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SOCIAL POLITICS AND FREEDOM:
INCORPORATING CIVIL SOCIETY INTO ARENDT'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

A Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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ABSTRACT:

The possibility of human freedom has captivated philosophers throughout the ages, often leading them to conclude that freedom is a unique capacity of humanity, exemplifying our potential for politics, contemplation, and/or religious salvation. In the modern age, beginning with the political writings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, freedom has been understood (at least within the early liberal tradition and common discourse) as unhindered and individuated economic movement, motivated by self-interest and actualized most fully in institutions such as the consumerist free market. Yet, we find that the more we devote our actions to fulfilling our individual interests and needs, the more our actions become subservient to physical/emotional impulses, leaving one to wonder how freedom can be found in these apparently necessitated activities.

Hannah Arendt's political theory, which draws on her personal experience of totalitarianism in Europe and her understanding of Greek culture and thought, offers a profoundly different and, in my estimation, superior understanding of freedom. It is not in individual, economic action that we find human freedom, but rather in the discursive and action-based associations we form with others. Thus, freedom is an essentially political phenomenon, and depends upon the willingness of humans to form public identities through their communal interactions with one another.

This project first undertakes a critique of the conventional understanding of freedom by means of an analysis of the early liberal tradition's attempts at defining freedom. I in turn formulate a novel definition of freedom based upon Arendt's work in

The Origins of Totalitarianism, The Human Condition, On Revolution, and Between Past and Future.

Secondly, I will discuss the ways in which humans have lost their freedom in the modern age through an analysis of consumerism. Utilizing Arendt's formulation of the "social realm," I will explore how conformist and economically-functional behavior characterizes a realm of human activity which is fundamentally anti-political and, therefore, destructive towards freedom. Additionally, through my response to Hanna Pitkin's critique of Arendt in *Attack of the Blob*, I will defend Arendt's use of the social realm as both a relevant critique of the modern age and a prescient conceptual category, further suggesting that the phenomenon of megachurches evidences her related claims.

Finally, I will utilize the tradition of civil society theorists beginning with Alexis de Tocqueville (*Democracy in America*) and continuing with Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato to describe the specific type(s) of activities that will facilitate freedom within our own consumerist context. I will conclude by arguing that my concept of civil society fits within Arendt's political framework (although she never explicitly dealt with the topic), focusing primarily upon her discussion of "social" forms of politics; most notable among these is Thomas Jefferson's "ward system." Such a move on my part is justified by drawing a nexus between the kind of freedom attributed to "civil society" in *On Revolution* with the way in which freedom is developed by Arendt in *The Human Condition* and other political writings. An Arendtian civil society, then, is not merely another, "more-friendly" form of politics, but rather ought to be viewed as *the* bearer of the conditions for freedom in our time.

I. FREEDOM BEYOND RESTRAINT:

An Arendtian Critique of the Early Liberal Tradition

Man cannot be free if he does not know that he is subject to necessity, because his freedom is always won in his never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from necessity.
– Hannah Arendt

How we define human freedom is inextricably related to the expectations we attribute to our political and social orders, for we treat freedom as an ideal which ought to be preserved, sought after, and shared by all members of our communities. Take, for example, the common understanding of freedom, which can be traced to some of the earliest formulations of liberal political thought and generally understands freedom as unhindered, individual movement, motivating this movement from economic self-interest. “Freedom” thus has been most fully actualized in institutions such as the consumerist free market, within which persons are encouraged to gratify their desires for commodities and profit in an unimpeded manner. Yet, a strange paradox arises if this unhindered “motion within the body of a man”¹ is the culmination of our freedom. For, it seems to me, the degree to which we give sway to our individual desires and needs is also the degree to which our actions are made to be subservient to those appetitive impulses and is, therefore, the extent to which those actions are devoid of freedom.

Shall we say, then, that all hope for human freedom is lost? The answer must be “yes,” unless we are willing to move beyond the individualistic presuppositions that are expressed first in the beginnings of the liberal tradition. In the following paper, I will justify such a move through my critique of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. While far from comprehensive, this critical analysis will serve the purpose of demonstrating the conventional understanding of freedom, insofar as it is rooted in Hobbesian and/or

Lockean thought, to be both incoherent and undesirable.² I will go from there to argue for a notion of freedom that is grounded in the theoretical categories of Hannah Arendt, who, in her description of politics and freedom, was able to discern crucial linkages between the *polis* of ancient Athens and the “public happiness”³ of America’s Founders. This kind of freedom is capable of breaking the shackles of individuated self-interest through the formulation of common goods and public identities, and thus relies upon the differentiation of private and public ways of living. Hanna Pitkin, a respected Arendt scholar, has accused Arendt of being exclusivist and unjust on this point, claiming that the poor are effectively banished from politics in Arendt’s theoretical system.⁴ In order to rectify this common misunderstanding and defend the careful distinctions drawn by Arendt, I will include a response to Pitkin within my discussion of Arendt’s “public freedom.” Furthermore, I will use James Mensch’s phenomenological interpretation of Arendt’s writings to delineate the ways in which public relationships facilitate this freedom through the formation of public identities and the presentation of novel possibilities.⁵ Such an exclusively public definition of freedom demands some guarantee of security for its citizens, and so I will conclude with an argument for the political significance of promises and forgiveness using Arendt’s explication of Jesus of Nazareth’s political thought.⁶

I

- LIBERTY in the EARLY LIBERAL TRADITION: HOBBS and LOCKE -

In the wake of the paradigm-shifting discoveries of Galileo and his “new science” of matter in motion, Thomas Hobbes’ political theory emerged as a concerted effort to explain human nature in terms of physical laws and principles. What Galileo had done with inanimate objects and mathematical formulas, Hobbes attempted to do with human

behavior and his State of Nature thought experiment. Accordingly, Hobbes' political thought can be seen as a project to reduce the vast complex of human life and interaction to physical laws and the movement they govern. The result is a depiction of humans as creatures subject to the influences of Appetite and Aversion, which act as "small beginnings of motion, within the body of man, before they appear in ... visible actions."⁷ Consequently, in our "natural condition," Hobbes imagined that humans live as isolated seekers of self-preservation, for, as individuals, we can do no more than pursue the fulfillment of our pressing physical desires. A strange sort of "equality of hope in the attaining of our ends" is achieved in this state of affairs, as is a vicious enmity among all persons: as we cross each others' paths, we will inevitably impede each others' pursuits of self-interest.⁸ Therefore, since frustration and violence are bound to occur when persons are prevented from pursuing their physical desires, freedom can mean nothing more than "the absence of [these] external impediments."⁹ Just as a ball placed on a downward slope will continue rolling freely in the same direction until some sort of obstacle is placed in its path, so will humans carry on with their chase after appetite's objects until some hindrance is placed before them.

Freedom, then, simply describes the way in which humans conduct themselves prior to meeting one another and is, therefore, only existent in individuals who are quite literally left to their own devices. It is not an ideal worth striving towards, and it certainly does not warrant much political concern. In fact, once persons are willing to form a political community (Hobbes used to the term "Commonwealth"), freedom is immediately and necessarily lost, for with the security offered by a government comes "impediments" in the form of laws and public obligations. Any freedom that remains after the formation of

this Social Contract is therefore private and/or economic: “the liberty to buy, and sell, and otherwise contract with one another; to choose their own abode, their own diet, their own trade of life, and institute their children as they themselves think fit; and the like.”¹⁰

Much could be said towards the disparagement of Hobbes’ vicious and despotic political system, but my critique will remain focused on his notion of freedom. The ways in which Hobbes describes the freedom of pre-political persons in the State of Nature and of subjects in the Commonwealth are plagued with a common limitation, one that is quite troubling and in the following passage is acknowledged by Hobbes himself:

“Liberty, and necessity are consistent: as in the water, that hath not only liberty, but a necessity of descending by the channel; so likewise in the actions which men voluntarily do: which, because they proceed from their will, proceed from liberty; and yet, because every act of man’s will ... proceedeth from some cause ... they proceed from necessity.”¹¹

Because persons are “naturally” unhindered in their attempts to satisfy biological desires sprung from “their will,” Hobbes detects an element of freedom in all human action. And yet, because of his insistence on reducing human behavior to physical laws and logical formulas, he must also admit to a pervasive sense of necessity – or, to use a different term, determinism – within his analysis of human behavior, as well. Credit may be given to Hobbes for admitting this perplexity, but his attempt to resolve it by appealing to “God, that seeth, and disposeth all things”¹² seems of little help for our purposes. There is an inevitable paradox in calling free those actions whose end is the satisfaction of bodily needs, for the fulfillment of physical needs is never a matter of freedom. Rather, we must take the word “need” to imply those desires and impulses which act as masters over us, punishing us with discomfort or pain until we take the *necessary* action to assuage them.

To begin a definition of freedom within these circumstances of predetermined needs is therefore quite odd and self-defeating.

In his *Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke followed the methodology of Hobbes by constructing a systematic political theory based upon the description of humankind in an imagined natural existence – the State of Nature. However, unlike Hobbes, Locke did not attempt to reduce human action to predictable, physical principles; rather, his overarching focus was private property and the protection thereof, and all other aspects of his political theory (including freedom) are properly seen as subordinate in comparison. Consider Locke’s State of Nature, which is “a state of perfect freedom” only because persons can “dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit.”¹³ Here, what is most significant is the absence of external authority that can lawfully constrain humans from fully enjoying their property. Furthermore, Locke inserts one crucial proviso to this natural freedom through his explication of the Law of Nature: “Though man in [the State of Nature] have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself.”¹⁴ With this, another demonstration of the primacy of private property is seen through an argument for its status as a “natural” right. Locke places the origin of property is within each individual’s body and affords it protection in the State of Nature through the universal enforcement of the Law of Nature, a universal maxim that acts as an across-the-board prohibition of self-destruction. This results in the absolute and inalienable protection of property’s most basic and natural form – the human body. Thus, the development of the Law of Nature allowed Locke to formulate private property as a necessary political principle without compromising its pre-political quality in the State of Nature.

To Locke, the laboring process also is fundamental and prior to any understanding of freedom, since laboring is the activity by which persons extend their bodies (the elemental form of property) into nature in order to obtain more property.¹⁵ Freedom, then, can be understood as an internal capacity which simply functions alongside labor for the acquisition of external forms of property, and is defined both positively and negatively by Locke. First, economic autonomy emerges positively through the self-directed ordering of one's own property, for, as previously mentioned, persons are free when they "order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and person as they see fit." Secondly, in order for Locke's laborers to exist freely, they must be unhindered (and therefore isolated) in their acquisition of property. This is implied by Locke with the phrase "as they see fit," and is negative insofar as it emphasizes a lack of external interference (e.g. greedy neighbors, overreaching state authority, etc.). Both aspects of this freedom are most fully realized when persons are allowed to labor and obtain possessions for themselves and their families with as little interruption as possible, and consequently, freedom itself is a form of property to be preserved and enjoyed. Accordingly, it can be taken and/or destroyed, and thus warrants defense: "Man ... hath by nature a power ... to preserve his property, that is, his life, *liberty*, and estate"¹⁶ (emphasis added).

Ultimately, Locke constructs his theory of governance around a Social Contract analogous to Hobbes', but with one important distinction. Locke considers the voluntary consent of all persons to be governed as the key to rightful political authority.¹⁷ Since persons naturally have absolute, free reign over their bodies and the possessions they acquire, the formation of a Commonwealth necessitates the voluntary surrender of this private rule. In return, citizens expect their government to protect their property through

the institution and enforcement of laws. As a result, the government which is formed through Locke's Social Contract is continually dependent on the willingness of a majority of its subjects to remain constrained by its laws, and therefore, a considerable amount of freedom is retained by Commonwealth citizens in the forms of economic autonomy and unhindered labor. However, should they ever wish to fully realize this freedom, they must jointly dissolve their Commonwealth (by majority decision) and reenter the State of Nature,¹⁸ which promises no external protection of their property, but allows property-acquisition to occur in an unhindered and unending manner.

Locke was well aware of the troublesome conclusions drawn in Hobbes' political theory, and therefore, his emphasis on governance *by consent alone* can be seen as an attempt to avoid the potentially abusive tyranny of Hobbes' Sovereign. However, a fatal flaw arises in Locke's theoretical treatment of freedom, and it stems from his suggestion that freedom is equivalent to the unimpeded enjoyment of property. The question must be asked: What, if anything, should be done about those cases in which some persons freely enjoy excessive amounts of property at the expense of others who have little or none? Ought there be an attempt to alleviate this disparity, so as to ensure a more politically egalitarian experience of freedom? While Locke briefly considers the problem of slavery in Chapter IV of the *Second Treatise*, his theory falls short of arguing for the political protection of persons who must sell their labor to the wealthy for a nominal wage. For if they voluntarily toil each day for an agreed upon wage, and if this wage allows them to buy the bare necessities of life, then, using Locke's premises, we would have to conclude that these persons maintain their freedom. What little property they have in the form of body, labor, and money, they are able to order "as they see fit," and therefore, no action on

their behalf is required. Locke would also claim that an exploitive economic relationship, of the kind just described, existent within the secure bounds of the Commonwealth is far better than the anarchic, interpersonal freedom offered by the State of Nature.¹⁹ Yet, how can we conclude that lives which are filled with days of hard labor and just enough food and sleep to survive are lives of freedom? As previously mentioned, activities dedicated to survival are inherently un-free; they are deeds done because their performance is necessitated by biological forces beyond human control. Therefore, by limiting the purpose of freedom to mere property-preservation, and thereby reducing freedom to a form of property, Locke's theory allows for the same untenable conclusion embraced by Hobbes: that it is possible for there to be a predominance of necessity in actions that are, at the same time, supposedly free.

II

- ATHENS, ARENDT, and the DISCOVERY of AUTHENTIC FREEDOM -

For Hannah Arendt, the discovery of freedom began long before the modern age and the prevalence of economic individualism. She looked to the Ancient Greeks and their understanding of politics to discover what was "lost" from popular notions of freedom, and discovered a fundamental contrast between life in the household (*oikos*) and life as a citizen in the city-state (*polis*).²⁰ Within the Greek household, the needs of the body and other survival concerns, such as reproduction, were properly dealt with. Every individual within this structure, with the *despotes* as ruler on top and women, children, and slaves as the ruled below, was positioned so as to ensure the propagation of the human species. Accordingly, persons within the private sphere of the household were defined primarily by their survival and/or economic function, so that women were known as child-bearers,

slaves were known as laborers, men as household heads, etc. Directly opposed to this need-driven realm was the *polis* and its offer of citizenship.²¹ By creating a space in which *despōtai* could shed their functional, household role, and interact with one another as equal citizens, the *polis* birthed the possibility of human action detached from necessity.²² As citizens began to deliberate with one another and join together on behalf of their community, they spoke and acted in ways that were not predetermined by biological instinct, but instead were unpredictable and therefore constantly “beginning something anew.”²³ Instead of remaining trapped within necessitated *oikos* roles, Athenian citizens discovered the possibility of public identity in political action, and in doing so, displayed the essence of human freedom.

