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THE DECISION-MAKING OF *HOMO FABER*

Abstract

This essay primarily engages with three works: *The Human Condition* by philosopher Hannah Arendt, *The Road to Serfdom* by economist Friedrich A. Hayek, and the essay “Tradition without Convention” from the compilation *Freedom and the Arts* by musicologist Charles Rosen. *The Human Condition* provides the foundation of the essay in which Arendt’s historical narrative traces the public and private realm as they existed and were defined in Greek antiquity to its various distortions in modernity. The change is primarily understood as a result of the fluctuating ratios of the human condition itself, which Arendt thoroughly categorizes as labor (*animal laboran*), work (*homo faber*), and action (*vita activa*). Within this context, we examine two main ideas: the incentives of decision-making and scopes of competence; and modern realms for excellence, contemplation, and peer equality that can thrive in the present day. At hand is a two-part discussion: the decision-making capacity within an eroded private realm; and the costs to the highest aspect of the human condition if the promise of the public realm and its requirements for entry are no longer afforded within modernity’s egalitarian standards. In F.A. Hayek’s compelling confrontation of central planning, the impossibility of its competence, and the moral decay from when decisions and responsibilities are outsourced, provide a useful and constructive framework for observing and guarding against the trappings of an invaded private realm. Rosen, with his stunning analysis of convention in early eighteenth-century classical music, provides an enlightening paradigm to not only locate a modern public realm, but to recognize conventions, patterns, and practices that contribute to its existence and longevity.

Keywords: Competence; contemplation; morality; individual responsibility; social organization

DIE ENTSCHEIDUNGSFINDUNG DES *HOMO FABER*

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz befasst sich hauptsächlich mit drei Werken: *The Human Condition* der Philosophin Hannah Arendt, *The Road To Serfdom* des Ökonomen Friedrich A. Hayek und dem Essay "Tradition without Convention" aus dem Sammelband *Freedom and the Arts* des Musikwissenschaftlers Charles Rosen. Die Grundlage des vorliegenden Essays bildet *The Human Condition*, Die *conditio humana* bildet die Grundlage des Essays, in dem Arendts historisch angelegte Erzählung den öffentlichen und privaten Bereich, wie er in der griechischen Antike existierte und definiert wurde, bis zu seinen verschiedenen Verzerrungen in der Moderne nachzeichnet. Die Veränderung wird in erster Linie als Ergebnis der schwankenden Verhältnisse der *Conditio humana* selbst verstanden, die Arendt ausführlich als Arbeit (*animal laborans*), Herstellen (*homo faber*) und Handeln (*vita activa*) kategorisiert. In diesem Zusammenhang untersuchen wir zwei Hauptgedanken: die Anreize zur Entscheidungsfindung und die Zuständigkeitsbereiche; und moderne Gebiete für Exzellenz, Betrachtung und Gleichberechtigung, die in der heutigen Zeit gedeihen können. Es geht um eine zweiteilige Diskussion: der Entscheidungsfähigkeit in einem erodierten privaten Bereich und den Preis für den höchsten Aspekt der menschlichen Existenz, wenn die Verheißung des öffentlichen Bereichs und seine Zugangsvoraussetzungen nicht mehr im Rahmen der egalitären Standards der Moderne gewährt werden. F. A. Hayeks überzeugende Auseinandersetzung mit Zentralplanung, die Unmöglichkeit ihrer Kompetenz sowie der moralische Verfall, der eintritt, wenn Entscheidungen und Verantwortlichkeiten ausgelagert werden, bieten einen nützlichen und konstruktiven Rahmen für die Beobachtung von sowie dem Schutz vor den Fallen eines eingenommenen privaten Bereichs. Rosen liefert mit seiner verblüffenden Analyse von Konventionen in der klassischen Musik des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts ein aufschlussreiches Paradigma, um damit nicht nur einen modernen öffentlichen Raum zu verorten, sondern auch Konventionen, Muster und Praktiken zu erkennen, die zu seiner Existenz und Langlebigkeit beitragen.

Schlüsselwörter: Kompetenz; Kontemplation; Moral; individuelle Verantwortung; soziale Organisation

Introduction

This essay engages with three main works: *The Human Condition* by philosopher Hannah Arendt, *The Road to Serfdom* by economist Friedrich A. Hayek, and the essay "Tradition without Convention" from the compilation *Freedom and the Arts* by musicologist Charles Rosen. *The Human Condition* provides the foundation for this thought experiment, as it serves

as a parallel and historical narrative for considering two main ideas: incentive and scope of competent decision-making; and a realm for excellence, contemplation, and peer equality that can thrive in the present day.

Arendt characterized the shift from antiquity to modernity as the fundamental change in the human relationship to truth. Truth, once a *revelation* only possible through the still of contemplation, now became a *discovery*, resulting from man's actions, innovations, and ingenuity. She pinpointed this change as brought on by the invention of the telescope, the Protestant Reformation, and the settlement of the entire world, in which the totality of the earth shrank to the territory of human oversight. To acknowledge the existence of the universe (as opposed to only the world) at once shattered man's certainty of truth in nature while reassuring himself of his own processes and abilities. Such a process was exemplified in mathematics, in which nature became subject to the logic of its symbols, and whose variances and inner workings only found representation through the result of its equations. Process and science became the fundamental tools for understanding reality and truth, reducing nature to a mere backdrop of various artifices of human hierarchal systems.

