

The Life of the Work: Virno's Reception of Arendt's Political Theory

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Since antiquity, political philosophy has been occupied with basic human capacities, dividing them into three main realms: work, action, and intellect. The definition and aims of these capacities, as well as their relation to the main human virtues, were elaborated in Aristotle's Ethics. This work is a starting point of a long tradition of reflection on the human condition. Its further development was incorporated by Hannah Arendt into her more-modernized political theory. Following Aristotle, Arendt defines two main spheres: *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. An attempt to redefine the main terms of this tradition was made by an Italian political philosopher, Paolo Virno, who combines it with Marxism. For this, Virno turned to Arendt's political thought. He follows the central idea that the ability of action is connected with speech and has a virtuosic character. However, in his perception of Arendt's theory Virno tries to blur the boundaries between other concepts of her political philosophy. The goals of this article are to explore the ways that the reception of Arendt's ideas has shaped Virno's political thought, and to analyze how his approach is able to cope with the main problems that she poses in her political theory. In his interpretation of Arendt's political thought, Virno tries to redefine the distinctions that she draws, and to combine the spheres of praxis, intellect, and work. According to the author of this paper, this strategy does not always succeed in accurately covering all aspects of Arendt's political thought.

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A Brief Introduction: The Common Sense of Arendt's Conceptual Framework

The main political treatise by Virno is called *The Grammar of the Multitude*. This text originated from the seminars held in 2001 at the University of Calabria. In this work, Virno attempts to justify the theory of the multitude, that is, political subjectivity which arises as a result of the formation of new conditions of production and lifestyles. In order to support this theory, Virno appeals to a variety of philosophical theories, and Arendt's political theory plays a big part thereof. Virno refers to Arendt in order to come to a deeper understanding of what the contemporary multitude is, and what universal capacities we can find here. The theory of the multitude, which Paolo Virno is trying to create, must be understood not only as a theory of a new political subject, but also as an attempt to revise the long tradition of political philosophy which can be traced back to Aristotle.

Virno says that for all who participate in a political life, the classic division of human experience into work, action, and intellect is reasonable. Aristotle's ideas are basic and essential for the comprehension of political life, and are accessible and understandable to many. Moreover, is not necessary to read Aristotle to be aware of this: "Labor, Action, Intellect: in the style of a tradition which goes back to Aristotle and which has been revisited with particular efficacy and passion by Hannah Arendt (*The Human Condition*), this tri-partitioning has seemed clear, realistic, nearly unquestionable. It has put down solid roots in the realm of common sense: it is not a question, then, of an undertaking which is only philosophical, but of a widely shared pattern of thought" (Virno, 2004: 50). According to Virno, Arendt clearly and convincingly shows the above-mentioned difference. One might even think that Virno hints that it is through her appeal to the experience of Greek political thinking and its reflection in Arendt's texts that this tradition first becomes more tangible and then acquires the status of common sense.

The threefold division of human activity is entrenched in the minds of a whole generation, according to Virno. We used to look at human activity from such an angle. If a person works, they interact in natural relations, fabricating products that they will later consume. When acting, they intervene in the political relations that arise between free people and require an active presence in public among other people. When a person begins to think, their external activity seems to freeze, but the internal flow of words and sentences begin to move: the person begins an internal dialogue with themselves. However, Arendt herself fears that these three aspects of human life might be mixed, and that that situation threatens to dispose of political action. In her text, there is a clear concern that political action starts to be treated within the work model, and is organized according to the work type. Hence, it loses its singularity and freedom. However, in general, highlighting these three human abilities helps structure human experience accurately. According to Virno, this is the main message of the Arendt's theory: "To each his own" seems to be the message of Arendt's *The Human Condition*, and every man for himself" (Virno, 2006: 206).

Here, Virno makes a sharp turn in relation to Arendt's thought. His analysis of modernity convinces him that work, action, and intellect are not located in different spheres, and can form a unified experience. Arendt intentionally made this distinction clearer because she feared that political action would finally take the form of work, the fabrication of parties, meetings, etc. However, Virno is more likely to say that it is the work experience itself that is changing: by creating work, we can now get the experience of political action where the experience of intellectual reflection is added, which does not withdraw a person from this world, and does not detach him from common affairs. The work experience is changing since modern conditions of production require quality from the worker. This is necessary for someone who has traditionally been understood as a so-called actor performing on the stage of political life. Thus, as the concept of virtuosity appears, Virno follows Aristotelian tradition: virtuosity is a quality that is found in art and politics. Labor is virtuosic as workers now have to master the performance skills in public, possessing the ability to solve various tasks, being flexible, and acting without a predetermined

script. Thus, in reconsidering Arendt's works, Virno tries to propose the opposite point of view: "As must be obvious by now, however, what I am arguing here is radically opposed to the conceptual schema proposed by Arendt and the tradition by which it is inspired" (Virno, 2006: 206). The basic concepts of Arendt's political philosophy in his conceptual framework will change their location in areas which were clearly defined for them earlier. For example, work traditionally does not fall into the public space, but, in accordance with Virno, it can manifest itself in a public way.