A distinction should be drawn here, so that Arendt’s allusion to Greek institutions in her formulation of freedom is not mistaken for an “irresponsible nostalgia for the days of Pericles’ Athens.”²⁴ Her admiration for Athenian politics was limited to the theoretical basis it provided for defining freedom as a public, interpersonal, and communal concept, and did not extend to the institutions that left women and slaves powerless and exploited: “The price for the elimination of life’s burden from the shoulders of all [Athenian] citizens was enormous and by no means consisted only in the violent injustice of forcing one part of humanity into the darkness of pain and necessity.”²⁵ Therefore, when attempting to extract a definition of freedom from Arendt’s writings, one must be careful to separate her own thoughts from her references to Greek thought and culture. This means that, while Arendt considered the *polis* to be significant for understanding freedom because it represented the possibility of public self-revelation and joint action, her theory has no special attachment to the *polis* as a historical or practical form of political organization.²⁶

Similarly, Arendt's references to Athenian citizenship are significant only because they describe the building of public relationships that can facilitate the discovery of public identities and action apart from household needs.²⁷

Arendt further explicated the way in which freedom is opposed to necessitated behavior through her comparison of the American and French Revolutions. She distinguished between liberation, which characterized the French Revolution and focused on relieving persons from economic impoverishment and oppression, with the genuine political revolution that took place in America, which sought "the foundation of freedom and the establishment of lasting institutions."²⁸ Since the French Revolution became "overwhelmed by the cares and worries which actually belonged in the sphere of the household,"²⁹ it allowed biological necessity to dictate the outcome of public interactions, thereby excluding the possibility of freedom from politics. The persons empowering and leading the French Revolution concerned themselves exclusively with the masses' "cry for bread," and therefore individual needs acted with "one will" to impose private, household functions on the public assembly; in turn, politicians were forced to act as members of one family instead of as unique citizens.³⁰ In contrast, the founders of the American Revolution devoted themselves to constructing a lasting polity, and therefore "remained men of action from beginning to end."³¹ By keeping the concerns of human community, and not human survival, as chief among their purposes, the "men of the American Revolution" preserved the possibility of citizenship, and successfully crafted a document which was intended to perpetuate freedom for hundreds of years to come. Thus, just as the Ancient Greek *oikos* was devoted to private, economic concerns and therefore was incompatible with the *polis* and its promise of freedom, the French Revolution was defined by its concerted effort to

address individual, physical needs, and therefore acted as the negative counterpart of the American Revolution which relied upon the joint action of citizens in public places for its political success.

Arendt's account of politics and freedom in *On Revolution* is oft criticized for being passive towards the plight of the poor. Hanna Pitkin, for example, accuses Arendt of being "highly ambiguous" and fundamentally unjust in her political writings.³² Pitkin suggests that, because Arendt attributed the failure of the French Revolution to its leaders' single-minded effort to remedy the problem of poverty, Arendt's notion of freedom supports the "exclusion of the exploited by their exploiters," and, in doing so, makes politics nonsensical.³³ By relegating economics to the private realm and reviving the Ancient Greek concept of public glory, Pitkin finds that Arendt replaces the competition of the marketplace with a competition for public recognition, and thereby transformed citizenship into the struggle for political fame.³⁴ Accordingly, Pitkin describes the government which results from Arendtian citizenship as "a traditional and quite offhand invocation of the theory of social contract. Each [citizen] sees his private advantage in being joined to others."³⁵ In other words, since Pitkin views Arendt's treatment of the French Revolution as indifferent towards poverty, she concludes that economic self-interest has no place in Arendtian politics, but then assumes that some other form of egoism must still be present. She discovers this in the form of hubris, and accordingly describes Arendt's ideal citizens as nothing more than self-interested individuals pursuing public glory at all costs, even if it means ignoring the condition of the poor. Consequently, Pitkin finds that Arendt's political philosophy is sorely lacking a concept of justice, and therefore is self-defeating in its attempts to promote freedom and genuine political

relationships in the public realm.³⁶ By refusing to admit the poor masses of the French Revolution into the space of politics and freedom, Arendt denied the possibility of action on behalf of genuine common interests, for common interests must include the troubles created by the existence of poverty. Pitkin therefore suggests that we link private economic concerns with public affairs so that the plight of the impoverished can be addressed, and we can better understand how “we are all in fact members of one another.”³⁷

The implications of Pitkin’s critique are devastating towards any attempt to apply Arendt’s political theory. How could we accept a definition of political freedom that carries with it the great injustice of excluding the poor from political consideration? Yet, a critical examination of Pitkin’s account reveals crucial misunderstandings that betray her conclusions, and these can be summarized with her statement, “Arendt is highly ambiguous about whether freedom and action are possible in private, or only in the public realm.”³⁸ Arendt is painstakingly clear in all of her political writings that freedom is an exclusively public principle: “[Freedom demands] a common public space,”³⁹ and again, “Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance.”⁴⁰ By suggesting otherwise, Pitkin apparently misunderstands the very foundation on which Arendt builds her definition of freedom. Additionally, it is this misrepresentation of Arendt’s notion of freedom that leads Pitkin to conclude, among other things, that Arendt is unsympathetic towards the issues of poverty and justice. Rather than attempting to exclude an entire class of persons from government, Arendt was greatly concerned with the preservation of a realm of freedom that could function properly only if *all* persons are potential participants: “For political freedom, generally speaking, means the right ‘to be a participator in government’, or it means nothing.”⁴¹ Certainly, Arendt’s

discussion of the role of poverty in the French Revolution could be characterized as careless, insofar as it fails to clarify ways in which impoverished persons can become citizens, but this should not be taken to mean that Arendt wished to deny poor persons access to citizenship (this will be discussed further in Chapter II). On the contrary, Arendt's focus in *On Revolution*, as well as in *The Human Condition*, is "the indictment of an activity, a way of life, even of a relationship to the world, but *not of a social class*"⁴² (emphasis added). In other words, Arendt considered activities of necessity, and not the persons participating in those activities, as the real danger facing politics and freedom. By becoming active members of a polity, any person is able to move beyond necessitated deeds and experience freedom.

Furthermore, Arendt's portrayal of this citizenship is not reminiscent of individualistic Social Contract theories, as Pitkin would suggest, but instead is entirely dependent upon the cooperation of persons working towards common objectives.⁴³ For Arendt, this occurs through public action and speech, which serve the purpose of revealing political agents to one another and thereby establish relationships which can facilitate the interchange of ideas and joint action for the execution of these ideas.⁴⁴ Action and speech are the two essential activities of citizens, and are possible only when "people are *with* others and neither for nor against them."⁴⁵ Once again, Arendt invokes Athenian politics by discussing the dual meaning the Greeks attached to the verb "to act (*praxis*)."*Archein* means "to begin" or "to lead," and was used to imply the formulation and initiation of a plan of action. *Prattein* means "to finish," and implied the actual implementation of the beginner's idea.⁴⁶ Together, these two concepts described the result of citizens speaking with one another on behalf of their community, and then jointly choosing a path of *praxis*

they thought best. Having dealt with the needs of survival within their households, citizens relished this opportunity to experience freedom through politics. Accordingly, Arendtian citizenship strives for the type of community that can facilitate free action among its members, and therefore seeks to provide a space for the building of relationships apart from the functional roles of necessity.

We can safely conclude, then, that a large portion of Arendt's political project is dedicated to demonstrating that freedom is a reality available to all humans through politics. No group of persons deserves to be left out of polity life, for its very existence implies its potential universality. Conversely, as soon as classes of persons are systematically prevented from taking part in politics, freedom for all persons begins to deteriorate. Since Arendtian citizenship centers on exchanges between persons in the public realm, and since it is only through these exchanges that common purposes are revealed, the loss of community members from the political realm means a decrease in the potential number of public relationships, and, more importantly, a decrease in the number of potential political deeds, which are our only means to experiencing freedom. Therefore, for Arendt, freedom can be defined broadly as follows: the appearing quality of actions that are dedicated to the construction and sustenance of a political community. It is quite unreasonable to conclude, then, that Arendt would support an egoistic and exclusivist political system, for such a government would make her explanations of freedom and citizenship impossible to comprehend.

III

- PUBLIC IDENTITY and the POLITICS OF JESUS -

The fundamental problem posed by liberal definitions of freedom, as previously discussed, is that predetermined desires and influences remain prevalent in acts which are supposed to be free. Individuals experience freedom, according to Hobbes and Locke, when they are unhindered in their ability to order their bodies and their possessions. The more isolated persons become in their pursuit of self-interest, the less likely they are to be impeded in this pursuit, and therefore, the more complete their experience of freedom becomes. Yet, using Arendt's categories, we find that the more isolated we are from others, the more confined we become to activities of necessity. The "perfect," isolated freedom of early liberals means nothing more than a life devoted to household, *oikia* needs, for there is nothing to meet us in our solitude other than the pressing needs and wants of our bodies. These desires, in turn, reduce our actions to mere functions of biological necessity, and soon we find our lives limited to the functional roles created by physical hungers. That is to say, actions that have as their primary end the satiation of bodily needs are fundamentally functional towards those ends, and thus, the lives of persons engaging in these types of activities can best be described by the functional roles created by the purposes of their survival. Therefore, it is my proposal that we consider the public identity found in Arendtian citizenship as the proper remedy to the physical functionality which plagues liberal formulations of freedom.⁴⁷ And in order to explain this more fully, I turn to James Mensch's phenomenological interpretation of Arendt's writings.

Mensch carefully examines Arendt's related statements that "in the realm of human affairs, being and appearance are indeed one and the same,"⁴⁸ and that "freedom consists of 'words and deeds which are meant to appear, whose very existence hinges on appearance.'"⁴⁹ He suggests that what is behind these claims is the recognition of

freedom's dependence upon the "excessive" number of possibilities presented by persons to each other through public relationships.⁵⁰ In other words, as I form public connections with others (that is, relationships which must appear in public), I am made aware of new perspectives and possibilities that lift my gaze from private necessity to shared values and interests. In doing so, I learn that I, too, can reveal new ideas, and therefore I begin to embrace the possibility of a public identity. Public identity can be defined, then, as the personality we learn to embody in our public relations with others, based upon the expectations which result from speaking and acting with them. It counteracts the confinement of private functional roles by revealing the possibility of action beyond the fulfillment of individual needs, and is therefore fundamentally free; as such, it "springs from ... possibilities always exceeding its expression."⁵¹ Since biological needs are predetermined, household roles exclude novel experiences, whereas public identities depend upon the discovery of the novel views of others and therefore establish freedom through the presentation of perspectives distinct from those created by private concerns. Additionally, identity-formation is a mutually constructive process that removes humans from solitude, for it is only when we speak and act with others that we learn the words and deeds of which our own public personalities consist: "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world."⁵² Accordingly, since an inexhaustible source of potential actions exists within the relationships of a political community, an element of unpredictability is present in this definition of public life. Here, the future is unknown, and the plurality of citizens' identities ensures that new possibilities will never be in short supply.⁵³

At first glance, it seems as though this account of freedom is chaotic and overwhelming, as the innumerable ideas and possibilities which “spring from” citizens’ interactions collide and combine in an unpredictable manner. Mensch’s and, accordingly, Arendt’s response to this objection lies with the security found in public promises. As persons reveal themselves through their public interactions and face the uncertain future of politics, promises bind these citizens “to the performance of an action,”⁵⁴ and therefore act as “isolated islands in an ocean of uncertainty.”⁵⁵ Promises ensure that persons will remain consistent to their publicly proclaimed identities so that the selfish needs of privacy will not be allowed to creep into public discourse and action. Without promises, persons would be unable to determine how to interact with one another in public, for they would have no reason to believe that the “appearance” of others was an accurate representation of their public “being” (that is, their actual beliefs, attitudes, and intentions concerning the future of their community). Furthermore, by making the commitment to only speak and act in ways that reflect the self which I have already revealed to others, I free these others from having to discern my secret thoughts and plans, and thus enable them to join with me in continuing to explore new possibilities for our community.

It is at this point Mensch’s insistence on maintaining a notion of “individual freedom”⁵⁶ becomes unsustainable. He suggests that private and public freedom are “irredeemably entangled,”⁵⁷ and yet, he also acknowledges that persons must be wholeheartedly committed to their public identities (through the act of promising) in order for freedom to exist. In other words, it seems as though he wishes to maintain the seeming refuge of an inner, private realm of freedom while still striving to construct a public space for citizens to experience freedom together. One must wonder how persons can experience

freedom within themselves if it is supposed to result from relationships, interactions, and speech that – above all else – must *appear* in public. By Mensch’s own admission, the “nature of public freedom” is “grounded by the appearing of others, [and] its expression is always in terms of a context.”⁵⁸ Any freedom apart from this drives persons back into isolation and necessity, for, without experiencing public connections to others, the unending possibilities of joint action eventually disappear, as individuals have nothing new to reveal or begin with themselves. Furthermore, if we allow ourselves to retreat into this privacy for the sake of freedom,⁵⁹ we compromise our public commitment to maintain the honest appearance of our identities. That is to say, if freedom can originate within individuals, it implies that our identities, which are required for freedom to emerge, can be revealed without the presence of others and therefore be partially or completely hidden from them. This would undermine the integrity and consistency required to facilitate joint action and agreement among citizens, for (as previously mentioned) without being able to trust the appearance of others’ identities as honest and complete, I cannot commit to join with them on behalf of our community.

The question may be raised: What is to be done, then, if persons are not able to achieve perfection in the performance of their public identities? Surely we cannot demand that the revelation of political personalities happens without error. Initially, this objection may seem to imply the need to reinstate some concept of private freedom, so that when our public attempts at freedom fail, either due to our own mistakes or because of the mishaps of others, we can rely upon ourselves to find some sort of freedom in personal pursuits and pleasures. However, in light of the previous discussion concerning the incompatibility of freedom with privacy, I suggest that we turn instead to the political implications of

forgiveness, which Arendt attributes to Jesus of Nazareth.⁶⁰ According to Arendt, forgiveness allows persons to remain citizens even in the midst of their imperfections because it constantly releases them “from what they have done unknowingly.”⁶¹ By forgiving each other, we acknowledge that public identities will be compromised from time to time, and that we cannot hold each other to these lapses, otherwise “everyone remains bound to the process [of vengeance].” Freedom disappears when persons engage in this continual retribution for past wrongs, for nothing new can be shared or done if all acts are focused on past transgressions, and so forgiveness is needed to protect the future possibility of political action. Herein lies the power of Jesus’ politics: that as we commit to venture beyond the secure bounds of private necessity, and found freedom through the mutual revelation of our public identities, we also agree to forgive each other for incidental wrongdoing. In doing so, we eliminate the fear of public reprisal that could prevent us from engaging in genuine citizenship. “The freedom contained in Jesus’ teachings of forgiveness is the freedom from vengeance,”⁶² and therefore is also the same freedom that must appear in public through the relationships of citizens.

By invoking the phrase, “Jesus’ politics,” I in no way mean to suggest some sort of theocratic ideal, or that one particular religious tradition should come to bear influence on politics and governance.⁶³ I simply intend to argue for the public importance of forgiveness, as suggested by Jesus’ teachings and applied by Arendt’s political thought. Forgiveness as a political concept needs no theological justification, for its significance lies in its ability to preserve citizenship. It allows human appearance in the public realm to transcend inevitable inconsistencies and mistakes, and therefore encourages the firm embrace of public identities that are lasting and trustworthy. Consequently, with the

stability derived from public promises and the security guaranteed by public forgiveness, we have the tools needed to facilitate public interactions that counter the necessity of private needs and wants, while still possessing the endurance needed to maintain a full and vibrant freedom that needs no restraint.

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Chapter VI, p. 34.

² A more complete analysis, which would extend beyond the bounds of this paper, would perhaps include a discussion of J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, and the various ways in which he both improves upon prior liberal notions of politics and freedom, and yet remains trapped within the paradoxes inherent to that tradition.

³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 118.

⁴ Hanna Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory* 9:3 (1981):327-352.

⁵ James Mensch, "Public Space," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2007):31-47.

⁶ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 236-247 and *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) p. 166.