Arendt only arrived at this conclusion of modernity after a thorough exploration of the human condition, which she identified in three fundamental facets: labor (*animal laboran*), work (*homo faber*), and action (*vita activa*). These properties of the Self can shift and interplay to varying ratios, as external or internal demands necessitate. Furthermore, she located ways in which the human condition ran parallel to the social organization of ancient Greece: the private realm and the public realm. Throughout this essay, the human condition should, on the one hand, remain a constant reference to this interplay of the Self, while on the second, be free to serve as the impeccable metaphor for the social hierarchy that it is. Arendt stratifies the human condition setting *homo faber* (work) above the primal and cyclical functions of *animal laboran* (labor) and below the sophisticated and superior operatives of the *vita activa* (action). Thus, for the quasi-screenplay of the social classes, (I'll repurpose the Latin terms as character names) consider *homo faber* a middle-class craftsman. More to come regarding who *homo faber* is, but first, let's be clear about who *homo faber* is not.

1. Homo faber and Process

1.1. *Who homo faber is not: Labor*

Only *animal laboran* (labor) is tied to the cyclical activities of the body. Whether literally, in the body's metabolic need to consume, expend, and rest, or metaphorically, in the cyclical rhythms of nature with the creation of life, its various junctures and phases, and ultimately, its decomposition. At every turn, *animal laboran* is confronted with the base level of survival, the primal necessities and urges of the body, and the continual demands of the life cycle. The functions of *animal laboran* are involuntary and instinctual, relinquishing zero freedom or choice. Exertion can only be offset by swinging to its corresponding pendulum of consumption or rest, "...one must eat in order to labor and must labor in order to eat." (Arendt, 2018, p. 143)

Incentives for *animal laboran* revolve around comfort and things that are easily consumed. It avoids pain— at all costs, scarcity. Only from an achieved stability, which would have meant a mass of workers dedicated to subsistence, could a social stratum develop that could have granted access for some to the higher two facets of the human condition. For instance, until the technology and industriousness of modernity, slavery had been understood in ancient times as the essential human state, for without it, no distance from scarcity could have ever been achieved. The proximity of *animal laboran* to threats of scarcity remains a powerful gauge for the human condition, even amid modernity's abundance of comfort. Rhythm, collective effort, and toil of the land remain powerful expressions of this primal aspect of the Self, recalling essential human compulsions and their visceral satisfactions.

1.2. *Who homo faber is not: Action*

"In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of their voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradiction to "what" somebody is— his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide— is implicit in everything somebody says and does." (Arendt, 2018, p. 179)

Vita activa (action) in its most fundamental sense can be understood from the question, "Who are you?" Several distinctions place *vita activa*

as our highest and rarest human capacity, namely, our ability to develop expressions of the Self that reflect rigorous cultivation and thought. As opposed to repetition, habit, or other natural inclinations of the sort, *vita activa* results from a concentrated effort that illuminates our capacity for excellence, confirmed by our presentation to others in speech, performance, or rhetoric. Crucial to this expression is that it is presented *to* and *for* the reception of others. This exchange is where we make understood our unique personality, our nuanced identity, or the specific sum of our experiences. This excludes extensions of the Self, say through artwork or books, that ultimately take on a life of their own.

I imagine it was of incredible disappointment to Arendt how fraught the link between the *vita activa* was to the highest class of modern social hierarchy, as the bond between *vita activa* and the highest class of ancient Greece, the *polis*, was a thoroughfare. In fact, it was the only subset of the population that had the freedom of both position and mind to pursue *vita activa*.

Entry into the Greek polis, the original public realm, was an exclusionary process. One had to be *free*, that is, *free from* the responsibilities of subsistence, business, and household operations. As well as *free to* develop one's inclinations and capacities for scholarship and excellence. The polis was a space of persuasion, where speech and rigorous discourse led to the highest human endeavor: contemplation. In the Greek polis, only the highest echelon of minds could enter, as *citizenship* required equality, that is, *equality of peers*. Thus, the privilege and responsibility of the chosen citizenry were to enter into the polis with an immense amount of preparation to contribute, engage in persuasive speech, and ultimately, the stillness of contemplation. Any chance for a glimpse of truth was only possible through this intensive route of thought and no doubt was of the highest priority for this select group of individuals.

1.3. *Who homo faber is: Work.*

“The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his.” (Locke, 1689, p. 1)

Just like Goldilocks, we shall encounter *homo faber* (work) right in the middle. There are keywords that place *homo faber* exactly in that ‘just right’ framework: usefulness, craftsmanship, and creativity. These traits shape the durability of *homo faber's* creations and signify his process.

The creations of *homo faber* were historically instruments, tools, and artworks. Notable about these creations was their durability, in which they could last beyond the life of their creator. This durability meant that the tools of *homo faber* survived, unaffected by the consumptive cycle of *animal laboran*, to which these tools aided and eased the efforts of necessity. It also meant that the durability created a constant among the day-to-day, enabling a “sameness” or a relation to the object itself, “From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that— in contradiction to the Heraclitean saying that the same man can never enter the same stream— men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 137) Durability demonstrated the object’s productivity while also showcasing its *value*. Value here doubly rewards *homo faber* in his achievement of turning raw, consumptive materials into an object of lasting permanence; and value expressed through the market or a public exchange, where *homo faber* would appear (with a likeness to *vita activa*) to others, demonstrate the particulars of his process, and receive attention, esteem, and compensation.

