed bygone temporal and spatial barriers to worldly development. In Arendt's time, she points to emerging satellite technology to illustrate this advancement, insofar as humanity has pushed its artifice outside earthly limitations in search of an Archimedean point from which to leverage itself beyond terrestrial confines.⁷⁵ If successful, humanity would become alienated from its given conditions and enter an entirely artificial context.

Following Marianne Constable's interpretation, this would rupture the foundation for intelligible meaning by removing the critical otherness of nature.⁷⁶ By speculating about space exploration in *The Human Condition*, Arendt admittedly over-dramatizes earth alienation. Yet, her essential argument remains cogent; instrumental rationality is dominating politics and creating an ontological dislocation between humanity and nature. "We look upon every tree as potential wood,"⁷⁷ she writes. This phenomenon of advancement, threatens the world's

⁷⁴ Cannavo, "Hannah Arendt: Place, World, and Earthly Nature," 253.

⁷⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 11.

⁷⁶ Constable, "The Rhetoric of Sustainability," 33.

⁷⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 158.

“permanence, stability, and durability.”⁷⁸ If unchecked, communities risk homelessness under the monotony of a consumer culture. Cannavo argues that suburban sprawl illustrates this effect, wherein environments are consumed for privately owned, culturally austere tract housing. “The result is an alienating built environment that lacks historical depth, provides little sense of connection, and impoverishes public life.”⁷⁹ We cease to experience our position within Nature. Arendt contends that “this has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or as potentially man-made.”⁸⁰ The boundary between world and wilderness is being ignored and everything seems subject to our instrumental rationality and the violence of fabrication.

Concomitantly, modernity has witnessed “the victory of the *animal laborans*.” With increasing technological complexity, Western societies have gradually transitioned from privileging *homo faber* during the early industrial period to now prioritizing *animal laborans*. In this analysis, Arendt echoes Marx’s conception of estranged labour, to the extent that people are reduced from craftsmen to wage-labourers. While potentially fabricating objects, the individual is alienated from the production process because other people determine its model and its organization; this renders the individual worker into nothing greater than another instrumental means, another replaceable component within the machinery of industry. Their participation is predicated on the biological necessities that are fulfilled through wages. Arendt contends that this cultural supremacy of the *animal laborans* has significantly altered the function of politics and, in turn, the world’s character. “Politics ceases to be a privileged realm of public liberty and

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁷⁹ Cannavo, “Hannah Arendt: Place, World, and Earthly Nature,” 265.

⁸⁰ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 89.

excellence regulated by its own standards and purposes, as it increasingly [falls] under the influence of economics.”⁸¹ This differs markedly from Arendt’s Hellenistic conception of politics, for the Ancient Greeks regard economic as the management of private affairs, governed by inequality, necessity, and coercion.⁸² As such, the necessities of nature have come to dominate western societies.

In contemporary liberal-capitalist societies, this economic orientation is pervasive, with politicians’ principal task being the utilitarian maximization of social welfare for fewest incursions into citizens’ private freedoms, *viz.* the lowest possible tax rate. Arendt never argues in her analysis that *animal laborans* have secured entry into the public sphere; rather, the overwhelming experience of alienation from *homo faber* has jeopardized the viability of politics by encouraging the liberal atomization of freedom. “The point is not that for the first time in history labourers were admitted...in the public sphere, but that we have almost succeeded in leveling all human activities to the common denominator of securing the necessities of life.”⁸³ Under these conditions people experience “world alienation” because the political community’s sense of reality atrophies from declining plurality within the public discourse.^{iv} Curtis addresses this point, stating that “the experience of the production/consumption processes of life and labour can but dimly provide [a sense of reality] because they are in an essential way the same for all of us.”⁸⁴ In other words, political communities have suppressed peak moments under the principle of economic development and its associated social welfare questions. Arendt recounts this historical distortion of *vita activa* with reference to the rise of Christianity, global exploration, nation-state sovereignty, and capitalism.^v However, this history is beyond our present scope. Our central

⁸¹ McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 102.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 126.

⁸⁴ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 82.

focus is Arendt's analysis that observes the consumer culture of western societies and the mass experience of jobholders within this culture.

D'Entrèves argues that these analyses are contradictory. "The victory of *animal laborans* indicates our subjection to natural process..., while in the other case the expansion of scientific knowledge and of technological mastery indicates the overcoming of all natural limits."⁸⁵ Yet, how could humanity alienate itself from Nature by constructing an omni-pervasive artifice through labour? D'Entrèves contends that Arendt's theory cannot resolve this problem, and instead, she maintains the contradiction by equivocating on matters of human/nature relations. This interpretation is inaccurate. Clearly, the jobholder experience associated with the *animal laborans* culture is limited to some socio-economic classes. Not everyone, in other words, sustains themselves through wage-labour. Next, the advancement in the human artifice accrues in aggregate, over both time and space. Consequently, Arendt's contention that modernity simultaneously restricts people to a laborious existence and collapses the world/nature distinction by expanding the human artifice is not only conceivable, but is echoed by green political theorists. After addressing this potential criticism, the following section considers the most significant existential consequences of these phenomena.

Taken together, modernity has increased humanity's risk of suffering the injury of oblivion. Citing John Adams' concern for early America's invisible poor, Arendt understands oblivion as the crippling injustice people endure when relegated to the darkness of being overlooked.⁸⁶ Here, a person's existential-urge for a public appearance is denied, and their opportunity for excellence is unrealized. "Those relegated to oblivion," as Kimberly Curtis summarizes, "suffer a loss of feeling for their own existence, their own reality, as well as for the

⁸⁵ D'Entrève, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 52.

⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 69.

larger world and their relationship to it.”⁸⁷ The effects of this exclusion extend beyond the individual by distorting the plurality of perspectives within the public sphere, and consequently these absences distort the collective’s articulation of reality. Whereas Adams argues that oblivion only afflicts the poor—as their continuous toiling against necessity prevents any freedom of appearance—Arendt extends the risk to everyone because of this distorted reality.

What are these risks? They range between totalitarian governance and frivolous preoccupations—between Orwell’s *NewSpeak* and Huxley’s centrifugal bumblepuppy. Having escaped Nazi Germany as a Jewish intellectual in 1933, Arendt’s writings are principally concerned with Orwellian forms of oppression, a form characterized by its “iron bands” which press people into a homogenous mass.⁸⁸ Here, politics collapse under the weight of a totalizing administration that manages a nation-state’s resources, including the nation itself. Without avenues for distinction, individuality declines and people become susceptible to being rendered superfluous as their value stems from their economic or historical potential, not from their contribution to civic plurality. “Men insofar as they are more than animal reaction and fulfilment of functions are entirely superfluous to totalitarian regimes.”⁸⁹ No individual, in other words, is essential for securing the regime’s ultimate end—*e.g.* eschatological fulfilment or ideological ideal. Contrary to traditionally understood despotism, which governs through tyrannical fear, Arendt claims that twentieth century totalitarianism was entirely unprecedented in its totalizing oppression that stretched into its subjects’ private spheres and encouraged thoughtlessness. Of course, totalitarianism is the limit case, *i.e.* the extreme consequences, of world-alienation. Nevertheless, Arendt’s writings, beginning with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, reference this

⁸⁷ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 69.

⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1976), 474.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 457.

possibility to demonstrate the risks associated with the denigration of politics and the public sphere. In confronting the universal threat of climate changes, her theory of action encourages communities to cultivate and protect their public spheres from apolitical incursions that emerge through a simular rhetoric of necessity.

ⁱ Arendt's limited understanding of tribal societies is clearly illustrated by this passage. Contemporary thought recognizes the rich and dynamic *worlds* of aboriginal societies. This study does not support this instance of othering, nor agrees with Arendt's assessment of tribal societies.

ⁱⁱ In *The Human Condition* Arendt never defines action as an existential contribution. Instead, the justification for the present use of this term stems from her 1948 essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" In this article, she states, "existence itself is, by its very nature, never isolated. It exists only in communication and in awareness of others' existence... [It] can develop only in the shared life of human beings inhabiting a given world common to them all" (186). Since action produces a people's common world, this reading understands individual actions as contributions to this collectively produced and guaranteed conception of existence, of being-in-the-world.

ⁱⁱⁱ Respectively, see Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann In Jerusalem*, and *Jewish Writings*.

^{iv} Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* makes a similar claim regarding the decline of American civic and social engagement.

^v See D'Entrèves' *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 37-50.

Chapter Two: Theorizing Nature

The Politics in Green Theory

Throughout western political thought, Nature is generally a peripheral concern. The contemporary climate crisis, however, has forced environmental questions into politics and ruptured the Copernican and Promethean assumptions that Dryzek observes in the foundation of the liberalism. In response, political theory has witnessed the emergence of a new green tradition that attempts to grapple with this challenge by creating, resorting, or reforming conceptual frameworks for bridging the divide between Nature and Artifice. Again, this chapter considers four significant texts from this tradition: John Dryzek's *The Politics of the Earth*, Robyn Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, Andrew Dobson's *Green Political Thought*, and John Meyer's *Political Nature*. These theorists have been selected to demonstrate some of the different theoretical positions within the tradition and to apply their primary conceptions to Arendt's *vita activa*. For instance, Dryzek offers a discursive typology of green political theorizing, ranging from survivalism to ecologism. Arendt, of course, never directly engages with the issue of environmental degradation. However, Dryzek's survey does provide a framework for evaluating where Arendtian environmentalism may sit within this range by comparing her theoretical points of resonance with green discourses. Next, Eckersley explores another continuum within green political theory that addresses the moral justifications that theorists espouse when drawing environmentalism into politics. Her principal objective is to advance an eco-centric paradigm that avoids the anthropocentric bias that purportedly afflicts most green theories. This introduces a significant challenge for Arendt's thought, and to grapple with Eckersley's critique this reading responds by emphasizing the difference between form and content in *Vita Activa*. Does Arendt's political theory (form) essentially bar the representation of

non-human interests within the public sphere? If so, does this undermine its contemporary applicability (content)? Like Eckersley, Andrew Dobson assumes an eco-political perspective, but rather than espousing a general moral ethic, he advances an ecological ideology intended to rival the conventional left-right continuum between liberalism and conservatism. Here, green theory appears to confront Arendt's critique of modernity, for Dobson's ideology appears to represent an environmental instance of the "rise of the social," as discussed above. His ideological approach exemplifies a common theme within green theory that combines public politics and public policy. But given the universal subject matter of ecologism and the urgency it demands to ameliorate the effects of climate change, does Dobson's ideology problematize Arendt's triadic structure? Lastly, John Meyer critiques the nature-politics relationship within western political thought for being divided between dualist and derivative theories. By contrast, he advances a constitutive approach that posits a dialectical relationship. This reading responds to Meyer's critique of Arendt's theoretical dualism by arguing that she offers a *similar* conceptual relationship when *vita activa* is interpreted as ontologically stratified, yet experientially porous.

Dryzek's Typology

"Discourse enable stories to be told." In Dryzek's most prominent book, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourse*, he offers a survey of the dominant discourses within the green political tradition. While clearly written with a green liberal-democratic bias, Dryzek does not overtly advance an argument on behalf of any discourse, nor advocate for the establishment of something new. Rather, he attempts to demonstrate the diversity of discourses within the green tradition and to discuss their most significant theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Here, each discourse encompasses various ideologies, organizations, parties, and movements; yet

Dryzek argues that despite this diversity of participants, there are commonalities that allow for their broad categorization. For this reading of Hannah Arendt, Dryzek provides a green theoretical context in which he begins by examining the fundamental assumptions of Western industrialism: Promethean ingenuity and Copernican reproduction. Our present purpose is not to judge a discourse's political applicability but, instead, to outline the existing green discursive horizon. As such, this section only considers the discourses' theoretical elements and mostly foregoes Dryzek's assessments of their specific socio-political influences.

Western political thought has historically adhered to a growth paradigm that presupposes a *virtually* unlimited supply of natural resources due to Nature's capacity for regeneration. To conceptualize this attitude, Dryzek argues that the existing industrial ethos that emerged in the 19th century and rapidly expanded in the 20th century can be characterized as Promethean. As aforementioned, this metaphor is drawn from Ancient Greece, where Prometheus is believed to have stolen fire from Zeus and, thus, give humanity an unparalleled ability to control their environment. Contemporary "Prometheans have unlimited confidence in the ability of humans and their technologies to overcome any problem—including environmental problems." Next, the Cornucopian assumption concerns humanity's access to "unlimited natural resources, unlimited ability of natural systems to absorb pollutants, and unlimited corrective capacity in natural systems."¹ To varying degrees these assumptions have underpinned the industrial ethos. While the recent awareness of anthropocentric climate change has helped reveal the extent of these assumptions and undermined their supporting frameworks, Dryzek contends that some theorists, such as Julian Simon and Bjørn Lomborg, have strictly adhered to the Promethean paradigm

¹ John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 51.

despite various environmental critiques.² This radical perspective occupies one side of Dryzek's discursive horizon.

Radical adherents of this paradigm obfuscate the possibility of anthropocentric climate change as being a crisis, for they assert that scarcity compels human ingenuity. While this belief resembles green discourses that advocate for alternative and renewable resources, Prometheans reject the conventional understanding of Nature as something external, as something measurable. Rather, they believe it constitutes a cyclically reproducing mass of raw materials that is “infinitely transformable, given enough energy.”³ Because nature is malleable, it cannot be understood as existing separate from human involvement because humanity—however it views the environment—always imposes its needs onto the matter present. This epistemological relativism bars anthropocentric climate change because nature itself is regarded as a social construction. That said, environmental limitations cannot be semantically resolved, only circumvented through a different application of energy. As such, Prometheans encourage population growth because it deepens the pool of human ingenuity and increases the probability of someone discovering another application of human agency in manipulating “the brute matter” of nature. The ecological modernist, discussed below, echoes this sentiment with their emphasis on technology.

The survivalist discourse argues, by contrast, that population growth is one of humanity's most detrimental problems, for the “carrying capacity” of our ecological systems cannot accommodate the present levels of consumption; thus, a population increase will only exacerbate the looming crisis by increasing material demands. This growth in demand is presumably to stem from the inherent growth principle of capitalist economics, a system that

² *Ibid.*, 55.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

encourages a tragedy of the commons by privileging material individualism.⁴ Survivalism occupies the other radical end of Dryzek's discursive horizon. Epistemologically, this discursive approach sees Nature as having an ontological independence from human awareness and intervention. That said, they simultaneously recognize humanity's embeddedness within natural systems. At present, we have sustained our over-consumption by using the natural resources that have accrued over millions of years (*i.e.* low entropy resources like fossil fuels).⁵ Once these are exhausted, the species will—this discourse believes—confront a rapid and a sordid decline. While this insight is commonly held throughout the green tradition, what distinguishes survivalist theory is the Draconian measures they advocate for transforming existing socio-political structures to avoid an ecological catastrophe.

For example, Garret Hardin and Paul Ehrlich advance a neo-Malthusian argument for forced sterilization in impoverished countries, an idea that requires the tyranny of authoritarian governance. As aforementioned, Hardin extends this argument to suggest that Western societies ought to “abandon the underdeveloped world if governments in the latter wish to continue policies that promote population explosion and ecological devastation.”⁶ Whereas Prometheans believe in Adam Smith's notion of the “hidden hand” and, thus, advocate for the individual's participation in discovering solutions to scarcity, survivalists firmly reject such initiative, even arguing that it produces a selfish voracity for resources through the coercive laws of competition. Robert Heilbroner draws from this belief to argue that Western states should adopt ecologically orientated forms of authoritarianism. Accordingly, this would introduce a centralized political economic structure that could more effectively monitor and protect the environment, *i.e.* for our

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

common good. Akin to Plato's philosopher-king, these eco-authoritarian regimes would require an elite cohort of scientific-rulers, "a governing class of 'ecological mandarins.'"⁷ Taken together, this discourse's extreme measures and elitism place it on the boundary of the green tradition.

The remainder of green political theories Dryzek surveys sit between the continuum created by the Promethean denialists and draconian Survivalists. Each of these remaining discourses accentuates a different actor for creating environmentally sustainable societies or, at least, for mitigating humanity's ecological footprint. To begin, administrative rationalism stresses the importance of environmental and governmental expertise in confronting the complex challenges associated with climate change, for it posits that effective solutions must come through comprehensive public policies as the nexus of ecological, environmental, economic, and political knowledge required to identify, assess, respond, and monitor environmental issues is presumed to be outside the general public's knowledge base.⁸ For instance, "the main cumulative impact of cost-benefit analysis may be in legitimating the idea that public policy is a matter for technical, expert choice and not a question on which non-specialists such as elected officials, still less any broader public, have any rightful say."⁹ Consequently, this discourse of problem-solving accentuates the technocrat as its principal actor and takes liberal capitalism as its societal foundation. Thus, it espouses the effectivity of resource-management bureaucracies, environmental protection agencies, and regulatory bodies.

Echoing Survivalists, this approach advocates for hierarchical bureaucratic structures under the pretext of efficiency. But unlike Heilbroner's authoritarian solution, it is paternalistic

⁷ As cited in *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

insofar as it avoids the question of democratic sluggishness by removing environmental questions from the *public realm* entirely.¹ The discourse thus views citizens as subordinate to the state and nature subordinate to humanity. This view, according to Dryzek, has caused the discourse to falter under the increasing severity of environmental problems. As he writes, “nobody can possibly know enough about the various dimensions of an issue...to sit with any confidence at the apex [of a centralized bureaucracy].” The requisite knowledge is fragmented and fluctuating. Drawing from Karl Popper’s critique of technocratic structures, Dryzek asserts that science-based solutions cannot depend on firm sources of authority but require open and equal discourses of experimentation. If otherwise, a system of specialized silos of knowledge emerges and encourages “displacement,” whereby one silos’ solution becomes another silos’ problem.¹⁰

The green democratic discourse, of course, accentuates citizens (*homo civicus*) as the principal actors for confronting the challenges of climate change. In Dryzek’s analysis, this approach is not restricted to institutional structures, but instead, it encompasses a broad range of avenues for public engagements with collective issues, including environmental problems. However, he limits this discourse to avenues commensurate with the existing liberal capitalist *status quo*, leaving contrary forms for the discourse of green radicalism.¹¹ The democratic discourse is conventionally and philosophically pragmatic; it seeks more realistic solutions for practical, common problems.¹² As such, it challenges discourses that excessively speculate about nature’s intrinsic values or impose moral absolutes on human/nature relations. Following from above, the democratic argument suggests that given the complexity of environmental problems,

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 93.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 113.

¹² *Ibid*, 100.

solutions must incorporate a democratic element—via alternative dispute resolutions, policy dialogues, citizens’ juries, public inquiries, *et cetera*—which allows for a diversity of perspectives to enter the public discourse since one of these admitted perspectives may introduce a significant insight. In this sense, it resembles the Prometheans’ open paradigm.