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter VI, p. 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter XIII, pp. 83-84.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter XIV, p. 86. See also Chapter XXI, p. 139: "But when the words free, and liberty, are applied to any thing but bodies, they are abused, for that which is not subject to motion, is not subject to impediment."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter XXI, p. 141.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ibid.

¹³ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, in *Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Wooton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996), Chapter II, p. 312.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., Chapter V, p. 321-322. Consider also this quote: “That labour put a distinction between them and common: that added something to them more than nature...and so they became his private right.” P. 322.

¹⁶ Ibid., Chapter VII, p. 337.

¹⁷ Ibid., Chapter VIII, p. 341.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 348-349. Citizens of commonwealths are required to remain citizens and therefore be outside “the liberty of the state of nature, unless, by any calamity, the government (they were) under comes to be dissolved.”

¹⁹ Ibid., Chapter VI, p. 328: “the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom...where there is no law, there is no freedom.”

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 23-24. While she distinguishes herself from the Greeks (see notes 23-26), she remains consistent in her use of their categories concerning household necessity and freedom through politics; consider the following statement from *On Revolution*: “Freedom as a political phenomenon was coeval with the rise of the Greek city-states.” P. 21.

²¹ In using the word “opposed,” I do not mean to suggest that freedom as a political ideal is hostile to necessity. While the Greeks may have sought to free themselves from the bounds of natural needs, Arendt was cognizant of the fact that necessity can never be fully escaped. In fact, in an important passage in *The Human Condition*, Arendt points out that

necessity is as much a part of understanding freedom as is politics: “For the elimination of necessity, far from resulting automatically in the establishment of freedom, only blurs the distinguishing line between freedom and necessity,” and thus, “freedom is always won in (human beings’) never wholly successful attempts to liberate (themselves) from necessity.” P. 121.

²² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 32: “for the household head...was considered to be free only in so far as he had the power to leave the household and enter the political realm, where all were equals.”

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁴ Roy Tsao, “Arendt against Athens: Rereading the Human Condition.” *Political Theory* 30:1 (2002): 98.

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 119-120.

²⁶ Roy Tsao, “Arendt against Athens,” pp. 108-109.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104: “Arendt’s conception of action’s specific mode of comprehensibility serves as the basis for her principal theses concerning the conditions under which action as such is possible. The most important of these conditions is what she called the ‘disclosure of the agent’s identity.’” This specific point will be discussed more completely later in the paper (see notes 50-55).

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, pp. 80-82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³² Hanna Pitkin, “Justice: On Relating Private and Public,” p. 331. In her book, *Attack of the Blob*, Pitkin’s interpretation of *On Revolution* brings up many alleged incoherencies and inconsistencies, especially in regards to answering the question of why the French Revolution failed. See *Attack of the Blob*, pp. 219-225.

³³ Pitkin, “Justice: On Relating Private and Public,” p. 336.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 348-349.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

³⁹ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 147. Consider also her statement in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Press, 1973): “[Even worse than slavery] is the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever...Only the loss of a polity itself expels [persons] from humanity.” P. 297.

⁴⁰ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 147.

⁴¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 210.

⁴² Martin Levin, “On *Animal Laborans* and *Homo Politicus* in Hannah Arendt: A Note” *Political Theory*, 7:4 (1979):521-531, p. 523.

⁴³ In fact, Arendt is quite critical of the Greek concept of immortal fame. See Tsao, “Arendt against Athens,” p. 115: “We can immediately see that [Arendt] directly implicates [the Athenian’s] ‘agonal spirit’ in the city states’ rapid demise.”

⁴⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 179: “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁷ When contrasting the liberal tradition with Arendt’s account of politics, one eventually must face the metaphysical conflict between the atomism of social contract theorists on one hand, and the implications of Aristotle’s term “*zōon politikon*” on the other. The underlying assumptions of the latter are made explicit in Arendt’s discussion of Aristotle in *The Human Condition*, pp. 12-13, 23-25.

⁴⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 88.

⁴⁹ Mensch, “Public Space,” p. 32.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 178.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Mensch, “Public Space,” p. 38.

⁵⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 244.

⁵⁶ Mensch, “Public Space,” p. 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵⁹ One could imagine a case in which the public realm denigrates into mob rule, in which private deliberation with oneself could in fact be the only way to avoid mindless

acts of terror. While I do not have room here to fully explore this possibility, I would briefly suggest that 1) public interactions are required before “deliberation with oneself” can begin, and 2) such a state of affairs should be viewed as an exception, and not a rule, of politics.

⁶⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 238: “The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth.” When taken with her statement in *Between Past and Future* that “if the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth were taken more seriously in their philosophic implications... (we would find) an extraordinary understanding of freedom,” p. 166, I would suggest that Arendt perceived Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness as extremely important for understanding how to construct a durable public realm of freedom.

⁶¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 240.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Unfortunately, we live in a time and place in which many persons have attempted, and still are attempting, to transform public spheres into authoritarian, religious domains.

II. THE LOSS of FREEDOM in the MODERN AGE:

Arendt's Social Realm and American Consumerism

Here, where the deed itself dispossesses us of all power, we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: 'It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea.' – Hannah Arendt

In order to better understand the freedom defined by Arendt's political writings, we ought to examine those conceptual conditions which negate this freedom by their very existence. That is, by analyzing the type of socio-political order which is directly opposed to the emergence of freedom, we should be better equipped to conceive of ways to view human activity for the purpose of recognizing its potentially free components. In order to do this, I will explicate Arendt's notion of "the social realm," insofar as it served to contrast and bound her ideal of politics or "the political realm," which, for Arendt, is the exclusive location of freedom. Additionally, I will attempt to clarify Arendt's use of the terms "realm" and "space" for the sake of avoiding the common ambiguities that arise when philosophers employ these words. Next, I will address Hanna Pitkin's critique of Arendt's use of the social realm as a philosophical category, in which Pitkin claims that Arendt is far too ambiguous and abstract when dealing with "the social." Pitkin suggests, in turn, that the value of Arendt's work lies in its call for individuals to take hold of their potential for action and not be frozen by conformist and economic social strictures. While hopeful in its tone, Pitkin's work is highly misleading when considered against the totality of Arendt's political project. Therefore, I will respond by defending Arendt's designation of "the social" as a concept that is by definition devoid of the potential for both politics and freedom; this is due to the social realm's fundamental embodiment of functional, behavioral acts.

In doing so, I will also acknowledge that Arendt's attempt to exclude what she deemed "social" matters (i.e. poverty, housing for the poor) from politics is unsustainable and inconsistent with her definition of freedom. Freedom is not, as she herself admitted, the escape from necessitated activity, but can only come when persons join together for the purpose of forming a community within which all can discover their unique identity. This creation of public personalities cannot occur if certain issues, such as poverty, are banned outright from political forums, for an essential part of political speech and action is the decision to include or exclude matters introduced by individual citizens.¹ Whether or not these problems are of political significance is a decision for citizens and their respective polities, not political philosophers. Thus, while Arendt's differentiation of the private, social, and political realms is highly valuable for understanding the type of activities which foster (as well as destroy) genuine politics and freedom, her attempt to correlate specific acts, issues, and spaces with these categorical activities is confusing and distracts from her more significant assertion: that American consumerism is an example of a cancerous form of the social realm which threatens, by its spread, to subsume all human activities within functional roles. Finally, I will conclude by illustrating the prescience of this claim through a critical analysis of the megachurch phenomenon, which, in my estimation, is the most astounding manifestation of consumerist society in recent times.

I

- A DEFINITION of CONCEPTUAL REALMS -

Perhaps no other idea or argument made by Arendt has been the subject of so much scholarly controversy – granting exception to the "banality of evil" – as her development of the "social realm." Therefore, in order to avoid treading into some of the unnecessary

ambiguity which has often plagued these discussions, I first want to establish a clear understanding of Arendt's conceptual "realms" or "spaces" as terms, defending against alternative interpretations and carefully clarifying their usage. This definition is based firmly in the qualitative description of human action and is distinct from other common uses, including the referencing of certain geographical locations, the categorization of kinds of relationships, and/or the abstraction of historico-political institutions.

When using the word "realm" in everyday conversation, we often refer to geographical-spatial domains, either literally or metaphorically. However, Arendt's employment of this term is neither figurative in the sense that it does not directly refer to specific locations nor is its metaphorical meaning grounded in physical spaces. Rather, she bases her discussion of realms in the description of certain kinds or types of human actions. Consider her careful phrasing as she correlates the differentiation of the public and private realms of the Ancient Greeks with the contrast between "*activities* related to a common world and those [activities which are] related to the maintenance of life"² (emphasis added). That is to say, Arendt's idea of the public realm consists first and foremost of activities that are devoted to the construction of a political community of public identities and joint endeavors, and her coinciding notion of a "private sphere" envelops those actions that are focused on the fulfillment of individual needs. Thus, we can also infer that, for Arendt, these realms of activities are categorized according to their diverging purposes, so that by referring to different kinds of activities we are, at the same time, referring to activities done for different reasons. It is important to note here that Arendt is not concerned with categorizing specific activities themselves i.e. she would not insist that all forms of eating are in themselves functions of the private realm. What is

significant for her is the attribution of purpose to activities, whatever actual form they may take, so that if eating is done for the purpose of satisfying physical hunger, then she would conclude that this consumption belongs to the private realm. Similarly, if, for some reason, eating became a ritualized component of the participatory procedures in a hypothetical polity, then Arendt's framework would lead us to conclude that the public realm extends around this eating activity. In fact, we can easily imagine a case in which localized forms of politics take place within houses and/or small community buildings, lending themselves to the incorporation of food and drink into their assembly activities.³

Unfortunately, Arendt's decision to base her discussion of activity-spaces in the Greek *polis* seemingly confounds this interpretation of her framework. First, the Greeks, according to Arendt, viewed the public and the private as actual, spatial domains that corresponded to the *polis* (and, more specifically, the *agora*) for the former and the *oikia* for the latter.⁴ This is immediately problematic when one considers that *ways* of doing activities are not necessarily correlative to *places* for the doing of those same activities. That is to say, a private act, defined as a deed done for the purpose of satisfying a private need, is therefore not inherently confined to households and could be done just as easily (withstanding some scrutiny and discomfort) in the shining light of so-called "public spaces." Secondly, since the Athenian model of citizenship closely associated political action with a group of privileged men, those who were allowed to leave their households and partake in the assembly, and private activity with the women, children, and slaves who were relegated to household functions, Arendt, in referencing the Greek *polis*, exposes herself to the criticism that her use of realms is exclusive of certain groups of people.⁵ My response to this accusation is delineated in the first chapter, and thus for now I will simply

remind the reader of Arendt's emphasis on types of activities and/or ways of doing,⁶ thereby neither excluding groups of persons nor referencing specific places and/or domains. Despite her occasional inconsistencies, we can move on, then, reassured that Arendt's theoretical realms refer not to places or people but rather to the ways in which humans engage in their various activities.

I willingly admit that the boundaries of these realms appear quite ambiguous at times, calling into question their descriptive efficacy. Consider the case of a couple who, over a cup of coffee and some blueberry scones, discusses the recent congressional election at a local coffee shop. Their actions are, at the same time, potentially 1) private, insofar as they are eating and drinking, and 2) public, insofar as they are partaking in dialogue which raises their awareness of political concerns and governmental happenings. How can we possibly apply the notion of realms in a useful manner in the numerous cases such as this, in which the salient purpose of an activity is far from clear? The immediate answer seems to lie in the notion of individual attitude or intention, so that the actor's perspective or privately perceived purpose of his or her action determines its qualitative description. Thus, in this coffee shop example, we might say that if the couple intended to meet at the coffee shop primarily to satisfy their morning hunger pains, and only incidentally engaged in some political discussion, then their actions should fall under the category of the "private realm," and if they purposed their meeting for the consideration of public affairs, and ate and drank only as a formality, then they partook in the words and deeds of Arendt's public realm.

However, difficulties arise if we allow our understanding of an activity's purpose to be determined solely by its actor's attitude or intention (which, for our purposes, can be

used interchangeably⁷). First, our intentions or attitudes about activities often change between the moment we first intend a certain action and the conclusion of that action's execution, as the intended confrontation of a distant friend ("Why haven't you called me back yet?") might transform into deliberate consolation once we learn of the tragic circumstances that he or she faces ("I'm very sorry that your parents are splitting up"), which in turn might change into charitable ministry after some egocentric reflection on one's own empathetic abilities ("I'm so glad I can help fix your emotional difficulty since I'm quite good at helping others with their problems"). That is to say, given the continually changing character of our interpersonal context and our continual adaptation to it based upon the results of our interactions with others, hope for the identification of singular, stable intentions seems in vain. Secondly, the nature of talk of "private intentions" is such that we, as individual actors, are granted privileged access to the experience of our own attitudes. Without delving into the many contemporary debates concerning the phenomenon of intention and intentional attitudes, I will suggest only that, insofar as we are concerned with differentiating kinds of activities that constitute commonly shared "spaces" of words and deeds, the admission of private intentions as a descriptive factor of human activity is a highly inconsistent move. How can we evaluate actions that are supposedly characterized by the manner in which they appear before others – their intersubjective quality – with a criterion rooted in subjective, individuated experience? This would be to fall towards a peculiar form of relativism, wherein any individual's self-description of their acts as "political" or "private" is sufficient for defining them as instances of the "political" or "private" realm.

How, then, are we to ascertain the purpose of actions, if not by the elusive intentions and attitudes of their actors? We must turn once again to Arendt's writings: "In the realm of human affairs, being and appearance are indeed one and the same."⁸ That is to say, the essence or purpose of the activities occurring within "the realm of human affairs" cannot be found in some hidden, individuated phenomena such as intention and attitude but rather is discovered by examining how these activities appear before others. Thus, while we cannot rely upon our attempts to discern the shadowy intentions and attitudes of others and ourselves, we can consider an actor's verbal account of his or her action, along with our own observations of the action and/or the testimony of others, as proper means for the end of determining an act's purpose, for these are all means towards intersubjectively experiencing the said act. They limit the scope of inquiry to the sorts of phenomena that are shareable by multiple persons simultaneously and thus maintain Arendt's descriptive and, I would suggest, prescriptive charge that being and appearance remain undifferentiated in human interactions.⁹ Furthermore, we ought to keep in mind the relational, cultural, and socio-political context within which an activity takes place, so as to include prior interactions, norms, cultural expectations, legal constraints, and the like as vital parts of our analysis of a certain activity's appearance. In my estimation, this is often much simpler than it sounds, especially when dealing with actions done within one's own cultural context, for many of these contextual factors can be presumed without explicit consideration. The result is what perhaps could be termed a "common attitude" towards actions – the intersubjective designation of purpose to acts based upon their ongoing appearance to others and their execution within a given context.

I have one final clarification regarding the relationship between an action and its purpose. Some might suggest that, while the notion of an intersubjective formulation of purpose is all fine and good, the application of this procedure is impossible due to the presence of an infinite regress within attempts to consider one – and only one – action at a time. Consider again the example of a couple eating and conversing at a coffee shop – does the one action consist of their entire meeting? Or does one action consist in the purchasing of food, and another in the discussion? Or, perhaps, does the discussion itself consist of multiple actions, based upon the shifting of conversation topics? Do individual sentences count as acts, and if so, what about words? While alluring in its seeming cleverness, this line of reasoning is entirely beside the point, for it presumes that activities should be examined for some sort of intrinsic essence that is more clearly seen upon further dissection. Arendt’s methodology is not to look “into” actions to expose their hidden content but rather to take human activity as it appears and then apply the definitions contained within her conceptual realms to these appearances; thus, an action’s duration is constrained (and maintained) by the boundaries of those definitions that are applied to it, preventing a lapse into the continual division of actions into smaller and smaller acts. In other words, once an act’s appearance is conceivable within the conceptual definitions given by our understanding of realms, its duration is sufficient for the application of the realm’s categories, and further investigation is only necessary if the act’s appearance is too complex to consider as a whole. To summarize this discussion, then: Arendt’s use of a theoretical framework of realms implies the categorization of types of human actions, and this in turn refers to the designation of purpose to actions (based upon the categories entailed by the realms) through the intersubjective account of these actions’ appearances.