1.4. Process, Open-Ended

The process of fabrication for *homo faber* constituted a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Fabrication began in solitude— insulating the creativity for the idea and the work itself; and it ended with company— in the showcase of the object, a quasi-public realm, which featured various public avenues of reward. As his own tools led to rather overwhelming discoveries, the construct of reality began to change altogether. Arendt pointed to the invention of the telescope, in which *homo faber* was able to see beyond the world around him, crumbling the certainty of nature’s ability to provide him with truth. The crushing weight of doubt further propelled *homo faber* inward to recover some remaining element of reliability. What was to be found was the self, the ingenuity and brilliance of *homo faber*’s own workings, which would become the well of truth and the reassurance of certainty. Furthermore, as the Americas were settled, the globe began to shrink in stature, and the methodology of *homo faber* was applied to create a new artifice that would erect the West: science and the state.

“Three great events stand at the threshold of the modern age and determine its character: the discovery of America and the ensuing exploration of the whole earth; the Reformation, which by expropriating ecclesiastical and monastic

possessions started the two-fold process of individual expropriation and the accumulation of social wealth; the invention of the telescope and the development of a new science that considers the nature of the earth from the viewpoint of the universe.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 248)

For truth to now be at the center of *homo faber's* process created an alarming derangement, distorting the balance and, ultimately, its purpose. The bookends of *homo faber's* process— solitude and exchange with others and privacy to presentation— provided crystal clear points of the process where he would drop his arms and stop. Unlike labor, in which the cycle is continuous and repetitious, the punctuations of fabrication illuminated a decision process reflecting *homo faber's* creativity, his desire to be useful, or the development of the object itself. Yet with an enlarged focus of the process, while no doubt attributed to the unprecedented boom of modern development, eventually distorted the schema for *homo faber* in which the ends no longer reflected the means, but the means became the end in itself. “This framework was forced wide open, however, when in the understanding of fabrication itself the emphasis shifted entirely away from the product and from the permanent, guiding model to the fabrication process, away from the question of what a thing is and what kind of thing was to be produced to the question of how and through which means and processes it had come into being and could be reproduced.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 304)

My skeletal sketch of the human condition is to quickly trace its correlation with the development of modernity. One could trace it to several inclinations toward various social organizations, movements, and regimes, as Arendt certainly did. I will follow the West, specifically the United States, the ultimate artifice of *homo faber*. The formation of the United States exhibits a punctilious process of principle, method, and initiative. It did not form gradually or naturally. It was preordained utilizing political techniques to gain consensus and to create the construct of law, government, and, in some sense, reality. Western systems of rationalism, utilitarianism, liberalism, epistemology, science, and capitalism all focus on the *how* with a great emphasis on the processes themselves. The track record for these systems is astonishing, immense, and they have changed the course of human history, one can confidently and empirically say for the better. However, as with any course of human decision and action, there will always be *trade-offs*. As Western society secures more and more space from scarcity, the information and dichotomies that we measure risk alarming falsity if the mechanisms we employ become distorted or the control of the process becomes a tool for

corruption. Crucial to this concern is the tensions that materialize as the human condition interfaces with the changing and dissolving boundaries of the private and public realms.

2. The Private Realm

The private realm is the sphere of necessity, intimate decisions, personal obligations, and requirements that affect the sustainability of all of these matters. The crucial distinction in ancient Greece was not that everyone belonged to a private realm, but that only a few had access beyond it. Scope will be of primary concern in this discussion, for reconciling the clear and limited *ancient* with the murky and expansive *modern* is problematic. An introduction to the private realm in ancient Greece should get us started.

The private realm was anti-political. It functioned strictly according to an authoritative hierarchy, i.e. the head of the household. At this most primal level, necessity determined these roles and there was little advantage or incentive to think otherwise. All matters of economy, the family, utility, order, education, healthcare, and the incredible effort of sustenance were all under the domain of the private realm. “We therefore find it difficult to realize that according to ancient thought on these matters, the very term “political economy” would have been a contradiction of terms: whatever was “economic,” related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 28) Our modern circumstance orbits so far from this paradigm that this idea might startle us into views of injustice, however, it is important to understand how vicious the threat of scarcity was (is) and that the fundamental achievement of the West was its conquering of nature and thus, scarcity.

The family and biological roles between man and woman remain true, and hopefully still obvious to us in the present day. Yet, the scope of the household is perhaps the most difficult to reconcile with modernity. For an entire community to function under an authoritarian household might seem odd or extreme. Yet, it was the normal form of human organization before the Protestant Reformation, a phenomenon cited by both Arendt and anthropologist, Joseph Henrich. Henrich’s *The WEIRDest People in the World* is a historical and psychological account of how this household, or for the technical term *kinship*, functioned; how that social organization was disrupted; and the acute differences between a person’s psychological orientation within kin-based versus Western social organization:

“Here are some broad patterns in the tribal populations of *pre-Christian* Europe:

- 1) People lived enmeshed in kin-based organizations within tribal groups or networks. Extended family households were part of larger kin-groups (clans, houses, lineages, etc.), some of which were called *sippen* (Germanic) or *septs* (Celtic).
- 2) Inheritance and postmarital residence had patrilineal biases; people often lived in extended patrilineal households, and wives moved to live with their husbands’ kinfolk.
- 3) Many kinship units collectively owned or controlled territory. Even where individual ownership existed, kinfolk often retained inheritance rights such that lands couldn’t be sold or otherwise transferred without the consent of relatives.
- 4) Larger kin-based organizations provided individuals with both their legal and their social identities. Disputes within kin-groups were adjudicated internally, according to custom. Corporate responsibility meant that intentionality sometimes played little role in assigning punishments or levying fines for disputes between kin-groups.
- 5) Kin-based organizations provided members with protection, insurance, and security. These organizations cared for sick, injured, and poor members, as well as the elderly.
- 6) Arranged marriages with relatives were customary, as were marriage payments like dowry or bride price (where the groom or his family pays for the bride).
- 7) Polygynous marriages were common for high-status men. In many communities, men could pair with only one “primary” wife, typically someone of roughly equal social status, but could then add secondary wives, usually of lower social status.” (Henrich, 2020, p. 162)