In addition, democrats aver that their solutions are more effective once developed because the broader boundaries for participation increase their solution’s legitimacy and, thereby, garner greater public support and adherence once reforms are introduced. Through their participation, the public becomes active agents within their governing system which, contrary to the centralization espoused by administrative rationalism, encourages a decentralized network of authorities, representatives, and stakeholders that interact through horizontal, rather than hierarchical, dialogue to continuously identify, assess, respond, and monitor societal issues—including environmental problems. However, this system of governance requires more time to cycle through these stages than centralized governments, making it less responsive to potentially rapid changes in socio-environmental conditions. Furthermore, its decentred character appears to impede a broader recognition of other collective issues. On this point, Dryzek asserts that citizens participate in environmental politics because they see themselves as having “ecoduties,” the notion that one is responsible for their ecological footprint, as a fundamental feature of their civic position.¹³ This encourages a “restraint principle” that limits the self-interest that the Survivalists identify as a catalyst for creating a tragedy of the commons scenario.¹⁴ How collective interests, including environmental sustainability and protection, initially arise within a public discourse composed of many different participants is not immediately apparent.

According to Dryzek, this discourse also struggles to find points of convergence between a

¹³ *Ibid*, 114.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

multitude of participants with varying degrees of political authority regarding what is within the public's interest: hence its relatively sluggish response time to environmental issues.¹⁵

Next, the discourse of economic rationalism orientates itself around the self-interest behaviours observed in capitalist societies. As such, it accentuates consumers/producers as the most significant actors for ameliorating the effect of climate change. This approach also takes liberal capitalism as foundational. Unlike democrats and administrative rationalists, however, it rejects institutionally directed green public-policy initiatives and cooperative frameworks. Instead, economic rationalists advance a *laissez faire* model that supposedly produces environmentally-friendly trends through the development of ethical consumerism, *e.g.* fair-trade products, eco-certification programs, energy-efficient models, *et cetera*. Here, the essential task for states is to establish free market conditions through the creation and protection of private property rights. Economic rationalism effectively flips the tragedy of the commons scenario by asserting that private property is less likely to be abused because its degradation heavily impacts the owner; consequently, owners will actively preserve it. Protecting environmental resources should therefore begin with privatization. For instance, "owners of forests that could not be logged economically would keep them as wilderness areas, or invest in wildlife conservation in order to attract hunters or photographers, who would be charged admission."¹⁶ Dryzek, echoing Freud's critique of the Great Chain of Being, raises the obvious point that market principles cannot apply to materials without a market value, *e.g.* species of animals without characteristics for human use. Likewise, some environmental entities such as air and water are not territorially restricted; thus, identifying the source of pollutants for these entities can be difficult to trace, a challenge that undermines the economists' central argument by neglecting the complexity of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

ecological systems. “Proposals for tradable quotas in ocean fisheries inevitably treat species in isolation. But rational management of a single species is impossible.”¹⁷ In response to these challenges, economists’ have advocated for the marketization of pollutants instead, *e.g.* cap-and-trade quota systems and pollution taxes. Through the coercive laws of competition, these initiatives incentivize polluters to find more environmentally friendly process of production.

Economic rationalism also presupposes that consumers and producers (*homo economicus*) know what actions are environmentally friendly. How is this so? While reading Dryzek, one is reminded of the Socratic question: do we ever make mistakes regarding who are our friends and who are our enemies? Without recognizing the role of the state and citizens in identifying environmental issues through subsidized, non-commercial research and public discussions, *homo economicus* has no recourse to rationally evaluate one course of action over another. This reading should not be interpreted as suggesting that *homo economicus* cannot think rationally. Instead, they are confronted with two limitations regarding environmental questions. First, their horizon is limited to material self-interest, which impedes their recognition of environmental issues that will only affect others, either across time or space. Second, the economic approach offers no conceptualization of Nature beyond its being a pool of resources for human production. Thus, its appeal for environmental protection is strictly utilitarian. Dryzek cites Andrew Dobson to contend, “economic incentives alone are unlikely to yield the substantive and multifaceted changes in behaviour that a sustainable society requires.”¹⁸ Economic incentives, in other words, cannot compel actors’ to transcend their material self-interest and acknowledge a non-instrumental end for natural resources because this would contradict their conceptual basis.

¹⁷ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 140.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

Ecological modernization accepts this criticism of free-market environmentalism and responds by asserting that technology is the most significant *factor* in confronting climate change. This discourse does not reject liberal capitalism but argues for its essential reconfiguration around the principles of sustainable growth via long-term planning and technological innovation. In this sense, it echoes the survivalists' reliance on expertise by granting significant authority to technology, a structure that Marten Hajer terms "techno-corporatism."¹⁹ Underlying this approach, however, is an uncritical commitment to scientific ingenuity, and as Douglas Torgerson comments, "a faith in science is not itself a form of scientific knowledge."²⁰ Aside from its technological commitment, this discourse strongly resembles administrative rationalism. As such, this summary now turns to radical democratic theories that reject the existing liberal milieu.

Green radicalism essentially argues that capitalism *and* liberalism are inherently incompatible with the principle of environmental sustainability. As Dryzek writes,

Inherent in liberalism are assumptions about the degree to which individuals are properly isolated from one another, rational in a narrowly instrumental and egoistic sense, and unequal in both material wealth and the capacity to exercise power and reason. The consequences are both socially unjust and environmentally destructive.²¹

In rejecting this cultural effect, green radicalism seems to constitute a discursive movement of broad socio-political stakeholders, for its objectives are not restricted to reforming existing societal forms but to fundamentally changing human/nature relations by creating a new ontological narrative that re-articulates humanity's self-conception as a species among species. Whereas survivalists advocate for something akin to Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception," a temporary suspension of laws for the defence and eventual reinstatement of those very laws,

¹⁹ As cited in *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁰ Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics*, 76.

²¹ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 187.

green radicalism seeks a comprehensive re-imagining of the human narrative.²² Torgerson observes, however, that this new ecological sensibility confronts an irony insofar as humanity's recognition of its equality with all other animals requires the simultaneous realization of this realization.²³ In other words, we are uniquely aware of our equality.

Nevertheless, green radicalism's rejection of the *status quo* splits the discourse into two sub-categories: the culturalists and institutionalists. The first sub-group (including deep ecologists, bio-regionalists, eco-feminists, eco-theologians, and others) argues that cultural norms are the principle *factor* in determining the environmentally abusive character of current human/nature relations. Yet, the primary actor this discourse accentuates for reconstituting this relationship is individual subjectivity, for this cannot be externally managed but must be internally developed. Therefore, they advocate for the cultivation of a "green consciousness" regarding "the way people experience and regard the world in which they live, and each other." Contrary to previously considered discourses, this emphasis places people before policies. Once green consciousness has been established, "then policies, social structures, institutions, and economic systems are expected to fall into place."²⁴ The various groups that comprise this green consciousness sub-discourse each accentuate a cultural phenomenon that is regarded as most detrimental to human/nature relations. Eco-theologians argue, for instance, that

The environmental crisis is the product of Judeo-Christian religious tradition, which places god outside of and above nature and then proclaims that man is made in god's image. This placement provides justification for unlimited human manipulation and abuse of nature for purely human ends.

Deep ecologists, meanwhile, point towards liberal individualism and, in turn, advocate for a broader conception of self, a "transpersonal ecology" that recognizes one's embeddedness in

²² See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, 2003.

²³ Torgerson, 112.

²⁴ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 181.

nature. Here, they challenge the existing anthropocentrism—as most obviously observed in the Promethean discourse—by introducing “biocentric equality,” where no species is granted superiority over another.²⁵ⁱⁱ Eco-feminists qualify this point by asserting that androcentrism, not simply anthropocentrism, characterizes Western culture. They argue that humanity’s reckless domination of nature begins with man’s reckless domination of women. Whatever norm is accentuated, however, each perspective asserts that confronting climate change begins by confronting culture, for a sustainable society cannot emerge without motivated citizens.²⁶

Such green radicals advance a broad conception of politics that includes the social and cultural systems surrounding the institutional structures commonly identified as political, *e.g.* legislative bodies. This approach is what John Meyer terms “inclusive politics.”²⁷ According to Dryzek, this enables the discourse to incorporate a romantic disposition, wherein politics is not limited to “devising strategies to achieve tangible goal” but also is an “arena in which different kinds of experiences can be sought and developed.”²⁸ These experiences are non-rational, in the Enlightenment sense of scientific instrumental reasoning, but instead are both artistic and aesthetic. Whereas liberal greens adhere to a rationalization of human/nature relations through policy adjustments, technological innovations, or economic incentives, green romanticism encourages an “empathetic and less manipulative orientation towards nature and other people.”²⁹ Romantics contend that instrumental rationality forces a dichotomy between subject and object, and according to Dryzek, this “estranges us from nature and each other with all kinds of

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁶ Andrew Dobson, as cited in *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁷ John M. Meyer, *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 114.

²⁸ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 191.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

disastrous consequences.”³⁰ This does not mean that green romantics reject or dismiss scientific rationality or the idealization of history; instead, it is the incorporation of alternative views that helps illuminate the incalculable aspects of human/nature relations, *i.e.* the inarticulate wonder experienced in nature. To form a green consciousness, this artistic turn allows for the introduction of emotional appeals and the creation of meaningful narratives that ascribe meaning to natural phenomena.

The second sub-group (including green political parties, social ecologists, eco-socialists, and environmental justice groups) “target recalcitrant social, economic, and political structures and practices more directly.”³¹ That is, they target existing institutions with the ambition of dismantling or fundamentally altering their ethos. This discourse accentuates collective political actors—e.g. non-governmental groups, parties, and states—as the primary actors in confronting climate change. Unlike the individualistic approach of green consciousness theorists, cultural reformation is here considered a necessary but insufficient condition for ameliorating environmental problems, for social, political, and economic systems are not reducible to their occupants’ aggregate dispositions.³² Culture cannot be isolated from its structural context as they are co-defining phenomena.

For instance, eco-Marxists push together the communist and the green traditions by arguing that climate change stems entirely from capitalism’s reliance on materialist growth. Like the exploitation of the proletariat, environmental degradation is believed to be the “second-contradiction” of capitalism.³³ Whereas other green radical theories acknowledge culture and social norms as relatively independent factors influencing human/nature relations, eco-Marxists

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 216.

³³ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 180.

regard these as epiphenomenal to economics.³⁴ Despite Karl Marx's approval of capitalism's material productivity, these contemporary interpreters believe the inevitable collapse of this economic system will *eventually* enable an environmentally benign communist state to emerge, benign because its elimination of classes would simultaneously eliminate the coercive laws of competition that propel over-consumption. Like traditional Marxism, their solution would generally entail the withering away of the state and the establishment of de-centralized, self-governing communities. Here, eco-Marxism ultimately relies on economic determinism, making it a radically left variant of the economic rationalist discourse considered above.

Other green radical theories emphasize various forms of socio-environmental inequalities and give less theoretical attention to comprehensive eco-sustainable norms. For example, the Environmental Justice movement highlights the disproportionate amount of environmental damage and pollution experienced in low-income communities, both domestically and internationally. Race also plays a significant role in eco-justice theories, for communities with citizens who are predominantly ethnic minorities are more likely to be situated near industrial sites.³⁵ Sociologically, this disparity arises from various social inequalities related to racialization, poverty, and political authority; consequently, this discourse often serves as a bridge for environmentalism into other social and international justice movements.³⁶ Some alliance will, of course, be *ad hoc* since protestors against a specific industrial project may simply reject its potential impact on *their* community or country, rather than its environmental impact in general.ⁱⁱⁱ Environmental Justice, itself, opposes industrialism but recognizes that societal transformations should not obfuscate longstanding struggles for social justice under the

³⁴ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 209.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

pretext of securing the higher order objective of environmental security. Environmental Justice, instead, promotes collective action through a network of social movements; such collaboration will provide “further support for the need to radically overhaul the industrial political economy.”³⁷

Dryzek never endorse a single discourse but concludes his survey by offering a brief argument for the establishment of new “discursive designs.” Accordingly, these are the product of “collective decision making through authentic democratic discussion, open to all interests, under which political power, money, and strategizing do not determine outcomes.”³⁸ By not aligning with a discourse and emphasizing democratic discussions, Dryzek is interpreted here as rejecting ideologically driven politics because it limits adherents’ capacity for “social learning” by confining them to fixed conceptualizations. While he maintains that every discourse surveyed—save the Prometheans’—offers some insights to environmental problems across different scales of government and different types of problems, Dryzek’s designs principally draws from Democratic Pragmatism, Ecological modernization, and Green Radicalism. First, the pragmatic paradigm encourages cooperative problem-solving and maintains a *plurality* of participants to ensure that the complexity of a socio-environmental challenge is well understood by allowing a diversity of perspectives to address the issue and express their social, cultural, or economic interest in it. Next, Dryzek promotes the potential continuous institutional adaptation made possible through Ecological Modernization’s self-monitoring and experimental development structure, for these characteristics prevent the ossification of societal forms. To illustrate this capacity, Dryzek points towards its opposite position in Survivalism, where the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 232

certainty of catastrophe and the ensuing sense of urgency impede its adherents' ability to experiment while its authoritarianism alienates people for the public realm.³⁹

Finally, Green Radicalism's proposal for self-governing, de-centred political communities is compatible with the creation of discursive designs, for this approach draws attention to the importance of integrating environmentalism with social justice movements to increase the validity and rigor of collective action. Moreover, engaging with other movements increases participants' opportunities for social learning by introducing oppositional claims that would otherwise remain unrecognized, *e.g.* environmental poverty. According to Torgerson, Dryzek draws from Jürgen Habermas' communicative rationality to advance a "green reasoning" that prioritizes a communitarian approach, one that strives to create an ecocentric *we* through the creation of environmental principles.⁴⁰ And, it prioritizes change to political communication before change to individual consciousness. This engagement with other socio-political movements thus ensures that discursive designs remain realist, not straying into conjectural schemes. The context Dryzek imagines for these discursive designs strongly resembles the early American town hall council systems that Arendt advocates for in *On Revolution*, as discussed below.

Robyn Eckersley's Ecologism

In *Environmentalism and Political theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach* Eckersley examines the moral principles that underpin human/nature relations. As her subtitle indicates, this text advances a holistic framework for evaluating environmental systems and their constituent features. In other words, it breaks from the anthropocentrism that purportedly characterizes Western liberalism. She argues, akin to green radicals, that this hegemonic

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁴⁰ Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics*, 113.

paradigm centres on and articulates itself through a possessive individualism that alienates its adherents from the intrinsic values within non-human nature by privileging a utilitarian rationality. In establishing political communities, or commonwealths, the liberal mantra maintains that through civic order individuals can escape a natural condition of absolute war or absolute stupidity, as Hobbes and Rousseau respectively claimed, by creating an artificial environment for the accumulation of *commodious* goods or enlightened sociability. The liberal freedom is negative; it is a freedom from impositions, natural or otherwise. Because this paradigm is individualistic, it presupposes that through civic conditions one person's accumulation of wealth will automatically create a "trickle down" effect⁴¹ to increase the general prosperity of others. If this were not the case, why would the disadvantaged continue to participate? Of course, Marxists have rejected this trickle-down assumption and argued that the disadvantaged participate under false consciousness or duress.

What function does Nature serve within the liberal tradition? According to Eckersley, liberalism's theoretical opposition to Nature and its individualistic perspective, generally, create an industrialist ethos of unrestricted material appropriation via *laissez faire* economics. John Locke exemplifies this position wherein "the Earth had been given to humans for 'the support and comfort of their being': moreover, the mixing of human labour with nature was an act of appropriation that created something valuable...out of something otherwise valueless."⁴² Despite its objection to the systematic inequalities in material distribution under liberalism's capitalist economics, Marxism equally adheres to this commitment to industrial progress, according to Eckersley.⁴³ Both paradigms argue that technological and organizational advances

⁴¹ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

will eliminate the scarcity that characterizes humanity's natural condition. Nature, it seems, constitutes an endless pool of resources from which societies construct themselves, creating what John Meyer terms a "dualistic relationship" between natural chaos and civic order. As climate change reveals the ecological limits for human intervention, the authority of liberalism has been undermined. Thus, Eckersley argues that Western thought must now integrate ecological science into its underlying conception of nature and thereby re-conceptualize its corresponding ideals of civic order. As she writes:

An ecocentric approach regards the question of our proper place in the rest of nature as logically prior to the question of what are the most appropriate social and political arrangements for human communities. That is, the determination of social and political questions must proceed from, or at least be consistent with, an adequate determination of this most fundamental question.⁴⁴

Having established this challenge, her text offers various critiques the eco-philosophies put forward by Neo-, Post, & Non-Marxist thinkers. Here, she highlights their failure to attribute sufficient value to ecological systems; consequently, they sustain the biases of anthropocentrism.

