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Notes for a Materialist Analysis of the Public and the Private Realms

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I TAKE AS THE TEXT for my reflections today Hannah Arendt's well known essay on "The Public and the Private Realm" in *The Human Condition*. Arendt's thesis, you will recall, is that the ancient and necessary distinction between the public and the private, successfully and fruitfully sustained in classical Athenian life and thought, has been undermined and all but destroyed by the rise of the social, which substitutes behavior for activity and thereby makes a genuine politics impossible. Arendt sees Karl Marx as the central chronicler and celebrator of the tendencies she deplores. I think that Arendt's approach to this subject is fundamentally misguided, and though my remarks will not rise to the level of a coherent focussed argument, for I do not see my subject clearly enough for that, I hope that you will find them of value, and that by their means I can contribute to the remembering and honoring of Hannah Arendt.

Some literary critical observations, by way of a beginning*

The world of a novel or romance is brought into existence by the storyteller's words and has its existence only in and through those words. It would not be quite correct to say that the world is created by the storyteller's words, for that would suggest that once created, it

*My discussion of the nature of a fictional world is taken from Cynthia Griffin Wolff, who is, to the best of my knowledge, the first critic to analyse the ontological status of fictional worlds in this way.

could continue to exist after the words had died away. The truth is that a fictional world exists in and is constituted by the words of the fiction. Only what the novelist calls into existence by his or her words exists in that fictional world, and it exists only *as* it is thereby conjured up.

Because a fictional world exists through the narration of the fiction of which it is the world, two things are true of it. First, a fictional world *exists from a point of view*, the point of view namely of the author of the fiction. When I say that fictional worlds exist from a point of view, I do not mean simply that they embody a certain attitude toward life, although that is true and significant, as we shall see. Rather, I mean quite literally that fictional worlds are inherently, or essentially, perspectival. Their ontological status is such that they are spatially and temporally anisotropic. There is a privileged or distinguished place in the world—that of the narrator of the fiction, or, in more complex fictions, that of the author—from which the events and objects of the fiction occur or exist. In this way, fictional worlds are ontologically distinguishable from the real world, for the real world is ontically prior to the various perspectives or standpoints from which narrative accounts of it can be composed. From this ontological asymmetry there follows an epistemological asymmetry: the perspective of the author is necessarily the correct perspective from which to apprehend the fictional world. When I read an historical account of the Terror, it makes perfectly good methodological sense to ask whether I can achieve a better knowledge of the events by adopting a narrative standpoint other than that of the account. It even makes sense to ask whether I can retell the very account itself from a different perspective, and thereby achieve a deeper insight than the author of the account himself or herself was able to achieve. But it would be a thorough-going confusion to ask whether I could achieve a deeper insight into the fictional world of *A Tale of Two Cities* by supplementing the narrative with Donald Greer's statistical analysis of the incidence of the Terror.

The space and time of a fictional world obey rules decreed by the author. In *Bleak House,* for example, events take place in locales of a fictional London which fluctuate in their distance from one another throughout the novel. The changing spatial relationships are a metaphor for shifting moral relationships, and space thus carries a *meaning* which is objectively inherent in the fictional world.

The second peculiarity of fictional worlds is that because fictions are constituted by, and exist through, language, the idiosyncratic connotations of the heightened language of the fiction—connotations that distinguish one author from another and serve, in part, to define the literary style of that author—become constituent features of the fictional

world itself. Certain words, phrases, syntactical constructions, or tropes have a significance for the author which is thereby embedded in the fictional world. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy makes his aristocratic characters speak French when they encounter one another in polite society. This stylistic maneuver carries a freight of meaning—the contrast between the westernized aristocrats and the peasants springing autochthonously from the soil of Mother Russia, the inner division of convention from native sentiment, and so forth. In the real world of Napoleonic Russia, the habitual use of French as a language of aristocratic conversation might or might not in any particular instance have these significances, but in the fictional world of *War and Peace* it *must* have this meaning, for Tolstoy has constituted his world thus.