II

- AGAINST the POLITICAL: ARENDT'S SOCIAL REALM -

Keeping these principles in mind, we can go on to examine Arendt's formulation of the social realm as a philosophical concept, primarily relying upon *The Human Condition* to inform our discussion. However, since the political realm is more authentic to Arendt,¹⁰ preceding the rise of the social realm historically and theoretically presenting persons with the opportunity to realize their potential for humanness,¹¹ I will first address the ways in which Arendt defines and describes activities that are essentially political. We will then be able to see clearly the conceptual antagonism which emerges between her explication of the political and social realms, keeping in mind that 1) the socio-political circumstances detailed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* serve as a backdrop to her work in *The Human Condition* and 2) the ways in which *On Revolution* demonstrated Arendt's attempt to apply the conceptual conflict between the social and the political to the particular historical events of the American and French Revolutions.

As previously mentioned, Arendt broadly defined the political realm as consisting of those human actions that are purposed towards the construction of a common world. Furthermore, she considered the political to have sole rights over all experiences which can be classified as genuinely free: "freedom is exclusively located in the political realm."¹² Taken together, these two criteria – actions dedicated to creating a political community and the emergence of freedom – adequately bound the regions of Arendt's political realm. First, by linking inextricably her notions of political action and a common world, Arendt elevates the interrelated ideas of speech, plurality, and equality, all of which are necessary for persons to be able to contribute towards a "common world." Speech serves the purpose

of revealing political actors, enabling them to appear before others and beginning the process of forming their public identity.¹³ In turn, the very possibility of a public identity implies that citizens are viewed as distinct from one another, that they each embody a different answer to the question “Who are you?”¹⁴ These answers, while learned through continued political interaction, are necessarily begun with the singular event of each person’s first articulated appearance. Thus, the “who” of each citizen is always unique, an irreplaceable contribution to the plurality of the common world. Should this plurality disappear and anonymity emerge, citizens would no longer be able to contribute qua citizens – they would simply be members of a single mass moved not by the deliberation of opinions and consensual agreement but instead by some overwhelming force. Equality, in cooperation with speech and plurality, describes the set of conditions within which individual persons are afforded the same kind of access to and membership in a participatory polity, negating the age-old distinction between “rulers” and “the ruled” and ensuring that citizens can “understand each other and those who came before them [as well as] plan for the future.”¹⁵ No citizen, insofar as they have a genuine identity and stake in their community, can be forced into submission to another, for this would negate the legitimacy of their appearance, subsuming it under the auspices of a ruler-figure.

Arendt’s definition of freedom and its associated concepts were discussed at length in the previous chapter, and thus I will only briefly outline them here for the purpose of completing my explanation of her political realm. Arendtian freedom is located within essentially spontaneous or new acts which in turn can only come about through the presentation of novel possibilities by and with others in community. This process demands that individuals, through their mutual revelation of each others’ identities and deliberation

concerning each others' opinions, offer one another the opportunity to formulate courses of action that are concerned primarily with the preservation of their political forum. In doing so, individuals are removed from the confining necessity of their private impulses and desires and allowed to participate in the creation and execution of prospectively freeing activities. To put it differently: persons (on their own) are unable to conceive of actions apart from the satisfaction of their needs and wants, and so, should they join together for the purpose of forming and conserving a political body (i.e. a community which preserves equality and plurality), the possibility of non-necessitated action will present itself. This possibility, which is fundamentally novel to each individual within the polity, is itself the means for experiencing freedom. Furthermore, just as Arendt's depiction of a common world eliminates the distinction between rulers and those who are ruled, so does her action-based definition of freedom erase the separation of means and ends in human activity.¹⁶ Since freedom qualifies the appearance of actions purposed for the furtherance of one's own political community, and since political communities are themselves realized in these common activities, the actions of Arendt's citizens have as their end their own execution. That is to say, since polities are formed by citizens' activities, and since the purpose of political action is to create and sustain polities, the actions (*praxeis*) of citizens are, as Aristotle would have it, ends in themselves.¹⁷

In contrast and opposition to this political realm of egalitarian commonality and freedom, Arendt posits the social realm in two distinct ways: 1) negatively as a non-political and non-private realm which functions in opposition to both private and the political forms of activity, and 2) positively as an amalgam of private and public activities that lends itself to conformist behavior and economic functionality. I will unpack the latter

explanation first so that the ways social activity opposes political interaction are seen most clearly. Furthermore, I will pay especially close attention to how the conditions for human activity presented by the social realm negate the possibility of freedom (as Arendt defines it). This should reinforce our understanding of Arendtian freedom as entirely exclusive of functional role-play.

Arendt's first attempt at defining the social realm in *The Human Condition* goes as follows: "[the social realm is] the rise of the 'household' (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a 'collective' concern."¹⁸ A few pages later, she offers a more succinct version of the same claim: "[society] is that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance."¹⁹ Her analysis of the phenomenon of the social goes in various directions after this point, exploring connections to American consumerism, European class society, and bureaucracy (among other things), but this first definition remains consistent and informative throughout these various investigations. Thus, we must carefully consider what is meant by "the rise of the household" (and, accordingly, 'private interests') to the public realm. Certainly, this transferal of private functions to the political realm²⁰ is not literal: the familial relationships and activities within households do not correlate directly with the relationships formed by persons in society. Rather, I would claim that the infusion of public significance to private acts via their public appearance necessitates a translation of household rules and roles. The result is the emergence of conformist behavior and a preoccupation with economic jobholding, both of which lead to the denigration of human activity into mere functionality.

Arendt describes this state of affairs as absolute rulership without an actual ruler: “But this nobody, the assumed one interest of society as a whole in economics as well as the assumed one opinion of polite society in the salon, does not cease to rule for having lost its personality.”²¹ Since the private realm is concerned with activities directed towards the satisfaction of biological (i.e. eating, sleeping) and relational (i.e. parenting, romantic companionship) needs, and since these activities are purely functional towards these necessitated ends, the spread of private acts and “interests” within the interaction of individuals in public space conceptually implies the creation of need-based, “social” roles with both economic and relational components. We might interpret Arendt’s diagnosis of American society’s tendency towards normalized behavior and the glorification of jobholding, then, as apt examples of how her social realm displays the two-part functionality (i.e. biological and relational needs) of the private realm, remaining consistent with her conceptual framework’s necessary consequences.

From here, we can begin to discern the antagonism towards all things political that Arendt attributes to the social realm. First, she finds that the imposition of economic and conformist functionality destroys the possibility of joint action outright: “society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members ... [and] to exclude spontaneous action.”²² By demanding that persons direct their efforts towards purely economic and/or normalizing objectives, individuals are prevented from thinking and acting beyond their own needs and wants. Consequently, the job-functions of economics and conformist standards of class and mass society simply reflect the individuated necessity of the private realm, demanding need-based behavior that by its very definition is incapable of presenting

the sort of novel possibilities necessary for political activity. And, as previously demonstrated, the ability of persons to join together and formulate novel possibilities – that is, “spontaneous action” – is crucial for the realization of Arendtian freedom. Additionally, by restricting human activity to necessitated behavior, the social precludes the formation of public identities and relationships and therefore hinders political speech and action – the very lifeblood of freedom’s existence within the political realm.

Secondly, Arendt finds that the social realm’s inherent functionality leads to the destruction of plurality and the emergence of anonymity. By reducing participation in common endeavors to task-driven behavior, society’s members act as faceless functionaries that, while perhaps performing different chores, are essentially undifferentiated from one another in terms of their public appearance. This translates into the establishment of anonymity, for if persons cannot distinguish themselves based upon their appearances to one another, they have no means by for the construction of unique identities. We can further conclude that this social anonymity directly corresponds to the emergence of expendability, for insofar as the functioning of individuals makes them indistinguishable from one another, each member of the social realm becomes replaceable by any other co-functionary.²³ A second apolitical consequence of the social realm’s functional anonymity is the destruction of equality. While a certain leveling of conditions may result from conformist and economic behavior, equality (according to Arendt) demands more than this, minimally requiring that individuals have the opportunity for pluralistic participation in politics. By eliminating, through the enforcement of functional roles, the possibility for individual distinction based upon the announcement of public

identities, the social realm creates an experience of sameness that is an insufficient replacement for the properly political experience of equality.²⁴

This is certainly not to say that economics and social interactions are by themselves hostile towards politics, or that economic systems can be developed only at the expense of political participation. When dealing with these descriptions of types of activities, one is permitted to conclude only that social acts, both economic and conformist, are simply not political acts, and vice versa. Furthermore, since Arendt focused her critique on the seemingly unlimited growth of the social realm in contemporary America – which we can translate as the increasing tendency of persons to act for purely social purposes – we can safely conclude that her claims concerning the expansion of the social realm at the expense of the political mean only that, as persons dedicate themselves more completely to social behavior, they will become less able and willing to engage in politics. The purposes of political deeds, as well as the plurality and equality upon which they rely, are entirely incompatible with the type of activity characterized by the social realm and must be sought independently of social acts. Therefore, if we dare to hope for the emergence of freedom from the eclipse of the social realm's predominance in recent times, we must also strive for the creation of polities within which human actions can be separated from the functionality of social ends.

III

- PITKIN'S CRITIQUE and a CRITICAL DEFENSE of ARENDT'S SOCIAL REALM -

Arendt's theoretical account of society and politics in the modern age is far from problem-free, as seeming contradictions and ambiguities greet attempts to extract a systematic political philosophy from her writings. Few recent commentators have

expressed greater discontent with these inconsistencies than Hannah Pitkin, and so in the following paragraphs, I will revisit her interpretation of Arendt's political thought, primarily focusing on her work, *Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*. I find her understanding of Arendt to be misleading, insofar as she fails to recognize many of the connections vital to interpreting Arendt's use of various examples and definitions given within her theoretical political framework; thus, I will also respond to Pitkin in defense of Arendt's designation of a "social realm" along with the primary meaning Arendt attached to this term. However, difficulties do arise upon consideration of some of the particular applications Arendt assigned to "the social," including her insistence that questions of welfare, which are of an allegedly social nature, be excluded from political debate. Therefore, using the critical analysis of Richard J. Bernstein, I will prescribe how Arendt's theoretical work might be preserved without sacrificing the participatory opportunities of impoverished individuals.

Pitkin's *Attack of the Blob* is itself an attack on Arendt's political philosophy on many fronts, ranging from psychoanalytic discussions of Arendt's fatherless childhood and adult romantic relationships²⁵ to arguments establishing theoretical connections between Arendt and Marx and Tocqueville. Here, I will limit my discussion to the three most pertinent disagreements I have with Pitkin's version of Arendt's socio-political theory: 1) her suggestion that Arendt's social is "autonomous" and on a quest to devour individuals, 2) her claim that no real connection exists between the functionality of economic society and the manners of class society, and 3) her argument that Arendt's description of political action implicitly depends upon the existence of a "free will" within individual actors.

Pitkin begins *Attack of the Blob* with an explanation of the linkage between “the Blob” and Arendt’s social: “Arendt depicts [the social realm] as a living, autonomous agent determined to dominate human beings, absorb them, and render them helpless.”²⁶ That is to say, like the monster-movie Blob of the 1950s, Arendt’s social realm is an amorphous, unstoppable entity that grows and grows as it continually consumes more and more human lives. Since persons seem utterly helpless when faced with its expansion, Pitkin suggests that a more accurate, “demythologized” understanding of Arendt’s social realm is to be found in the diagnosis of those states of affairs in which individuals feel and/or are impotent in regards to the consequences of their actions.²⁷ With regards to the specific conditions and causes of this debilitating phenomenon, Pitkin is unhelpful, suggesting that Arendt herself is inconsistent as to the specific characteristics of the social realm. Yet, as previously demonstrated, Arendt’s definition of the social realm as those activities that combine public significance with private functions, while broad, is quite congruent with her various references to and applications of the same.²⁸ That is to say, while her examples of social behavior are diverse and seemingly disparate, they find commonality in their exhibition of actions that are necessitated by private functionality and yet are public in their appearance and import for human interaction.

Additionally, it is a fundamental misunderstanding of Arendt’s methodology on Pitkin’s part that leads her to conclude that Arendt’s social realm acts, in its mythical form, as an independent being that absorbs individual lives, and non-mythically as the destruction of individual agents’ efficacy. Arendt’s definition of realms, as already discussed, deals solely with the categorical description of human activities, and thus, these realms can have no existence apart from their application to “the realm of human affairs.”

The social is not, as Pitkin would suggest, autonomous in its movement towards domination, but rather an attempt to clarify and respond to the decline of genuine political activity and the rise of economic and conformist behavior in the modern age through the use of theoretical categories. Thus, by using terms such as “absorption” and “devouring,”²⁹ Arendt is not suggesting that the social realm has a life of its own but rather that those activities designated by the social realm have been granted a predominant role in modern life by modern humans themselves, thus “expanding” the social realm’s boundaries and diminishing the possibility of political interaction. Furthermore, if persons feel a loss of control in the wake of their participation in Arendt’s social realm, it is not because the consequences of their actions have been removed from their control, as if they were transformed into mindless machines by some menacing force. Rather, their social servitude of private necessity is akin to the proverbial donkey that is willing to drag a cart daily because a carrot is dangled in front of its nose, all the while surrounded by lush, open fields. Individuals need only divert their attention from functional needs to the pursuit of common interests with one another in order to move beyond their burdensome routines.

At various points in *Attack of the Blob*, Pitkin expresses bewilderment at Arendt’s attribution of both economic and conformist characteristics to the social realm:

“But what is the connection between, on the one hand, suppressing individuality, imposing rules of behavior, the polite conformity of the salon, and, on the other, economics, necessity, and biology? Salon behavior and biological urges seem almost polar opposites.”³⁰

Indeed, she is right to suggest that Arendt consistently refers to both jobholding-*oikia* activity and the conformist “manners” of class society as essentially social behavior, for these are, in fact, the paradigmatic cases Arendt uses to exemplify the social realm.

However, their connection lies not with the fact that, as Pitkin hypothesizes, “a large

population presupposes a complex economy”; she herself admits the inadequacy of this explanation.³¹ Rather, the previously discussed notion of functional role-play within the social realm is what holds these two components together, as both a jobholder’s mentality and norm-driven behavior display a similar denigration of human action into mere functionality. Again, since the desire for relational closeness and the satisfaction of physical needs, both of which Arendt labels “private,”³² necessitate the formation of social roles when given public exposure, all attempts to fill these roles in public must consist of activity that is functional towards one or both of these private ends. There is no mysterious divergence, then, between conformist and economic manifestations of social behavior; they are simply reflective of the twofold nature of the private realm – relational needs and physical/biological needs – and are thus far from being “polar opposites.”