In these critiques, she never suggests that political structures ought to derive from natural phenomena. On this point, she cites the eco-socialist André Gorz who argues that it is "impossible to derive an ethic from ecology." After all, history demonstrates that both authoritarian and democratic governments have caused significant ecological damage. Instead, her critiques merely indicate that some societal structures are more conducive to ecological sustainability than others, and of those theories she surveys, she believes all are "fundamentally limited by [their] anthropocentrism."⁴⁵ Reviewing each of her criticisms would exceed our present limits, and therefore, this section briefly considers just one example to further illustrate Eckersley's theoretical position.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

Murray Bookchin's "social ecology" argues that environmental justice first requires social justice. In other words, the emergence of an environmentally friendly society requires a deconstruction of social hierarchies and the development of anarchistic political communities. His justification for this approach derives from an eco-philosophy that espouses the "logic of evolution," a process that inherently strives towards diversification and complexity from an initial condition of homogeneity.⁴⁶ Gradually, this process purportedly produces autonomous beings, capable of experiencing freedom and selfhood. Through ecological science, humanity can evaluate its undertakings as either an impediment or embodiment of this natural process. Of course, Bookchin's eco-ethic derives from a false dichotomy, suggesting that humanity cannot achieve an accurate ecological understanding until freed from social inequalities, a claim which elevates human needs over ecological needs. Despite this anthropocentric privileging, Bookchin assumes communities will inherently become ecologically benevolent once materially satisfied. While equally committed to localizing politics, Eckersley rejects this benevolent belief. As she states, "I do not assume that handing over more power to local communities will necessarily make them Green, like-minded and 'good.'"⁴⁷ Rather, environmental politics requires simultaneous changes to societies' institutions, cultures, and economics. Placing human needs before environmental needs merely perpetuates the *status-quo* and artificially separates humanity from nature. Nonetheless, Eckersley does not disparage the legitimate claims for social justice. Her approach calls for "provisions of adequate compensation whenever ecological reforms are likely to produce inequitable consequences for certain social groups, classes, or nations."⁴⁸ Eco-socialists, such as Bookchin, could respond that such provisions merely address incursions by

⁴⁶ Bookchin, as cited in *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

environmental initiatives and do not allocate resources to social injustices themselves. Although accurate, Eckersley does not exclude such allocations. Moreover, her essential point remains: human flourishing is inexorably connected with others, both human and non-human; therefore, eco-politics cannot neglect the existential mutuality that characterizes humanity's ontological embeddedness in Nature.⁴⁹

Dobson's Ecological Ideology

Dobson extends this ecologically-informed rejection of anthropocentrism beyond Eckersley's general principle by constructing an eco-political ideology.^{iv} His "essential political message...is that we must learn ecological self-restraint before it is forced upon us by a potentially monolithic and totalitarian regime or by the brute forces of nature."⁵⁰ As previously mentioned, he attempts to position this "ecologism" outside the traditional left-right continuum by suggesting it challenges the "the super-ideology of industrialism" that largely underpins western political theory, for its foundational *assumption* is that "continuous and unlimited growth is *prima facie* impossible." Accordingly, this essential insight distinguishes his ideology of ecologism from environmentalism which, he believes, is a malleable principle that has been routinely espoused by ideologies with ecologically dubious conceptions of human/nature relations, *viz.* liberalism.^v Ecologism, by contrast, is positioned as a transformative ideology that seeks to radically alter the western industrial milieu. Like Machiavelli, he does not propose "taking men as they are" but "taking men as they might be." In this regard, Dobson equates the political ecologist, *i.e.* himself, as the contemporary of Rousseau's "lawgiver."⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁰ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

To affirm his ideological account, Dobson positions ecological science as the touchstone for his ideology's political assertions, suggesting that through its empirical observations political communities can draw lessons from Nature and integrate these into their own societal forms. Given the diversity of ecological systems, this eco-political approach is contextual and, therefore, encourages what eco-political theorists term bioregionalism. For Dobson, "the guiding principle of bioregionalism...is that the 'natural' world should determine the political, economic, and social life of communities."⁵² The adherents of this ideology will ideally internalize the insights provided by environmental sciences to create an "ecological consciousness," wherein one becomes aware of their "state of being" as extending beyond the corporal self and being integrated in the non-human realm.⁵³ This decentering process of self-extension attempts to break with western anthropocentrism, which manifests itself through possessive individualism, and enable an environmentally sustainable society.

Unlike Eckersley, Dobson's political ecologism is pragmatic and recognizes the practical limitations of ecocentrism, insofar as its radical adherence would create a contradiction by advocating a form of self-negation. On this he writes that "any human undertaking will be...anthropocentric, including the green movement itself."⁵⁴ For instance, searching for the non-instrumental, intrinsic value of natural entities—those values which some ecologists argue are inherently worth preserving—presupposes a human subject who requires these values for reasons outside the knowledge itself, *e.g.* curbing industrial pollution. This recognition of ecocentrism's limits resembles Arendt's critique of human nature. On this she writes, "it is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us,

⁵² *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁴ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 55.

which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves.”⁵⁵. Just as human nature cannot be understood endogenously, anthropocentrism cannot be rejected absolutely, for one would enter a contradiction by rejecting their own conditions for make such a rejection. Rather than constructing a conception of intrinsic values to justify eco-politics, then, Dobson relies on the aforementioned “state of being,” for this accommodates the essential violence within the human condition while advocating for an ecologically aware self-conception. Thus, he accepts that a gap exists between theory and praxis—between deep ecology’s rejection of anthropocentrism, as espoused by Eckersley, and political ecology’s transformative ambitions to ameliorate western societies’ environmental impact.⁵⁶

What lessons does nature provide? The two primary lessons Dobson draws from nature are the phenomena of equality and interdependence; his ideological recommendations, whatever their specific focus, are rooted within one of these lessons. As such, they effectively illustrate the general sentiment of his project to “decentre the human being...and to refuse to believe that the world is made for human beings.”⁵⁷ On equality, ecological science asserts that environments flourish through diversity, wherein every entity contributes to the healthful condition of the whole. This principle of equality arises from the recognition that each participant has equal opportunity to flourish through their contribution. In application, Dobson cites the bioregionalist Kirkpatrick Sale who suggests that natural equality should inform our distribution of power within political communities. Sales advocates for “spreading of power to small and widely dispersed unities.”⁵⁸ “Associated with this is the idea,” writes Dobson, “that nature’s lesson, as

⁵⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 10.

⁵⁶ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

far as social relations are concerned, is one of equality.”⁵⁹ While competition largely characterizes the relationships between differing species, he believes that hierarchy and competition are seldom witnessed *within* a species. Ecologism should, therefore, not institutionalize these attributes into political structures. The second lesson of interdependence derives from the belief that each natural entity has equal standing within and equal contribution to Nature, for here no teleological purpose exists against which a hierarchy of value can be established. This discourages the domination of one species over another because it would undermine the stability of the whole by disrupting networks of interdependence. “It is, then, an ecological axiom,” Dobson claims, “that stability in an ecosystem is a function of diversity in that ecosystem.”⁶⁰ According to ideological ecologism, regional communities should therefore embrace networks of interdependence and facilitate the preservation of diversity, both naturally and socially.

Dobson’s *Green Political Thought* elaborates on these essential lessons to advocate for the radical restructuring of major western institutions and systems, such as democracy, agriculture, transportation, *et cetera*. Of these recommendations, there are two points that merit our attention because they resonate with major themes in Arendt’s theory of action. First, political ecology argues that work serves an existential and communal function. Against technological determinists who advocate for a workless future, Dobson approvingly cites Jonathon Porritt who states that “I’m one of those who consider work to be a necessity of the human condition, a defining characteristic of the sort of people we are.”⁶¹ He goes on to assert that universal automation would render human life meaningless. Porritt hedges his claim,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

however, by suggesting that technology does allow people to avoid monotonous and dangerous work. Here, one is reminded of Nietzsche's "last man" who discovered happiness, yet "still works, for work is a form of entertainment."⁶² In other words, work contains a non-instrumental aspect that its participants internalize to give their world and themselves meaning. Dobson builds from this assumption to argue for various economic transformations, *e.g.* the re-evaluation of traditionally unpaid labour. Without work, he is interpreted here as arguing that humanity would slide into a nihilistic state of idleness. This conception of work resembles Marx's, insofar as it enables people to realize their species-being. If work creates meaning, as Porritt claims, where does that meaning manifest itself? Commodities? As discussed above, work can provide individuals with sociological identities, but their existential development—their ontic selfhood—cannot emerge through the instrumental mentality of fabrication. This assertion is further developed in Chapter Three.

Second, Dobson argues that political ecology integrates its foundational assumptions of equality and interdependence into its commitment to democracy. Throughout green theory there have been tensions, however, between radical greens and democratic greens, between reformers and transformers. As discussed above, survivalists have advocated for various forms of ecologically informed authoritarianism under a consequentialist assumption that the contemporary climate crisis is so severe that the procedural character of democratic systems cannot respond rapidly enough to avoid environmental catastrophes. Moreover, there are spatio-temporal tensions between most green theories and western liberal democracy, in that conventional election cycles and political boundaries often struggle to address the long-term and the global character of ecological issues. This limitation arises from democracy's commitment to

⁶² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.

representation, necessitating a space and opportunity for various factions to influence the public discourse. Additionally, radical green thought occasionally conflicts with the liberal values that underpin western democratic structures, *viz.* curbing population growth versus individual liberty.⁶³ Next, ecological science encourages specific public policies; whereas, democratic discourses can be susceptible, Dobson claims, to populist ideals or cultural sentiment that may impede environmental restoration or protection initiatives. To pragmatically respond to climate change, radical greens like William Ophuls have advocated for constitutional authoritarianism. Yet, Dobson sates that “neither theory nor practical experience suggests that authoritarian regimes are likely to best democracies at resolving environmental problems over the long term.”⁶⁴ Given that he describes himself as being akin to Rousseau’s lawgiver, it is surprising that he ultimately rejects green radicalism. Even without this allusion, do ideologies not strive towards hegemony?

Nevertheless, Dobson approvingly cites Bob Goodin’s democratic commitment based on a “green theory of value” wherein significance is conferred to entities that emerge through natural rather than artificial processes.⁶⁵ This framework bars eco-authoritarianism for largely two reasons. First, the theory applies to humanity itself, for people simultaneously stand inside and outside of Nature. It would be contradictory to deny ourselves the possibility of flourishing that we are attempting to create for other species by subjecting ourselves to authoritarian oppression. Eckersley offers a similar argument for green democracy by citing ecology’s commitment to autonomy as encouraging democratic processes.⁶⁶ Second, ecological science can legitimately identify natural entities that deserve greater socio-political valuation, but it cannot

⁶³ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁶ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 222.

determine the character of this valuation. This limitation of science also holds for the value of the environment in general. Due to the “essential indeterminateness and normative character of the concept of sustainability...it needs to be understood as a discursively ‘created’ rather than an authoritatively ‘given’ product.”⁶⁷ The sheer enormity of human/nature relations prevents any one perspective or small collective of perspectives from objectively knowing how these valuations should influence socio-political institutions. Dobson’s ideological ecologism, thus, avers that democratic systems provide an open space for deliberative interpretation of these scientific valuations.

What democratic form does Dobson believe political ecologism should support? And, how will this form of democracy integrate the environmental interests of future generations and non-human entities? First, Dobson never specifies an *ideal* democratic form. In critiquing green movements within existing political structures, however, he appears to support direct democracy. On western representative democracies he writes, “participatory politics demands the radical restructuring (if not the abolition) of present institutions rather than their use in the service of participation. Attempts to press them into such service will necessarily result in the progressive dilution of the original project.”⁶⁸ In other words, direct democracy cannot be integrated into existing forms of representative democracy without undermining the effectivity of direct participation. Given his advocacy for interdependent diversity, this assertion seems to indicate his support for direct democracy. Yet, his discussion of the climate crisis’ global effect throws this possibility into doubt. Elsewhere, Dobson advocates for “proxy representation,” where people are selected to speak on behalf of non-participants, *e.g.* non-human interests or future generations. These representatives could, however, be equally integrated into either direct and

⁶⁷ Barry, as cited in Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 119.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

representative forms of democracy, and thus, it offers no further insight into Dobson's ideal democratic form.

Without an ideal political form, what function does Dobson ascribe to his eco-ideology? Again, his writings attempt to actualize the theoretical framework of deep-ecology—as exemplified by Eckersley. This requires a pragmatic compromise, or gap, between theory and practice; this is likely why Dobson never posits an ideal democratic form since this would preemptively bind ecologism to a specific means and, thus, jeopardize its ends. Instead, he advocates for various form of eco-political action, ideologically directed by ecologism. First, he suggests—like many other green thinkers—that actors could push environmental concerns into the conventional democratic system with the development of green parties. However, he writes that

Initiatives in and around the legislature [are] too easily absorbed, and thus neutralized, by their context. Initiatives that live outside the prevailing culture and its diversionary channels have much brighter chance of remaining oppositional and therefore of bringing about radical change.⁶⁹

These external initiatives largely include lifestyle changes to consumption, transportation, and community relations. Accordingly, these actions are political insofar as they challenge the existing consumerist cultural. “Even the toilet,” he claims, “is a potential locus for radical politics, for... ‘a quarter of all domestic water in most countries goes straight down the toilet.’”⁷⁰ However, these initiatives cannot occur in isolation. To be politicized, one must voice their motivations for altering how they flush their toilet. The vegetarian, to give a more cogent example, does not engage in politics when privately enjoying her dinner. Only when speaking to others about why she is a vegetarian (*e.g.* her opposition to animal cruelty, the environmental

⁶⁹ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 137.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

impacts of animal industrial agriculture, *et cetera*) does this private activity garner the public appearance necessary to become something political.

The ideological pragmatism of Dobson's approach overtly avoids addressing the conceptual task of framing human/natural relations. He builds, instead, from the deep ecologist observation that humanity is inherently interconnected with and constituted by nature. Dobson's ideal solution to anthropogenic climate change is to entirely reconstruct Western socio-political structures under the guidance of ecological science.⁷¹ While he convincingly articulates practical avenues for *mitigating* humanity's environmental impact, his ideological approach blurs the ontological distinction between politics and governance. With regards to Arendt's theory of action, our present concern is not the viability of Dobson's pragmatism, but instead, his underlying conceptualizations of both politics and nature. According to John Meyer's *Political Nature*, Dobson's political conception is derivative, insofar as it arises *from* Nature. The assumption being that should humanity manage to radically transform its societal structures in accordance with the natural lessons uncovered by ecologism, it would restore humanity to its natural position, creating an ideal state of sustainability. This encourages the question: what happens to politics when this state is achieved? John Meyer's meta-theory provides a useful framework for considering this question as he grapples with the Western tradition's conceptualization of the political-nature relationship.

Meyer's Green Dialectics

What is the relationship between nature and politics? This is the essential question of John Meyer's *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Thought*. According to him, Western political theory has traditionally characterized this relationship as

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

either derivative or dualistic. The first characterization asserts that the foundational principles of political institutions, broadly understood, derive from natural phenomena. In other words, human communities have historically been organized in accordance with their people's understanding of the cosmos, *i.e.* Nature.⁷² Of course, this understanding of the cosmos changes throughout history, and correspondingly, political theory has altered its normative organizational principles in accordance with these changes; thus, the tradition in general maintains the essential derivative relationship between politics and nature notwithstanding major advancements in scientific knowledge. Political ecologism is currently attempting to articulate such a transformation by suggesting that the mechanistic understanding of nature that underpinned early western industrialism is steadily being revealed to be inaccurate. However, the credibility of any derivative theory depends on its foundational articulation of nature, a criterion that encourages continuous debates within the tradition regarding nature's boundaries and essential character. Meyer's second category encompasses theories that posit a fundamental separation between politics and nature. Their "predominant story is one of communities that sought to tear themselves away from the cycles of nature by celebrating and elevating qualities believed to be distinctively human."⁷³ While these two frameworks are partly correct, Meyer contends that both are theoretically indefensible. The relationship between nature and politics must, instead, be understood as dialectical.

Ultimately, Meyer is attempting to distinguish between the constitutive and directive functions that nature imposes on politics by offering his dialectical account of the politics-nature relationship. Constitutively, nature encompasses everything that is the case, as opposed to things imagined or things departed.^{vi} Here, humanity is fundamentally a natural being, embedded within

⁷² Meyer, *Political Nature*, 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

a complex ecological system. While this insight is patently true, it cannot distinguish what faculty or quality transforms human products from being regarded as natural to being regarded as artificial. Likewise, this monistic definition renders the concept of nature meaningless by stretching its signified object over a universal state of existence. Consequently, political theory must presuppose an essential difference between nature and artifice and emphasize a variable that enables humanity to transverse from the one to the other. Of course, this variable varies across different theoretical traditions, *i.e.* speech, reason, agriculture, religion, *et cetera*. By inserting such presuppositions and creating a foundation for human uniqueness, Meyer believes that politics can comprehend Nature by comparison with itself. As he writes,

When we speak of nature as a condition, a place, or a realm of experience—something familiar among, but by no means unique to, environmental discussions—we are creating a category whose boundaries are not authoritatively defined by a conception of nature and which are necessarily subjective and political. What we have is a category that might be described as *political nature*. Not a unique product of either a conception of nature or of politics, it emerges from a dialectic between them.⁷⁴

Politics cannot glean any insights from a monistic definition of nature, and therefore, its must construct a narrower conception of nature from which to differentiate itself. This process is dialectical insofar as politics imposes categories on Nature and, simultaneously, internalizes the opposition created through the process to buttress its own conceptual territory. As such, politics cannot derive from natural principles nor can politics constitute a non-natural realm since both approaches presuppose a *political nature*.⁷⁵

To illustrate this dialectic, Meyer extensively critiques various dualistic and derivative interpretations of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Aristotle's *Politics*, and he ultimately contends that these classic theories advance a dualistic understanding of the political-natural

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

relationship.^{vii} This section only discusses the essential features of Meyer's dialectical interpretations since our primary concern is not with these canonical thinkers but with Meyer's own account of the nature-politics relationship. Compared to the previously discussed theorists, this section gives significantly greater attention to Meyer's text. This is because his dialectical approach informs the present environmental reading of Arendt's *vita activa*—as presented in Chapter Three. To begin, Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Aristotle's *Politics* are largely regarded within the Western political tradition as the foundational texts for the dualistic and derivative genres. This generalization serves our present purpose except in one instance: Meyer argues that Arendt, in contrast to the common reading, interprets Aristotle's politics as dualistic. He is correct, insofar as Arendt rejects derivative politics. However, his account overstates the division she reads between nature and artifice. The following section that addresses this overstatement is meta-theoretical in that it examines Meyer's understanding of Arendt's interpretation of Aristotle. Despite its abstract character, this discussion is considered useful because it addresses a common misreading of *vita activa*. Meyer's own dialectical approach more aptly explains Arendt's interpretation of Aristotle and her conception of *vita activa* than a nature-politics dualism.

Hobbes' Monistic Nature

Hobbes asserts that nature is ultimately matter in motion.⁷⁶ Although this resembles Aristotle's cosmological definition that regards nature in terms of objects inherently moving towards their *telos*, Hobbes' emphasis on motion is mechanistic, rejecting the possibility of final causes.^{viii} Humanity is essentially motion, then, since we remain a natural object. This monistic view, thus, opposes the Cartesian dualism between mind and matter. As Hobbes' writes, "every

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is not part of the universe. And because the universe is all, that which is not part of it is nothing.”⁷⁷ To transition away from this absolute conception of nature and allow for politics, Hobbes argues that people can cognitively “endeavour,” wherein motion occurs within the mind’s imaginative space and imaginative time. This abridgement is important because it maintains his monistic understanding of nature, while allowing for reasoning—*i.e.* the variable that enables humanity to construct political communities through the realization of “natural law.” What compels people towards this realization? Survival. Hobbes speculates that under natural conditions, humanity’s radical equality would encourage a war of all against all, for everyone would continuously seek a relative power to ensure themselves against potential usurpers. This “state of nature” he famously describes as “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁷⁸ Presuming life strives towards its own realization, this condition compels individuals to form political communities through a social contract, wherein a sovereign is collectively given the power to impose civic laws for the establishment of the mutual benefit of peace. Western political theory commonly cites this social contract as the foundation for a dualistic relationship between nature and politics, wherein nature constitutes the original disorder that humanity has overcome through collective reason, through political order.