The real world can be construed as inherently perspectival or fraught with meaning only insofar as we conceive it in religious terms to be the object of a continuous divine creating. Thus understood, space becomes the field on which God's story unfolds, and time takes on the anisotropic structure of a narrative, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. A fictional world can be in and of itself metaphorical, some things objectively standing for others, so long as the author has constituted it in that way. But in the real world, the moon's reflection of light from the sun does not *of itself* refer to the relationship between lover and beloved, or pope and emperor, unless God tells the story of the world in that way.

A divinely created world is indeed inherently perspectival. Heavenly bodies, men and women, kings and nations, exist from God's point of view. They exist in order to exemplify or fulfill God's purposes. They have an objective *telos*. Certain words—sin, faith, grace, salvation—have objectively heightened meanings, corresponding to the shape and meaning of certain decisive events in the fictional world of the divine Narrator—the creation, the fall, the exodus, the covenant, the incarnation, and so forth.

Once we decisively give up the fantasies of religion and acknowledge the unmysteriousness of the world, we must put behind us as well the notion of a narrative shape to history and nature. There will be no objective metaphors—no childhood, adolescence, and maturity of civilization. Nor will there be places and times rich with objective meaning, pivotal places on which the human story turns. There will simply be time, and space, and the seamless flow of events. In particular, we shall have to give up the fantasy of classical Greece, which substitutes, in the sophisticated adult mental lives of many richly cultivated European and American intellectuals, for the never-never land of "once upon a time" fairy tales.

Hannah Arendt, like so many learned thinkers of the western tradition, construes the past two millennia of the cultural and political history of the European peninsula of the Eurasian continent as having the structure of a fictional world. Her narrative perspective is that of a cultivated and alienated member of the continental upper middle classes, and the dominant tonality is nostalgia for the lost glories of Classical Athens. That time and place occupy a privileged position in the perspectival fiction conjured by Arendt, and their invocation consequently carries a moral and aesthetic weight in her discourse utterly incompatible with the ontological status of the historical actuality. A cluster of small agricultural and trading communities in the eastern Mediterranean is accorded the same heightened resonance and pendulosity (to use Auerbach's lovely word) that other communicants in other frames of mind have imputed to Calvary, or to Mecca, or to the Paris of the 1790's, or to St. Petersburg in October, 1917, or to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787.

This is not to suggest that Arendt's account of classical Greece is factually inaccurate, any more than to suggest that Tolstoy has misrepresented the Napoleonic Wars. An historical novel written with meticulous attention to the latest historical scholarship is no less a fiction for all the learning of its author. In the real world, we can be nostalgic for ancient Athens, just as we can be nostalgic for medieval Paris, or for the court of Genghis Khan, or for Hoboken in the 1940's. But only in a fictional world can a place and time be in and of themselves objectively nostalgic.

Because Arendt writes from within a fictional world in which ancient Greece shines as the golden age toward which we longingly yearn, rather than from within the real world in which the affairs of fifth century B.C. Greece are merely one among many examples of human collective behavior—because she persistently confuses the two in her writings—it is nearly impossible to come to grips realistically and objectively with her theses. The richness of her learning and the depth of her philosophical penetration merely complicate the task, for she intertwines the real world and the fictional in a manner difficult to dissect.

It is characteristic of this way of approaching the analysis of western civilization (which, needless to say, is in no way peculiar to Arendt) that the etymologies of words are made to carry an enormous freight of meaning, as though by a logical reversal, the world itself were constituted by the words with which we describe it (a reversal, of course, that is literally true of fictional worlds). Consider, for example, the following extraordinarily effective and evocative "argument by etymology,"

as we might characterize it. Speaking of the household realm, which is the sphere of the private, Arendt says:

> Not the interior of this realm, which remains hidden and of no public significance, but its exterior appearance is important for the city as well, and it appears in the realm of the city through the boundaries between one household and the other. The law originally was identified with this boundary line [footnote: The Greek word for law, *nomos*, derives from *nemein*, which means to distribute, to possess (what has been distributed), and to dwell. The combination of law and hedge in the word *nomos* is quite manifest in a fragment of Heraclitus: *machesthai chre ton demon hyper tou nomou hokosper teichos* ("the people should fight for the law as for a wall"). The Roman word for law, *lex*, has an entirely different meaning; it indicates a formal relationship between people rather than the wall that separates them from others. But the boundary and its god, Terminus, who separated the *agrum publicum a privato* (Livius) was more highly revered than the corresponding *theoi horoi* in Greece.] which in ancient times was still actually a space, a kind of no-man's land [footnote: Coulanges reports an ancient Greek law according to which two buildings were never permitted to touch] between the private and the public, sheltering and protecting both realms while, at the same time, separating them from each other. The law of the *polis*, to be sure, transcended this ancient understanding from which, however, it retained its original spatial significance. The law of the city-state was neither the content of political action (the idea that political action is primarily legislating, though Roman in origin, is essentially modern and found its greatest expression in Kant's political philosophy) nor was it a catalogue of prohibitions, resting, as all modern laws still do, upon the Thou Shalt Nots of the Decalogue. It was quite literally a wall, without which there might have been an agglomeration of houses, a town (*asty*), but not a city, a political community. This wall-like city was sacred, but only the inclosure was political. [footnote: The word *polis* originally connoted something like "ring-wall," and it seems the Latin *urbs* also expressed the notion of a "circle" and was derived from the same root as *orbis*. We find the same connection in our word "town," which originally, like the German *Zaun*, meant a surrounding fence. See R. B. Onian, *The Origins of European Thought*, 1954, p. 444, n. 1] Without it a public realm could no more exist than a piece of property without a fence to hedge it in; the one harbored and inclosed political life as the other sheltered and protected the biological life process of the family. [The legislator therefore did not need to be a citizen and frequently was called in from the outside. His work was not political; political life, however, could begin only after he had finished his legislation.]

This is Arendt at her best, weaving together historical materials, etymological tracings, evocative tag-lines from ancient authors, all in the service of a dominant vision of modern western society as a disastrous falling-away from the antique city, with its clear demarcations of the private and the public realms embedded in law, in philosophy, in architecture, in religious ritual, even in the landscaping, and all serving to make possible a politics of rational discourse among equal participants in the public space.

The inhabitants of this antique city seem not, in Arendt's account, to be real people who enact roles and interact with one another in all the ambiguous, complex, mechanic ways that characterize human life everywhere. A permanent rosy glow tinges the lineaments of the portrayal of this happy place and time, where true political discourse flourished in public places, and the sacred rituals, language, geography, and art reinforced one another to constitute and sustain an aesthetic/intellectual whole of great beauty, power, and profundity. It is all powerfully affecting, and thoroughly unreal. It is a literary construction, existing from the perspective of a modern narrator, imbued with the nostalgic longing of its author, or indeed many authors, and quite unlike the actual day-to-day existence of real people.

Contrast this with Arendt's characterization of modern society.

> The emergence of society—the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems and organizational devices—from the shadowy interior of the household and into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old border line between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen. Not only would we not agree with the Greeks that a life spent in the privacy of "one's own" (*idion*), outside the world of the common, is "idiotic" by definition, or with the Romans to whom privacy offered but a temporary refuge from the business of the *res publica*; we call private today a sphere of intimacy whose beginnings we may be able to trace back to late Roman, though hardly to any period of Greek antiquity, but whose peculiar manifoldness and variety were certainly unknown to any period prior to the modern age.
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> It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, 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, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.

(and finally): behavior has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship.

What are we in fact to make of this extraordinary claim that behavior has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship? Arendt does not say, at least in the essay we are discussing, but by action she presumably means autonomous, rationally guided deliberation and choice, what Kant would characterize as the agency of a noumenal being. Behavior, by contrast, consists of phenomenally determined events in space and time, subsumable under descriptive laws and explainable by inclusion in a temporal sequence of empirical causes.

Does it make the slightest sense to claim that in the good old days, men acted, whereas now they only behave? Certainly not according to Kant, who argued that every bit of human behavior must at one and the same time be understood as the appearance of rational agency. If Arendt merely means to lament that there were intellectual giants in the earth in those days, then we may enjoy her dirge, but can scarcely treat it as a scientific diagnosis of the modern age. Are we to imagine that the political maneuverings of Charlemagne, Henry the Eighth of England, Robespierre, Lenin, or the members of the United States Congress are *behavior*, but that when Athenians encountered one another in the marketplace, their gossip, their political deals, their musings about public affairs took on the elevated metaphysical status of action? This is romance, an intellectual version of Hemingway's adolescent fantasy that when the hero and heroine of *For Whom The Bell Tolls* make love, the earth moves.