Lastly, I wish to address Pitkin’s claim that Arendt’s conception of political action implicitly depends upon the acknowledgment of some sort of “free will” within individual citizens. Pitkin offers very little justification for this assertion, and in fact spends relatively little time addressing it. Her entire statement on the matter is as follows:

“The free will question, in particular, [Arendt] construes narrowly as focused on an inner something called ‘the will’ and whether it is ‘free.’ In that sense the issue is, as she points out, invented by philosophers only after political freedom had disappeared from the ancient world. She does not acknowledge, and probably does not see, the extent to which her own teachings about political freedom depend on the free will conundrum more broadly construed, how the very idea of action presupposes something like free will, and how here distinction between freedom and necessity is another version of the same conundrum.”³³

Since Arendt herself was deeply concerned with defining freedom as an exclusively political phenomenon and also, as Pitkin admits, argued *explicitly* against the philosophical use of the “free will,” and since the present project is dedicated in large part to Arendt’s definition of freedom, I find it important to adequately respond to Pitkin on this matter.

First, it is unclear exactly *why* Pitkin thinks that participation in Arendt's political realm demands the existence of a free will writ large; perhaps it is in large part due to Pitkin's belief, as expressed in other parts of *Attack of the Blob*, that the choices of individuals qua individuals are absolutely essential to any analysis of political phenomena: "If one puts the perspective of the agent at the center, then the only 'explanation' of the social one needs or can have is that we aren't yet doing anything to diminish it."³⁴ However, this still fails to establish a clear connection between the action of Arendtian citizens, which demonstrates only the need for the public associations, and the free willing of individuals.

Secondly, Arendt's argument against traditional conceptions of the free will is based upon two crucial premises: 1) that an individual "will" can never appear in "the phenomenal world,"³⁵ making the free will as hidden and ambiguous as private intention, and 2) that the free will's dependence upon a foreseen consequence for a given choice negates both its alleged freedom and renders it ineffectual in the face of changing circumstances and weakened resolve³⁶ – neither of which are clearly addressed by Pitkin, thus making her argument for Arendt's implicit dependence upon the existence of individually free wills quite unconvincing. That is to say, Pitkin does not directly respond to Arendt's assertion that the free will's invisible, insensible, and radically private nature makes it an unsuitable basis for defining freedom, which, as a reality that ought to be located in the visible world of human affairs, must appear in some manner. Neither does she answer Arendt's convincing argument that any analysis of the free will breaks down upon consideration of the many instances in which the supposed "willing" of an individual are confounded by impotence on the part of the actor or changing external circumstances.

Thus, Pitkin is unable to fully substantiate her claim that Arendt's notion of political action necessitates a "free will" of some sort. In fact, the contrast between freedom and necessity, as portrayed by Arendt and explicated in the previous chapter, has very little to do with individual choices by themselves and very much to do with the nature of collective interactions, which in turn may contain individually "willed" choices but are in no way reducible to them. Arendtian political action can occur whether or not individuals are "willing" their decisions, for it emerges only from those words and deeds that appear to others and thus it is brought forth solely by a community of citizens.

It would be dishonest to go on from here without acknowledging the problematic inconsistencies that emerge within Arendt's account of the social realm. Most of them can be summarized with her occasional attempts to label specific issues, such as poverty and welfare, "private" and/or "social," thus implying that these concerns themselves are inappropriate for political forums. This is most blatant in *On Revolution*, within which, as discussed previously, Arendt compares the American and French Revolutions specifically in terms of the establishment, in the case of the former, and destruction, in the case of the latter, of genuine politics and freedom. The ways the French Revolution functioned for the purpose of alleviating poverty are, for Arendt, a prime example of the overwhelming force of the "social question."³⁷ By concerning itself primarily with the problems of material destitution, Arendt finds that the French Revolution sacrificed its ability to be political and, in doing so, became an essentially "social" movement through its elevation of private needs (i.e. poverty) to the level of public and/or governmental consideration. Thus, the "necessity" of private, biological need was introduced into governmental affairs, transforming political activities into social behavior.³⁸ Unfortunately, Arendt goes one step

further by claiming that “the multitude of the poor” themselves were partially responsible for burdening the French Revolution with social concerns, thus contributing to its demise: “When [the poor] appeared on the scene of politics, necessity appeared with them.”³⁹ This is very problematic when considered in light of the activity-based interpretation of Arendt’s realms for which I have been arguing, certainly lending ammunition to those, such as Pitkin, who have labeled Arendt’s political theory as elitist – focused on recovering the hubristic glory of ancient Athens and neglectful of the fate of the downtrodden.

In fact, there is no satisfactory explanation to be gleaned from Arendt’s work which could somehow integrate her claim that poverty, and those who represent it, should be excluded from political discourse and action with her larger, broader differentiations of the social and political realms based upon the diverging purposes of collective activities. The very nature of realms based in the description of activities, rooted in the attribution of purposes, is, as we have seen, incompatible with the assignment of particular issues and socio-economic classes to these realms. One might even claim that Arendt is guilty of equivocation on this point, insofar as she uses the term “social” to refer to both a kind of human activity characterized by its privately-sourced functionality and the widespread public concern with how material resources are distributed.

The question then becomes: how do we maintain a coherent understanding of Arendt’s social realm, if such coherency is at all possible? I would suggest that, by returning to her definition of the social realm in *The Human Condition*, one that is firmly planted in the qualitative description of human activity and thus clearly placed within her theoretical framework, we can disregard her later digressions into particular “social” issues. Whether or not they were carefully thought out, perhaps as well-intentioned

attempts to illustrate the prescience of her work, or simply careless theoretical slips on her part, we can separate them from the rest of her conceptual framework by reconsidering the discursive nature of her political realm. For Arendt, the act of announcing oneself as a member of a political community of equals and bringing to the forum opinions for debate is the defining act of citizenship.

This means that the decision of *what* issues should be deliberated is as much a part of the political process as the actual deliberation itself.⁴⁰ Richard J. Bernstein puts this quite succinctly: “Indeed, the question whether a problem is itself properly social (and therefore not worthy of public debate) or political is itself frequently the central political issue.”⁴¹ For individuals experiencing the want and misery of poverty, it would amount to nothing short of discriminatory injustice to refuse them the opportunity to share with their political community the problems created by material deprivation. How else will such societal ills be addressed in an equitable and effective manner, if political bodies do not welcome the testimony of the impoverished? Considering Arendt’s definition of the social and political realms by themselves, it certainly does not follow that the inclusion of the economically underprivileged on the part of polities would compromise their unique promise of freedom, and the imposing of *a priori* boundaries on the content of public discourse could be said to contradict the purpose of such speech itself.

IV

- AMERICAN CONSUMERISM and MEGACHURCHES -

Having explored the definition and theoretical implications of Arendt’s social realm by itself, we can move on to examine the ways its adoption of the expansion principle of laboring – the belief that the growth of laboring processes is valuable for its

own sake – results in a dangerous distortion of purposes in the realms of human activity. A current manifestation of this phenomenon can be detected in American consumerism, which is described by Arendt as a “consumer’s society.”⁴² To her, consumerism represents the embodiment of the expansion principle as a fundamental value within the economic division of the social realm; this labor-oriented sector has spread, in turn, into all other aspects of human life, including the state, non-economic society, and the household, transforming private and public activities alike into consumption-oriented enterprises. The result is a state of affairs in which anonymity and expendability have become pervasive features of human existence. Here, I will focus my discussion on what I believe to be a uniquely dangerous symptom of consumerism – the megachurch movement, which will also demonstrate Arendt’s critique to be quite relevant in our own context. The possibility of freedom presented to citizens is inestimably fragile, and unless we are willing to confront how the lives of Americans are increasingly dedicated to the functionality of a “consumer’s society,” we will lose sight of this freedom altogether, forgetting the promise of politics and forsaking our uniquely human potential for freedom.

Arendt situates her discussion of consumerism within the definition and analysis of labor as a form of human activity that corresponds exclusively to the satisfaction of desires and needs through the consumption and production of commodities.⁴³ For Arendt, labor exists in contrast to work and action, thus forming a descriptive system of activity categories that, at first glance, seems to parallel her development of the private, social and public realms. However, a crucial distinction exists between these two frameworks – while the categories of the private realm, social realm, and public realm correspond directly to the quality or purpose of human acts, the division of labor, work, and action express the

relationship between human deeds and the external world. Thus, while the private realm entails those actions done for the express purpose of fulfilling private needs, labor consists of those activities focused on the production and consumption of items that, while usually used for the purpose of satisfying personal appetites, are primarily characterized by the fact that they are made to be consumed: “It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind.”⁴⁴ Thus, it is not private necessity, but a lack of durability, which signifies the products of labor, implying that laborers relate to the world around them by transforming it through production into things for consumption. Additionally, Arendt claims that the processes of labor are cyclical insofar as they continually move between the production and consumption of commodities, each part necessitating the performance of the other as the physical exertion spent in laboring must be compensated by adequate consumption, and, in turn, the depletion created by consumption must be replenished by further laboring.⁴⁵ We can conclude, then, that by placing her analysis of consumerism within her discussion of laboring, Arendt is suggesting that consumerism is the state of affairs emerging from social activity that is characterized primarily by the laborer’s mindset, the perspective that views the world solely in terms of its consumable form.

Arendt claims that the cyclical nature of laboring activity, when given a dominant status in the social realm, exhibits an inherent tendency for expansion. Her reasoning goes as follows: since contemporary society has given normative priority to the notion of increasing abundance or profit (one and the same for our purposes), and since laboring is the only mode of action whose cyclical nature ensures such a continual increase of capital, the social realm will inevitably seek to expand its laboring processes so that individuals will have ever-decreasing amounts of time and energy to spend on any other kind of

activity but laboring.⁴⁶ This is strikingly evidenced by the social mandate insisting that “whatever we do, we are supposed to do for the sake of ‘making a living.’”⁴⁷ In other words, by bowing to the pressure to dedicate themselves to increasing the accumulation of capital, both for themselves in the form of wages and for the profits of their social organizations (e.g. corporations),⁴⁸ and to do so by viewing their actions in terms of the production-consumption cycle, individuals commit their lives to expanding the domain of human activity over which consumerism’s values reign. In doing so, they resign themselves to the functional membership offered by a consumerist society. Here, job titles matter very little, for both an assembly-line worker and a professor can view their jobs simply as a means towards gaining enough money to purchase a desired amount of commodities (i.e. “making a living”).

This participation in a consumerist social realm is functional due to the very nature of consumerism itself. Its end is the expansion of its own influence, and this expansion can only occur insofar as more and more aspects of the world are transformed into commodities. This process demands, in turn, that individuals lend themselves as functional components. Thus, within a consumerist society we see that the economically functional component of social activity (i.e. the satisfaction of physical needs on a public scale) is paired with the consumption-oriented perspective of laboring, with the natural result that members of consumerist societies find as the purpose of their deeds the endless expansion of production and consumption processes. Whether or not these jobholders produce and consume in terms of capital, money, or actual physical items matters very little so long as stock options, salaries, and cars are viewed primarily as useful components for life within the production-consumption process.

Consumerism's upshot for humans in terms of their potential for politics is devastating. If the social realm by itself represents human activity which is apolitical, a consumerist social realm represents human activity that is not merely apolitical but unavoidably hostile towards politics. For, by increasingly devoting themselves to the cyclical metabolism of consumerism, individuals are at the same time committing themselves to the elimination of the possibility for political forums. This is due to the implications of consumerism's inherent push for expansion. Since a laboring perspective is not bounded by particular kinds of items, but instead represents a way of relating to the world as a whole, consumerist processes will be applied to as many aspects of human life as possible. This means that, since the continual increase of production capacities inevitably physically exhausts the individuals who act as producers, "leisure" time will be designated solely as the opportunity to consume sufficient amounts of commodities (e.g. food, and entertainment) in order to enter into the production process for another day.⁴⁹ Thus, even the "superfluities" of life, such as television, music, games, and even religion, are placed within the cycle of consumerism, resulting in "the grave danger that eventually no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption."⁵⁰

In this *modus operandi*, there is no opportunity for persons to meet with one another as citizens, and, in fact, such political relationships are necessarily discouraged, for they can do no more than interfere with the furtherance of consumerism's domain. The realization of politics depends upon the presence of citizens who recognize the inherent value of each other's appearances, which would imply that no one's words and deeds are entirely subjected to a removed end but instead are always treated, to some extent, as

intrinsically precious.⁵¹ If, on the other hand, individuals spend all their time as laboring consumers, either producing or consuming commodities, the notion of collective action for the creation and sustenance of polities is hardly a distant hope, for no actions are viewed as valuable in themselves but instead are thought to be purely functional within the production-consumption process. No individual's deeds are allowed to become the irreplaceable constituents of a political body, lest the laborer's mentality be set aside and replaced with the intersubjective perspective of a citizen, the viewpoint of a speaking doer seeking to understand itself as such within the context of other speaking doers.

Furthermore, how persons relate to one another when acting as members of a consumerist society, if such interaction can be said to occur, is merely as co-producers and co-consumers and not as individually identified citizens, for they differ from one another only in terms of the particular manner in which they produce and consume. Thus, even though one individual might produce (and, in doing so, obtain sufficient amounts of money for consumption) in terms of being a nurse and another as a doctor, if they both maintain the perspective of a laboring consumer, the difference implied by their titles is negligible in terms of their respective roles in consumerist society. Both are simply contributing to an increase in the amount of laboring and consuming activity done in a social manner. This sameness necessarily implies anonymity, for if the means for the formation of individual political identities have been removed from consideration, and if the one remaining possibility for distinction within society – job titles – is insufficient for distinguishing individuals from one another, how then could we conclude otherwise? And, just as the anonymity of social functionality implies expendability, so do the anonymous job-roles of a consumerist society make individuals essentially expendable. So long as one devotes the

whole of one's time to the increase of production and consumption, "who" one is becomes entirely insignificant, and thus, the role one plays within society is entirely replaceable. Blinded from viewing their actions as anything other than the deeds of production and consumption and thus incapable of forming relationships that could reveal one another as citizens, we can safely conclude that the members of a consumer's society are by definition interchangeable and, thereby, politically impotent.

In order to better illustrate what is meant by this analysis of consumerism, I will next critically examine the megachurch movement. Widely defined as those Christian congregations which boast a weekly attendance of at least two thousand persons, a more telling analysis of this recent phenomenon entails the examination of "organizational and leadership dynamics"⁵² that evidence unmistakable symptoms of the aforementioned characteristics of consumerism. Therefore, for our purposes, megachurches will be defined as follows: local religious institutions that claim Christianity as their faith identity, maintain a belief that their organizational expansion is an unqualified good, and thus, are also willing to utilize a vast administrative apparatus to facilitate such growth.

"I'm just trying to get people in the door."⁵³ Such is the nature of the seemingly innocent justification given by megachurch ministers for the rapidly increasing size of their churches. What underlies this reasoning is the belief that church growth is necessarily a good – that is, a value that needs no critical consideration – thereby allowing for organizational expansion to act as an overarching end, intentionally or otherwise. As growth rates spiral upwards, emerging megachurches tend to "evolve their buildings, leadership, and programmatic structures along with their growth."⁵⁴ Put simply, as churches grow exponentially, their belief that such growth is unquestioningly good

naturally implies that they will begin functioning for the purpose of maintaining their increasing magnitude. Megachurch members, in turn, are expected to play a part in this growth process, first as consistent attendees (i.e. consumers of church services) and eventually as participators in the execution of church functions (i.e. producers of church services): “There are always groups [within megachurches] which organize and train church volunteers both to assist in the functioning of the church and in the performance of its ministries.”⁵⁵ As megachurches position themselves to welcome and employ the resources of more and more individuals, they are required to develop a startling number of ministry options – ranging from financial help seminars to Judo exercise classes – that require a large number of people to both lead (i.e. produce) and participate (i.e. consume).⁵⁶ The result is a vast apparatus of ministry outlets which takes on the feeling of a commercial shopping center, offering potential consumers more opportunities than could ever be exhausted in a lifetime.⁵⁷

Lest the reader think me unfair in my assertion that megachurches are akin to the secular temples of American commercialism, consider this telling quote taken from an interview with a prominent megachurch leader: “We want the church to look like a mall. We want you to come in here and say, ‘Dude, where’s the cinema?’”⁵⁸ In fact, I would suggest that commercialistic tendencies are nothing short of a natural consequence of these religious organizations’ unwavering adherence to the furtherance of their own growth, given our consumerist context and the “seeker-friendly” tendencies of modern evangelical theology. Since shopping malls are a central institution within the secular consumerist realm, and since the tenets of evangelism provide a deceiving justification for the endless growth of churches, it is quite unsurprising that megachurches would unflinchingly

embrace organizational aspects of consumerist institutions such as malls. Members need only remind themselves of the higher purpose of their expansionist activities – the eternal salvation of souls – if the commercial nature of their project ever disturbs their conscience.