Influenced by the Scientific Revolution of the 17th Century, Hobbes was a nominalist thinker. As such, “he repeatedly emphasizes the absolute importance and temporal priority of defining terms.”⁷⁹ He integrates this commitment into his conception of sovereignty authority, for it alone provides “a single, unifying set of definitions” for the establishment and maintenance

⁷⁷ As cited in *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

⁷⁹ Meyer, *Political Nature*, 82.

of civic order. The state of nature's absolute war, by contrast, is believed to arise through humanity's natural equality insofar as people cannot establish a unifying conception of justice because each assertion of order carries equal weight. Consequently, people are restricted to individual struggles for power and *ad hoc* alliances, creating an anarchic and nihilistic condition that allows for violence.^{ix} Meyer draws attention to Hobbes' nominalism because it illustrates the latent dialectics within his theory. Meyer writes, "the state of nature emerges as the negation of [a] prior conception of sovereignty, rather than the foundation of it."⁸⁰ Escaping the disorder of Nature, it seems, requires the order of sovereignty. Dualistic interpretations commonly observed a clear separation here between nature and artifice. But Meyer contests this characterization of Nature and problematizes this dualism. Hobbes identifies human equality as the inherent attribute (a given condition *of* Nature) that creates and sustains absolute war. He believes that existence seeks its own preservation; therefore, people rationally seek peace to escape the sordid conditions of war. However, this assessment presupposes an opposing ideal from which its evaluation garners significance because Nature itself is meaningless: it is simply matter in motion. The state-of-nature is an intermediary notion, a *political nature* that is dialectically informed by Hobbes' natural philosophy and politics—between absolute motion and enduring order.

A mechanistic nature is endless; it has no *telos*. Meyer's second major criticism against dualistic interpretations of Hobbes' political theory relates to the natural limits imposed on the sovereign's power. Through reason, the civic community forms with the ambition of securing peace for the realization of "commodious living."⁸¹ According to Hobbes, the sovereign's authority is limited by the social contract's foundational peace principle; any violation of this

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 97.

principle would rupture the participant's initial pact and, potentially, re-introduce a state of nature. Yet, peace—and by extension commodious living—is positioned as the product of sovereignty. As already suggested, Hobbes inserts this political achievement into his initial evaluation of the state of nature's absolute war. If peace is non-natural, how does it then impose limits on sovereignty? As Meyer writes,

Once we see that the restricted end of sovereign power is not an inevitable consequence of Hobbes' conception of nature, however, then we can also see that the particular way in which the sovereign encourages, discourages, or directs human interaction with the material world are not inevitable or unalterable.⁸²

That is, the ambiguity between natural and artificial conditions bars a strictly dualistic, or even derivative, interpretation of Hobbes' theory and allows for malleability within its underlying nature-politics relationship. Whatever his intentions were, Hobbes *Leviathan* is best interpreted dialectically, as the conceptual foundations for its social contract require a *political nature* that is co-defined through a non-teleological, monistic conception of Nature and a presupposed conception sovereign order.⁸³

Aristotle's Teleological Nature

Derivative Readings. Aristotle also characterizes nature by its movement, but contrary to Hobbes' mechanistic account, this motion is teleologically driven.^x Here, the concept of motion differs from the geometric idea of something shifting its position in space. For Aristotle, it means an innate change process that propels something towards its most advanced state of being. This "source of movement within the thing itself is its nature."⁸⁴ The movement's end does not correspond with the object's demise, but its greatest moment of thriving, its best condition. As such, the realization of this moment is not inevitable. Since all natural objects have their distinct

⁸² Meyer, *Political Nature*, 85.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

ends, the diversity of motion creates conflicts that impede some objects from realizing their telos in relation to others. According to Meyer's reading, Aristotle would reject the monistic conception of nature advanced by Hobbes because it cannot explain why nature moves. By espousing a teleological account of such natural movement, Aristotle cannot reduce the heterogeneity of natural objects to a monolithic whole that either directs or initially propels the movement observed. At best, natural diversity can be conceptualized in aggregate, as a cosmos.⁸⁵

Because Aristotle argues that "man is by nature a political animal," readers have interpreted him as advancing a derivative political framework wherein politics itself is regarded as natural.⁸⁶ Accordingly, the political movement within humanity ends with the realization of a *polis*. Aristotle appears to argue this point in writing that "every *polis*...exists by nature."⁸⁷ In other words, it emerges wherever political movement is unimpeded, for it affords the most amenable conditions for human flourishing. Of course, Aristotle's conception of the *polis* is historically specific, and thus, distinct from empires, states, nations, and bureaucracies. Drawing from ancient Athenians, he presents the *polis* as a uniquely "self-sufficient" civic community wherein citizens take turns in ruling and being ruled, a participatory structure that strives to transform its constituents.⁸⁸ Here, the notion of self-sufficiency extends beyond the satisfaction of the community's mere material necessities—since many other forms of political organization can achieve this essential function—to include those aspects of civic life that buttress human flourishing. In effect, the community provides both a physical and an ontological dwelling for its citizens. Due to the *polis*' transcendent character, existing over consecutive generations, some readers have suggested it constitutes an autonomous phenomenon that emerges through

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. H. W. C. Davis (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 112.

⁸⁷ Meyer, *Political Nature*, 101.

⁸⁸ Meyer, *Political Nature*, 99.

humanity. Rather than its being a manifestation or aggregate reflection of humanity's natural movement, this approach reifies nature into an independent entity. As Meyer writes, "[it] exists as a natural unit apart from its composite part, *i.e.* its citizens."⁸⁹ Whatever the degree of independence afforded to Nature, derivative readings typically incorporate a "natural right" component that asserts that because the *polis* is naturally best due to its participatory structure, people must have a natural right to such participation. Arendt draws a similar inference from Aristotle's regarding humanity's essential right of appearance, but Meyer contends that her reading is firmly dualistic—as elaborated below.

Meyer's critique of derivative readings of Aristotle first focuses on this naturalization of politics. He argues that it paradoxically empties politics of conceptual significance by positioning Nature as simultaneously the conceptual background and external standard from which politics arise and against which it is evaluated. In effect, politics is relegated to an administrative process that simply enacts policies to achieve naturally given organizational ends.⁹⁰ Again, this hollows out the effective function of politics and virtually renders the term meaningless because a reified Nature is positioned as its primary subject, its actor. Next, Meyer's critique raises an empirical challenge. Historically, the *polis* is an exceptionally rare political form. This rarity is problematic for Aristotle's theory, which argues that nature reveals itself through its regularity. Meyer contends, then, that this would be "the only example of a natural thing that virtually never reached its *telos*."⁹¹ Under the derivative framework, ends must be achievable; otherwise their validity is conceptually tenuous since these unattainable ideals could merely be subjective inferences rather than logically revealed directives from Nature.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

Arendt's Dualistic Reading. In contrast to the derivative interpretation, Hannah Arendt purportedly reads Aristotle's politics as essentially artificial. Therefore, Meyer places her within his dualistic category. Again, this section elaborates on this point because it will be argued below that Arendt's political theory more closely resembles Meyer's own dialectics. Revealing this commonality will be made apparent through this discussion of his misrepresentation of Arendt's *reliance* on Aristotle. In Meyer's view, Arendt observes a firm distinction between the *oikos* and *polis*, wherein the former is restricted to matters of necessity and the latter is restricted to matters of freedom. They are mutually exclusive spheres of human activity. While the *oikos* is open to everyone, since life's necessities compel all to satisfy their essential needs, its focus is limited to such requirements.⁹² The *polis*, by contrast, concerns the ontological question of "the good life" which is approachable under conditions of freedom. In ancient Greece, this sphere was open to Athenian citizens only, restricting women, children, slaves, and foreigners from participating. This dualism, Meyer argues, serves as the foundation for Arendt's own theory, where she sees "the tragedy of modernity [as] rooted in the demise of this dualism, resulting from 'the rise of the social.'"⁹³ In other words, Arendt's own theoretical account of modernity builds from this Aristotelian dichotomy to advocate for the preservation of politics against the matters of society.

Moreover, the *oikos* occurs by nature. As it stands, this is an uncontroversial claim. However, Meyer argues that Arendt's reading is problematic because she ossifies the *oikos*' natural boundaries by conflating them with the "biological life process." Everything compelled by nature, it seems, occurs within the *oikos* (broadly understood to encompasses both the private and social realms). For instance, she positions economics—a social phenomenon related to

⁹² Aristotle, *Politics*, 30.

⁹³ Meyer, *Political Nature*, 106.

housekeeping—within this natural, apolitical sphere.⁹⁴ Meyer draws from this that “the *polis* appears distinguished by its *antinaturalness*.”⁹⁵ Politics is understood as being inherently oppositional to Nature, and Aristotle is interpreted as advocating for a firm barrier between the private and public spheres. Accordingly, this contradicts the aspects of Aristotle’s thought that derivative readings take as foundational and Meyer takes as politically influential: “man is by nature a political animal” and that the *polis* “exists by nature.” By allegedly neglecting these aspects, Arendt’s strict dualistic interpretation appears dubious.

However, Arendt does address these natural claims and clearly rejects the derivative assertion that humanity possesses a political substance. “Politics,” she writes, “arises in what lies *between men* and is established as relationships.”⁹⁶ This position does not stem from a dualist reading of Aristotle’s *Politics*, however. Instead, she references the *Nicomachean Ethics* in recounting his assertion that communities arise through an equalization process of exchanges (*isasthēnai*), a process materially facilitated by money. Friendship (*philia*) is the immaterial version of this process, in that civic friendships “create equal partners in a common world—that they together constitute the community,” despite the inherent social inequalities that emerge in their private, agonal life.⁹⁷ Through this interpretation of Aristotle, politics is regarded as necessary and, thus, natural. As she writes,

Aristotle sees friendship in analogy to want and exchange. It is related to the inherent materialism of his political philosophy, that is, to his conviction that politics is ultimately necessary because of the necessities of life from which men strive to free themselves. Just as eating is not life but the condition for living, so living together in the polis is not the good life but its material condition.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 29.

⁹⁵ Meyer, *Political Nature*, 72.

⁹⁶ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 95.

⁹⁷ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Politics, then, is naturally necessitated. However, Arendt's *vita activa* builds from this assertion to differentiate the *polis*, the organizational model, from its constitutive phenomena: speech and action. The enactment or character of these abilities cannot, according to Arendt, be naturally determined because their novelty stems from people's natality. Thus, there is no regularity or precedent to action, nor is there a *telos* towards which it strives. If otherwise, humanity would be denied the ontological grounds from which its individuals can establish an ontic conception of self as everything would be naturally predetermined. Meyer's critique of Arendt's reading is a straw-man argument. He examines the Aristotelian-inspired aspects of Arendt's *vita activa*, rather than her interpretation of Aristotle's theory itself. What is important, however, is Meyer's assertion that "Arendt celebrates the nature-denying freedom that she identifies with her description of the Aristotelian *polis*."⁹⁹ This characterization is overstated: Arendt's politics does not *necessarily* ignore nature.

Meyer's own interpretation of Aristotle sees the *polis* as stratified. That is, his conceptualization has two strata of organization: exclusive and inclusive. The exclusive conception resembles contemporary understandings of politics as governance. While the function of this aspect varies between regime types, the essential administrative purpose remains constant. Even radically democratic systems (*e.g.* self-governing anarchic councils) have institutional structures directed towards such governing. In Aristotle's time, this space barred major segments of the population on naturalistic claims of inferiority.¹⁰⁰ As such, Aristotle is understood as advancing a normative claim about the teleological naturalness of social inequalities. Meyer contends that this assertion conflicts with the *polis*' inclusive stratum, which encompasses the *polis*' socio-political milieu, *i.e.* the society's social and cultural characteristics. Here, "the

⁹⁹ Meyer, 106.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer, 114.

activities of the *oikos* become a fundamental component of political decision-making and thus can be limited and directed by the political community's own understanding of the appropriate ends and purposes of these activities."¹⁰¹ Meyer builds his interpretation of this broader stratum from Aristotle's assertion that the *polis* inherently emerges through the combination of family structures into a village for the natural end of living well.¹⁰² In other words, the *oikos* gradually becomes politicized when integrated into a community. Given these origins, Aristotle enables a self-reflective analysis of the natural boundary he establishes between these private and public domains and their associated social inequalities. This is precisely what theorists of feminism and race-relations strives towards, the politicization of the private, social sphere under the expression: "the personal is political."¹⁰³ In Meyer's reading, Aristotle's assumption of women's and slave's inferiority is a sociological convention carried into politics. In this regard, Meyer argues that Aristotle's politics is best interpreted as presenting a dialectical conception of the nature-politics relationship. Political organization may naturally arise through humanity's ambition to congregate for mutual flourishing through the collective realization of a state of self-sufficiency, but nature cannot fully determine the character of the subsequent political structures.

Meyer's Dialectic

How does Meyer conceptualize his dialectical approach in general? First, the notion of dialectics holds a prominent position in Western thought due to the theories of Hegel and Marx. Unlike these thinkers, Meyer's theory is not predicated on a vision of motion. Whereas Hegel's *geist* and Marx's materialism each advanced dialectically towards an idealized state of perfection

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 144.

or resolution, Meyer's dialectics are cyclical insofar as he attempts to capture the continuously co-defining relationship between Nature and politics. As he writes,

The existence of a dialectical relationship between conceptions of nature and politics prompts us to see that determinants of the character and scope of the political sphere in relation to other spheres of human action are left unresolved by a commitment to any conception of nature.¹⁰⁴

Unlike derivative or dualistic approaches, then, Meyer's dialectics is conceptually open-ended because it recognizes humanity's agency and nature's mutability. As he writes, "there is no end to this dialectic, as there is no end to our participation in the natural world itself."¹⁰⁵

Consequently, his approach cannot offer normative standards for navigating socio-political horizons or direct the establishment of socio-political ideals.

What, then, is the nature-politics relationship? As previously discussed, politics inherently requires a foundational context/backdrop from which to establish itself. If things were otherwise, politics would remain within an undifferentiated whole. Yet, this differentiation cannot occur simply between Nature and politics, for this would conceptually position politics outside Nature and create a dualism. The "political nature" of Meyer's dialectics overcomes this conceptual challenge of delineating between the natural and the artificial foundations of politics by integrating aspects from each. According to Meyer's reading, Hobbes' state of nature effectively demonstrates this secondary nature through which politics defines itself. However, this dialectical approach should not be interpreted as advancing a post-modern constructionism. Meyer acknowledges the environmental limitations imposed on politics and politics' imposition on the environment, *e.g.* the contemporary climate crisis that undermines the industrialist ethos of perpetual growth.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

If political nature cannot offer normative standards, why emphasize it? “When we ignore or submerge this dialectic,” Meyer claims, “we relinquish power to others who have a stake in constructing our political conceptions.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, “political nature” is ambiguous because it provides space for collective participation via deliberative struggles regarding what *is* natural and the character of our relationship towards it. In this sense, Meyer is arguing that a community’s relationship with Nature is defined through its inclusive political domain, as previously articulated. The robustness of this relationship’s definition and its depth of character depend on the community’s diversity of political participants. To illustrate this point, Meyer suggests that even within a political community that universally adheres to an “ecological worldview,” the nuances of its *political nature* would remain contested.¹⁰⁷ Without guidance from natural standards or absolute artificial control, politics relies on judgements that continuously evaluate the diversity of human experiences to recognize relatively enduring phenomena from which structures may be grounded.

In discussing the theories of John Dryzek, Robyn Eckersley, Andrew Dobson, and John Meyer, this chapter has sought to highlight key themes and concepts within the emerging green political tradition to be applied to Arendt’s *vita activa*. Of course, a direct theoretical comparison cannot be undertaken given the historical differences between these green theorists and Hannah Arendt. Contemporary readers cannot reasonably critique historical works for overlooking current social, political, or environmental issues. However, the themes and concepts discussed within this chapter inform this environmental reading of *vita activa* insofar as they provide a framework for assessing the ability of Arendt’s theory to accommodate environmental politics within its public sphere. Dryzek’s discursive survey, for instance, provides context by

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

positioning the green tradition as largely in opposition to liberalism's Copernican and Promethean assumptions. Within this opposition, his discursive typology helps to locate points of resonance between green theories and *vita activa*, as discussed below. Robyn Eckersley's eco-centrism addresses the ethical justifications that underpin green theories. Her critique of anthropocentrism poses a significant challenge for Arendt's theory, by raising the question of how non-human interests can be politically represented within the public sphere. Dobson extends Eckersley's eco-centrism into conventional politics by constructing an ecological ideology. His approach recognizes the gap between theory and praxis. From an Arendtian perspective, however, Dobson's assertions collapse the distinction between public politics and public policy. Moreover, its appeal to ecological science has the consequence of suggesting that politics is epiphenomenal to natural science. Finally, John Meyer's dialectics examines the ontological relationship between politics and nature, asserting that humanity's natural embeddedness prevents either a dualistic or a derivative conceptualization of this relationship. It will be argued in the following chapter that Arendt's triadic conceptualization of *vita activa* encourages a similar dialectical understanding of the political-nature relationship. Given the breadth of the green tradition, the theorists discussed in this chapter cannot be expected to exemplify every major theme or concept. However, their writings do provide a sufficient theoretical framework for posing the questions of environmental sustainability to Arendt's theory of action. Towards that end, Chapter Three considers her conception of nature and sustainability before considering how the themes raised by Dryzek, Eckersley, Dobson and Meyer can either be accommodated into or rejected by *vita activa*.

ⁱ Here, the “public realm” is used to distinguish between public spaces and the general discussions they contain from Arendt’s theoretically specific public sphere and the political action it enables. Whereas the former space could include organizations, corporations, or special-interest groups, the latter space only occurs between people as an ontological stratum of being, an existential space of becoming.

ⁱⁱ Deep ecologists often lean towards the Survivalists’ discourse by advocating through their biocentric paradigms for misanthropic solutions, such as population reductions with voluntary sterilization and non-interference with naturally occurring famines disease epidemics (Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 184).

ⁱⁱⁱ This is the “NIMBY” (Not in my backyard) phenomenon observed in green political theory.

^{iv} Dobson understands ideology to mean “any more or less coherent system of beliefs or views on politics and society” (*Green Political Thought*, 5).

^v “Environmentalism and liberalism are compatible, but ecologism and liberalism are not” (*ibid.*, 165).

Dobson makes this claim with an emphasis on liberal individualism, for it espouses a conception of freedom that allows for ecologically destructive material accumulation. This freedom of movement within the laws, *i.e.* positive liberalism, assumes that one knows their own best interests. However, political ecology suggests that in aggregate personal interests can have detrimental consequences on the environment; this is the commonly understood crisis of the commons.

^{vi} In this reading, Meyer’s constitutive conception of Nature resembles Ludwig Wittgenstein’s opening assertion in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, “the world is all that is the case; the world is the totality of facts, not of things” (I-I.I). That is, the world is constituted by the specific facts which have given way to its current realization, for the things themselves, the raw material of reality, have innumerable possibilities for enabling a characteristically different world.

