

Human Condition Extended Paper

Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* outlines fundamental conditions of human life on Earth as well as a historical and linguistic account of changes within the human experience and condition since the days of the ancient Greeks up until the rise of modern society. Arendt shows the dissonance between what is absolutely fundamental within the human experience and what society has now become. Arendt argues that our condition has sprung up alienation to our world and planet. By taking a comprehensive look at human history on a linguistic / societal level as well as a biological phenomena, Arendt attempts to calibrate the reader's relationship to the world around us and the planet we live on.

Arendt opens her case by exploring three fundamental elements of the human condition: Work, Labor, and Action. "Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body (...) Work is the activity that corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence (i.e. 'worldliness') (...) and action engages in founding and preserving political bodies" (7-9).

The most fundamental place Arendt starts with is labor; the biological sustaining of physical life in which all life is involved in. Next work involves our constructed world of unnatural society in which the human construct attempts to transcend death on some sort of level, whether it is our own personality and understanding of ourselves in addition to our biological processes or the societal infrastructure of the man made world; cities, sidewalks, art etc. With these concepts in mind one can see the tension that could be resulted from this kind of natural / unnatural dichotomy, but the real curveball to the balance of the human condition is action. Action involves

human interaction and togetherness, which in a way is like the mediator between the labor of human biological processes and the work of man. Action is what takes place between man and fellow man. Arendt views action, historically as a political natured condition.

This concern of politics is taken up from a historical lense because of the mere fact that society has not always been this way. To the greeks, man was by nature a political being or in other words a social being. To Arendt, this distinction of linguistic understanding of political as social is crucial to understanding our current situation. To be political, was in a sense, a means of raising consciousness through speech and history throughout community. Through the rise of the city-state, the human condition became more and more of a political or social experience. The historical effect of the rise of city-state and political zone is the distinct separation of worldly experience resulting in the public sphere and the private sphere, as Arendt calls it.

The distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere is not something created by society, but rather the rise of society made them distinctly different, or perhaps imbalanced. Arendt believes the public and private are two qualities of life for humans that are essential for human worldly relationships. To Arendt, the rise of the public sphere became a concern of freedom. Arendt states, "If there was a relationship between these spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for the freedom of the polis" (31). By having work and labor mastered, man is able to be free among his peers. Arendt emphasis, however, the nature of this kind of freedom. This kind of freedom is a not a matter of Justice as is today, but rather being able to interact with those of your equals in a political way. Action i.e, political and social interaction throughout the community was the essence of Freedom, "to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed" (33). It

is this kind of freedom that Arendt argues was lost throughout the long parade of human 'progress.'

Because of the rise of modern society, Arendt argues that the public sphere that was once a means of individuality amongst a larger group or community has now become a sphere of conformity and behaviorism. Throughout time, shifts in society has resulted in politics becoming a public concern for economics. Economics was once a personal endeavor to sustain one's own labor of physical life, but now economics is a public concern on a global level resulting in the most fundamental quality of human life (labor) to be not mastered by the individual on a private level, but indebted to accomplish on a public sphere of labor, a labor more like Marx's labor - unlike the fundamental labor we once could master. This - amongst other influences such as technology and expansion of conformist culture through capitalistic and consumeristic means, the private sphere has dissolved into an ever expanding pool of the public sphere. The expansion of global concern results, in an individual sense, only in a conceptual shrinking of the world. It is here in which Arendt tackles the issue of worldly and earthly alienation.

Through expansion and progression of modern society, pressure on the public sphere has been exponentially increased. Arendt offers examples of societal progress that expands the public sphere such as the telescope and the expansion of space travel. Space travel and even the concept of space travel widens the public sphere to a universal level, smothering the private sphere to even more repressed conditions. It is important to note here, that the private realm is not limited to the physical conditions of privacy, but rather a more contemplative state. Through means of space travel, political matters have changed on the large scale including the iconic race to the moon, but it can also affect us on an individual level diminishing our own private sphere. Arendt describes this effect as an alienation to the world and the earth. By expanding

our global consciousness to a universal level, the conception of the world shrinks and our place on it becomes increasingly more disorientating. A more grounded example can be made by means of transportation. Through means of international flights, or even a trip from Brooklyn to Manhattan via subway disassociates our sensual experience with the planet as well as the world, i.e. our place on the planet. By understanding space on the planet as a place in the world - and communicating such an experience in pictorial language i.e. maps or in verbal means, *take the d to coney*, for example - our space in the planet has been confined to memes of information for societal benefit and economic progress, resulting in cognitive dissonance in our own human experience.

It is this Worldly Alienation as well as Earthly Alienation that is modern society's relationship with itself. A war against all ensues on the natural world as well as our own human experience. Common goods and natural resources become means of world economics and human Work a means of political bounty, physical labor becomes a public concern and struggle while the once social aspect of politics that once granted the concept of freedom onto man and their fellow man, freedom now exists in a realm of dominance in its eternal dialectic in a sphere where man alone neither feels at home in their world nor planet.

Through an even modern lense in the year 2018, Arendt's concept of alienation holds even stronger in the rise of the technological age. Space and Place are continuously becoming more and more dissonant to us while google maps and facetime for example remain in our pockets at all time. What could be considered my private affairs are voluntarily posted on public forums of social media on the daily. Public, political powers not only have control of such technologies, but have even been known to use it on us, for their own benefit. This is nothing new, as companies have been known to use all sorts of means of communication and technology as form of advertisement and coercion and even technologies prior to the internet or

television such as art and any means of art or propaganda in any culture. This is the essence of a dialectical freedom exercised through language and history; there is a give and a take from and to the individual. While the printing press has influenced the spread of propaganda and hegemonic spreading of information, we also received the novel, which Arendt praises as the most public art form. An art form so public to the eye that can only be created and ingested through the practice of private contemplation. While the use of technology in upcoming generations have been increasing on a regular basis, we see events such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal for instance. A company designed to steal millions of minute meme like units of information from millions of people online to allegedly sway public beliefs and values. On the other hand, however, the individual now has more opportunity than ever to create alternative forms of community to redefine their individual public and private personas through means of gathering a seemingly infinite amount of information for their own private contemplation and cultivation of new public platforms. If an imbalance within the human experience is a problem of history and language, than it must be up to history and language to get us out of this mess.

Hannah Arendt gives a cohesive report of societal understanding of itself throughout a long curve of dissociation between the individual and the collective global force. The rise of various sources such as technology, world economy, and shifts of global perspective, resulted in a heightened pressure of the human in a larger context, diminishing the human part of a family or community, or even of its own right. This shift into a larger public, political sphere has diminished freedom of the individual as well as a general alienation from the world and earth. The causes of these switches seem to be of a historical response to our spatial relationship to everything dictating by language. It seems that Arendt's first response to environmental crisis is to recalibrate our own individual essence of humanity to find balance between the biological processes of the world and of the self, the things we do and construct, our relationship with

each other. The environmental problem to Hannah Arendt is a social one, and must be countered through social means.

Work Cited

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press. 1958. Print.