It is not difficult to see how Arendt’s diagnosis of consumerism applies to the conditions of megachurch development, both in regards to their definition and implications for human activity. Megachurches facilitate institutional expansion by appealing to new “consumers” with advertisements and entertaining services, and then, in order to maintain their increasing size, find ways for consistent attendees to play a part in facilitating services and ministries (which in turn act as consumption opportunities for others) while still allowing them to maintain a high level of service-consumption themselves. This reflects Arendt’s description of the cyclical process of production and consumption that characterizes a laboring consumer’s society and evidences her claim that consumerism, as a social phenomenon, will inherently seek to envelop all aspects of life, including “superfluities” such as religious practice. For, religious belief and the activities of churches do not seem to be, in themselves, directed towards a consumerist increase in organizational resources and magnitude. However, as more and more individuals have learned to partake in consumerism’s process by viewing their actions (and the actions of others) as functional within expanding consumption-production cycles, enterprises such as churches are exposed to the possibility of acting for consumerist ends i.e. seeking their own growth as an end in itself and utilizing a production-consumption process to facilitate such growth.

Full-fledged members of megachurches, so long as they are consistent and active consumers and producers of church services and ministries, serve primarily functional ends within their respective churches, thus exemplifying the anonymity of a consumerist

society. Since the growth of their church is a surpassing and unquestionably good end, and since the achievement of this end comes through the attendance and facilitation of services, members differ very little from one another in terms of the qualitative appearance of their activities. While one might be a nursery worker, another might help park cars, and another might serve coffee in between Sunday morning services, they all still share the same fate of playing a given part in their organization's growth, known not by their potential identity (their "who") but instead by the functional role they fulfill. And, as we might expect, this widespread implementation of functional roles results in the emergence of expendability insofar as the functioning of one megachurch member is, for all intents and purposes, easily replaced by any other. The result is a state of affairs in which individuals tend to refrain from taking hold of their spiritual beliefs and growth, unprompted to develop their capacities for ethical thought and community action, and instead must rely upon the church to control and centralize the ways in which participation in religious activities and the formation of belief systems takes place.⁵⁹ Additionally, by being relieved of personal responsibility and the possibility of participating in collective action, megachurch members are left to find purpose in their own functionality, resulting in a distortion of significance lamented by Arendt in the following passage from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

"No matter what individual qualities or defects a man may have, once he has entered the maelstrom of an unending process of expansion, he will, as it were, cease to be what he was and obey the laws of the process, identify himself with anonymous forces that he is supposed to serve in order to keep the whole process in motion; he will think of himself as mere function, and eventually consider such functionality...his highest possible achievement."⁶⁰

Such is the state of affairs in which individuals, blind to their futility and vulnerable to the religious institutions on which they depend for their spiritual livelihood, are subject to what I suggest is a most frightening irony: megachurches, while claiming to continue the

radically humanizing work of Jesus of Nazareth, employ organizational operating patterns that are, at their core, denigrating and homogenizing towards all who take part in the furthering of their expansionist ends.

Yet, we must also remember Arendt's insistence that, no matter how discouraging or devastating the effects of social institutions such as consumerism and political movements akin to National Socialism, we should never come to the point of losing all hope and so think "that modern man has lost his capacities [for freedom] or is on the point of losing them."⁶¹ Despite the overwhelming prevalence of anti-political ways of living, we should not despair that all hope for politics is lost. Rather, we must reconsider our potential for acting in non-social ways, consumerist or otherwise, and begin meeting with one another for the purpose of creating forums that sustain public identities and thus foster and protect the emergence of freedom. We might be surprised at the nearness of these potential polities and thus begin to truly appreciate the unwavering optimism Arendt was able to maintain – both in the wake of totalitarianism's terrors and in the face of consumerism's seemingly endless growth and inhibition of human freedom.

¹ Richard Bernstein, "Rethinking the Social and the Political," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 11:1 (1986):111-130. P. 123.

² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958. P. 28.

³ This will be discussed at length in Part III.

⁴ Ibid. In a section entitled, "The *Polis* and the Household," Arendt writes: "The distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and

the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state.” P. 28.

⁵ As discussed in the first chapter, Hanna Pitkin makes this very accusation in her article, “Justice: On Relating Private and Public,” *Political Theory*, 9:3 (1981): 327-352.

⁶ See Martin Levin, “On *Animal Laborans* and *Homo Politicus* in Hannah Arendt: A Note,” *Political Theory* 7:4 (1979): 521-531. This article does an excellent job highlighting the ways Arendt builds her political theory on the differentiation of activities as opposed to spaces and/or groups of persons. Additionally, in a revealing letter to Karl Jaspers from 1946, Arendt describes the contrast between what she calls “political freedom” and “social oppression” in America, which correspond respectively to the willingness of Americans to join together for political purposes in a spontaneous fashion and the seeming helplessness of Americans to deal effectively with their “race problem.” Thus, 12 years prior to the publishing of *The Human Condition*, we can see that, in Arendt’s mind, the contrast between the social and political is based upon the ways in which persons *act*. See *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 26-27.

⁷ Both attitude and intention imply that the actor’s internal perspective concerning his or her own actions is primary. My doing x with a “public attitude” does not differ significantly from my intending to do x in a public manner, for both refer to the same ambiguous collection of forethought and self-reflection.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 88.

⁹ We can find innumerable examples of individuals who, in their appearance, purposefully mask their actual “being.” Thus, it would seem unreasonable to take from this

statement a purely descriptive account of human experience, for what real “realm” can we speak of that is free from this sort of inconsistency and deception?

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176. For Arendt, the opportunity to be political is the highest and most exclusive human possibility: “But only man can express [the differentiation of plurality]...and only he can communicate himself and not merely something.” In other words, only humans are capable of politics, and thus, politics is, for humans, their most noble path towards fulfillment.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178. Arendt articulates the difficult – but crucial – distinction between discovering *what* someone is and *who* someone is. “What” can be defined by function and titles, and thus is insufficient for political interaction, which in turn must rely upon figuring out “who” people are; that is, their identity in relation to other citizens. In doing so, she recognizes how easily we lapse into thinking of persons in terms of “what” instead of “who” they are.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁶ In her categorization of “work,” Arendt discusses the eventual futility that attends all attempts to set a concrete end to human action apart from the action itself. See *The Human Condition*, pp. 153-159.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by David Ross, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. “For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot, for good action itself is its end.” P. 143.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁰ For the most part, Arendt uses the terms “public realm” and “political realm” interchangeably, since (for her) activities that result from public relationships should be political, in keeping with the classical model of politics. However, within her discussion of the social realm, Arendt acknowledges that there is a public element to actions that, through their concern for private needs, are fundamentally apolitical. Therefore, in order to avoid potential confusion, I will usually refer to private, social, and political realms of affairs.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 40.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Hints of this characteristic of the social realm emerge in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Press: 1968): “Selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable, was no longer the expression of individual idealism but a mass phenomenon.” P. 315.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 39.

²⁵ Hanna Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 230-232. Strangely, Pitkin avoids discussing Arendt’s philosophical debt to phenomenology while still emphasizing her personal relationship with Martin Heidegger.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11: “The large-scale consequences of people’s own conduct therefore confront them as inevitabilities, as if imposed by some alien, irresistible power.” See also

p. 252: “[The social is] a condition in which a collectivity of people – for whatever reason – cannot (or at any rate do not) effectively take charge of the overall resultants of what they are severally doing.”

²⁸ Even outside of *The Human Condition*, Arendt maintains her claim that the social exists as a “blended” realm. See, for example, *On Revolution*, in which she suggests that the “social question” deals with the movement of private necessity to the realm of political affairs. PP. 49-50.

²⁹ Arendt’s most colorful language concerning the social realm comes in *The Human Condition*, pp. 28-49.

³⁰ Hanna Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob*, p. 14. See also p. 86: “...the puzzling dual features of the social: economics and conformism.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³² Arendt is less explicit concerning the connection between the need for relational intimacy and social conformism than she is in drawing the nexus between private physical needs and economic society, but I think that her discussion of the opposition between the Romantic era’s call for the protection of intimate relationships from societal forces suffices for this purpose (See *The Human Condition*, pp. 38-39). That is to say, Arendt is arguing that the Romantics’ cry for shielded intimacy is a direct reaction to the invasiveness of the social realm’s conformist tendencies, and thus she is also implying that social conformity is the result of the public translation of private relational needs: “...society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest.” P. 39.

³³ Hanna Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob*, p. 245.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 281. This comes from the section entitled, in line with Pitkin's firm belief in some sort of individual free will, "Just Do It!"

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 143.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 150: "Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other." Consider also her statement, "It as though the I-will immediately paralyzed the I-can, as though the moment men *willed* freedom, they lost their capacity to *be* free." P. 160.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 50.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 81: "Since the [French] revolution had opened the gates of the political realm to the poor, this realm had indeed become 'social.' It was overwhelmed by the cares and worries which actually belonged in the sphere of the household and which, even if they were permitted to enter the public realm, could not be solved by political means."

³⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁰ Richard J. Bernstein, in his article, "Rethinking the Social and the Political," describes a particular exchange between Arendt and a student at a 1972 conference dedicated to her work. Upon receiving the question of whether or not problems of education, health, and urban housing are political, or just social, Arendt responded cryptically, claiming that "with every one of these questions there is a double face. And one of these faces should not be subject to debate." This raises the question – how do we decide which "face" of an issue should be politically debated, except through political debate itself?

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 126.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96: “Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear, until eventually dead matter, the result of small, single, cyclical, life processes, returns into the over-all gigantic circle of nature herself, where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless, repetition.”

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126: “We live in a laborers’ society because only laboring ... is likely to bring about abundance.” On this point, Arendt makes a careful distinction that reinforces my activity-based interpretation of her political categories: “This [consumer’s] society did not come about through the emancipation of the laboring classes but by the emancipation of the laboring activity itself, which preceded by centuries the political emancipation of laborers.” *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁴⁸ The structure of the stock market makes it so that the increase of private wealth can correspond directly with the increase of a corporation’s wealth. Ironically, both stockholders and corporate leaders can enjoy abundance while workers remain impoverished or even suffer the insecurity of unemployment due to strategic “streamlining.”

⁴⁹ This is strikingly reminiscent of the criticism I made of Locke’s understanding of freedom in terms of the acquisition of property. See Part I, “Freedom Beyond Restraint,” Section I, “Liberty in the Liberal Tradition: Hobbes and Locke.”

⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 133.

⁵² Scott Thumma, “The Megachurch Phenomena: Their characteristics and cultural context.” Hartford Institute for Religious Research. <hrr.hartsem.edu>.

⁵³ Jonathan Mahler, “The Soul of the New Exurb.” *The New York Times*. March 27, 2005.

⁵⁴ Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We can learn from America’s Largest Churches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. P. 12.

⁵⁵ Thumma, “The Megachurch Phenomenon.” Thumma also asserts, in the same article, that “megachurches...require massive numbers of volunteer workers.”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement flirts with Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993. P. 12: “Modern megachurches have been built on the philosophical and structural pattern of America’s recent shopping malls, which, in turn, have long been described as ‘cathedrals of consumption.’”

⁵⁸ Mahler, “Soul of the New Exurb.”

⁵⁹ Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 215.

⁶¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 323.

III. CIVIL SOCIETY and the RESTORATION of FREEDOM:

Incorporating the Phenomenal Freedom of Social Associations into Arendt's Framework

Freedom for them could exist only in public; it was a tangible, worldly reality, something created by men to be enjoyed by men rather than a gift or a capacity, it was the man-made public space or market-place which antiquity had known as the area where freedom appears and becomes visible to all. – Hannah Arendt

Upon considering the nature of orders that, at their core, are prohibitive of freedom's emergence, we are left with two crucial questions: 1) How can we define the interpersonal conditions for freedom (remaining consistent with the conclusions drawn in Part I), given the constraints of our consumerist context, and 2) How can we incorporate the results of this inquiry into Arendt's theory of realms, since it is from this framework we have extracted our understanding of freedom? To be successful in this endeavor, we will have to first reconsider the essentially phenomenal nature of Arendtian freedom and then, from there, discern the types of human interactions within which this freedom can appear. It is my claim that civil society, understood as a non-economic sector of social activity, is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of these sorts of relationships. Unfortunately, within the history of modern philosophy, the term "civil society" has been used to describe a variety of social and/or political systems, multifarious in both purpose and character. Thus, using the relatively recent work of Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato in their *Civil Society and Political Theory*, I will outline a conception of civil society that is both non-economic and external to state institutions. This will be in keeping with the tradition begun by Alexis de Tocqueville's observations of spontaneous social associations in America and his accordant analysis of their significance for the wellbeing of modern democracies. And while I accept Cohen and Arato's emphasis on the local, participatory,

and “positively” free components of civil society, I find that their unqualified inclusion of the nuclear family within civil society and suggestion that civil society is interrelated with economic society is problematic for reasons that will be discussed later on.

Additionally, in their critical analysis of Arendt’s writings, Cohen and Arato argue that Arendt acts as a critic of civil society, a claim which I reject. Arendt never uses the term “civil society,” at least in her works of political theory, and thus any suggestion of strong opposition on her part to a concept of civil society must be subject to great scrutiny. It is my belief that they confuse Arendt’s description of the social realm’s activity as fundamentally nonpolitical with their own elucidation of *civil* society as essentially political, thus leading them to peg Arendt as a critic of civil society and preventing them from acknowledging how Arendt’s framework is possibly inclusive of civil society as an origin of political interaction. In fact, I will suggest that Arendt’s definition and description of the political realm and its corresponding mode of doing (“action”), when considered in light of the implications of a consumer’s society, is most clearly exemplified by civil-social institutions and, thus, the experience of Arendtian freedom depends upon the establishment of such organizations. That is to say, in order to recover our capacity for forming the kind of relationships that will allow us to engage in non-consumerist public activity, we ought to turn to those forums that are both locally accessible and potentially available for universal participation. Fortunately, Arendt’s writings are not devoid of guidance on this topic. Her illuminating discussions of both Thomas Jefferson’s “ward system,” which was inspired by the town hall meetings of the American Revolution, and the worker’s movements of the 19th and 20th centuries point explicitly towards localized, more “social” forms of politics and their significance for the human experience of freedom.

- INTERSUBJECTIVE FREEDOM and CIVIL INTERACTIONS -

I asserted in Chapter I that freedom should be considered as a purely public phenomenon, demanding both the presence of others for the formation of public identities and a willingness to make promises and offer forgiveness within one's own community in order to sustain citizenship. Here, I want to further explicate this argument, focusing on the seemingly peculiar notion that freedom must appear, an idea that stands in stark contrast with more traditional understandings of freedom as an internal, or at least individualized, experience. By making this concept of "phenomenal" freedom more clear, I also hope to demonstrate how civil-social relationships are its proper facilitators. They offer both a "space" for freedom's appearance and the opportunity for the continual reappearance of public actors, thus allowing for a consistent and substantial experience of freedom.