As this list demonstrates, the comprehensive issues concerning the necessities and matters of life were contained within kinship (a private realm). What also becomes clear is how much space could cognitively and physically exist beyond this sphere, in which few were admitted and the issues of concern would be of a completely different variety (public realm). Ideas that could be completely detached from utility and also insulated from application or logistics. Kinship was, for the most part, self-contained, as there was an inherent limitation, not only literally with reproduction, but with the risks associated with expansion, conflict, and resources.

2.1. *The Realm of Society*

“At a time of national instability in 1972, Wali Khan, a Pashtun politician in Pakistan, was asked about his personal identity and “first allegiance” during an

interview. He replied, “I have been a Pashtun for six thousand years, a Muslim for thirteen hundred years, and a Pakistani for twenty-five.” (Henrich, 2020, p. 205)

The 16th-century societal combustion known as the Protestant Reformation was a remarkable event that not only brought about the West, but completely upended the boundaries and functions of the private realm, and thus, the public. There are key phenomena to be cherry-picked from the Protestant Reformation: the change in social organization— with new taboos placed on marriage and polygamy, intercourse with new groups and strangers became favorable and advantageous; the collective property of the kinship fractured into the private property of dispersed households, with the Church as the new possible heir; frugality, economic productivity, and creative entrepreneurship now aligned with measures for securing one’s eternal fate, resulting in a boom of socio-economic progress, especially among those in the middle class; and lastly, the impact of literacy, both in how it was stressed in Protestantism and in how the practice of religion changed for the individual.

Henrich provides a second list. What he amusingly refers to as the “Church’s Marriage and Family Program,” he collects the policy implementations that completely altered family life while also making the Church incredibly wealthy. These changes trace how the kinship structure was disrupted, converting it to the nuclear family that we have today in the West:

- 1) “Prohibited marriage to blood relatives. These prohibitions were gradually extended to include quite distant relatives, up to sixth cousins. This essentially tabooed marriage or sex between those who shared one or more of their 128 great-great-great-great-grandparents.
- 2) Prohibited marriage to affinal kin within the circle of tabooed blood relatives. If your husband died, you couldn’t then marry his brother, your brother-in-law. In the eyes of the Church, your husband’s brother became like your real brother (incest!).
- 3) Prohibited polygynous marriage, including the taking of secondary wives, as well as the use of sex slaves and publicly supported brothels. Brothels were both legal and common in the Roman Empire, which explains why Latin has 25 words for “prostitute.”
- 4) Prohibited marriage to non-Christians (unless they converted).
- 5) Created spiritual kinship, which established the institution of godparents. This institution provided a means to form new social bonds to care for children. Of course, you couldn’t marry or have sex with spiritual kinfolk.
- 6) Discouraged the adoption of children. Mothers were to care for their own children; if they couldn’t, the Church or godparents would provide.

- 7) Required both the bride and groom to publicly consent (“I do”) to marriage. This suppressed arranged marriages and began to more firmly hitch marriage to romantic love.
- 8) Encouraged, and sometimes required, newly married couples to set up independent households— neolocal residence. The Church also encouraged the use of traditional marriage payments (e.g., dowry) to help fund this new residence.
- 9) Encouraged the individual ownership of property (land) and inheritance by personal testament. This meant that individuals could personally decide where their property went after their death.” (Henrich, 2020, p. 165)

With private property having many potential heirs, relation that was to be developed by the individual with strangers, and a repositioning of women to not only choose whom to marry but also enter into various sectors as an employee and contributor, illuminate one final point with this disruption of kinship and the opening of the private realm: *impersonal trust*. A general trust of strangers not only contributed to a significant expansion of commerce, markets, and a diversification of trade, but also to a belief and commitment to an *impersonal system*. This transformation most significantly affected the middle class, “The last groups to feel these enduring psychological shifts were (1) the most remote subsistence farmers and (2) the highest levels of the aristocracy, who continued to consolidate power for centuries through intensive forms of kinship, long after it had been extirpated from the urban middle classes.” (Henrich, 2020, p. 321) With incentives for innovation, commerce, and a new religiosity placed upon work, the attributes and virtues of *homo faber* became the emblem of Western society, proudly boasting its clear and measurable advances, egalitarian standards, and upward mobility.

Last but not least, the Protestant Reformation identified literacy as a fundamental tool necessary for every individual to cultivate their relationship with God. Your eternal salvation rested on your ability to read and interpret the Bible. This requirement to read the Bible, processing and reflecting within one’s own capabilities, was a complete derailment from not only how religion historically functioned, but presented a unique, egalitarian challenge to the traditional social hierarchy. If we place this into the context of the human condition, the access to literacy and the directive for religious truth now placed one of the exclusive properties of *vita activa* into the daily activities of *animal laboran* and *homo faber* (albeit at various stages of intensity). This breach of the public realm, if first viewed from *vita activa*, the invasion of the many destroyed the premise for an equality of peers. The

space and quiet for contemplation and absolute rigor of thought, which could only happen if free from the requirements of utility, were severely compromised, if not altogether destroyed. But from the perspective of *animal laboran* or *homo faber*, development intensified in a host of areas in which new distances from scarcity were achieved, thus improving an overall standard of living and comfort. While our modern inclinations might shrug at this invasion, what Arendt, Henrich, and ultimately Hayek direct our attention to is the dysfunction and conflict when household decision-making is appropriated to the larger, more distant collective that we call society.