Nevertheless, as we will see further in Virno's texts, Arendt's central idea of action will remain as a virtuosic performance of the act in public, inextricably bound with speeches and similar to an actor's performance on stage. Here, Virno can be interpreted as an Aristotelian postmodernist. Despite his attempts to revise this political tradition, he inherits it in many ways. Discussing the problem of work, action, and intellect in the second part of his *Grammar*, the author largely refers to Aristotle's analysis. Virno adopts the basic definitions of *poiesis* and *praxis* which Aristotle provides, disagreeing only with the relation between these two concepts.

Moreover, Virno sees Arendt as an absolute adherent of this tradition. Aiming at a revision of the relationship between the key concepts of this tradition of understanding work, that is, action and intellect, he also reshapes other significant distinctions of Arendt's philosophy, such as the distinction between private and public, social and political, and thinking and action. Nevertheless, the following question remains open: how successful is this interpretation in relation to all of the concepts of her political philosophy? It should be noted that Virno incorporates only a part of Arendt's concepts into his reflections on the multitude, while many important details are overlooked. Virno ignores, for example, the distinction between the social and political, but in Arendt's philosophy, this point was connected to the problem of action and the possibility to substitute blind administrative regulations and norms. As a part of our work, it is necessary to see how Arendt makes the most important distinctions in her philosophy and builds a hierarchy of relations between work, action, and intellect, and to examine this hierarchy being turned over in the political theory of Paolo Virno.

The Social and the Political

The problem of the social, as Arendt put it, has been analyzed by many political theorists and is considered to be one of the most important conceptual frameworks that helps to understand the structure of the modern world. There is no doubt that the social is not some kind of transcendental structure that makes all other things comprehensive to us in the modern world, but it is rather a product of historical development. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid this concept since it says much about the place where humans conduct themselves with each other, and how we can describe this kind of conduct. Though this concept looks very simple and intuitive at first glance, it is rather hard to define. Hannah Arendt discussed this concept in her various books, and analyzed it from different points; she compared it to a family and as opposed to the political realm and the private.

A simple solution in defining it is to put the social as a mediate term between the private and the political, which is, however, only one side of this issue. Pitkin, in her study of Arendtian philosophy, gives a very catching metaphor of the social as “the Blob,” an aggressive anonymous mass, or the multitude that absorbs everything within its reach. Pitkin writes that “society is variously said to ‘absorb,’ ‘embrace,’ and ‘devour’ people or other entities; to ‘emerge,’ ‘rise,’ ‘grow,’ and ‘let loose ‘ growth’; to ‘enter,’ ‘intrude’ on, and ‘conquer’ realms or spheres; to ‘constitute’ and ‘control,’ ‘transform’ and ‘pervert’; to ‘impose’ rules on people, ‘demand’ certain conduct from them, ‘exclude’ or ‘refuse to admit’ other conduct or people; and to ‘try to cheat’ people. The social, then, is very lively indeed” (Pitkin, 1998: 4). However, this living essence is difficult to analyze without referring to the political (or public) and private, which are opposed to the social, according to Arendt.