Initially, the suggestion that freedom should be defined as an exclusively public experience is somewhat jarring, resonating dissonantly with the fact that some of our most cherished "freedoms," such as the freedom of speech, originate with the notion that our private thoughts – if nothing else – can be considered free. Therefore, some justification is needed to sustain my position. In Chapter I, I offered an argument for this same purpose that can be summarized roughly as follows: Freedom, insofar as it exists in contrast to private necessity and depends upon the experience of novel possibilities, requires that persons pursue the common good of a community within which these novel possibilities can be presented. This, in turn, demands that public identities are formed. Thus, if we allow for freedom to exist at a private level, we imply that either 1) freedom can be had without novel possibilities (a contradiction in light of our operating definition of freedom)

or 2) public identities can be formed in private, thereby undermining the stability necessary for the creation of communities and destroying the foundation on which freedom is built. Therefore, freedom ought to be viewed as a purely public phenomenon.

I think this argument is sufficient for achieving its end, but I would like to offer an additional, somewhat similar justification that centers on a qualitative account of the nature of freedom and echoes our prior consideration of individual intention as a faulty basis for categorizing human activities.¹ If freedom is to be spoken of as a reality for humankind, as an appearing quality of actions that counteract and transcend the physical necessity of private life and, in doing so, provide a firm basis for politics, it must be fundamentally intersubjective in its character. For, as previously demonstrated, “internal” or hidden mental states such as intention and motive, while helpful in formulating accounts of human responsibility and voluntary action, are nigh useless when considered for their value in the effort to categorize human activity in terms of its purpose or quality. By allowing for the possibility of irresolvable discordance between one’s account of one’s own action (on the basis of motive, attitude, etc.) and others’ description of the same deed, the effort to construe human activity as characterized by purpose would never get off the ground, paralyzed by the primacy of each individual’s private understanding of their own praxis. We would, in effect, be committing ourselves to separating being from appearance “in the realm of human affairs” and thus admitting that, in associating with others, we can never know who they really are, for the purposes of their speech and action would be contained within the mysterious true selves hidden beneath the veneer of public interaction.²

Similarly, a notion of freedom grounded solely in one’s inner experiences never can fulfill the requirements of the project to conceive of freedom as a predicate of action

defined by its political purpose or quality. That is, if we are to speak of freedom as existent in words and deeds identified according to their exemplification of the purpose to form and sustain political communities, then we must admit that its definition lies not in the private, subjective experience of this activity but rather those aspects that are possibly experienced simultaneously by multiple persons. This is what is meant, then, by the claim that freedom is the “appearing quality”³ of political activity. It implies that freedom, when realized in the context of citizens, is never experienced by a single speaker or actor by themselves, regardless of their status as the source of words heard and deeds seen. Rather, words and deeds act as intersubjective vehicles by which citizens can learn who they are in the context of one another and, in doing so, partake in activity that is seen to originate not in their private desires, needs, and volitions but rather as emergent from their collective effort to constitute, through their appearance as citizens, a political realm.

Promises and forgiveness have already been established as pre- and co-requisite factors for the birth and maturation of freedom within a community, inasmuch as freedom is understood according to the previous elucidation.⁴ Now, I would like to explore more thoroughly the kinds of relationships that can facilitate both of these securing forces and distinguish them from private and economic forms of interaction. How can individuals relate to one another in such a way as to foster the trust needed to commit to promises and extend forgiveness, all the while maintaining their capacity to experience freedom with one another? Or, to put it differently, under what circumstances will individuals be willing to sustain their publicly announced identities and continue their relationships with others even when the associated expectations are compromised?

First, I would suggest that persons must know to *whom* they are making promises and granting forgiveness in order for such acts to occur; that is, they must be fully aware of the identities of those with whom they are interacting.⁵ Promising, insofar as it consists of the commitment to maintain the expectations assigned to an individual through the announcement of that self in a community, presupposes that the one making the promise knows the content of the public personalities which form the context for the promise's execution.⁶ Without knowing the identities of those who form the binding provisions of a commitment, promises dissolve into empty statements that are likely no more lasting than the so-called "resolutions" penned on the first of January each year.⁷ This means, consequently, that should new persons join a given community, promises must be implicitly made anew in order to include the unforeseen circumstances introduced by a new identity.

Forgiveness also requires that persons know one another as citizens, for so long as forgiveness is understood as the deed by which individuals who have acted inconsistently with their respective identities are allowed – and even encouraged – to remain as a vital part of their community, it precludes the possibility of forgiving those who are not known. Consider the paradox of inviting someone who is not known, who has not appeared as a citizen, to continue acting as a member of one's own community. This further means that if individuals are forcefully prevented from entering into any sort of community, they are incapable of forgiving those who obstruct their path to freedom. They are, in a way, victims of an unforgivable sin, for without first forming public connections with others, they are blind to the personalities of those who bear the burden of guilt and thus are unable to unchain their antagonists from the results of their isolating actions. Such deeds

“transcend the realm of human affairs,”⁸ making painfully clear the need to know one another in such a way that we might provide (and be provided with) release “from the consequences of what we have done,”⁹ should our acts compromise the self we have promised to be.

Second, the existence of genuine promises and forgiveness demands that individual identities within a given community are treated with equal import and respect. This brand of equality can be distinguished from material and/or economic equality (and, as we found in Part II, social “sameness”), but it is difficult to imagine how great disparities in wealth and financial standing could exist without unduly influencing the ways in which citizens are treated by one another. Nevertheless, equality implies first that individuals, insofar as they form public identities through their interactions with other citizens, are given an opportunity to partake in community affairs and that, should they choose to address their peers, their statements are granted public consideration and subjected to deliberation.

Additionally, equality – for our purposes – allows for no citizen to act as a ruler, even in the slightest, over any other citizen; that is to say, so long as equality is maintained amongst members of a polity, none of them will be bound to obey the demand of any other, no matter how venerable or influential a single member or group of members may be. In order for promises to be made such that they genuinely reflect their content, then citizens must be able to trust that their cohort is neither cowering before them in fear (as subjects before a king) nor able to enforce arbitrary demands upon them (as tyrants). What is to prevent a servant from acting deceptively in order to earn the good favor of his master? And what compelling reason can be given to an authoritarian dictator to prevent him from imposing mandates upon his subjects as unconditional as they are unpredictable?

In both cases the idea of promising is made irrelevant, for neither do public commitments bound the promise-maker to a given set of requirements nor are promise-makers provided with a secure context within which they could possibly uphold the expectations following from their promise. Therefore, without the assurance of an egalitarian political context, individuals cannot muster enough confidence to assume that the persons to whom they are making a promise will maintain their identities in a consistent manner – a necessary condition for the formation of lasting commitments.

Similarly, the act of forgiveness itself presupposes that individuals are not affected by the power differential of a political or social hierarchy and instead can view each others' transgressions as equals. Forgiveness granted from above can be received as nothing more than a favor or, as in the Christian tradition, an act of grace, just as when a parent, refusing to remain angry at their child's misbehavior, invites the child to come down from his or her room and join the family for dinner. While meaningful in certain contexts, this attitude of graciousness is entirely inappropriate amongst citizens. It encourages the recipients of favors to become dependent upon or indebted to their benefactors, thus preventing the formation of *independent* identities. Contrarily, the thought of an inferior forgiving a superior is almost laughable since it is expected that those bound by obedience will submit to those in authority regardless of the moral standing of the authority's actions. In this instance, forgiveness is simply superfluous, for the ruler will keep ruling and the ruled will remain subservient even if offensive actions committed by the former are left unrecompensed. Thus, the extension of forgiveness from one individual to another takes place only insofar as the former can rightfully invite the transgressor to remain as a fellow citizen,¹⁰ demonstrating neither the unwarranted favor of

a paternal authority nor the pretense of an upstart servant and, thus, displaying the true equality of political peers.

We are left, then, to inquire into those kinds of relationships that ensure the identities of humans are formed and known and that these individuals, inasmuch as they have announced their identities, relate to one another within an egalitarian framework. The resulting political community – whatever else we may call it – will be shown, consequently, to be the proper “location” for freedom. Furthermore, should we be successful in this endeavor, we will also be able to see how this “space” for freedom, defined by the conditions for freedom’s emergence, is distinguished from and counteracts the effects of other categories of activity, such as consumerist society. In keeping with the suggestions of various contemporary scholars, I will suggest that “civil society” is an apt term for this community of free citizens.¹¹ Incidentally, modern political philosophy has presented the West with many diverging depictions of “civil society,” ranging from the governments of the social contract tradition based upon the security of individuals to Hegel’s amalgamation of corporations and law enforcement. Here, I will be utilizing the work of Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato in *Civil Society and Political Theory* to clarify my own concept. However, Cohen and Arato choose to include the nuclear family within their definition, a move I find inconsistent and deleterious in light of the effort to describe an intersubjective freedom of anti-consumerist character. Therefore, I will offer a brief criticism of Cohen and Arato’s work on this point, defending the unique relationship between political citizenship and the experience of freedom.

In order to properly define a realm of human activity – that is, in order to remain consistent with our discussion in Part II, Section I – we will have to posit a particular way

actions can be described in terms of their appearing purpose. Thus, in the attempt to develop “civil society” as a collective concept of those human interactions that are fundamentally free, a descriptive, purpose-oriented definition that takes into account the preceding discussion of promises and forgiveness must be formulated. This implies that, whatever else we might say, civil society consists of those words and deeds that, through their appearance, establish the identities of individuals, facilitating interaction amongst them that is befitting of equal citizens. Or, to put it differently, we could claim that the realm of civil society bounds human activity that, through its intersubjective appearance, works towards the connection of individuals in an egalitarian network, a community of individuals within which the participation of those individuals is viewed as inherently valuable. When using the term “civil society,” then, we must exclude all activities in which the actor is made to be a functional cog in a machine that monopolizes value, for identities cannot be formed if individuals are not given the opportunity to announce themselves as independent, irreplaceable selves within a community of other such selves.

Consequently, given the consumerist character of most contemporary economic institutions, one must sharply distinguish civil society from profit-oriented firms. To the extent that profit is viewed as the overarching end for a particular organization, members of that organization are (as previously demonstrated) reduced to merely functional components. Additionally, insofar as “economic” refers to efforts directed towards the satisfaction of private needs and desires, in keeping with its etymological root,¹² we must exclude the whole of “economics” from civil society, for acts that are primarily dedicated to the satiation of physical impulses are inherently distinct from the deeds of publicly identified citizens. Whenever we commit ourselves to alleviating the pangs of hunger or

the drowsiness of sleep deprivation we are constraining ourselves, at the same time, to the anonymous and functional nature of biological cycles, acting in ways wholly incompatible with the political interactions of freedom.

This is very much in keeping with the thoughts of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose observations of the “spirit of association” in America led him to conclude that such civil activity was inherently linked to the health of a democracy.¹³ He found that individuals who were consistently active in the “public affairs” of their local community were required to “turn from the circle of their private interests and occasionally tear themselves away from self-absorption.”¹⁴ Linking de Tocqueville’s 19th-century conclusions with contemporary political theory, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato have constructed the following definition of civil society: “a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication.”¹⁵ For Cohen and Arato, this means that the discursive, egalitarian, and pluralistic components of human activity are primary in any discussion of civil society. In so doing, they draw upon the work of Jürgen Habermas and distinguish themselves from the social contract tradition and classical liberalism, moving away from the all-too-common presumption in modern political theory that the atomic individual is fundamental in the analysis of political phenomena.¹⁶ However, rejecting the naturally isolated individual of classical liberalism does not necessarily mean that the notion of persons as individuals disappears. Rather, as I have been suggesting and as Cohen and Arato imply with their emphasis on political pluralism, the description of a community-oriented context within which persons form individual identities through their interactions preserves the possibility

of individuality while still elevating the importance of intersubjective appearance as a condition for politics.

That being said, there are some problematic inconsistencies that arise within Cohen and Arato's "operational definition" of civil society that need to be examined and carefully distinguished from my own claims. First, I struggle to understand why the "intimate sphere," composed primarily of the nuclear family, is included as a vital part of a realm which, above all else, is supposed to be egalitarian and pluralistic. Insofar as both equality and pluralism refer to the development of public identities by citizens who are granted equal access and participatory import within a given polity, the prospect of exposing the members of a family to such public scrutiny from each other seems as destructive as it is absurd. To be sure, Cohen and Arato would not necessarily accept my use of the concept "public identity" as a necessary condition for civil interaction, but in order to remain consistent with our careful definitions of equality and plurality, we must continue to regard the formation of identities with others as an inherent component of political activity. And, while a careful discussion of the purpose and functioning of a nuclear family cannot be included here, I will suggest that, at the very least, the family works towards the security and physico-emotional well-being of its members. This implies the following crucial point: The family functions as a single unit, with all members serving functional (but not necessarily degrading) roles within its auspices. Familial love might maintain that each member is inherently valuable, thus avoiding the exploitive and patriarchal conditions that have emerged within family structures throughout human history, but the possibility of individual identity and equality is negated by the surpassing effort to secure and satisfy physical needs. Should persons within a family decide to form public identities through

their interactions with one another, we might say that they must suspend their existence as a family and create amongst themselves a political community, pushing aside their prior focus on each others' physical safety and physico-emotional welfare.

For similar reasons, I find Cohen and Arato's depiction of mutual exchange between economic and civil society also unacceptable. For them, civil society serves as a mediator between the economy and state, meaning that it could somehow, in its effort to establish pluralistic and community-oriented activities amongst citizens, also take into account the common effort to produce goods, primarily those which are consumable. In their words, "the principles of civil society can be brought to bear on economic institutions within what we call economic society."¹⁷ Yet, in light of the various conclusions drawn thus far concerning the incompatibility of freedom with need-based activity and the apolitical, functional roles that accompany it, I am at a loss to explain how it is that the "principles" of civil society – such as pluralism and equality – could be incorporated with economic activity. This is not to say that economic activity is necessarily degrading, though our consumerist context presents innumerable examples that seemingly serve as substantial evidence for such a claim, but rather, my point is simply this: if we wish to maintain a notion of civil society that is grounded in the appearance of citizens through their public identities, and if civil society promotes the experience of freedom through pluralistic and egalitarian speech and action, then we cannot, at the same time, claim that the core tenets of this kind of human activity can be "brought to bear" on economics. We must insist on the unique role of civil interaction, lest we give sway to the already-dominant tendency to view human action in economic and/or consumerist terms.

II

- INCORPORATING CIVIL SOCIETY into ARENDT'S FRAMEWORK -

The complexity and variegated nature of Arendt's political writings makes it difficult, at first attempt, to understand how a concept that appears foreign to her writings – civil society – can be included as a vital component of her political theory. Yet, it is on the demonstration of this claim that the entirety of my project hinges, and so, in the following paragraphs, I will first respond to naysayers such as Cohen and Arato who interpret Arendt's critique of the social realm as an outright admonition of all things social, including civil society and, in doing so, equivocate between her definition of the social realm and their own elucidation of civil society. Next, I will utilize Arendt's work in *On Revolution* to differentiate her great appreciation, both practical and theoretical, for local, "social" forms of political engagement from her strong opposition to the social realm as an anti-political form of activity, basing this distinction in my construal of her conception of freedom. We should not make the mistake of assuming that civil society, as a localized, accessible mode of polity-formation, is by its nature "social" in Arendt's sense of the term; neither should we hastily conclude that there is nothing "social," as the word is used in colloquial discourse, about Arendt's ideal of politics and freedom. Thus, I will conclude by depicting what I take to be an Arendtian civil society, purposed not only towards the establishment of freedom but also towards its restoration in an increasingly consumerist, depoliticizing culture such as ours.