2.2. *Introducing Hayek*

“What concerns us in this context is the extraordinary difficulty with which we, because of this development, understand the decisive division between the public and private realms, between the sphere of the polis and the sphere of the household and family, and finally, between activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life, a division upon which all ancient political thought rested as self-evident and axiomatic. In our understanding, the dividing line is entirely blurred, because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but “national economy” or “social economy” or *Volkswirtschaft*, all which indicate a kind of “collective housekeeping”; the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call “society,” and its political form of organization is called “nation.”” (Arendt, 2018, p. 28)

As society in the West expanded, especially with regards to the United States toward a historically unprecedented pluralism, the overstepping of various political entities in making household decisions regarding values, morals, ethics, and even enforcing national customs has been a constant growing pain if not an outright, unresolvable conflict. What we will explore, via Friedrich A. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*, are the merits of an impersonal system and where modern private boundaries do exist. While the strict boundaries of the ancient private and public realm could not have produced the technological boom of modernity, the significant wisdom of the ancient realm illuminates the interdependence of scope to the highest level of competence.

One of the main tensions of representative government (if not *the* main one) lies in the consensus of the designation of power and preference

between the individual and the collective. Take taxes, healthcare, justice, civil and religious rights, or education. The dysfunction at the center of these issues are bad policy decisions made from separate, unaffected entities; the inhibition of individual privacy and autonomy, either from a limitation of resources or from the curbing of decision-making power; and a competing level of interests that never seem to be fairly or efficiently matched with dutiful responsibility. Hayek is primarily concerned with this tussle. His determinations for which route to take are measured by the capabilities of an entity to truly know all of the information necessary for an informed decision. Thus, *competence* is only met when an entity can comprehensively know and see the entire range of possibilities and the vast interests of the population on behalf of which such decisions are made. What might be obvious is that, as Hayek stresses, such knowledge is impossible from any scope larger than that of the individual and his immediate community. Not only is such information impossible from the vantage point of any central planner, but furthermore, the presumptive assumption that such an entity could know and anticipate the needs and desires of such a numerous population is not only reductive but severely limits the potential good that could be achieved by individuals responding directly to the interests of their community and held responsible for the fulfillment of their values. This “good,” what Thomas Sowell, Adam Smith, and others refer to as the self-interest incentives of the market, captures the ability for flexible and rapid decisions that promote reliable distances from scarcity. When these fluctuations are responded to, rather than controlled for, the result is unintentional *surplus*. Thomas Sowell states in *A Conflict of Visions*, “Economic benefits to society were largely unintended by individuals, but emerged systemically from the interactions of the marketplace, under the pressures of competition and the incentives of individual gain. Moral sentiments were necessary only for shaping the general framework of laws within which this systemic process could go on.” (Sowell, 2007, p. 14) This paradigm puts into question a common social assumption: do good intentions produce good results; and are good intentions responsible for an overall greater good? Sowell continues:

“The economic benefits to society produced by the capitalist, were, according to [Adam] Smith, ‘no part of his intention.’ The capitalist’s intentions were characterized by Smith as ‘mean rapacity’ and capitalists as a group were referred to as people who ‘seldom meet together, even for merriment or diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public or in some contrivance to raise prices.’ Yet, despite his repeatedly negative depictions of

capitalists, unrivaled among economists until Karl Marx, Adam Smith nevertheless became the patron saint of *laissez-faire* capitalism. Intentions, which were crucial in the unconstrained vision of Godwin, were irrelevant in the constrained vision of Smith. What mattered to Smith were the system characteristics of a competitive economy, which he saw as producing social benefits from unsavory individual intentions.” (Sowell, 2007, pp. 20-21)

Hayek concludes, calling upon the complicated history between morals and ethics:

“We are not concerned here with the question whether it would be desirable to have such a complete ethical code. It may merely be pointed out that up to the present the growth of civilization has been accompanied by a steady diminution of the sphere in which individual actions are bound by fixed rules. The rules of which our common moral code consists have progressively become fewer and more general in character. From primitive man, who was bound by an elaborate ritual in almost every one of his daily activities, who was limited by innumerable taboos, and who could scarcely conceive of doing things in a way different from his fellows, morals have more and more tended to become merely limits circumscribing the sphere within which the individual could behave as he liked. The adoption of a common ethical code comprehensive enough to determine a unitary economic plan would mean a complete reversal of this tendency.” (Hayek, 2009, p. 101)

If one were to trace the good intentions of many U.S. government programs throughout the 20th century, no doubt a significant subset of the population was facing a crisis that placed the population within an alarming proximity to scarcity. Regardless of the success or failure of a given program, what remains tied to such interventions is the usurpation of power that is never returned or dismantled once the crisis recedes. For the uncomfortable question lurking is *who* would a central authority return such power to? If a central authority commands such power over an *impersonal* system, an otherwise infinite series of autonomous individual decision-makers, it has then declared itself the point person, personifying an otherwise faceless ecosystem. For central power to reign control, it will have to attenuate the vast chain of mechanisms, implementing policies that reflect its very limited knowledge base and consensus. As deficits make themselves felt, the fork in the road leaves two options for the central planner to effectively remain in control: totalitarianism or politicize the mechanism itself.