^{vii} It should be acknowledged that Meyer’s conception of derivative politics is overstated with regards to contemporary green theory. While he references contemporary political ecologists when introducing this sub-category, Meyer restricts himself to Aristotle’s teleological politics when analysing it. Contemporary derivative theories do not argue that politics *inherently* mimics natural phenomenon, as though humans spontaneously or unconsciously modelled their communities on natural principles. If this were the case, then, similar to Dobson’s Ecologism, politics would be epiphenomenal to natural science insofar as the latter would merely integrate the empirical insights gathered by the former. Such circumstances would denigrate politics into an invisible, bureaucratic process of administration. Anthropocentric climate change would have, it logically follows, developed through deleterious science. This implication would undermine the credibility of natural science and, in turn, ecologism’s own empirical claims. To avoid this potential contradiction and maintain the generally derivative relationship between politics and nature, ecologists must recognize that politics encompasses human autonomy. Eckersley understands this point well. She writes, “we are *relatively* autonomous beings who, by our purposive thought and action, help to constitute the very [societal] relations that determine *who we are*” (*Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 53). Although natural science cannot fully determine socio-political relations nor guarantee Dobson’s “ecological consciousness,” Eckersley maintains that human autonomy is logically limited by *environmental facts* that if unrecognized will eventually result in the community’s demise. There is, she writes, “nothing *inevitable* about the possibility of a new, ecologically informed cultural transformation” (*Ibid.*, 52). Transformation, instead, requires political engagement within the reality given.

^{viii} If nature is all encompassing, its movement logically must derive from an initial source—what contemporary science largely identifies as the big bang and what Hobbes identifies as God.

^{ix} This transcendent authority via power (*i.e.* strength) is essential to Hobbes’ account of politics because humanity’s natural constitution is embedded within Nature, in its monistic form. Therefore, the power-drive that Hobbes says characterizes human nature by cannot be altered, only hedged by the *awe* of a power imbalance.

^x Aristotle argues that natural change has four causes: Formal, Material, Efficient, and Final. Meyer neglects the initial three causes for the purpose of brevity. This analysis recognizes these other aspects of Aristotle’s thought, but it is restricted to Meyer’s interpretation and therefore does not delve into these aspects.

Chapter Three: Arendtian Environmentalism

The categorical boundaries in Arendt's *vita activa* should be interpreted as analytical, each capturing a different aspect of humanity's ontological experience; the separation she draws between matters of necessity and freedom being phenomenological. As such, the contents of each sphere remain open in praxis. If otherwise, her theory would pre-emptively limit politics with arbitrary criteria, a possibility she vehemently opposes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. From this interpretation, this chapter argues that *vita activa* is not inherently antagonistic to environmental politics. Although Arendt never addresses the ecological concerns expressed by green theorists, her theory's ambiguous conceptualization of human/nature relations leaves open the possibility for its accommodation of green principles, such as ecological sustainability. In turn, this theoretical openness may encourage her insights regarding the communitarian foundations for human freedom and the politics of the public sphere to positively contribute to or influence readers' engagement with green political theory. Under the anxiety created by a looming ecological disaster, the green tradition has demonstrated a willingness to consider authoritarian forms of government, curtail public liberties, introduce isolationist international policies, advocate for dramatic technological advancements, and promote powerful expert-based administrative bureaucracies. Arendt's theory implies that these suggestions for ecological security should be approached with scepticism, if not overt distrust, for they carry the risk of undermining human freedom by constricting the politics of the public sphere.

Nature and The Human Condition

“The goals of politics are never anything more than the guidelines and directives by which we orient ourselves.”¹ Although Arendt cannot be considered an environmentalist, her

¹ Arendt, *Intro to Politics*, 193.

conception of politics as free public action, again, leaves open the possibility of its adoption of green guidelines and re-orientation away from the industrial ethos. This does not mean that environmentalism can be interpreted from *within* Arendt's writings; rather, *vita activa's* concept of politics does not automatically bar the introduction of environmental issues from the public sphere's political content. That said, Arendt's understanding of the earth resembles some green conceptions of nature, and her principle of caring does contain similarities with general green principles of ecological sustainability. These existing theoretical elements are too understated to be leveraged into a standalone Arendtian environmentalism, but they serve as points of resonance between *vita activa* and environmentalism that provide a basis for a theoretical exchange. The following section discusses these points before considering the challenges Dryzek, Dobson, Eckersley, and Meyer introduce for an Arendtian environmentalism and some potential criticism of these approaches by Arendtian theory.

Nature

What is Arendt's understanding of Nature? Unfortunately, she never offers a concise definition, an omission that likely reflects her post-war milieu, which was grappling with the horrors of totalitarianism and was largely uninformed about environmental degradation. When asked by Roger Errera what her generation would leave for the twenty-first century, for instance, she suggested modern art.² Clearly, she was unaware of the enormous environmental impact of her post-war industrial society. Nevertheless, her writings do offer a conception of the earth that includes a description of nature. Here, nature is understood as encompassing all material and organic features that emerge autonomously—what she describes as “a free gift from nowhere.”³ This definition can be inferred when reading her discussions on fabrication and throughout her

² Arendt, *Last Interview*, 123.

³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 2-3.

poetry. Two quotations help illustrate this point. First, she states, “the world, the man-made home erected on earth and made of the material which earthly nature delivers into human hands, consists not of things that are consumed but of things that are used.”⁴ This deliverance occurs independently of and prior to human production, indicating that earthly nature is everything that exists independent of man’s intervention. Second, she wrote:

Earth poetize, field to field
with the trees interlinear, and let
us weave our own paths around
the plowed land, in the world.

blossoms rejoice in the wind,
grass stretches out to bed them softly
heaven goes blue and greets mildly
soft chains the sun had woven.

People go about, no one is lost—
Earth, heaven, light and forests—
Play in the play of the Almighty.⁵

Again, the poem speaks to humanity’s position within a given material reality. Following from Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s biography of Arendt that clearly establishes her as secular Jewish thinker, “the Almighty” could be interpreted as a placeholder for that non-articulable wonder that she believed—and which Ludwig Wittgenstein also addresses as the silence beyond language—surrounds the *miracle* of existence itself.⁶ So, humanity is natural, but its world is not. As she writes, “if nature and the earth generally constitute the condition of human life, then the world and the things of the world constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can

⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 134.

⁵ Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World*, 246.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

be at *home* on earth.”⁷ Nature, in other words, provides humanity with the resources and space to dwell.

Nature endlessly moves *through* an earthly foundation. In describing humanity’s natural conditions, Arendt draws an important distinction between earth and nature, *i.e.* between form and content. Nature constitutes the autonomous life-force that repetitiously moves the earth’s corporeal elements; “[it] moves in endless cycles of growth and decay, one generation of animals or plants replacing the previous generation in a natural movement that is indifferent to individual specimens.”⁸ This earth/nature distinction provides further depth to Anne Chapman’s argument “that in building a world of lasting human artefacts we are attempting to emulate [the] immortality of nature.”⁹ We recreate the distinction within the artifice and the world as form and content respectively. The world, then, constitutes the autonomous human presence that repetitiously moves within the artifices’ persistent structures. Ontologically, however, the individual cannot experience this distinction *alone* because of their limited temporal existence, and instead, they only experience the content of these domains: nature and world. Yet, the environmental crisis ultimately manifests between the earth and the artifice, as the latter gradually overwhelms the former. Escaping our temporal limitation requires Arendtian politics, for only through collective memory and collective action can one generation acquire the power necessary to transcend its position and alter the earth/artifice relationship—*i.e.* the enduring form behind the contents that characterize Meyer’s nature/politics relationship.

This distinction between form and content also carries an epistemological component insofar as reality precedes awareness. Contrary to social constructivists or post-modernists,

⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 134.

⁸ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, 106.

⁹ Chapman, *The Ways That Nature Matters*, 439.

Arendt's approach firmly recognizes the independence of earth/nature. Through natality, the individual's initial ontological position is strictly natural, their only concern is being-in-nature. This initial position is not dependent upon objective artefacts; a nascent people could persist without fabrications as mere *animal laborans*, for instance. As Arendt writes, "earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and *without artifice*."¹⁰ Radically understood, then, humanity's ontological position does not automatically reside *in-between* nature and world—as simultaneously an animal and a fabricator. Rather, this position is constructed and maintained. When beginning to contribute to the world, the individual enters this in-between position. Even within the individual, nature precedes worldliness, and therefore, it follows that earth/nature exists independently of the artifice/world. Existence precedes awareness.

Western liberal thought predominantly espouses a narrative of progress through history: for example, Hegel's world-spirit or Marx's communism. By contrast, Arendt's conception of the nature/world relationship is cyclical. Historicists may contest her assertion by arguing that prior to its realization, the world exists as the natural realization of humanity's teleological or its eschatological ends. But, this defence of progress presupposes a natural or divine determinism. It suggests that whatever occurs is inevitable or pre-determined, a belief that undermines human freedom. As Arendt said to Roger Errera, "if you look at history retrospectively, then, even though it was contingent [on innumerable variables], you can tell a story that makes sense."¹¹ Why? Because reality overwhelms our perception of history and wipes away the bygone variables to create a narrative of linear movement where an infinite horizon of possibilities once

¹⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 2 (Emphasis added).

¹¹ Arendt, *The Last Interview*, 118.

existed.¹² Even to assume that any specific world is humanity's teleological end creates a conformation crisis. How could the fabricators of this reality escape their positional bias to objectively substantiate their claim?

Sustainability

Humanity's existential awareness arises through its inherent urge for caring-taking. In Arendt's essay 1948 "What is Existential Philosophy?" she describes this phenomenon in relation to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*. She writes,

The nature of *Dasein* is not that it simply is but, rather, that in its being its primary concern is its being itself. This basic element is called 'care,' which underlies all the daily care-taking in the world. Care-taking has a genuinely self-reflective character. It only appears to be directed at whatever it happens to be occupied with at the moment. It actually does everything in the mode of for-the-sake-of (*Um-willen*).¹³

Here, Arendt signals the ephemeral character of care-taking as something fully occupied in the presence of being. Existence strives, in other words, towards its own preservation. Following Heidegger's philosophy, this condition accompanies one's temporal and material thrown-ness (*Geworfenheit*) into the *in-between* space of existence. Whereas Heidegger meant the thrown-ness of existence itself—as opposed to nothingness—Arendt extends this concept to include our thrown-ness into an existing human condition. Care-taking is endlessly necessary to sustain those conditions which enable one's existential development, which enable one to *dwell*.

Arendt never directly addresses the question of environmental sustainability, but stresses this similar notion of "care-taking." Although she acknowledges that humanity may persist within Nature without an artifice, this possibility is, by contemporary societal standards, limited to states of exception or speculative histories regarding nascent people. Everywhere else, humanity ontologically stands *in-between* these realms, as simultaneously an animal and a

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³ Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 179.

fabricator. As such, every emergent generation enters pre-existing societal forms that characterize their human condition. Consequently, humanity's apolitical activities cannot simply produce but must also re-produce its inherited world, for Nature's cyclical movement invariably draws everything back into itself. However, the character of a community's care-taking initiatives is not fully determined by nature. Sociological factors influence how and what structures are maintained. Here, fabricators retain some autonomy. As Arendt writes, "we can find traces and signs [of freedom] in almost all activities."¹⁴ A political community establishes its collective narrative in relation to this re-productive process, a narrative that defines its human/nature relationship and influences its environmental impact.

This interpretation of care-taking is an extension of Arendt's assertion that, existentially, every human being stands in "the gap between past and future." Here, "life itself, limited by birth and death, is a boundary affair in that my worldly existence always forces me to take account of the past when I was not yet and a future when I shall be no more."¹⁵ This means that each person enters a historical moment wherein a tradition carries meaning into the present. The individual must grapple with these inherited meanings and assess their applicability for navigating the future. Arendt's contention is that modernity has ruptured the western tradition's future viability with the collapse of transcendental authority, either divine or philosophical.¹⁶ Green political theory has generally drawn a similar conclusion regarding the Western tradition's decline, but instead of citing a baseless authority, it points to ecological exhaustion as the final cause. Although every epoch stands between the past and the future, our present condition

¹⁴ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 167.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 192.

¹⁶ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 141; *On Revolution*, 181.

confronts the exceptional circumstances of needing to fundamentally renew our worldly presence in nature. We must re-evaluate the future sustainability of our built environment.

From Eckersley's perspective, this emphasis on worldly care-taking is brazenly anthropocentric. Additionally, its justification rests on an antagonistic relationship between human development and natural movement, a movement described as "the unceasing, indefatigable cycle in which the whole household of nature swings perpetually."¹⁷ This description resembles the Promethean's discourse with its Copernican assumption regarding the infinite potential of a limitless nature. Whereas green political theory is concerned with environmental sustainability against human incursions, Arendt is concerned with a human sustainability against environmental incursions. Although Arendt does characterize the human/nature relationship as antagonistic, it would be incorrect to interpret this as indicating her support for the Promethean perspective. Rather, her theory addresses humanity's essential conditions of being. Her humanistic understanding of sustainability can be interpreted as occupying one side of a continuum where ecologism occupies the other. The former approach concerns a sufficient environmental impact and the latter approach concerns an excess.

Additionally, the cyclical movement of nature refers to ecological cycles, not a replenishing of resources. Arendt recognizes that *homo faber's* worldly ambitions can exceed environmental limits. On the contemporary wastefulness of capitalism, she points towards postwar Germany, which thrived economically through its destruction and re-construction. "Under modern conditions," she laments, "not destruction but conservation spells ruin because ...[it] is the greatest impediment to the turnover process, whose constant gain in speed is the only

¹⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 96.

constancy left.”¹⁸ Given that *homo faber* is inherently a destroyer of nature, this increased speed of turnover, of consumption, logically results in the degradation of the natural environment.

Although she never recognizes the severity of this degradation, Arendt does consider this one aspect of world alienation that is brought about by a “universal science” that reduces the earth from being humanity’s home to its raw materials. In response to this universal perspective and its technological advancements, Arendt asserts that “foremost in our minds at this moment is of course the enormously increased human power of destruction, that we are able to destroy all organic life on earth and shall probably be able one day to destroy even the earth itself.”¹⁹

Writing during the Cold War, Arendt is clearly referring here to nuclear technology. However, climate change has shown that this destructive potential resides in benign technologies as well, *e.g.* the commonly used internal combustion engines. Taken together, Arendt’s emphasis on nature’s cyclical movement should not be interrupted as Promethean since she recognizes the potential dangers associated with its disruption. To further this interpretation of Arendt’s notion of sustainability, the following sections examine how each category of *vita activa* relates to this conception of Nature, and contributes to the process of care-taking.

Labour

Labouring unconditionally ties us to Nature. As Arendt writes, “life itself is outside [our] artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms.”²⁰ As embodied beings, *animal laborans*’ consciousness recognizes itself as a natural object—*i.e.* of being-within-the-world, as Heidegger describes it. But, this recognition extends no further because the labourer moves anonymously within the *timeless* cycles of Nature. As Arendt writes,

¹⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 253.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

“Nature and the cyclical movement into which she forces all living things knows neither birth nor death as we understand them.”²¹ Why? Death of the individual is a sociological phenomenon that requires a place of appearance. In isolation, the *animal laborans* has no such place and consequently remains nameless, for their entire ontological functioning is directed towards their essential existence. Therein, they remain indistinguishable, merely representing another member within an ever-reoccurring species of beings, all of whom behave in accordance with their biological demands.²² They persist, in other words, within an existentially shallow condition, unaware of their mortality due to a pre-occupation with the necessities of the present. For them, even time would be conceptually irrelevant.

What is labour’s existential contribution? In this interpretation, Arendt’s theory suggests that labour’s influence is limited to one’s private blissfulness in recognizing their embodied experience of being-in-nature. In other words, when *animal laborans* successfully attain their daily sustenance they experience “the sheer bliss of being alive.”²³ However, this experience is predicated upon one’s labouring against life’s eternally reoccurring necessities, *i.e.* the *bios*.²⁴ Blissfulness only acquires its meaning, then, as the essential experience of existence in relation the arduousness of labour, for the human being’s perishability is readily discovered when confronting the violence of Nature’s harsh conditions, as discussed in chapter one.²⁵ The *animal laborans*’ relationship with nature is non-existent, for in isolation this aspect of the human condition is undifferentiated from the environment, like Rousseau’s natural man. Here, one equally experiences the violence of natural forces as something internal and external.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

²² Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 52.

²³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 134.

²⁴ ²⁴ Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 51.

²⁵ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 44.

Whatever the technological interventions humanity fabricates over time to facilitate its labouring process, the *animal laborans* aspect of humanity remains tied to Nature. “Insofar as we all need bread,” Arendt claims, “we are all the same.”²⁶ In this regard, she differs significantly from liberalism’s classical conceptions of the primitive economic man. Shiraz Dossa, an insightful reader of Arendt, argues that unlike Hobbes’ natural man the *animal laborans* is uninterested in social matters, such as power and property.²⁷ He is exclusively concerned with labouring. Of course, biological drives encourage some sociability for the purposes of reproduction, but the labourer’s social concerns extend no further. This limits the need for speech and enduring relationships outside the private family structure. Due to this asocial disposition, the *animal laborans* always meets violence with violence, whether its origins are natural or social. Under such conditions, “the violence with which he pits himself against other men in the battle for survival is not incompatible with his social nature,” Dossa claims, “because this society is no more than a crude companionship of natural men.”²⁸ In this regard, this essential component of the human condition adheres to the natural law of self-preservation that underpins Hobbes’ “state of nature.” Unlike Hobbes, however, Arendt does not suggest that the *animal laborans* is overcome through a civic liberty bounded by laws; it always remains a constituent feature of the human condition in general, not a presumed condition of any non-civilized being. For our *animal laborans* selves, “the reward of toil and trouble lies in nature’s fertility, in the quiet confidence that he who in ‘toil and trouble’ has done his part, remains a part of nature in

²⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 89.

²⁷ Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

the future of his children and his children's children."²⁹ This essential perseverance is labour's contribution to care-taking.

Work

To existentially distinguish itself from Nature, humanity must produce its own World. As previously discussed, this requires work from *homo faber*.³⁰ When roaming nature, Heraclites argues that “the river where you set your foot just now is gone—those waters give way to this and now this.”³¹ Arendt refers to this insight when contrasting the conditions of the *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, insofar as the observation depicts the laborans' experience of reality. The river, as with Nature generally, remains in flux—without a permanent feature to anchor one's experience. By contrast, *homo faber's* artefacts of production stabilize the human experience through the objects' endurance against natural cycles. The craftsman's table, for instance, assures its fabricator of the continuity of their existence and simultaneously separates them subjectively from the objective material of Nature. How? The material world produced by workers becomes, in aggregate, the antecedent societal forms—the “human artifice” — for subsequent generations. “The reality and reliability of the human world,” Arendt claims, “rests primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they are produced.”³² This includes the world's intangible socio-cultural structures, for these immaterial social products, including the social sphere itself, persist beyond their initiators.

“Without a world into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but the changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of

²⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 107.

³⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 136, n1.

³¹ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 27.