Any useful distinction between action and behavior must be grounded in an objective analysis of human nature and development, not in an essentially literary tradition that identifies certain places and times as having special weight or valence, and that orients us toward those places and times in a nostalgic, or elegaic, or celebratory mood. This injunction, let me say, holds with equal force against those romantic political thinkers whose orientation is forward, to a future event called "the revolution," which is invested with a heightened significance that can be rationalized only in a fiction or in a divinely created world. The invocation of "the revolution" rests on the same fatal misconceptions as the invocation of classical Greece.

The Genetic Undetermination of Human Personality

The normal growth and development of even the higher mammals proceeds according to genetically determined pathways which fully de-

termine the nature of the mature individual instance of the species. The young may need adults of the species in order to complete their growth to maturity—to teach them how to hunt, perhaps—but within a given species, the process of normal maturation is everywhere the same. Consequently, although one can observe variations among adult wolves, or apes, or dogs, these variations do not constitute culture. Hence, we cannot meaningfully speak of the cultural component in the development, or life-cycle, of any of the animal species. A wofl, left to grow to maturity in the wild, grows up to be a healthy, normally functioning adult wolf; a bear, left alone to grow to maturity, grows up to be a healthy, functioning, adult bear.

Human beings, however, are different. Our genetic inheritance radically underdetermines our healthy, normal growth. A human child, deprived of the interactions, relationships, experiences, constraints, introjections, and meanings that we call culture, grows up to be a subnormal, unhealthy, dysfunctional animal.

In his writings, Erik Erikson gives us an account of the complex patterns and processes by which a mature, functional ego develops in the growing child. Leaving to one side the details of Erikson's theory of the emergence of a coherent personality through the staged development of libidinally activated bodily zones, what is clear in his theory, and in virtually all other modern accounts of personality development as well, is the central and essential role played in the development of a healthy ego by the human culture and society in which the infant grows up.

The language, bodily styles, emotional interactions, roles, expectations, prohibitions, and enticements by which the plastic libidinal energy of the infant is shaped into a focussed personality play an essential role in the development of the ego. They must not be thought of as supererogatory additions, available perhaps only to advantaged babies from culturally rich upper-middle-class families. Nor must they be thought of as corrupting and perverting intrusions into the normal, autarchic growth processes of the natural human being. Jean-Jacques Rousseau has done us all a great disservice by making so entrancingly plausible the absurd notion that the healthy child, preserved by an appropriate pastoral environment from the corruptions of civilization, will grow naturally and spontaneously into a vivacious, moral, active, appealing Frenchman. Rousseau's modern disciples, such as the poet, philosopher, and social critic Paul Goodman, have substituted formal education for city life as the corrupter of natural innocence, but their mistake is as great as Rousseau's. Culture is an essential element in the formation of a healthy, coherent ego. In speaking of culture, needless to say, I am referring to the totality of patterns of meaning-laden

interaction, ritual, body style, religion, technology, kinship relations, and productive activities which form the subject matter of cultural anthropology. I am not speaking of the "high culture," so-called, of our or any other society. Indeed, I am referring to what Arendt disparagingly calls *the social*, but which she construes as having arisen in western history at a specific relatively recent time, rather than as forming an indispensable component of all distinctively human life.

Erikson's analytic models and also his detailed accounts of the child-rearing patterns of a number of western and non-western societies show how our genetic inheritance places limits or constraints on what sorts of experiences and interactions can serve as the developmental matrix for the emergence of a healthy ego. But these limits so radically underdetermine healthy growth that a wide variety of very different cultural patterns seem equally well to complete the determining structure of personality development. Despite Erikson's own efforts, in *Gandhi's Truth* and elsewhere, to extract substantive moral conclusions from his clinical explorations of healthy and pathological child development, no sound conclusions can be drawn about the relative superiority of one culture over others merely from a consideration of the objective determinants and requirements of healthy human growth. We can conclude that the social is an essential precondition for the formation of adult personalities having the characteristic coherence, organization, and functioning that we recognize as human; but that no society and culture is, in *this* regard, superior to any other.