“It is not difficult to see what must be the consequences when democracy embarks upon a course of planning which in its execution requires more agreement than in fact exists. The people may have agreed on adopting a system of

directed economy because they have been convinced that it will produce great prosperity. In the discussions leading to the decision, the goal of planning will have been described by some such term as “common welfare,” which only conceals the absence of real agreement on the ends of planning. Agreement will in fact exist only on the mechanism to be used.” (Hayek, 2009, p. 103)

The control that is sought from central command in the name of “freedom” or the “common good,” no doubt requires an enormous confiscation of rights and of individual autonomy, in which, similarly to central authority during a crisis, such rights and freedoms are hardly returned. Moreover, this sly apprehension of liberty often slips past even the shrewdest individual, as it is presented not only in the name of acquiring ideal ends, but it convolutes the premise of how freedom is procured and negotiated. “Stripped of all technicalities, this means that government in all its actions is bound by rules fixed and announced beforehand— rules which make it possible to foresee with fair certainty how the authority will use its coercive powers in given circumstances and to plan one’s individual affairs on the basis of this knowledge.” (Hayek, 2009, p. 112) Freedom exists because the governing body follows the written, stated-beforehand, slow-to-change law. Its coercive powers can be predicted by its citizens, and the individual can otherwise pursue his interests without worry of arbitrary intrusion.

Keeping tabs on scarcity is necessary and fundamental to the life cycle, to which no higher progress can endure without predictable and stable distances from it. The mold-breaking achievement of impersonal systems, like the free market, is the continual new information it provides, as the totality of nature cannot be seen within the constructs of *homo faber*. “The moment he wants what all ages before him were capable of achieving, that is, to experience the reality of what he himself is not, he will find that nature and the universe “escape him” and that a universe construed according to the behavior of nature in the experiment and in accordance with the very principles which man can translate technically into a working reality lacks all possible representation.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 288) If we consider that nature “lacks all possible representation” in the constructs of *homo faber*, impersonal systems and mechanisms would be the sharpest tools we have for insight into the unknown. How off-base would our mechanisms become for detecting scarcity if our decision-making is misappropriated and incompetent? How dull would our tools and skills for a crisis of scarcity become if lulled by a misapprehension of control and a facade of comfort?

2.3. *Conquering Society*

“But they are mistaken when they carry the comparison further and argue that we must learn to master the forces of society in the same manner in which we have learned to master the forces of nature. This is not only the path to totalitarianism but the path to the destruction of our civilization and a certain way to block future progress. Those who demand it show by their demands that they have not yet comprehended the extent to which the mere preservation of what we have achieved depends on the coordination of individual efforts by impersonal forces.” (Hayek, 2009, p. 212)

Let’s take a slight right from scarcity to society. The danger of incompetent decision-making, while so far having been primarily exemplified by market distortions, also is mirrored in destructive breakdowns within society and the family unit. At hand, while still classified as a tension between the individual and the collective, we can further describe this as individual conduct, responsibility, and moral principle, against the common good, collective nihilism, and the lonely mass man. A compelling point of connection between Hayek and Arendt was their caution that among these systems— either the *impersonal systems* of Hayek or the *scientific reality* of Arendt’s *homo faber*— this way of thinking and approach cannot be applied to society itself without drastic and tyrannical consequences. This final reflection is perhaps the most important with the loss of the private realm.

“The emergence of society— the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices— from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, but 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.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 38) The decisions of the private sphere and thus the *privacy* of the private sphere, when exposed to the political and social machinery, equally face the highest danger of incompetence. This tension repulses every arm of individual decision-making, diluting morality to a watered-down cliché, legislated by the mythical consensus of the majority. This corruption of individual morality is when private decisions “assume public significance.” What we would call “social capital” or “virtue signaling” today, as it nears closer and closer to the most primal expressions of our *animal laboran*, essentially elevates the motivations of necessity and bodily urges to a realm once only suited for excellence and the highest of human capacities.

Furthermore, a weakened private realm reveals the very superficial footing that modern *homo faber* places his rootedness, heritage, and identity. “For men cannot become citizens of the world as they are citizens of their countries, and social men cannot own collectively as family and household men own their private property. The rise of society brought about the simultaneous decline of the public as well as the private realm. But the eclipse of a common public world, so crucial to the formation of the lonely mass man and so dangerous in the formation of the worldless mentality of modern ideological mass movements, began with the much more tangible loss of privately owned share in the world.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 257) This is a particular problem in the United States. The foundation of the United States as a nation of law, principle, and impersonal systems continually negates the exclusive and restrictive workings of the private realm. While in its stead it offers an unimaginable *equality of social condition* (Tocqueville, 2003, p. 11), lasting distinction of the individual remains a conundrum, for the most meaningful distinction, a result of merit, would only find its fullest expression among an equality of peers in the public realm.

3. The Public Realm

“According to Greek thought, the human capacity for political organization is not only different from but stands in direct opposition to that natural association whose center is the home (oikia) and the family. The rise of the city-state meant that man received ‘besides his private life a sort of second life, his bios politikos. Now every citizen belongs to two orders of existence; and there is a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own (idion) and what is communal (koinon).’” (Arendt, 2018, p. 24)

The public realm, the center of the Greek polis, was an exclusive sphere of excellence hosting an equality of peers, where speech, rhetoric, and contemplation fulfilled the *vita activa*. This highest aim of persuasion was the chief expression of Greek political life. Violence was decidedly not political, and therefore a tool only appropriate in pre-political times or life outside of the polis.