³² As quoted by Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 501.

all other animal species.”³³ To preserve their existential awareness and development, then, humanity must sustain its world against the inevitable process of decay. Since our world’s foundations are material, *homo faber* is its principal care-taker. This aspect of humanity most directly engages with Nature as something objective to which instrumentalism must be applied for the creation of an artifice, something we both inhabit and internalize.³⁴ “What he sees...is not some confining force to be freed from but ‘the almost worthless things’ out of which to build a world to house human affairs.”³⁵ This perspective places *homo faber* on an ontologically higher stratum than the *animal laboran*.

As a care-taker, *homo faber* cannot exceed their environment’s material limits; they must fabricate sustainably. “The protection and preservation of the world against natural process are among the toils which need the monotonous performance of daily repeated chores.”³⁶ The emphasis here should be on “daily repeated chores,” suggesting a sustained relationship with natural cycles. In other words, the latent violence of production and preservation must reflect the cyclical movements of nature, insofar as care is required to maintain an artificial structure. This process presupposes that Nature is reproductive, restoring itself against the violence of production. This aspect of Arendt’s theory relies on Marx’s foundational, albeit nearly self-evident, assertion that there exists a “metabolism between man and nature.”³⁷ Of course, humanity’s construction and maintenance can become excessively violent towards nature and, consequently, distort the human condition. Again, Arendt believes that unfettered capitalist industrialism and mechanization has produced such an excess, distorting *homo faber*’s care-

³³ Arendt, as cited in Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, 57.

³⁴ Peter Cannavò, "Hannah Arendt: Place, World, and Earthly Nature," in *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon*, ed. Joseph H. Lane and Peter F. Cannavò (Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2014), 261.

³⁵ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 43 citing Arendt, *Human Condition*, 135.

³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1976), 100.

³⁷ Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 170.

taking objectives through a commitment to perpetual growth of the “consumer society.”

However, this material excess cannot derive from the instrumental logic of *homo faber*, but instead, it must derive from political action—or more precisely, mass inaction.

Action

Action creates the collective narrative through which a political community becomes a people and its inhabitants become freely participating individuals. Its relationship with nature is hermeneutic, insofar as politics seeks to provide an explanation of a community’s position within history and nature. As Michael Janover writes, “only action and speech can disclose the world, by constituting the shared space of meaning, memories, and stories.”³⁸ Here, a people collectively reflect on their *who* characteristics, as opposed to the *what* characteristics which occupies their apolitical work, their sociological positions. For example, the American Civil Rights movement was predicated on the American ethical commitment to the principle of equality, not a specific rejection of any single public policy regarding racial segregation. If the general notion of equality is demonstrated to be mutable, this would jeopardize the concept’s constitutional and ideational functions throughout the entire American ethos. Arendt therefore argues that the Civic Rights Movement was not simply directed towards the welfare of American Blacks but also towards “the survival of the republic.”³⁹ The narrative that manifests itself within the public sphere either maintains or transforms the values bequeathed to a people, values which subsequently inform the spirit of its entire care-taking ambitions, for care-taking is self-referential.

³⁸ Michael Janover, "Politics and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," in *Action and Appearance: Ethics and the Politics of Writing in Hannah Arendt*, ed. Anna Yeatman, Charles Barbour, Phillip Hansen, and Magdalena Zolkos (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 30.

³⁹ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 200.

Action is the final stratum of *vita activa* and *ideally* stands above both labour and work, for unlike these lower strata it does not emerge by necessity. Rather, political action within the public sphere occurs through human agency. Here, Arendt foreshadows Meyer's dialectical reading of Aristotle by arguing that humanity is political by nature but not naturally political. As she writes, "even today we believe that Aristotle defined man primarily as a political being endowed with speech and reason, which he did only in a political context."⁴⁰ In other words, the individual only realizes their political capacity within the appropriate space of appearance. They create a "political nature," in Meyer's terms, through action. If interpreted otherwise, *i.e.* as humanity being inherently political, then everything someone undertakes could be regarded as action, diluting the term's significance. As aforementioned, politics itself requires a context from which to be differentiated. For action, Nature serves this function. Contrary to Meyer's assertion, discussed above, this does not make action antagonistic to nature. Its artificiality is limited to the formation of the public sphere; the contents of politics therein remain undetermined since it emerges through human freedom. The contents are those "peak moments" of novelty. A political community could, thus, choose to espouse an ecocentric narrative, as articulated by Eckersley. With this interpretation of Nature and sustainability within Arendt's theory of action, the discussion turns to a theoretical comparison with Dobson, Dryzek, Eckersley, and Meyer.

Responding to Green Theory

Ideological Ecologism

Whatever their objectives, ideologies impede Arendtian politics by compelling people to adhere to pre-established frameworks, an adherence which undermines their ability to act by limiting avenues for the realization of novelty. In short, they enable non-thinking. "Nothing,"

⁴⁰ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 120.

Arendt writes, “compromises the understanding of political issues and their meaningful debate today more seriously than the automatic thought-reactions conditioned by the beaten paths of ideologies.”⁴¹ To consider the implications this has for green politics, it is useful to briefly review Arendt’s own, historically situated reflections on ideologies and politics. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she argues that ideologies, when fully realized, enable the development of totalizing conditions if coupled with terror. Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union respectively relied on ideologies of Nature and History, and their systems of terror were institutionalized in the concentration camps and *gulags*.⁴² While it far exceeds the scope of this reading to delve into the details of these regimes, it should be clarified that the Nazi’s ideology of Nature asserted that Aryans were a naturally superior race and, thus, entitled to power. For the Stalin’s ideology of History, communism was purported to be the final realization of human emancipation, an assumption *inspired* by Marx’s theories. In both instances, an ideology offers a grand explanation that justifies the regimes, their policies, and their opponents. Unlike Arendtian politics, which is predicated on non-instrumental freedom, ideologies encourage a utilitarianism by introducing an idealized end from which the most efficient means for its realization can be evaluated.⁴³ These are, of course, historically extreme examples, but their severity helps illustrate Arendt’s opposition.

When carried into the public sphere, ideologues relinquish their capacity to judge the world anew. According to Arendt, action appears within conditions of freedom, wherein thought can judge a phenomenon for its meaning without impediment. Such judgments are often made through the existing standards created by personal prejudices that serve as heuristics for

⁴¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 215.

⁴² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 468.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 469.

navigating similar circumstances efficiently.⁴⁴ When confronting something new, however, judgements must occur without assistance. Arendt draws from Kant to assert that these moments ultimately require aesthetic judgement, *i.e.* taste. Here, one must “think without banisters,” a process that recognizes change and allows for learning (something akin to the “social learning” advocated by Dryzek).⁴⁵ The existential power of action, also, derives from these moments of unassisted judgement, for they reflect the individual’s perspective and their assessment of meaning or justice.¹ When judgements ossify into or adopt ideologies, they become disconnected from the visceral experience of reality, which tastes depends upon. Instead, “they shield... us from all experience by making ostensible provisions for all reality.”⁴⁶ The universal explanatory power attributed to an ideology makes adherence to its truths a pseudo-logical accomplishment, a calculation. Arendt’s most famous example of an individual’s failure to think outside of ideological banisters is, of course, Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi Lieutenant Colonel for *Schutzstaffel*. While another extreme example, Eichmann’s *banality* demonstrates how a thoughtless ideological adherence creates a “remoteness from reality” so acute that it hollows out one’s humanity and renders them a “nobody.”⁴⁷ By contrast, judgment requires a deliberative engagement with others and the perception of reality they support. Because taste is subjective, creating a shared meaning between actors based on aesthetic judgements requires persuasion; it requires deliberation.

Dobson’s ecologism equally impedes politics. Under the *universal* threat of anthropogenic climate change, ecologism ultimately advocates a technocracy—rule by experts. Without this approach, he claims that nature’s brute force will impose totalitarian conditions.

⁴⁴ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 102.

⁴⁵ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 234.

⁴⁶ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 103.

⁴⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 288.

Although he espouses the cultural value of democracy in general, the horizon of possibilities for those with an “ecological consciousness” is limited by the scientific insights that ground his ideology, insights that are regarded as being beyond contestation. In effect, politics is epiphenomenal to science and technology, operating within the banister these domains establish around what is deemed materially sustainable. Dobson’s politics are, thus, instrumental, a public process that logically debates the most efficient policies of those supported by environmental science for first achieving and then maintaining a sustainable society. This democracy is fitted for the crisis-at-hand. Yet, the ever-present need for sustainability makes this crisis an ever-present possibility. As Dobson writes, “the more democracy is understood to be government *for* the people rather than democracy *by* the people, the more compatible with the objective-driven nature of green thinking it becomes.”⁴⁸ The freedom to act, including the freedom to judge, is restricted to technocratic elites. This only leaves the public with the opportunity to choose. Without action, in the Arendtian sense, how does a society’s inhabitants realize their existential self-development? How do they become a community? According to Dobson, this self-development emerges through work, for he claims it “uplifts the spirit and helps create and reproduce ties to one’s community—even helps to create oneself.”⁴⁹ This essentially echoes Marx’s privileging of work and therefore suffers equally from its materialism. Objects of production can demonstrate *what* someone does, but they cannot articulate *who* they are.

Like every ideology, Andrew Dobson’s ecologism seeks political hegemony; it strives to supersede the purportedly subpar perspectives of reform environmentalism, ecological modernism, animal protectionism, wildlife conservation, *et cetera*. Arendtian scholar Douglas Torgerson offers an insightful critique of such green nominalism. He argues that such theories

⁴⁸ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 122.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

are committed to a single perspective, to the denunciation of all others. By contrast, Torgerson interprets the political element of *vita activa* as rooted within a communitarian tradition that attempts to preserve the political sphere's need for plurality. As such, the public sphere is predicated on an "arguability" that attempts to maintain this plurality of perspectives, for everyone carries the fundamental right—by virtue of their shared apolitical animality, as discussed below—to raise environmental matters within their community's public discourse. Ideologies, however ecologically accurate, constrict this access and impose criteria for participation. In their benign form, ideologies served as banisters that direct an actor's thought; when exaggerated, they become the "iron bands" of totalitarian control. Yet, the inherent novelty of action makes it incompatible with even such benign direction, for whatever its content, novelty is *naturally* unprecedented and unpredictable. By contrast, ideologies offer "ready-made formulas" that demand execution, not action. In this regard, they are paternalistic insofar as they deny people the capacity to act, to form their own opinion.⁵⁰

Western Anthropocentrism

Eckersley's critique of the anthropocentrism of Western political thought raises a significant challenge for Arendt's theory of action since the latter remains largely silent on questions concerning non-human interests, especially with regards to politics. In approaching this challenge, however, it is necessary to reiterate the theoretical and analytic split in Arendt's thought. *Vita activa* theorizes the human condition's ideal ontological categories and their ideal hierarchical order. Like the earth/nature distinction above, her theory articulates the formal conditions through which politics can emerge but never describes the contents of such politics. The analytical aspect, by contrast, applies this framework to examine modernity's major

⁵⁰Arendt, *On Revolution*, 256.

maladies, including alienation from both the world and the earth. Eckersley's general criticism aptly applies to Arendt's theoretical writings because they are entirely directed towards human flourishing.ⁱⁱ This applies especially to *Homo Faber* for whom everything is evaluated through an instrumental logic; this process "implies a degradation of all things into means, their loss of intrinsic and independent value." Meanwhile, the public sphere is inherently restricted to human participants. But, how could it be otherwise? Following Aristotle, Arendt claims that only humanity has the capacity for action by virtue of contemplation (*nous*).⁵¹ If ecocentrism were to deny Arendt's *political humanism*, it would be operating in bad faith because politics only occurs between people. Instead, "ecocentric notions could help in constituting a *we* for ethical debate and deliberation, but these efforts remain human, indeed all-too-human."⁵² Consequently, every future- and non-human value or interest must be interpreted and represented within the public discourse. This raises the question, who has the right to represent these positions?

Before addressing this question of representation, it should be noted that Arendt was not oblivious to theoretical challenge of anthropocentrism. Concerning *Homo Faber*, she writes "the perplexity of utilitarianism is that it gets caught in an unending chain of means and ends without ever arriving at some principle which could justify the category of means and ends, of utility itself."⁵³ From this anthropocentric worldview, everything becomes an instrument, including the world itself, resulting in a meaningless totality of material. Yet, the individual fabricator does not directly experience this meaninglessness, for their products are ends-in-themselves. They become an object amongst other objects. Only when a society privileges this instrumental,

⁵¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 27.

⁵² Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics*, 106.

⁵³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 154.

anthropocentric worldview does the aggregate effect produce meaninglessness.⁵⁴ A strict adherence to the Promethean discourse reviewed by Dryzek would have this result, for if human ingenuity could overcome every limitation, no object could *retain* an intrinsic value since everything would be subject to a radical resourcefulness. Politics is required to curtail this potentially unending process by establishing non-instrumental values that limit such instrumentalization. These values are not inherent to natural or artificial objects. As Paul Ott argues, “value [can] not...exist in nature until humans put it there through valuation and the creation of worlds.”⁵⁵ Intrinsic value theory reifies values and presupposes that they inherently occur within Nature. Rather, ascribing value to nature requires a material and political world.⁵⁶ This leads back to the above questioning concerning authority and raises another: how can non-human interests initially appear within the politics of the public sphere?

Arendt cannot determine the character of this environmental politics *a priori* without contracting the principle of plurality that the public sphere supports through its arguability. Even if she had addressed the political foundations for non-human interests rather than remaining silent on this issue, her theoretical approach would have limited her from establishing or identifying any intrinsic values in Nature, in whole or in part. Nevertheless, Eckersley’s critique encourages an interpretive response that considers first the theoretical basis for the individual actor’s right to raise non-human interests or values within the public sphere, and second, what justification can be drawn from Arendt’s theory to support these claims once raised.

Inside the public sphere, everyone’s relationship to nature is equal. To support this interpretation, it is necessary to consider Arendt’s understanding of human rights before

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁵ Ott, *Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship with Nature*, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

returning to Eckersley's challenge. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that when Europe's Jewish people were forcibly removed from political communities they discovered the fallibility of their proclaimed human rights. Like Edmund Burke's nationalistic assertion that only the "rights of the Englishmen" exist, Arendt draws from the Jewish experience to claim that only enduring political institutions, not nature, divinity, nor history, can guarantee civic and political rights.⁵⁷ Thus, once expelled from their political communities, Europe's Jewish people were rendered stateless. Without an avenue for publicly presenting their claims, they remained a rootless mass without any guaranteed protections whatsoever.⁵⁸ⁱⁱⁱ According to Arendt, "the world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human."⁵⁹ Instead, one's sheer humanity only secures a "right to have rights;" that is, one's right to those rights that emerge politically.⁶⁰ This stems from one's right to appear within a human community by virtue of their humanity.⁶¹ Without such an appearance, people become indistinguishable beings as their existential potential languishes in a state of oblivion. That said, Arendt's right-to-rights is interpreted, here, as the human right to the condition of flourishing since appearing within the politics of the public sphere is positioned within *vita activa* as humanity's most developed ontological stratum.

Given this right-to-rights, a person's sheer humanity, their being-in-the-world, must secure them a universally shared interest in the natural environment's healthfulness. Why? Arendt's essential right is apolitical, deriving from a person's animalistic membership within the species. Also, the conditions for human flourishing must encompass every stratum of *vita activa*.

⁵⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 298.

⁵⁸ Passerin D'Entrève, 145; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 269.

⁵⁹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 299.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁶¹ Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World*, 257.

Through a reflection on our *animal laborans* interests, then, everyone has an equal and legitimate basis for raising environmental concerns within the public sphere. This approach differs from the existing literature on Arendt's environmentalist potential. For instance, Anne Chapman interprets *vita activa* as enabling an environmental ethic wherein "nature is to be valued and cared for in the same way as we care for works of art and other cultural objects."⁶² This quotation captures a general sentiment throughout the literature that leads several theorists to advocate for the extension of Arendt's care-taking principle from the world to natural. But, care-taking seeks to preserve the world from natural decay by preserving or re-producing its constituent objects. The degradation of nature is not endogenous; it does not require saving from itself. Rather, environmental care-taking should prevent the world from exceeding its environmental limits, or as Paul Voice advocates, it should constrain consumption and unconstrain deliberation.⁶³ How this occurs is a political question requires aesthetic judgments regarding a community's collective identity and its associated representation in their world's cultural and material artifice. While this universal right to politically raise environmental concerns remains anthropocentric, this interpretation offers an initial theoretical basis for eco-politics.

Returning to Eckersley's challenge, on what theoretical basis might actors acknowledge non-human, eco-centric interests? If humanity recognizes for itself the essential right to conditions of flourishing, why should this right not be extended to other animals or, more generally, ecosystems? In this reading, there is nothing within Arendt's theory that bars this *new* ecological possibility. But, on what authority can individuals represent eco-centric interests or values within the public sphere? After all, these eco-concerns are, by definition, outside the actor's experience and therefore not grounded by their essential right-to-rights. Also, how does a

⁶² Chapman, "The Ways Nature Matters," 440.

⁶³ Paul Voice, "Consuming the World," 179.

political community approach such interests? These questions require a broadening of the discussion to consider the relationship that Arendt draws between truth and politics.

Green Representation

Ecological limits may limit political choices, but they do not determine them... A society adapted to ecological constraints... could take widely varying forms

Ryle (as cited in Dobson, 71).

The authority required for representing ecocentric interests or values must derive from ecological and environmental sciences. This scientific basis is here regarded as necessary because the representative cannot have any investment in the position they present, otherwise they become susceptible to the charge of anthropocentrism. Politically represented eco-interests, thus, constitute factual truths regarding the conditions required for something's flourishing. The same scientific impartiality applies equally to the representation of human flourishing, for these too are environmental facts that acquire their authority through scientific objectivity, *i.e.* their factual truthfulness. As such, representatives of environmental truths cannot become political actors, but instead, they must stand outside the public sphere. "This standpoint," Arendt writes, "is the standpoint of the truth-teller, who forfeits his position—and, with it, the validity of what he has to say—if he tries to interfere directly in human affairs and to speak the language of persuasion or of violence."⁶⁴ This is because factual truth appears within the public sphere's politics under equal terms as opinions. Unlike philosophical or religious truths that reveal themselves through insight and revelation, factual truths are contingent on natural variables. What *is* could have been otherwise. This stems from Arendt's epistemological claim that "the earth in general and all forces of nature'... clearly came into being without the help of man and

⁶⁴ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 255.

have an existence independent of the human world.”⁶⁵ As such, factual truths are contestable, like opinions. This invites an extended discussion of Arendt’s understanding of the relationship between truth (rational, philosophical, and factual) and politics; however, a comprehensive consideration of this relationship—although applicable to green theory generally—does not directly relate to our present purpose of considering the potential for Arendt’s theory of action to accommodate environmental questions. With reference to her article “Truth and Politics,” it is sufficient to say here that environmentalists cannot engage in eco-politics without jeopardizing the objective authority of their position. Rather, “factual truth informs political thought just as rational truth informs philosophical speculations.”⁶⁶ Because scientific facts are simultaneously factual observations of our socio-political processes and rationalized speculations regarding the unobservable phenomenon of Earth/Nature, it follows that its insights influence both politics and philosophy.