The implications for our present topic are reasonably straightforward, I think. It is a fantasy to suppose that in the heady youth of western civilization, autonomous individuals flourished who were capable of a form of agency metaphysically distinct from the debased behavior to which we have latterly sunk; that we are now victims and products of the social, of behavior that is habitual, banausic, vulgar. "It is decisive," Arendt says, "that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, 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, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement." But society always and everywhere imposes innumerable and various rules which tend to normalize its members. Indeed, as we have just seen, in the absence of some such network of rules, patterns, habitual expectations, traditions, and social norms, we would have not spontaneous action or outstanding achievement, but pathology of the most elemental and inchoate sort—not even interestingly twisted human beings, like Iago or Smerdyakov or Lady Macbeth,

but institutional cases with malformed egos, lacking affect or focussed rationality.

Material Reproduction and Social Reproduction

"Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or by anything else you like," Marx writes in one of the best known passages of the early writings. "They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life" (*German Ideology*). I take this insight to be not only fundamental to Marx's entire theoretical enterprise but also true, and fundamental to any attempt to understand the human condition.

The central concept of a science of society is not strictly *production* but *reproduction*, for the finite, temporal character of human existence dictates that the conditions of that existence be endlessly re-produced through time. The central analytical feature of reproduction, as opposed merely to production, is that the product or output of one cycle of production becomes the material or input for the next cycle. In this way, a circular flow of inputs and outputs is endlessly established and reestablished, forming the context and basis of human existence.

There are three species or modes of reproduction, inseparably intertwined with one another in actuality, but distinguishable for purposes of theoretical analysis. The first mode of reproduction is material reproduction, the subject of the political economy which formed the central activity of Marx's mature years. In the process of material reproduction, the coal, iron, linen, and corn which emerge from this cycle of production serve as the material inputs into the next cycle. Out of this conception of material reproduction emerges the concept of a physical surplus, the distribution and employment of which is thus the focus of theoretical investigation and practical decision. By contrast with neoclassical marginalist political economy, with its emphasis on the problem of efficient allocation of scarce resources, the classical political economy culminating in Marx's *Capital* takes as its two central issues the distribution of the social surplus and the conditions of economic growth. The concept of reproduction serves to concentrate attention on the class conflicts which dominate the processes of distribution and the internal systemic contradictions which impede or entirely frustrate the growth of the annual product.

The second mode of reproduction is human reproduction, by which I mean both the replacement of the old generation of men and women

with the new, and also the daily replenishing of human capacities and energies which are depleted by laboring and which must be recreated in order for the processes of material reproduction to go forward. Human reproduction has the same cyclical structure as material reproduction, for today's children are tomorrow's parents. The inclusion of human reproduction within the circle of material reproduction, by means of the analytical concept of the subsistence wage as the natural price of labor-power determined by the cost of its reproduction, is one of the major theoretical achievements of classical political economy.

Finally, because human nature is, as we saw, radically underdetermined by its genetic material base, and because human beings are therefore social and historical beings, we must complete the analysis of reproduction with the concept of social or historical reproduction. By social reproduction I mean the unending recreation of society itself as a largely unintended collective human product, and also as the historical transformation and transmission of culture. This social reproduction is carried out in and through language, kinship relationships, patterns of interpersonal interactions, customary and explicit practices of child-rearing, religion, mores, laws—and also, as we shall shortly wish to emphasize, through the reproduction of the social relationships of material reproduction.

Because of the underdetermination of human personality, the process of social reproduction is not an activity carried out by independently completed human beings who transmit an external and supererogatory culture from generation to generation. The social which is reproduced is constitutive of human being. It completes and specifies the matrix of determinable, but indeterminate potentiality grounded in the physical nature of the human species. History is thus not a story told by a narrator who has his or her being separately from the tale. In this sense, Louis Althusser is quite correct that there is no *subject* of history, meaning by that, I take it, that there is no narrator whose tale history is.