Completely separated from the private sphere, the concerns of the household, like utility, efficiency, and economy, were inappropriate and unfit for discourse in the public realm. Such matters entering into this sphere of thought polluted one’s ability to think, as the clutter of the household and vulgar concerns of utility trespassed concentration. The head of the

household in the private or the select group of intellectuals in the public did not confuse one another, nor were they interested or thought themselves capable of speaking on the issues to which the other was responsible. The causes for the dissipation of the public realm were nonetheless mirrored by the dissipation of the private. To restate them all from the perspective of the public realm would be redundant. What relevant considerations await are the two qualities of the public realm: an equality of peers and a culture for contemplation.

For the concept of contemplation, Arendt did not take to chance for the reader to mistake just how monumentally important this was to the ancient Greeks. The stillness in which one could think, deeply, was the only route to the phenomenon of contemplation— “whose chief characteristic is that its content cannot be rendered in speech.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 27) Only with a complete cessation of activity could one access contemplation, and thus, the possibility of the revelation of truth. That truth would be revealed in this way, as a gift from nature that enveloped man’s existence, connected to the ancient concern of immortality and the transcendent view of one’s purpose, as to serve generations to come and fulfill an extension of generations previous.

Stillness and solitude have almost entirely lost their ancient prestige in modernity, but they did not become obsolete. What remains are gradations of privacy afforded to the Self. Arendt made the case that as the social realm became this tepid mixture of private concern meeting public significance, privacy was not so easily discarded. Intimacy, a trivial version of privacy, nonetheless came to the forefront as a modern expression of the inner life. Even though intimacy can be experienced in public, as Arendt specifically referenced social art like music and the novel, could it be harnessed to direct the modern mind toward reflection, thought, and perhaps, contemplation?

3.1. Introducing Rosen

As the impersonal systems of *homo faber* have been the star feature of this essay, the *art* of *homo faber* deserves the big finish. The art of *homo faber* is an incredible point of reconciliation between the ancient and modern, as the process has remained intact, preserving clear and punctuated periods of solitude for creativity and exchange for presentation; while also embodying one of the highest realms of performance, which no doubt serves as a public realm. This public realm, to which I don’t think Arendt considers or acknowledges, does feature (and to this day in the present) the possibility

of excellence, equality of peers, and a practice or culture of contemplation. Furthermore, what is opportune about the etiquette and customs of the art of *homo faber* is that dialogue and discourse can happen at multiple planes, simultaneously. For example, take the classical music concert. The exchange possible in a string quartet performance can be ferocious and challenging among its four members (an equality of peers), rhetorical and provocative to the listening connoisseur, and meditative and reverent to the novice. Concert etiquette requires all to drop their arms, silence their phones, and engage in stillness for the duration of the performance. Incredibly, this prototype meets the social standards of modernity, if understood properly, and despite some internal short-sightedness within the art form itself (which Rosen will aid in navigation), it provides a secular, public, and social event where shared reflection commands the experience.

Charles Rosen, an insightful and incredibly prolific musicologist, provides an analysis of convention in 18th-century classical music. He connects specific qualities and techniques of the music itself to its manifesting etiquette that the audience at large— who were not, if at all, connoisseurs— understood. At the heart of his analysis are techniques for rhetoric, the arbitrariness of etiquette, and locating the fine line for when crafting original expression blunders into destroying tradition and the consequences that follow.

3.2. *Technique for Rhetoric*

In the temporal medium of instrumental music, the first delineation that Rosen is clear to distinguish is between content and filigree. Just as this balance is at the heart of style with the written word, music follows a similar procedure with corresponding results. The musical works at hand are from the classical period, with W.A. Mozart serving as the preeminent example. Musical content, similar to grammatical subjects and predicates, consists of melodic motifs, harmonic progressions, and most importantly, how and when chords cadence— which is akin to declarative punctuation, like a period, exclamation point, or question mark. Filigree, say adjectives and adverbs, consists of arpeggios, scales, and flourishes of passing notes that contribute to the expansion of sound, resonance, and ornamentation of the content itself. The convention of the classical period made these musical techniques procedurally timed, so they were legibly distinguishable to the lay ear. This not only made the music easily understood, but it promoted the particulars of the content— surprises, deviations, or expressive

moments from the performer. For the public ear to readily understand the organization of an otherwise abstract set of materials is something that should garner pause. The triangle of exchange created between composer, performer, and listener functioned at levels of intensity I would dare say did not find its reincarnation until jazz of the early 20th century. The classical template, for even as brilliant a composer as Mozart, first demanded mastery of convention, only welcoming originality and heightened sophistication after the former had been achieved. For the listener, it allowed clear moments of intentional listening and moments of reprieve. During these moments of reprieve—transitional filigree in the music—the spotlight turned to showcase the performer’s virtuosity, improvisatory inspiration, and expressive ease, as the technical mechanisms (like the arpeggio, scale, etc.) were intended to be effortlessly executed, so as to promote moments of freedom and release for all.