Who occupy these apolitical positions and what gives them the authority to do so? According to Arendt “outstanding among the existential modes of truth telling are the solitude of the philosopher, the isolations of the scientist and the artist, the impartiality of the historian and the judge, and the independence of the fact-finder, the witness, and the reporter.”⁶⁷ She claims that such individuals largely orbit universities, institutions that actively position themselves outside the cacophony of the public sphere. This was, of course, their initial function. For instance, Plato’s Academe was purposefully positioned outside the *polis*. Their authority means, for Arendt, an “unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed.” And this recognition is bestowed either on people or institutions. With

⁶⁵ Arendt citing Marx and Engels, *Human Condition*, 156

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁶⁷ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 255.

regards to the ecologist, their representative authority is acquired through their sociological position and its associated expertise, not their political actions. As such, neither they nor their purported truths carry political power since such power only arises between people “acting in concert.”⁶⁸ Instead, “the teller of factual truth is also a storyteller, he brings about a ‘reconciliation with reality.’”⁶⁹ Given the existential function Arendt attaches to politics, she should not be interpreted as suggesting that the incumbents of these representative positions are barred from the public sphere as individuals. If that were the case, who would seek truth to their own existential detriment? Rather, the apolitical aspect of authority appears limited to the position they occupy.

Plato’s adventurer, for instance, can return to the cave and share his insight, but he cannot use this knowledge to impose a new political order. As Voice writes, “facts alone are not enough to make the environmentalist’s argument, and a technocratic imposition would rob policy of legitimacy and inspire resistance.”⁷⁰ A political community may recognize an individual’s expertise and, therefore, their ability to represent a non-human interest, but this recognition does not guarantee that their representations will garner influence in the community’s political discourse. Without this limit to their authority, experts could stifle political freedom since truths carry a coercive power by virtue of its purportedly uncontestable nature. Should Plato’s adventurer choose to impose a technocratic order, however, their foundational truth would risk disbelief through its use in acquiring political dominance. This is because truth, despite being incontestable, can be difficult to discern from opinion or falsehood. Here one is, again, reminded of Socrates argument in Plato’s *Republic* regarding the ambiguity between our friends and

⁶⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

⁶⁹ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 257, citing Isak Dinesen.

⁷⁰ Voice, “Consuming the World,” 191.

enemies, for this problem concerns our ability to discern a truth from a falsehood. For Arendt, truths will eventually be revealed because although “persuasion and violence can destroy truth ...they cannot replace it.”⁷¹ Before this occurs, however, falsehoods can inflict lasting damage to a community’s world. Taken together, *vita activa* encourages environmentalists, representing either ecological or anthropological interests, to remain outside of politics in order to ensure their messaging retains its authority as an independent claim to earthly reality.

Additionally, the attributes required to excel as a representative are different from those required to excel as a political actor; public virtues of judgment, trustworthiness, and integrity are orientated towards plurality, but the representatives’ apolitical positions are inherently outside this condition and, therefore, these attributes may not be applicable.⁷² Arendt makes this claim in *On Revolution* with reference to administrative/social/economic positions. To illustrate her point, she references the Russian Revolution and the failure of the *Soviets* (in their initial formation) to manage the existing forces of production. “The councils in the factories brought an element of action into the management of things, and this indeed could not but create chaos.”⁷³ This insight appears equally applicable to environmental “truth-tellers.” As Plato’s adventurer discovered upon his return into the darkness, truth does not automatically translate into power.

Plato responds to this limitation by advocating for “philosopher kings” who are supported by the violence of a guardian class that protects the regime from *both* external and internal threats. This paternalistic approach believes that philosophers (*elites*) can re-model society in accordance with the truth, a truth that the people cannot understand themselves. Dryzek’s review of the Survivalist discourse—*i.e.* Heilbroner’s eco-authoritarianism—raises a similar

⁷¹ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 255.

⁷² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 266.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

theme within the Green tradition, wherein environmentalists are positioned as the ideal societal leaders. Arendt suggests that such elitism would eventually falter because a tyranny of truth remains a tyranny. Here, Arendt's theory resembles Meyer's critique of derivative politics insofar as a truth—rational, factual, or philosophic—cannot fully determine a political community's response to the reality it references. When discerned, environmental facts—like all other truths—serve as epistemological boundaries for a community's sense of reality and thereby create the navigable horizon of possibilities. How a community chooses its path across this horizon should, ideally, emerge through collective judgment regarding its existential sense-of-self within the material and social reality given. In other words, people's response to reality must reconcile their sense of *who* with their sense of *what*. By contrast, Plato's philosopher king and Heilbroner's eco-authoritarian merely justify the imposition of an elitist's choice from the horizon of possibilities by referencing *Truth*. This would be an extreme instance of the "rise of the social" phenomenon discussed above, for it eliminates the plurality of Arendtian politics by restricting action to elites and privileging the instrumental rationality that accompanies the *natural* sciences.

Political Judgement

Having addressed political representation, we turn to the question: how does the political community approach these eco-centric interests or values? As mentioned, political communities ideally respond to environmental facts, or truths, through collective judgment that strives to reconcile their response with their cultural identity. On such judgements, Arendt cites Kant's *Critique of Judgement* because she believes it provides a framework for understanding how people respond to novelty. This applies equally to communities and individuals. Here, she echoes Dryzek's discursive designs, which "involve collective decision making through authentic

democratic discussion, open to all interests.”⁷⁴ But unlike Dryzek, her approach is not directed towards public policy, for this is an instrumental concern that is properly handled by systems of government. Her politics is, instead, directed towards a community’s general principles and values.

Without standards, one must draw from the particular to assess the universal on the basis of one’s own intuition, *i.e.* on a visceral response. For instance, the quality of a particular table could be judged as exemplifying attributes desired in all tables, making it simultaneously a particular and universal object.⁷⁵ This visceral assessment derives from one’s “taste,” but unlike an idiosyncratic desire or preference, tastes are influenced by one’s understanding of common sense (*sensus communis*). As Kant writes, “in matters of taste we must renounce ourselves in favour of others.... In taste egoism is overcome.”⁷⁶ According to D’Entrèves’ interpretation, Kant is asserting that judgements of taste are only communicable and valid when they internalize the perspectives of others. Because aesthetic judgements of something being beautiful or something being wrong are subjective, they cannot *logically* compel agreement amongst others but must acquire acceptance through persuasion. To maintain an understanding of the *sensus communis*, actors must “think ‘representatively,’ that is, from the standpoint of everyone else, so that we are able to look at the world from a number of different perspectives.”⁷⁷ Through this process of mentally positioning oneself within the plurality’s perspective, Arendt believes we internalize some of the spectator’s objectivity. Of course, no actor can completely remove themselves from their context, but this process allows one to garner some insights into the interests of others. In effect, Arendt believes this internalization produces what Kant terms an “enlarged mentality,”

⁷⁴ Dryzek, *Politics of the Earth*, 270.

⁷⁵ D’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 115.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

which allows an actor to introduce the voice of others into their internal dialogue with themselves.⁷⁸ This differs from sociological expectations related to social roles since the public sphere is characterized by freedom and, therefore, such roles are inapplicable. Instead, this mentality enables actors to judge for themselves which potential actions would be regarded as tasteful.

Glaucon's critique in Plato's *Republic* offers an illustration of Arendt's political use of Kant's aesthetic judgment. Following Socrates and his interlocutors' agreement that they have successfully envisioned a simple, sustainable city-in-speech (*Kallipolis*), Glaucon asks: "isn't this exactly the fodder you'd lay on if you were devising a community for pigs?"⁷⁹ Socrates concedes to Glaucon's challenge and reasons that their imagined city must be extended if they would like to accommodate non-essential features. On this point, he says, "although the inhabitants of our former community could live off the produce of the land, the land will be too small now." To overcome this limitation, he suggests, "we'll have to take a chunk of our neighbour's land," an incursion which subsequently necessitates increased military resources.⁸⁰ This moment pivots the discourse—which seeks to articulate justice within the individual through the metaphor of the city—by everyone's acceptance of Glaucon's *taste*. Yet, his critique does not arise logically in response to Socrates' narrative; instead, it emerges as a *visceral* rejection of the sustainable society's relatively austere social and cultural adornments. Socrates recognizes the material fact, i.e. the *truth*, that adopting a culture of opulence will exceed the city's environmental capacity. Despite this known limit, those present—including Socrates

⁷⁸ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 237.

⁷⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 327d.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 373d.

himself—relent to a cultural ideal about *who* the community wants to be. Glaucon's *taste* and its effects on *Kallipolis* illustrate the political autonomy that communities maintain in judging truth.

Dialectical Nature-Politics Relationship

Arendt's theory appears capable of accommodating environmental politics, but John Meyer's dialectical framework raises a final question: how does Arendt conceptualize the structural character of her public sphere? Additionally, Meyer raises two concerns with Arendt's *vita activa* that should be addressed before discussing Arendt's ideal political structure, for these concerns derive from his misreading of *vita activa*'s categorical boundaries. In addressing this misreading, this section aims to clear potential conflicts for Arendtian environmentalism and highlight a theoretical resemblance between Meyer's dialectics and Arendt's *vita activa*. In other words, this section argues that *vita activa*'s politics derives through a dialectical relationship between the naturally imposed necessity and artificially created freedom.

To begin, natural resources serve as the foundation for the private sphere of the household (*oikos*). Within this sphere production and re-production are, again, pursued in accordance with one's inherent *urge* towards subsistence against the eternal necessities associated with nature's impermanence.⁸¹ John Meyer interprets this aspect of Arendt's theory as establishing a dualism between the private and the public spheres, or more specifically, he asserts that she creates a dualism between their contexts: nature and artifice. Accordingly, he understands this to mean that nature's imposition fully occupies our private spheres, yet this imposition is absent from the discourse of the public sphere.⁸² From this misreading, Meyer's first contention concerns the social hierarchy and resulting inequalities purportedly created by

⁸¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 37.

⁸² Meyer, *Political Nature*, 112.

this dualism.⁸³ By privileging politics as humanity's highest ontological faculty, in other words, Arendt fails to recognize the sociological barriers that impede some cohorts from overcoming the conditions of necessity, leaving them few opportunities for entering the public discourse. In this regard, Meyer's criticism assumes that Arendt relies on a dualist interpretation of Aristotle's politics wherein politics is firmly separated from social questions, even asserting that the public sphere is "antinatural." He points towards women, children, and slaves within the Hellenistic period as cogent examples of such political inequalities and argues that effectively similar limitations persist which impede the public plurality. Arendt apparently fails to recognize this practical issue.

As aforementioned, in her analytic reflections on conditions of modernity, she clearly recognizes the sociological limitations that, as John Adams once observed, keep the *absolute* poor outside the public sphere.⁸⁴ Meyer is correct, insofar as Arendt seeks to separate politics from social questions, for she believes that social issues should properly reside within the domain of governance and their amelioration is the concern of public policy. Politics occurs prior to policy; it is a community's ontological self-realization which guides their governmental structures and arises through their collective and continuous judgements of taste that define their culture's foundational principles.⁸⁵ On this ability for action and its contemporary decline Arendt writes,

I think it can be shown that no other human ability has suffered to such an extent from the progress of the modern age, for progress, as we have come to understand it, means growth, the relentless process of more and more, of bigger and bigger. The bigger a

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸⁴ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 50.

⁸⁵ Arendt, *Promise of Politics*, 104.

country becomes in terms of population, of objects, and of possessions, the greater will be the need for administration and with it the anonymous power of the administrator.⁸⁶

In other words, bureaucratic bigness threatens politics by overwhelming the public discourse with the social questions that Meyer evokes when raising the issue of inequality, for he fails to recognize the distinction Arendt is making between politics as an ontological experience of human plurality and policy as a societal instrument for securing practical ends. Critics, such as himself, could reply to this defence by arguing that without overcoming these socio-economic inequalities, the public sphere will continuously suffer from a distorted plurality. This possibility is the crux of her book *On Revolution*, wherein she argues that the French Revolution, unlike the American, ultimately failed because it became oriented towards a mass want of bread.⁸⁷

That said necessity in *vita activa* refers to the essentials of subsistence. Of the examples she references, the early American citizens who participated in town halls were not the bourgeois; the workers who participated in the Hungarian Revolution were not elites; and the youth who participated in the 1969 Student Movement were not jobholders.⁸⁸ The threshold for action, Arendt seems to suggest, is low, for political power is generated by people acting in concert. “Power,” she claims, “is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.”⁸⁹ Politics does not require any excesses in material wealth, in armed strength, or in social capital; it just requires the abatement of natural needs, a public sphere, and an assembly of peers. Taken together, Arendt is understood as arguing that politics can occur concomitantly to the amelioration of social questions, since relative poverty does not automatically bar someone from their public appearance.

⁸⁶ Arendt, *On Violence*, 83.

⁸⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 84.

⁸⁸ Arendt, *Last Interview*, 71; *On Revolution*, 274, 257, & 266.

⁸⁹ Arendt, *On Violence*, 44.

Meyer's second contention is that environmental politics constitutes a contradiction in terms under Arendt's dualism. This interpretation, as previously discussed, is shared by other readers and speaks to Arendt's nearly non-existent influence on green political theory. "Not only are the participants in the *polis* differentiated from those of the *oikos*," he writes, "but the concerns of the former are also distinguished by its exclusion of all questions connected with biology, survival, life, labour, ... and *nature*."⁹⁰ Politics purportedly pursues an immaterial conception of the good life or, as Aristotle says, "living well" at the expense of those within a labouring underclass. Environmental politics appears caught in this dichotomy. If supported within a community, its focus undermines the public discourse by introducing matters of necessity. If neglected, it creates ill-prepared politics in face of climate change. However relevant Arendt's works remains in other regards, such as totalitarianism or Jewish nationality, this inability to accommodate environmentalism appears to reveal its antiquated character. Given the severity of climate change's effects, any comprehensive account of the human condition cannot neglect the relationship between nature and politics. Since Arendt fails to address this matter, Meyer suggests her dualistic Aristotelianism cannot offer contemporary readers any significant insight regarding our contemporary condition.

Here, Meyer's objection is predicated on a conflation between nature and artifice. We witness this when he writes that "the *polis* appears distinguished by an *antinaturalness* [*sic.*]—its opposition to biology and life—just as the *oikos* is equated with the fulfillment of these necessary and natural processes."⁹¹ By folding the private sphere into nature, Meyer interprets Arendt as arguing that humanity's only *true* artefacts are its political structures. This argument can be rearticulated as asserting that because the production process, including both labour and

⁹⁰ Meyer, *Political Nature*, 109.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

work, is naturally required within the conditions of being, whatever it fabricates must be equally natural. Is the bird's nest considered any less natural, for instance, than the bird itself? For Arendt, yes: insofar as the one occurs *in* nature whereas the other occurs *by* nature, respectively. If otherwise, nature would become conceptually meaningless by signifying everything which occurs. This is what Paul Ott understands as a "nature-cultural monism [which] affirms as a positive value that humans are simply, or merely, a part of nature."⁹² Environmental politics would be redundant under this nihilistic framework, for it would legitimate the human artifice as an inevitable manifestation of nature itself. This approach creates a naturalistic determinism that would obfuscate the environmental degradation associated with anthropogenic climate change by collapsing the ontological divide between our artificial world and the nature environment. It does so by undermining human agency in the processes of production and seems to suggest the historicist assumption that humanity goes forward because it must. The implication of this is that Nature compels production, and human progress merely reflects the manifestation of changing environmental impositions.

But, Arendtian action cannot occur in isolation from labour and work, for without these worldly references it would produce only nonsense. Since action ultimately occurs through speech, as the significance of any deed cannot be understood without some articulation, it requires the same signified reality as language, even though this reality can never be fully articulated. As Arendt writes,

Action is concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests. These interests constitute, in the word's more literal significance, something which interests, which lies between people, and therefore can relate and bind them together.⁹³

⁹² Ott, "World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature," 2.

⁹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182.

Unlike the *animal laborans* or *homo faber*, actors confront the world from an ontologically distinct position that seeks to bestow meaning through the development of principles and construction of narratives, both past and present.

In this reading, politics occurs through the individual's ontological experience of being *thrown* in-between Nature and artifice, wherein one grapples with their triadic experience as simultaneously an animal and fabricator. Meyer's dualistic reading of Arendt misses the minutia of her *vita activa*. If participants shed their apolitical experience of Nature before entering the public sphere, they would lose the very distinctness that comprises a community's plurality. As a homogenous mass, they would have no basis for discussion. "Only if we scrutinize standards from a great variety of perspectives," Whiteside states, "do we gain confidence that they are not arbitrary assertions of particular wills."⁹⁴ In other words, only through the plurality of apolitical experiences that each participant brings *into* the public sphere, does a political community garner an understanding of reality, a sense of the real. Curtis terms this function within Arendtian politics as a "profusion of view."⁹⁵

Arendtian politics takes seriously Lessing's question: "what is the use of use?" In doing so, political communities repetitiously judge and modify their apolitical endeavours. Meyer's dualistic interpretation of *vita activa* is profoundly inaccurate. By contrast, this does not suggest that Arendtian politics is derivative, for its foundation in freedom is characteristically outside natural necessity. A strict adherence to naturally derived principles would undermine this emphasis on freedom and its corresponding potential for capturing the novelty that occurs through human natality. Thus, Arendt's conception of the Nature-politics relationship is dialectical. It concerns human necessity from a position of freedom.

⁹⁴ Whiteside, "Hannah Arendt and Ecological Politics," 352.

⁹⁵ Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 84.

The Council System

Because Arendt distinguishes between public politics and public policy, action can occur under a variety of governmental structures. Unlike most green political theories, *vita activa* is not essentially antagonistic to liberal capitalism. A vibrant public sphere could conceivably become manifest within such a society; however, she claims that under modern conditions this is largely not the case with the development of world and earth alienation. Yet, she argues in *On Revolution* that during the American Revolution public spheres flourished through Jefferson's ward system, wherein people could appear and discuss their community's public concerns in open town hall meetings.⁹⁶ Had the post-revolutionary federal government enshrined these town hall structures within its constitution, she claims, future American citizens would have retained greater access to a public sphere.^{iv} It follows, then, that Arendtian politics is possible within liberal societies, but it remains equally possible within other *governing* structures since action is not synonymous with democracy. Despite this flexibility, Arendt draws from this and other historical examples to roughly conceptualize an ideal *political* system that enables the fullest ontological realization of *vita activa*. With regards to environmental politics, her system will be shown to strongly resemble other green theories, a parallel which further validates the accommodative potential within her theory of action. Unfortunately, Arendt does not elaborate on this ideal political system, mostly restricting her thoughts to a few paragraphs in *On Revolution*.