The thesis that a Tocquevillian conceptualization of civil society ought to be included within Arendt's political theory is an ambitious one; a seemingly foolhardy argument in light of her unswerving criticism of the social realm in the modern age. Cohen and Arato, for example, suggest that Arendt presents "one of the most challenging, and

certainly the most passionate, critiques of modern civil society.”¹⁸ They find an insurmountable opposition between her negative portrayal of contemporary society as an in-between realm of publicly announced private interests and their own analysis of civil society as a mediating space of community-oriented action between the economic and public spheres. Furthermore, they claim that Arendt’s understanding of politics is limited to a “historically specific and unique constellation: the ancient city republic,” and, as such, maintains the “prejudices of the Greeks.”¹⁹ Therefore, they conclude that Arendt’s political theory is essentially anachronistic, unable to achieve relevance in the modern age due to its exclusion of modern forms of organization, including so-called “social movements.” Even Arendt’s acknowledgement of the political import of the mid-19th to mid-20th century labor movements is dismissed by Cohen and Arato as insular, for they find her discussion on this point to imply that these political events had no “social and economic interests and demands.” It is, for them, an “entirely fictitious” retelling of the labor movements’ story.²⁰

While initially compelling, Cohen and Arato’s critical application of Arendt’s theory to their concept of civil society is fundamentally mistaken, primarily because they confuse Arendt’s subtle, yet carefully bounded, definition of the social realm with vernacular uses of the term “society.” Certainly, Arendt describes the “social realm” as essentially anti-political in character and incapable of fostering freedom, and her reasons for doing so were explained at length in Part II. There is, however, no justification for making the further claim that, since Arendt is critical of the implications of the “social realm” insofar as it is a central concept in her political thought, she also must be critical of civil society as a localized form of political interaction. Unless Cohen and Arato are willing to admit that their construal of civil society is compatible with the conformist and

economic character of Arendt's social realm, which I highly doubt, they have no basis for arguing that there exists here an opposition between Arendt's political theory and their definition of civil society. Their interpretation of Arendt's writings is further handicapped by the strict, literal manner in which they connect her thought with the "historically specific" political body which emerged in ancient Athens. Having already addressed this point in Part I, I will refer to Roy Tsao's insights again only briefly, summarizing them as follows: Arendt's treatment of Greek politics is purely instrumental, helping her to formulate her concepts of citizenship, freedom, and political action but leaving her theory itself unattached from the particular institutions which made up the Athenian *polis*. Thus, Arendt is in no way sympathetic towards Greek "prejudices," contrary to Cohen and Arato's claims, especially those that encouraged discrimination against women and the pretentious avoidance of *oikos* affairs.²¹

Finally, Cohen and Arato's dismissal of Arendt's discussion of the worker's movement is unfair and misleading, supporting their overall depiction of Arendt's theory as outmoded, irrelevant, and exclusive of civil society. Arendt does not pretend as though labor unions had no social and/or economic interests, and she finds them politically significant not because she abstracted them from their socio-economic context but rather because they represented to her an actual case in which individuals, on behalf of the injustice and inequality they faced as underprivileged jobholders, organized as citizens, making their economic activity "incidental" to their political action.²² What we find, then, is that Arendt's political writings, far from being anachronistic, are surprisingly prescient, for they are explicitly open to diverse forms of genuine political action, even those which are labeled "social" by many.

We must clearly distinguish, then, those forms of political interaction that are commonly termed “social” because of their localized, accessible, and communal character from the anti-political activities of Arendt’s “social realm” so we can understand how it is that her theory is inclusive of civil society. There is an unmistakable difference between the description of deeds that are public (i.e. publicly appearing) reflections of the “two-part functionality” of the household,²³ either through their economic usefulness and/or their conformity to society’s norms, and an account of the formation of polities rooted in local communities and the challenges faced by members of those communities. “Social” in the former sense is certainly anti-political and not only incapable of facilitating but also hostile towards the experience of freedom, and it is justifiably criticized as such by Arendt. However, if we accept that the latter mode of human activity is also social, not according to Arendt’s particular definition of the term, but because of the relative closeness and familiarity of its personalities, issues, and realm of influence in relation to its members, then we are well on our way towards understanding the necessarily social character of Arendtian politics.

Consider the following example, given by Arendt in a 1946 letter to Karl Jaspers, of what she considered to be an authentic example of political action:

“[An American family in New England] and many of their friends wrote immediately and *spontaneously* to their congressmen, insisted on the constitutional rights of all Americans regardless of national background, and declared that if something like [the Japanese internment camps] could happen, they no longer felt safe themselves.”²⁴

This nostalgically simple yet powerful act of political concern is contrasted by Arendt, with regrettable irony, to the “social” oppression of African Americans via the norms and legal institutions that reduced them to something less than the level of humanity Whites

thought themselves worthy to enjoy.²⁵ The crucial point, for us, is this: Arendt herself was well aware of the distinction between the destructive and anti-political nature of the “social realm” and the ways in which community-oriented, “sociable” polities act as loci of freedom. The sociability of the “American family in New England” towards their friends was a vital component of their ability to gather them together and jointly write letters to their legislative representatives. Without such hospitality the persons involved likely would have been reluctant to engage in the sort of political discourse and action necessary to achieve the task at hand. Thus, the “social” character of civil society – that is, those aspects that contribute toward an accessible and welcoming environment – provides the relational safety-net necessary for many persons to become willing to form public identities with others. Without this reassurance of locality and hospitality, the vast majority of individuals simply would not have access to a forum within which they could discover their potential for citizenship. And, once the process of creating public identities is initiated, it follows that the interactions of individuals will begin exhibiting an authentic, shared experience of freedom.

This argument is substantially bolstered by Arendt’s discussion of Thomas Jefferson’s notion of “little republics” – a ward system, within which “‘every man in the State’ could become ‘an acting member of the Common government.’”²⁶ Arendt finds that, in light of the recent concentration of governmental power in impersonal bureaucratic structures and elite state institutions, this notion of localized forms of political activity represents the sole possibility of freedom for most individuals in the modern world. In pre-Revolutionary America, the existence of townships, within which citizens would meet as members of localities, provided a model for Jefferson’s vision of a subdivided republic.

Arendt suggests that Jefferson, understanding the implications of institutionalizing legal authority in a strong, federal government, feared the widespread disengagement of citizens and thus proposed his scheme of “little republics” to serve the purpose of making the public space of America “present” to each citizen. Thus, here we see Arendt explicitly linking the concept of accessibility with her formulation of freedom as a public reality; in agreement with Jefferson’s assessment of America, she claims that “no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom ... no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power.”²⁷ She draws parallel conclusions concerning the role of council systems in revolutionary Europe, which “obviously, were spaces of freedom”²⁸ insofar as they presented individuals with the opportunity to meet with one another at a local level and on behalf of jointly-determined public interests.

Implicit to Arendt’s analysis of localized, accessible forms of politics is her belief (stated later in *On Revolution*²⁹) that the development of freedom demands equal accessibility to political assemblies, a claim also congruent with our previous consideration of the implications of intersubjective freedom. For Arendt, if a polity is to establish interactions worthy of the label “freedom” amongst its citizens, it necessarily must not be the case that some citizens are afforded a lion’s share of public interaction while others are left without any opportunities for political appearance. This requires, accordingly, that individuals be presented with the opportunity to meet with one another as citizens at a local level; otherwise, politics is quarantined to institutions designated for participation by an elite alone. If political interaction is isolated to such forums that are accessible only to a privileged few, to those who are deemed politicians or statesmen because they are able

and/or have been chosen to relocate themselves and devote their time to public business, then the experience of freedom is isolated to these individuals' interactions and, eventually, entirely disappears.

That is to say, by reducing the number of individuals who engage in public affairs to a select few representatives, and by expecting these individuals to act not only as citizens but also as the collective voice of their respective constituencies, we leave these public officials with an irresolvable dilemma: they must either 1) discover their own unique and individual public identity and, in doing so, likely disregard the opinions of those who sent them, or 2) continually attempt to give voice to the concerns and interests of their constituency and, in making this commitment, never fully pursue the discovery of their own identity. In the former case, freedom is generated amongst so-called "representatives" but only if these individuals are willing to sacrifice their duty to represent the desires of those to whom they promised (at least implicitly) such representation. Yet, should this duty be maintained fully, as in the latter option, neither representatives nor the members of their constituencies are capable of forming public identities and, therefore, freedom becomes a façade for the negotiations that take place between members of the political elite. Though these individuals seem to be engaging in the sorts of activities compatible with the experience of freedom, they are never directing their words and deeds towards the articulation of their unique, appearing personalities. Instead, they simply are bringing forth whatever issues are deemed necessary to sustain the support of those who legitimize their political participation. "The trouble, in other words, is that politics has become a profession and a career," a problem which stems from "the lack of public spaces to which the people at large would have entrance."³⁰

Civil society, then, is not merely a more friendly approach to politics, but is itself a necessary component in the effort to preserve Arendtian freedom for both citizens “at large” in a modern democracy and their elected representatives. By expanding the reach of public assemblies through the formation of “social” associations that act on behalf of locally-determined issues and efforts, freedom is made real both to the vast majority of individuals through their voluntary participation in such civil-social organizations and to elected members of government, who are then relieved of the impossible burden of embodying the totality of political voices within their respective constituencies. By allowing for public space to emerge between persons acting in concert, through activities as simple as writing letters to members of Congress and in venues as “social” as one’s own home, we acknowledge that the formation of public identities is a real possibility for all individuals. Accordingly, we recognize that the experience of freedom is an ever-present reality, should persons choose to partake in it. So long as the purpose of a public gathering is directed towards the identification of each of its members through their speaking and acting on behalf of their community, the realization of freedom is immanent.

From here, furthermore, we can see how an Arendtian civil society, through its fulfillment of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the making of promises and the offering of forgiveness, counteracts the devastating effects of consumerism. The experience of freedom depends upon the willingness of political actors to promise to one another that they will, in all future endeavors, remain consistent with their appearing identity and to forgive by inviting one another to remain co-citizens even when the consistency implied by their promises is compromised. Civil society facilitates freedom, then, through its widespread accessibility and emphasis on pluralistic equality, making it

possible for individuals to know each other in such a way that they can make promises and extend forgiveness. That is to say, civil society creates a public network that is available and stable enough for the sustenance of freedom. And, if we accept that the uniquely destructive aspect of consumerist society is that, through its natural spread into all arenas of human life, it seeks to turn all human activity into purely functional deeds, transforming humans into anonymous functionaries for its continual advance, then the remedy offered by civil society is found in those very same characteristics deemed to represent the possibility for promises and forgiveness. For, by demanding that individuals form identities through their public appearance to one another and requiring that these individual appearances be viewed as equally and inherently significant, it is as though we forcefully wedge a steel rod in-between the smoothly spinning gears of consumerism's mechanical growth. We abruptly wake the members of consumerist society out of their functional stupor and present them with the possibility for a meaningful, freeing existence. Thus, consumerism cannot gain influence wherever individuals act as genuine citizens, for members of a polity whom are known by one another and treated with equal respect are necessarily liberated from functional degradation and, as a result, free to jointly create and sustain their polity.

This, then, is the promise of civil society for our day and age: that through the deliberate creation of polities amongst ourselves, at a local, accessible, and "social" level, we will discover a mode of activity which will remove us from the functionality and expendability inherent to consumerism's expansion. We will be enabled to identify one another as equals, co-citizens with whom we can discover and experience genuine freedom. Should we view Arendt's work in light of this concept of civil society, we will

see, in my estimation, a coherent and relevant interpretation of her understanding of the relationship between political action and freedom, one that is increasingly significant within our socio-political context.³¹ She discerned vital connections between the unique way of life developed in the *polis* of ancient Athenians, the “public happiness” enjoyed by politically-active individuals in pre-Revolutionary America, and the “spaces of freedom” created by the European revolutionary councils, encapsulating their significance with the term *freedom*. My sincere hope, then, is that we will carry her work even further by conceptualizing civil society as the bearer of freedom’s torch in our context, recognizing that it carries within itself the promise for meaningful living that is naturally, and justifiably, attributed to humanity’s capacity to be free.

¹ See Part II, Section I.

² Here, I reference the quote given in Part II, Section I: “In the realm of human affairs, being and appearance are indeed one and the same.” Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 88.

³ This is taken from the definition I proposed in Part I, Section II.

⁴ See Part I, Section III.

⁵ Ibid: Public identity is defined as “the personality we learn to embody in our public relations with others, based upon the expectations which result from speaking and acting with them.”

⁶ James Mensch, “Public Space,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2007):31-47. P. 38: “[In promising] you affirm that you will be the person who will play the promised part in a given affair. Since this commitment is public, it inherently involves others.”

⁷ “Without being bound to the fulfillment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man’s lonely heart.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 237.

⁸ Ibid., p. 241.

⁹ Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 240.

¹¹ For example, Richard J. Bernstein suggests that one could “rehabilitate a concept of civil society that is not formed in the image of classical liberalism” in order to “reclaim the type of politics that was at the center of Arendt’s vision.” See Bernstein, “Rethinking the Social and the Political,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 11:1 (1986) 111-130. P. 127. Along the same lines, James Mensch claims that “civil society is the result of [the making of public promises].” Within it, “the disclosed presence of the social space is...multiply determined by [a plurality of] projects.” See Mensch, “Public Space,” p. 44.

¹² I refer here to the Greek word *oikos*, which described the realm of household affairs defined primarily by its physically necessitated character.

¹³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. New York: Penguin Books (2003). In his introduction to the book, Isaac Kramnik states: “[Tocqueville notes that] the enthusiastic involvement of Americans in private associations and local self-government not only checks abuse of power but also helps overcome the excessive individualism of Americans. Both activities take Americans outside of themselves, drawing them away from a preoccupation with private interests and turning them to shared common needs and sympathy for others.” P. XXXI.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 592.

¹⁵ Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge: The MIT Press (1994). P. IX. Additionally, Cohen and Arato are very explicit about their use of Tocqueville's work in constructing such a definition: "...we build upon the thesis of one of the most important predecessors of the pluralist approach, Alexis de Tocqueville, who argued that without *active* participation on the part of citizens in *egalitarian* institutions and civil associations....there will be no way to maintain the democratic character of the political culture of social and political institutions." P. 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 179.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

²¹ Roy Tsao, "Arendt against Athens: Rereading the Human Condition." *Political Theory* 30:1 (2002).

²² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 219. Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to examine the intricacies of Arendt's view of political rights and her critical analysis of the modern fervor for universal human rights, both of which are necessarily involved in any discussion of her perspective on social movements. However, if one wishes to begin such an analysis, I would suggest as an excellent starting point Peg Birmingham's recent article, "The An-Archic Event of Natality and the 'Right to Have Rights.'" *Social Research* 74:3 (2007): 763-776.

²³ See Part II, Section II.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, “The Infinitely Complex Red-Tape Existence,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Books (2000). P. 27.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin Books (1977). P. 245.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 247.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 267.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 269.

³¹ Ibid., p. 271: Here, Arendt claims that a system of localized councils would be “the best instruments, for example, for breaking up the modern mass society, with its dangerous tendency toward the formation of pseudo-political mass movements, or rather, the best, the most natural way for interspersing it at the grass roots with an ‘elite’ that is chosen by no one but constitutes itself.”