Since this notion of the social constitution of human being is central to such conclusions as I shall try to draw concerning the distinction between the public and private realms, let me take a few moments to try to clarify it a bit. There is a familiar methodological presupposition underlying a good deal of the political theory, economic theory, and moral philosophy of the past several centuries, according to which the ontological structure of desire, deliberation, choice, and action is prior to and independent of the social context of these purposive activities. Both Kant and Bentham, for example, despite their dramatic opposition on

so many fundamental issues of moral philosophy, suppose that the structures of goal-identification, goal-orientation, rational deliberation, choice, and implementation of choice in action, can be analyzed independently of the particular material context in which they occur. The utilitarians sometimes write as though the new-born infant, to put the matter facetiously, differs from the mature adult only in being thoroughgoingly ignorant and as yet not in control of its voluntary nervous system. Not merely the content of desire, but also and more importantly the structure of desire, is treated as given exogenously. The infant's problem is then construed as three-fold: first, to obtain knowledge of causes and effects in order to be able to predict the consequences of its actions; second, to carry through a rational deliberation guided by canons of prudential calculation, in order to determine the most efficient way to satisfy its desires; and third, to obtain some measure of control over its environment, so as to be able to put the results of its deliberations into operation. This conception of human action is then embodied in the moral philosophy of utilitarianism, the political theory of classical liberalism, and the economic theory of free-market political economy.

The truth is totally different from this fantasy, which, I suggest, remains methodologically operative despite the fact that few if any theorists of the human condition would subscribe to it in the simplified sketch I have given of it. The process by which the infant develops into a coherent, effective adult is a process of enculturation whereby specific, determinate modes of desiring, willing, choosing, and acting take form as the characteristic ways in which the adult *is* a person. This framework of coherent purposiveness is at once the product of, the substance of, and the producer of human society. In the personality of each individual this structure of cyclical reproduction is reinstated.

It may be, as Erikson suggests at various places in his writings, that from a trans-cultural perspective we can perceive certain deep similarities in the outcomes of culturally specific but diverse processes of personality formation. He says, for example, in an oft-quoted passage from *Childhood and Society*, that "Each individual, to become a mature adult, must to a sufficient degree develop all the ego qualities mentioned [in the preceding characterization of the stages of the life-cycle], so that a wise Indian, a true gentleman, and a mature peasant share and recognize in one another the final stage of integrity." But it would be a thorough confusion—not one made by Erikson—to conclude that we could abstract from these and other cases of ego-integrity a framework or formal structure of healthy—or, in Erikson's own Platonic usage, virtuous—choice and action which could then serve as

the basis for an independent theory of action. The cultural context is primary, and only through an understanding of it can we arrive at an insight into the social reproduction of distinctively human being.

If I understand Marx correctly, his espousal of a materialist theory of society consists essentially in the claim that the patterns, processes, and institutionalizations of material reproduction constitute the major determinants of human and social reproduction. I take this to mean that the way in which a society cyclically reproduces its food supply, its housing, its transportation, its technology, and so forth shapes and specifies its kinship patterns, its religious rituals, its personal relationships, its legal institutions—and, of course, its politics as well. Needless to say, there is an interaction here, and the transmission of the forms of material reproduction from generation to generation must proceed through the reproduction of society. Nevertheless, I understand Marx to be asserting that we can only understand the historical processes of change and the cultural specificity of any given society by beginning, in our analysis, with the forms of material reproduction.

It follows from this assumption, and also from the arguments of the first two parts of this paper, that any objectively grounded distinction between the public and the private realms must be drawn *within* the social, and rooted in the processes of material reproduction, not drawn in *contrast* with the social. For the social is the matrix within which specifically human being develops and is actualized, and the processes of material reproduction—if Marx is correct—are the primary determinants of the social.

Arendt imputes to Marx, and to political economists in general, the view that "politics is nothing but a function of society," and that "action, speech, and thought are primarily superstructures upon social interest." But in fact politics *is* a function of the social, as indeed is everything that is distinctively human. The Kantian conception of a kingdom of ends—a community of rational agents engaged in rational discourse about the objectively right—is arrived at not by a legitimate process of philosophical analysis but by an illegitimate process of abstraction. It is, indeed, precisely the sort of illegitimate abstraction which Kant elsewhere shows us leads to the vacuities and contradictions of rational psychology and theology.

Let us ask instead what could constitute a materialist basis for a legitimate distinction between the public and the private, holding in mind the remarks that have been made about the nature of material, human, and social reproduction and the genetic underdetermination of human personality, and trying, insofar as possible, to avoid the substitution of a narrative within a fictional world for a description of the

real world.