To articulate this ideal structure, Arendt references the community councils that spontaneously emerged during the Russian and Hungarian Revolutions; these were councils that independently formed throughout neighbourhoods, factories, universities, *et cetera*; and, they

⁹⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 248.

were organized amongst workers, peasants, students, and soldiers. It is important to recognize the independent formation of these councils because it contradicts the Western social-contract tradition that assumes anarchistic violence will emerge wherever people are unbounded by a sovereign's law. In practice, they also challenged the liberal emphasis on individualism by demonstrating an inherent urge by some communities to form community-based associations for the realization of a "new order" of shared power. According to Elizabeth Fraser's interpretation, Arendt's council system is anti-elitist insofar as "they are attended and participated in by just those individuals who have a *taste* for politics and can maintain the trust of their fellows."⁹⁷ The council system is understood here as prioritizing a communitarian ethic.

Ideally, Arendt believes that similar councils could be communally formed and federally organized into a network of interdependent entities. This federalism is markedly different from the centralized administrative control observed in contemporary western liberal democracies, but instead, it emulates the "co-associations" of early colonial North America. Here, councils or "elementary republics" are linked under the principle of republicanism, wherein the federal government's "own central power [does] not deprive the constituent bodies of their original capacity to act."⁹⁸ Moreover, Arendt maintains that a separation of powers, presumably—like that observed between the American Congress, Executive, and Judiciary—ought to preserve the relative autonomy of the federal entities. Of course, political issues, such as environmental problems, transcend communal boundaries; as such, she suggests the formation of higher scaled regional councils. These would be occupied by selected members from the constitutive

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Fraser, "Hannah Arendt: The Risk of the Politic Realm," in *Concept of the Public Realm*, ed. Noel O'Sullivan (New York, NY, 2013), 215 (emphasis added).

⁹⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 259.

communities.⁹⁹ Arendt stresses that these members would be selected on the basis of their political abilities, not expertise. Their participation is based simply on their proficiency for action, not a mandate to represent their community.¹⁰⁰ In effect, these higher order councils would comprise hubs within a network of political communities that address regional concerns, *e.g.* climate change. This system attempts to preserve politics against the intrusion of the “social question” by maintaining localized public spheres that maximize the potential for public participation, a system that fosters plurality. Consequently, Curtis argues that such increases to political plurality allow for the cultivation a deeper public awareness of a community’s shared world and a stronger sense of reality.

Does Arendt’s council system further *vita activa*’s accommodative potential with regards to environmentalism? Again, her conceptualization is exceptionally limited. Its general character must be interpreted through inferences made from her reflections on the American, French, Russian, and Hungarian Revolutions with reference to *vita activa*. Such an interpretation is beyond our present purpose. From the limited structure she provides, however, parallels can be drawn between it and green radicalism.^v Bio-regionalism and Eco-anarchism advance the most similar political frameworks within the green radical tradition. For brevity, this section just considers bio-regionalism. First, it encourages a similar community-based politics that strives to cultivate an ecological identity amongst citizens by orientating their political boundaries around ecological systems. As Dryzek writes, “[citizens] need to become aware of the type of ecosystem they inhabit, and regard themselves as part of it.”¹⁰¹ By bounding political structures principally to ecological regions, this approach argues that citizen will be more compelled—than the current

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁰¹ Dryzek, *Politics of the Earth*, 188.

consumer-citizens of liberal capitalism—to ensure their environment’s healthful condition because they cannot routinely rely on other regions for their sustenance or their waste-removal. This regional independence Eckersley describes as “reinhabitation.”¹⁰² Nothing, it seems, prevents Arendt’s regional councils from being organized in this ecological manner. Likewise, Arendt’s emphasis on federalism is echoed within bio-regionalism, as ecological systems cannot persist in isolation, nor can every region support the entire needs of contemporary societies, making *regulated* trade an essential component of this approach. The environmental claims for such a decentered approach appear equally applicable to Arendt’s council system.

Dryzek and Eckersley also advance approaches that parallel Arendt’s council system to lesser degrees. Dryzek’s “discursive designs” prioritize political plurality in open-ended public discussions that he regards as ends unto themselves, for they facilitate “social learning.” His public sphere is conceptualized around the principles of radical democracy, wherein social barriers to participation are nearly eliminated and civic opportunities are expanded beyond the simple vote. Does this plurality promote environmental politics though? On this, he writes, “the kinds of values that can survive authentic democratic debate are those oriented to the interests of the community as a whole, rather than selfish interests within the community.”¹⁰³ In other words, Dryzek is suggesting that environmental values will inherently emerge and endure within authentic politics when confronted with the detrimental effects of climate change. Like Arendt and bio-regionalism, Dryzek recognizes the spatial limits of public politics and advocates for a network organization of localized communities.¹⁰⁴ In 1987 Eckersley generally supported a similar decentralized, radical-democratic approach. On this she writes, “the most revolutionary

¹⁰² Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 167.

¹⁰³ Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, 234.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

structures are seen to be those that foster the development of self-help, community responsibility and free activity and are consistent with the ecotopian ideal of a loose federation of regions and communes.”¹⁰⁵ This assertion captures the major tenets of Arendt’s council system.

In her 1992 book, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: towards an ecocentric approach*, however, Eckersley alters her position because of the international organization required to confront the global effects of climate change. According to this analysis, horizontally organized networks of autonomous political regions lack the integrative potential to exert the force and resources necessary to effect global green action. Eckersley’s shifting position clearly reflects a pragmatic transition from an idealist to a realist perspective that appears motivated by the increasing risks associated with climate change. The human condition encourages the decentered approach advocated by Arendt and Dryzek, but present environmental conditions are too dire, as the survivalists argue, for idealism. Instead, Eckersley vaguely encourages expanding contemporary liberal democracies to become multitiered, breaking up the current hegemony of nation-state model. To mitigate the most deleterious effects of climate change, she is effectively recommending a compromise, an ecologically informed industrialism. It is precisely this compromise that Arendt’s theory encourages readers to reject and why green political theory should engage with her theory of action.

Despite the similarities with these green approaches, Arendt’s council system is distinctly political. Eckersley, by contrast, argues, “the ultimate principle of ecopraxis is the need to maintain consistency between mean and ends.”¹⁰⁶ Given Arendt’s emphasis on action’s foundation in freedom and its associated existential potential, her brief sketch of the council system cannot be interpreted as leading towards a unified system of governance. Such an

¹⁰⁵ Eckersley, “Green politics: a practice in search of a theory,” 1987, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Eckersley as cited by Dobson, *Green Political Theory*, 136.

interpretation would contradict the categorical boundaries of *vita activa* by determining the contents of politics *a priori*. Rather, the council system is here interpreted as an institutionalized public sphere that persists outside but parallel to governing structures—liberal capitalist or otherwise. Again, Arendt claims, “the goals of politics are never anything more than the guidelines and directives by which we orientate ourselves.”¹⁰⁷ It provides a space of appearance for the continuous process for natality’s *becoming*. The narratives that emerge through this space continuously influence the character of the community’s artifice and its governing structures. Eckersley’s, like many other green political theories, presupposes such an Arendtian politics insofar as her theory conceptualizes eco-centrism and then proceeds to speculate on its implications for pre-existing conditions if fully adopted by political communities. Yet, eco-centrism’s public acceptance is contingent; it requires action to appear within the public sphere, someone to introduce it as a new principle for human/nature relations. Then, it requires a community’s recognition, enactment and re-enactment. In a sense, Eckersley’s theory constitutes an instance of Arendtian action, or more accurately, her public advocacy for eco-centrism constitutes action.

However, Eckersley’s compromise is precisely what Arendt’s theory rejects and strives to prevent. As she writes, “the fact that contemporary politics is concerned with the naked existence of us all is itself the clearest sign of the disastrous state in which the world finds itself—a disaster that, along with all the rest, threatens to rid the world of politics.”¹⁰⁸ Although she is addressing the destructive potential of nuclear weapons in this passage, her insight is equally applicable to climate change because its effects are equally dire for humanity’s survival and its origins equally located in the human artifice. Eckersley’s compromise is predicated on the assumption that the

¹⁰⁷ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 193.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

administrative force of existing state systems are sufficiently effective to introduce comprehensive public policy reforms regarding environmental resources, *e.g.* land-use restrictions, pollution controls, *et cetera*. In the West, public participation in these existing systems is largely restricted to representative democracy. But, as suggested above, action is not synonymous with democracy. By reducing most public participation in politics to voting, Western democracies force social questions of welfare into the public discourse because elected officials cannot publicly *appear* on another's behalf in the Arendtian understanding of being-in-the-world. They can, instead, represent their material apolitical interests in policy debates. In representing a multitude, however, the representative's vitrine, as it were, becomes a contested space since not every interest can be brought forward. To ameliorate conflicts, this system inherently seeks the most efficient and most effective solutions for the management of welfare interests. This "rise of the social" characterizes a major feature of conventionally understood politics, *i.e.* agenda setting, special interest lobbies, *et cetera*. If political communities forego the exercise of political freedom for administrative efficiency—for the "bigness" of bureaucracy—under the duress of climate change, they will only discover insecurity.

One cannot have security without freedom. In the extreme circumstances of totalitarianism, Arendt contends that one's political appearance is the only practical foundation for civic rights. Of course, Eckersley's compromise does not advocate for such extreme measures, but Survivalists have advocated for totalitarian-like responses to climate change. As such, should the question of freedom under eco-authoritarianism be discounted? No, in fact, it helps reveal the essential power of Arendtian politics, a politics that Eckersley's theory presupposes and subsequently neglects. If a political community relinquished its capacity for action for the sake of bureaucratic efficiency, who guides that bureaucratic process?

Human/nature relation relations are inherently fluid given human natality and the cyclical movement of nature. Thus, whatever principles initially directed a bureaucratic process will eventually become obsolete. For instance, an eco-centric administration could conceivably curb humanity's footprint through draconian measures. Who can determine when this process is complete in the absence of politics? Technocrats? No, these institutional positions are theoretically limited to an instrumental logic, a logic that Arendt asserts is unable to grapple existential questions. The elites who occupy these positions can still appear within the public sphere, but *only* they can appear. An absolute reliance on administrative systems for *managing* climate change will produce such a distortion on the public sphere's plurality, no matter how the elites attained their positions—*e.g.* authoritarian violence or democratic selection. "The trouble," Arendt avers, "is that politics has [under these conditions] become a profession and a career, and that the 'elite' therefore is being chosen according to standards and criteria which are themselves profoundly unpolitical."¹⁰⁹ In other words, Eckersley's compromise does not eliminate the public sphere but unintentionally encourages its general neglect by ordinary citizens; it encourages mass inaction. Without a reasonably accessible public sphere, communities undermine their civic security and relinquish authorship of their collective narrative. "When a people loses its political freedom, it loses its political reality, even if it should survive physically."¹¹⁰ Thus, the council system is interpreted as a political system that seeks to maintain a community's political capacity to grapple with the existential question of being-in-the-world.

¹⁰⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 269.

¹¹⁰ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 161.

Summary

The loss of worldly permanence and reliability—which politically is identical with the loss of authority—does not entail, at least not necessarily, the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us.

— Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 95.

As discussed in Chapter One, Hannah Arendt's theory of action, *vita activa*, conceptualizes humanity's ontological movement through natural conditions of necessity to artificial conditions of freedom, a movement that enables our existential development via politics. Humanity's relationship to nature throughout this movement is principally framed in instrumental terms and characterized as antagonistic since humanity's biological and material needs are satisfied through an essential violence towards the environment. In private and social spheres, natural resources are to be managed by the administrative systems of governing structures. Once people secure their natural needs, they may freely enter public sphere's politics. In Arendt's analysis of modernity, however, this movement has been disrupted by "the rise of the social," the phenomenon of apolitical social issues dominating the public sphere's discourse.¹¹¹

Contemporary critics interpret Arendt's analysis of this social phenomenon as inversely arguing that concerns associated with humanity's apolitical activities, labour and work, cannot appear in politics lest their origins in necessity distort human freedom by introducing a coercive force that may compel certain courses of action. If accurate, what would be the contents of Arendtian politics? Without reference to these spheres, her notion of politics would appear hollow. For environmentalists who adhere to this interpretation, *vita activa* is understood as being aggressively anthropocentric insofar as its principal concern is human flourishing within an artificial world via violence towards nature. Moreover, its politics actively exclude non-

¹¹¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 68.

human interests. Given Arendt's limited influence on green political theory, it seems that this understanding is common within the tradition, as suggested in Chapter Two. This discussion has argued, however, that this is a misreading. *Vita activa* offers a phenomenological account of the human condition's fundamental activities, but it never determines the character of these activities *a priori*. In other words, Arendt articulates a form without stipulating its contents. *Vita activa*, thus, can provide space for the accommodation of green theories' environmental politics.

To recognize this space, readers must see the distinction Arendt draws between politics and governance. Politics is broadly understood as a communitarian response to human plurality that arises within the space of appearances that exist in-between people. Its participants' actions (via speech or deed) introduce novelty to a community's shared sense of reality and give meaning to this reality. Governance, by comparison, encompasses the social and material management of societal structures and institutions through instrumental rationality and, often, bureaucratic systems. The rise-of-the-social phenomenon does not constitute social questions intruding *into* politics. This cannot occur because politics is an ontological experience between people. Thus, social questions related to necessity simply cannot acquire the qualitative significance to be regarded as political, in the Arendtian sense. Rather, the cacophony of social questions within the *discourse* of the public sphere overwhelms politics by usurping its time and space. This modern malady, writes McCarthy, "essentially signifies the intrusion of private interest and homogenizing forces into a worldly space where they don't belong."¹¹² In recognizing this distinction, it becomes clear that Arendt's theory strives to preserve a space for politics without automatically barring actions related to social or environmental matters. As presented in Chapter Three, it is precisely the diversity of community members' apolitical

¹¹² McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 278.

experiences that gives politics its foundational plurality. Unlike governance, political engagement with these apolitical experiences its not instrumental but hermeneutic.

Without such political opportunities within the public sphere, Arendt argues that people become alienated from their community's world. The corresponding decline in political participation fosters a simultaneous alienation from the earth, for she believes that Western liberal capitalism has gradually produced the "instrumentalization of the whole world and the earth, that will create a limitless devaluation of everything given... where every end is transformed into a means and which can be stopped only by making man himself the lord and master of all things."¹¹³ This mastery is being accomplished through the rapid expansion of technology into nature, but its benefits are unevenly distributed. The masses' experience of modernity is characterized as a subjection to nature with "the victory of the *animal laborans*," *i.e.* the societal dominance of jobholders all labouring for necessities.¹¹⁴ Here, neither the master nor the subject experience nature since the former strives to escape earthly limitations and the latter rarely labours directly with the earth. Capitalism encourages us, argues Arendt, to "consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the 'good things' of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into the never-ending cycle of man's [sic] metabolism."¹¹⁵ Thus, Western industrialism's metabolic relationship with nature has become asymmetrical.

Why should green theory recognize the accommodative potential within Arendt's *vita activa*? Unfortunately, the misreading above prevents Arendt's other insights regarding the existential function of politics and the importance of freedom in maintaining civic rights from

¹¹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 157.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

gaining influence in green political theories. In responding to anthropocentric climate change, humanity confronts the determinantal consequences of its own excessive violence towards nature. However benign its appearance, the latent violence of Western consumerism is undermining itself. In response, green political theory has predominantly advocated for increasing governmental authority in regulating the societal processes of production and consumption through public policies. From eco-authoritarianism to bio-regionalism, green theories accentuate systems of governance as the primary factor in mitigating the effects of climate change. But, this approach is inherently restricted to the instrumental mentality of *homo faber*, a mentality that cannot escape its means-ends matrix.

This “instrumentalism is particularly dangerous in politics, for when consistently applied to the public realm, other persons become disposable means in the service of cherished political ends.”¹¹⁶ The eco-authoritarianism advocated by Survivalists illustrates this danger, for it simply extends governmental authority through violence. The consequences for human freedom would be severe in comparison to the direct democracy advocated by bio-regionalists. Tyrannical rule eliminates the Arendtian form of politics altogether and thereby denies people their essential right-to-rights: that is their right to appear within a community for mutual recognition and the establishment of a shared reality. On this risk, Arendt points to the history of totalitarianism to argue that human rights are baseless without civic membership. Eco-authoritarianism may increase a community’s material security, but it simultaneously produces political insecurity. This applies equality to technocratic solutions which are directed by “nobody,” those without the capacity for political judgment.¹¹⁷ No expert can comprehensively understand the complexity of ecological science, nor can science fully determine a community’s political character.

¹¹⁶ McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, 99.

¹¹⁷ Arendt, *On Violence*, 50.

Confronting the novelties of reality requires aesthetic judgements of Kantian *taste*, judgements that are dialectically informed by one's natural necessities and artificial freedom. Realizing an environmentally sustainable reality, thus, requires that people judge their world anew from their ontological position in-between nature and artifice. Only then can a community discover a new narrative and new principles for guiding their self-sustaining process of care-taking. All together, *Vita activa* encourages the green political tradition to consider Lessings' question: "what is the use of use?"

ⁱ In *Life of the Mind*, Arendt conceptualizes this process of judging as one aspect within *vita contemplativa*, accompanied by thinking and willing. Judgement, she claims, encompasses one's morality, for here actors must internally reconcile with themselves the legitimacy of their conclusions. Arendt's theory builds from the Socratic assertion that it is better to be in disagreement with the world than in disagreement with oneself (see Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship", *Responsibility and Judgement*, 17)

ⁱⁱ Here, "flourishing" is understood as a healthful condition wherein people can experience each stratum of *vita activa*; it does not indicate a teleological state of absolute perfection or contentedness.

ⁱⁱⁱ In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt elaborates on this point, for Nazi Germany first denaturalized its Jewish citizens, positioning them within a condition of statelessness, before pushing them into a system of forced migration and, subsequently, into a system of labour and death camps. As Arendt writes, "[German] legal experts drew up the necessary legislation for making the victims [European Jews] stateless, which was important on two counts: it made it impossible for any country to inquire into their fate, and it enabled the state in which they were residents to confiscate their property" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 115). Arendt, herself, was stateless for sixteen years, for becoming a naturalized American in 1951 (Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World*, 113).

^{iv} Instead, Jefferson imagined that state and municipal governments would efficiently address domestic affairs. But, "state government and even the administrative machinery of the county were by far too large and unwieldy to permit immediate participation" (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 251).

^v Margaret Canovan has drawn a similar parallel between Arendt's council system and Rousseau's conceptualization of city-states; the major difference between them, however, is Arendt's emphasis on plurality and Rousseau's emphasis on the "general will" (see "Arendt, Rousseau, and Human Plurality in Politics." *The Journal of Politics* 45, no. 2 (1983): 286-302).

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