3.3. The Arbitrariness of Etiquette

“The conventional is both commonplace (that is, familiar and banal) and arbitrary (that is, imposed by an act of will). A convention is accepted by everyone precisely because it is arbitrary, because it is imposed. There can be no disagreement because there is no argument...That is why language is essentially social, not personal, and makes available only the meanings that society has agreed upon, not the inimitably individual significance that each of us might like in order to express something absolutely unique.” (Rosen, 2012, p. 146)

If we zoom out from the music to the invisible glue of etiquette, the soft power of custom reflected and reinforced the exchange of the composer-performer-listener triangle. Rosen credits the arbitrariness of etiquette as one of the key features to why this worked, yet also foreshadowing its dismissal toward the end of the 18th century. The key distinction of arbitrariness is the negation of an argument or discourse that forms its domain and rules. While this is fiercely something to avoid in the realm of legislation and government, this quality provided something productive in the realm of culture. Not only did it alleviate the copious amounts of mental and emotional labor that would otherwise be required without such custom, but the ability to streamline such communication was the true payoff. This focus on the arbitrary features of convention, similarly to language, should highlight the quality of the tool itself, not the derivation of its offspring. Yet, the insatiable hunger for originality would ultimately confuse the tool

with the outcome, as connoisseurs and artists alike would demonstrate. Is this because distinction (via craftsmanship) would prove ineffective and impotent in contrast to distinction (via originality), if competition expanded to such a degree from the inclusion of more and more players?

“The identification of the commonplace with the arbitrary is profound, but it obscures the dynamic process of stylistic development: a convention only becomes commonplace when it loses its logical reason for existing— when, in short, it becomes arbitrary, when its justification becomes dubious. A convention remains alive when it seems inevitable; but when we become aware that we can do without it, it begins to be tiresome, and even to seem vulgar. It is not frequency that makes repetition appear commonplace, but the lack of evident necessity.” (Rosen, 2012, p. 148)

3.3. *Originality/Tradition*

Back to the music: the abandonment of convention at first was a slight alteration of intention— where the tools remained the same, but the process in which they were utilized started to drift from the procedural norm. Cue Beethoven:

[Referencing Beethoven’s *Emperor* Concerto] “The arpeggios have ceased to appear conventional: they have become thematic, the principal motif, the bearer of meaning on which we concentrate all our attention. In short, the “arbitrary” has been “naturalized”— that is, given an immediately perceptible meaning unforeseen by the tradition and independent of it. It now sounds as if Beethoven had created the idea of arpeggios specifically for his concerto: with that, the existence of a tradition has been made irrelevant. Beethoven does not simply employ the traditional stuffing with the mastery of Mozart: he reinvents it.” (Rosen, 2012, p. 153)

For originality to now occupy the domain of form, convention’s order and clarity now faced extinction as what was structurally sound would become a shifting trend, subject to the artist’s vision, and what was definitively content, now indiscernible from the mass texture of sound.

As Rosen reminds us, the tools of convention have shifted time and time again, which should not warrant surprise. Yet if such an awareness of convention could be kept at the forefront, so as to not drop or forget the responsibilities that it had assumed, that would be hindsight’s urgent lesson of history. The etiquette of classical music has been interrogated by many (myself included). The alarming concern over the dwindling audience before us has resulted in continual attempts to remove any unnecessary stuffiness or

tiresome song-and-dance. Should this etiquette be discarded, the multiple planes of discourse it afforded, the space for reflection it provided, and the requirement to drop one's arms and sit in stillness must be reappropriated, repurposed, or reinstated. Classical music mirrors the Greek public realm in the modern world. It is a sphere of excellence, where a range of actors and agents expand and deepen enlightened discourse. Perhaps the gravest sin is not stuffy etiquette but the shortsightedness of its admitted members—the awareness that one has indeed been admitted to a public realm and with that privilege comes service to the highest capabilities of the human spirit.

Closing Questions

“Unfortunately, and contrary to what is currently assumed about the proverbial ivory tower independence of thinkers, no other human capacity is so vulnerable, and it is in fact far easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 324)

As this open-ended thought experiment comes to a close, additional questions persist. Despite my linear presentation of the ancient and modern, I am not suggesting that progress would have been better had humanity remained loyal to the social organization of ancient Greece. However, the ancient containment of the two realms has illuminated alarming hazards for when their boundaries are exposed. This point, though, would seem to be the most obvious and palpable regarding the private realm, as modern discourse finds itself in a constant traffic jam trying to reconcile the standards of society with individual demands and specifications.

Advocacy for the public realm incites more complications. Within tensions of the exclusionary properties of the public realm lie the fundamental conflict between individual distinction among a mass egalitarian society. For if distinction finds its fullest expression through merit, the continual effort and strategy of a predominantly *homo faber* mindset may be insufficient and wanting. Furthermore, if the identity and rootedness of modernity's mass are to also be primarily affirmed through this schema, the sheer number of people overwhelms this ordinary and utilitarian metric.

The underlying plea from all of the writers cited, especially Arendt, is to think. If we are situated comfortably from scarcity, how aimless would our initiatives become if we do not have a consensual, visible, and revered public realm? Is modernity squandering its opportunity to think by not protecting spaces and institutions where one can pursue the highest echelons of the

mind? For media technology to craft algorithms for attention, does that not reveal the inordinate amount of untapped, underdeveloped, and underutilized mental resources of the public? Should the upswing of busyness be a central cue that the average mind is, to plainly state, bored?

Lastly, the issue of the public realm reveals a confrontation of commitment and, yet again, a misapprehension of scope. Are we applying a scope of equality that is counterproductive? Are we after equality or sameness? Do we have the capacity to prioritize potential over outcome? Can we forego micromanaging the bumpy ebbs and flows of individual trajectories, especially if technology does not permit the privacy of such processes? And finally, is the ultimate lesson for us, or *homo faber*, that happiness is not found in abundance but in the rigorous quiet of contemplation?

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