Although we mentioned that putting the social as a mediator term between the private and the political is only one side of this question, it is a very important side that must be looked at carefully. Indeed, the social realm is a historical phenomenon which appeared in modern times. Political thinkers used to talk about the republic, the *polis*, the monarchy or commonwealth, but not about the social. Even the “science” of the social, that is, sociology, has only appeared at the beginning of the 19th century with the positivism of Auguste Comte. Arendt says that the social in some sense is a transformation of the private sphere, which was a realm of the household, the household’s administration, and so on. The household, *oikos*, is a place where people used to carry out their private affairs and necessities of life. It is opposed to their public life where people were able to devote themselves to glorious deeds and speeches, and contribute to the life of the city. The distinction between the private and the public seem to be more “primordial,” originating in ancient Greek thought. Aristotle articulated Greek common sense with its primal distinction in social ontology. It is reflected in the distinction between *oikos* as a private sphere of life’s necessities and *polis* as a public sphere where a free man can act towards other free members of the political community. In this hierarchical relation between *oikos* and *polis*, we can observe relatively different aspects of life. *Oikos* does not function under the rule of *nomos*, but under the natural dominance of the householder. Hence, in this private sphere, a human “appears as much more bound to the animal, tied to the grinding necessities of production” (Butler, 2010: 7). In fact, it is in the public sphere where I spend a rather political way of life, free from labor and life’s necessities. The *polis* is relevant for deeds and speeches, and is where people organize their life not as dictated by Nature, but under the rule of *nomos*. One of the main conditions of the ability of taking part in the political life of the community is to be free from the necessities of life. Thus, one must be a householder or an aristocrat to have this possibility, so a major part of the *polis*’ population was excluded from political communication. Nevertheless, for Arendt, political life was a true foundation of freedom, a place where one can reveal one’s human nature to the world and exercise it through glorious deeds and speeches.

Then the new political body appears — the State with a sovereign power, where free and equal members of the political community transforms to include citizens and the population — and this little sphere of the household grows in size and covers new masses

of people. *Oeconomics* turns into economics, the administration of production, distribution, and trade. Thus, the social can be considered as some kind of improper expansion of the household sphere to a very large collectivity of people. In fact, this situation greatly affects the division between the private and the public: “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, 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, 1998: 38).

Therefore, the social at this level is connected to the administration, control, private interest, and the problems of sustaining life. Then, these narrow interests are transformed into a more common language, and the place where people gather together to deliberate on public affairs would be the sphere of the political. In contrast to the social, where private interests and passions direct people and their motives, the political is a certain way of life when people can form a collectivity of another kind. The social produces a mass collectivity, the *vulgus*, which is driven by affects, while political collectivity is some kind of self-deliberating and self-observing collectivity. In the political realm, people have an “ability . . . to take the standpoint of others into account, to reverse perspectives and see the world from their point of view. In fact, it is a crucial virtue in a civic policy that certainly becomes most necessary and most fragile under conditions of cultural diversity and social opacity. The public sphere is like the pupil in the eye of the body politic” (Benhabib, 2000: 211). Additionally, in this sense, the description of the Social made by Pitkin as “a collectivity of people who-for whatever reason-conduct themselves in such a way that they cannot control or even intentionally influence the large-scale consequences of their activities” (Pitkin, 1998: 16) is very precise. The social collectivity lacks this capacity of deliberation and solving political problems since it cannot control or oversee all the different issues that might occur.

The social that expresses itself in the appearance of the masses on the stage of political life is also connected to revolutionary movements. In her book *On Revolution* Arendt shows what happens when the masses rush into politics. The masses bring only violence and terror because the aspirations of the masses are not in the area of establishing the institutions of freedom, but in the area of eliminating need and poverty. Arendt calls it the “Social Question,” which is the main difference between the French and the American Revolutions: the aim of the former was to solve the social question by political means, while the latter aimed to establish an area of political freedom. However, solving a social question with the help of political force leads to the spread of violence; the masses are not able to use other methods, as their obsession with emotions, such as compassion and pity, paradoxically turns into a desire for violence and terror. Arendt writes that “Since the revolution had opened the gates of the political realm to the poor, this realm had indeed become ‘social’. It was overwhelmed by the cares and worries which actually belonged in the sphere of the household and that, even if they were permitted to enter the public realm, could not be solved by political means, since they were matters of administra-

tion, to be put into the hands of experts, rather than issues which could be settled by the twofold process of decision and persuasion” (Arendt, 1990: 91). Thus, the opening of the social space in this manner opposes and suppresses the political. However, it does not have anything to do with the fact that the masses do not want to discuss matters peacefully, but with their attitude that does not allow them to do so. Their mode of existence does not allow them to establish a space free from violence and suitable for discussion.

The Three Capacities of Active Life

According to Arendt, every part of human activity has its own proper place either in the public or private sphere. Things which are considered to be hidden from the eyes of others find their place in the realm of the private. On the contrary, things that must come into this world for the sake of good deeds and speeches which allows one to disclose one’s personality in the eyes of others must be performed in public. Arendt uses the term “action” to describe the part of active life which is usually performed in public. In Arendt’s view, action is not only bound to communication and freedom, but it also brings something new to the world. By doing so, we reveal our own unique identities and create a new beginning which are unpredictable in its end as we cannot foresee what kind of person the newborn baby will become. Her famous concept of natality represents the situation when newcomers enter this world, and all human activities thereafter are aimed to bestow the world upon them as a safe place for living and prospering. She points out that natality is inherent to all human activities, but, of course, action has a closer relation with natality due to its creative and virtuosic nature.