When I speak of the public realm, I intend two different meanings, depending on whether I am speaking of form or of content. From the standpoint of *form*, the public realm is that system of mutual recognitions, ritual performances, shared acknowledgements, and institutional arrangements within which, and by means of which, a society of men and women self-consciously recognize their collective existence and set themselves to make and carry out collective decisions. In Arendt's evocative image, it is a *space* in which men and women meet one another. From the standpoint of *content*, the public realm is the totality of those substantive matters of major social importance which are the objects of collective decision.

The central matter of major social importance in any society is the reproduction of society itself—material, human, and social. If Marx is right, then the determinant mode of reproduction is material reproduction. Hence, the central matter of major social importance must be the cyclical reproduction of the means of subsistence and production, their distribution to the several classes defined by these processes of reproduction, and the allocation of the physical surplus generated in each cycle of production. In many societies, of course, these matters of major social importance have not yet become the object of anyone's decision. The allocation of the physical surplus either for immediate consumption or for productive investment, although possibly the single most important matter of major social importance, only becomes an object of someone's decision at a relatively advanced state of social and economic development.

Even after many matters of importance concerning material reproduction have become objects of decision, they may as yet not be objects of collective decision, and hence may not have entered the public realm. This, I take it, is the central insight of Marx's critique of capitalism as a society in which the processes of production become increasingly socialized while the processes of distribution, allocation, and control over the social surplus remain private. The rate of economic growth, the composition of capital investment, the structure of relative prices, the pattern of wage payments, the social rate of unemployment—all those are matters of major social importance which either are not at all objects of collective decision in a capitalist society or else have only very imperfectly become objects of collective decision and therefore subjects for discourse in the public realm. It is a striking fact, for example, not sufficiently recognized in discussion of politics in societies like ours, that even so vitally important a matter as the terms of the contract negotiated by the auto manufacturers and the auto workers can-

not become an issue in the discourse of public life, whereas the administration's policy with regard to such relatively unimportant matters as the disposition of several islands off the shore of mainland China can be the focus of a presidential campaign.

So long as the determination of the processes of material reproduction is excluded from the public realm, a species of false consciousness will infect the public life of a society, rather like the self-delusion that afflicts those persons who deny and repress the libidinal basis of rational thought processes. In our society, the exclusion of the work world, in which the labor of material reproduction is performed, from the public sphere encourages the delusion that democratic political procedures constitute substantive political liberty. Citizens whose work world is dominated by the canons of labor discipline suppose themselves free because periodically, on election day, they can share in the determination of matters of secondary social importance.

Arendt, I suggest, cooperates in and endorses this misconception of the nature and appropriate content of the public realm. She writes in a deliberately anachronistic vein that communicates a sense of dismay, indeed of contempt, asserting, for example, that "since the rise of society, since the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm, an irresistable tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and the private as well as the more recently established sphere of intimacy, has been one of the outstanding characteristics of the new realm." She concludes this paragraph, apocalyptically, with the claim that "the monolithic character of every type of society, its conformism which allows for only one interest and one opinion, is ultimately rooted in the one-ness of mankind. It is because this one-ness of mankind is not fantasy and not even merely a scientific hypothesis, as in the 'communistic fiction' of classical economics, that mass society, where man as a social animal rules supreme and where apparently the survival of the species could be guaranteed on a worldwide scale, can at the same time threaten humanity with extinction."

The truth, I suggest, is that in every era and every society, the processes of reproduction—material, human, and social—constitute the major determinants of human being in general and of the form and content of the public realm in particular. As these processes of reproduction develop, and in particular as the processes of material reproduction develop, the control, direction, and shaping of reproduction becomes an object of conscious collective decision. It becomes possible, in short, for the matters of the greatest social importance to enter the public realm. When this happens, the result is not at all the loss of a golden age, nor the dying away of reason, nor the disappearance of oppor-

tunities for "spontaneous action" and "outstanding achievement." Quite to the contrary, the reception into the public realm of the processes of material reproduction as objects of collective decision makes possible for the first time the achievement of self-conscious rational deliberation about and control over the fundamental conditions of human being.