In a sense, the capacity of action gives us, as political animals, the possibility to overcome natural causality and start something new. However, we cannot be sure in what way our deeds might change the world. Sometimes, action can lead us through humble beginnings to the apex of power. Hence, the action itself has a characteristic of potentiality, and human beings can actualize different projects of life that are always related to the world we live in. Thus, action has a relationship with the world, and we cannot act without regard to the current situation. As Lawrence Biskowski put it: “Political action is inherently connected to care for the world, not only for what the world thinks (the ‘glory’ for which the Greeks strove) but for what the world will be like in the wake of one’s acting. . . . Action is an ontological category, a way of being in the world irrespective of the unpredictable practical consequences of any particular action” (Biskowski, 1993: 880). Hence, care for the world, which is inherited from the capacity of action, brings an ethical component to our actions.

This ethical component correlates with the idea that our world is perishable, and there are dozens of methods that can contribute to this. In his reflection upon Arendt’s concept of political judgement, Biskowski considers care for the world as one of the most important aspects of the capacity of action. Indeed, it is worth to admit that along with love of freedom, caring for the world provides the crucial relation between acting and judging, which is one of three capacities Arendt puts in the sphere of *vita contemplativa*. In her

Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy (Arendt, 1992), Arendt says that care for the world is more important than care for the soul. The concern for the soul, especially for its purity, can be successfully exercised in the private realm, since politics for Christianity and the public realm itself is something that can be easily avoided if we aim to live in the City of God. As we know from Machiavelli (Machiavelli, 1998: 67), public affairs usually demand another kind of ethos. Our care for the world helps us to withdraw from this private standpoint to a situation when we are able to act towards a common goal. According to Arendt, these political deeds can encounter evil and "by resisting evil, you are likely to be involved in evil, your care for the world takes precedence in politics over your care for your self—whether this self is your body or your soul" (Arendt, 1992: 50). The world is a common place for human beings, and thus it creates a potentiality of a common framework for political judgement. Biskowski proclaims that love of freedom and care for the world establishes some kind of "quasi-transcendental foundations for political judgment. They are the more or less formal conditions that must obtain if politics and political action in Arendt's sense are to be viable possibilities. But they also provide substantive moral and practical content to the theory of judgment and thus perhaps also a bridge over the abyss of relativism" (Biskowski, 1993: 885). Though political action has a deeper relation with the care for the world, such activities of the private sphere such as labor and work also take part in that process. The products of work contribute to our material culture just as art and science contribute to our spiritual culture.

Turning back to the distinction between private and public, we should analyze the types of activities that Arendt attributes to the realm of the private. The main activities of the private sphere are labor and work. The former is connected with every day activities in maintaining the necessities of life, whereas the latter is connected with the creation of things and weapons which make this world fit and available to us. In short, this unusual distinction can be presented in the famous phrase which Arendt attributes to Locke: the labor of our body and the work of our hands (Locke, 1988: 287). It also corresponds to the distinction between animal *laborans* and *homo faber*. As it is implied in the title, *animal laborans* is more akin to the slave or animal lifestyle occupied with every day routine issues in maintaining life, while the *homo faber* has a certain goal to be achieved, which is a more human way of life. Richard Sennett brilliantly described the situation of *animal laborans* in *The Craftsman*: "*Animal laborans* is, as the name implies, the human being akin to a beast of burden, a drudge condemned to routine. Arendt enriched this image by imagining him or her absorbed in a task that shuts out the world, a state well exemplified by Oppenheimer's feeling that the atomic bomb was a 'sweet' problem, or Eichmann's obsession with making the gas chambers efficient. In the act of making it work, nothing else matters; *Animal laborans* takes the work as an end to itself" (Sennet, 2008: 7). Let us remind ourselves here about the traditional Aristotelian distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*, that are proposed in terms of ends; *poiesis* always has a certain end outside, whereas *praxis* has an end inside its own process, i.e., public conduct is considered as excellence. This situation highlights a similarity between labor and action that at first might

seem strange because both of these parts of *vita activa* require a comprehension of the goal as something placed inside the very process of their activities.

Arendt traces the roots of this distinction back to the etymology of many European languages, like “arbeiten” and “werk” in German, or “lavoro” and “opera” in Italian. The main difference between these words is that labor usually has an unproductive nature, as it leaves nothing behind as a result of its activity. It quickly consummates everything in order to continue the process of life-maintenance. In contrast, the ultimate goal of *homo faber* is not to consume, but to create. *Homo faber* creates an artificial world of different things, as the working process always leaves many products which can be consumed later by other people or can be used as other tools of world transformation for the sake of human life. Products crafted by *homo faber* have durability; therefore, they are not simply consumed, but are being reused. The more stable condition of crafted products allows them to “withstand, ‘stand against’ and endure, at least for a time, the voracious needs and wants of their living makers and users” (Arendt, 1998: 137). However, at the same time, the process of work is more violent than labor, as it takes material from Nature directly or indirectly, and transforms it with a purpose of crafting something new. Thus, if *animal laborans* lives in stable conditions and in peace with Nature, *homo faber* aims to be the master and conqueror of Nature. Yet, it allows the craftsman to be a more virtuous man since the products of work can be used by other people and involves the craftsman into a closer communication between them. The act of finishing the labor is sufficient because, by doing so, we want to satisfy our natural needs and consume that we have already created. Moreover, it can be a well-done job, and will be a virtuous act since we can get recognition and feel proud of what we have done after a creation of something good.

The Virtuoso Nature of the Worker

In contrast to Arendt whose methodology includes the clarification and the refinement of concepts, that is to say, making distinctions, Virno is attracted to the establishment of relations. Being a Marxist theorist, Virno does not pay attention on the distinction between labor and work. In his works, the terms “labor” and “work” (“lavoro” and “opera” in Italian) are usually used together. Arendt criticizes this position, saying that only productive labor was important for Marx since it is deeply involved in the economic system by creating the so-called surplus value. However, Marx regarded unproductive labor as a parasitic type of activity which does not produce any products. Moreover, Arendt writes that antiquity also ignored the distinction between labor and work, although Aristotle distinguishes *poiesis* and *praxis*. The former has producing a product as an ultimate goal while the latter has an end in itself. Meanwhile, Virno might rely more on that distinction since he frequently uses the term “activity without finished work,” which refers to the Aristotelian definition. Hence, he does not separate the two terms of labor and work since they can be used as synonyms.

Virno mostly concentrates on the relations between action, work, and intellect. His main thesis is that work, as the transformed mode of production which he defines as

post-Fordism, has similar characteristics to action: “In the post-Fordist era, we have Work taking on many of the attributes of Action: unforeseeability, the ability to begin something new, linguistic ‘performances,’ and an ability to range among alternative possibilities” (Virno, 2006: 190). Work acquires the qualities that are exclusively imposed on political action. Work demands not only the implementation of some repetitive actions at the modern stage of the development of capitalist relations; it requires cooperation, communication between individuals, and a certain flexibility in order to solve various tasks. Therewith, it is required not only to solve them, but to do it with excellence, qualitatively, and in a virtuosic manner. Virtuosity is required at all levels of production, whether it is a simple worker who is among other workers, or a leader who is compelled to solve numerous issues in a masterly fashion, acquiring the traits of a performing artist as a result. Thus, work becomes public and is then performed among other people. The purpose of work now is not only to create a material culture but also to modulate social cooperation; hence, communication skills play a significant part in this process. Besides, this modulation “takes place through linguistic services that, far from giving rise to a final product, exhaust themselves in the communicative interaction that their own ‘performance’ brings about” (Virno, 2006: 192).

Blurring the boundaries between work and action implies that a worker would in some sense perform an “activity without finished work,” the matrix of which is the virtuosic performance of the act of speech. Similar to the pianist or actor, a worker under these circumstances performs an activity with a purpose that coincides with the very fact of its execution. In the essay “When the Word Becomes Flesh,” Virno considers such activity primarily as an act of speech. In his opinion, this “activity without work” can fill the gap between structural linguistics and the philosophy of *praxis*, that is, between the *Course* by Saussure and the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle (Virno, 2015: 21). The structural gap lies in the fact that the linguistics of Saussure only singles out the formal structure of the language and pays little attention to how the language is connected with the public sphere, whereas the ethics of Aristotle considers the features of *praxis* and its differences from *poiesis*, without linking *praxis* to a specific application language ability. Thus, Virno radicalizes Hannah Arendt’s thesis that action and speech cannot be separated. In her version, action includes speech, since there can be no speechless deeds from which it would be impossible to say anything. Virno takes a step forward and argues that language activity is action *par excellence*, that is, *praxis* in the literal sense. Thus, the linguistic activity is not directed at any specific aim, but has this aim in itself.

Undoubtedly, Virno does not claim that there are no extralinguistic goals for acts of speech. In fact, he states that just as the meaning of playing the piano cannot be explained on the basis of something external related to this act, so language itself constitutes its rules and norms. Pragmatism and cognitivism are aimed at understanding language as *poiesis* (activity directed toward an external goal) or *episteme* (knowledge system), but they miss the fact that the language is primarily a *praxis*. The speaker, as a virtuoso performer, is potentially able to establish new connections and articulate new relationships. It is worth mentioning that there are significant differences in how language is understood by Ar-

endt and Virno. For Arendt, language is an instrument of our thought, where thinking is carried out through an inner dialogue. However, Virno emphasizes the moment of virtuosity in the very nature of language: “If language is a symphony, the speaker shares the same characteristics as the performing artist. Being contingent and singular, each speech act boils down to a virtuoso performance. It does not create an independent object and therefore it implies the presence of others. This means that linguistic activity, considered as a whole, is neither production (*poiesis*) nor cognition (*episteme*), but action (*praxis*)” (Virno, 2015: 24). Hence, their interpretations of the concept of virtuosity are also different. Virtuosity, as Arendt defines it, is an illustration of freedom which is inherent to a human’s capacity of action. Virtuosity also describes an excellence which makes someone a good artist, pianist, etc., and virtuosic politics are similar to the performing arts: “Since all acting contains an element of virtuosity, and because virtuosity is the excellence we ascribe to the performing arts, politics has often been defined as an art” (Arendt, 2000: 153). If one can perform playing on the piano or another art with virtuosity, that makes him free. Thus, freedom is always at the center of any consideration. However, Virno concentrates mostly on the idea that virtuosity can be described as the identity between the performance of an action and its purpose, where “its results perfectly coincide with its execution” (Virno, 2015: 28). This idea is based on the Aristotelian distinction between *praxis* (action) and *poiesis* (making or production). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle draws this distinction in this way: “For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end” (Aristotle, 1999: 94). Hence, the very concept of activity without work is a direct reference to this passage from Aristotle.

Contemplation and Thinking

Now it is necessary to approach the human’s third capacity, that of intellect and thinking. For Aristotle and Plato, a contemplative lifestyle based on *nous* (intellect) was considered to be the most beautiful and the most highly valued. Here, Arendt and Virno deviate from the thoughts of the classics, considering that it is in political life that the human experience is manifested in the most complete way. However, Arendt follows Greek classical thought where it is considered to be a separate sphere or a particular way of life which is named the *vita contemplativa*. Virno sees the intellect as something that is manifested in modern society largely in production processes where intellect acquires public character. Virno says that Arendt “rejects out of hand the very idea of a public intellect. In her judgment, reflection and thought (in a word, the ‘life of the mind’) bear no relation to that ‘care for common affairs’ that involves an exhibition to the eyes of others” (Virno, 2006: 193). However, the question of why, in this case, was the intellect and contemplation originally understood as a kind of solitary activity remains unanswered.

The state of contemplation is described as a conscious cessation of activity when someone in a speechless wonder can behold a deity. Contemplation belongs to the sphere of *vita contemplativa*, which Arendt considered as something radically different from *vita activa*. The former starts from the speechless wonder which causes one to withdraw

from the reality of material world to the ideal world of pure thought, while the latter is concerned with public matters or satisfying the necessities of life. However, in some sense, *homo faber* also might be the awareness of the experience of contemplation. The fabrication of products that are later used by other people is certainly a very active process. Sennet adds that while accomplishing this, we are deeply engaged in doing a good job, so our motives are driven not only from a desire of profit and goal achievement, but also by the very form or *eidōs*. Hence, a special contemplative glance might seem to be a part of the attitude towards the things one fabricates. As Arendt writes: "*Homo faber* could be persuaded to this change of attitude because he knew contemplation and some of its delights from his own experience; he did not need a complete change of heart, a true periagoge, a radical turnabout. All he had to do was let his arms drop and prolong indefinitely the act of beholding the *eidōs*, the eternal shape and model he had formerly wanted to imitate and whose excellence and beauty he now knew he could only spoil through any attempt at reification" (Arendt, 1998: 304). However, this attitude has faded since modernity concentrates mostly on the process of producing things rather on the contemplation of the pure form or *eidōs*. Thus, there is no place in the modern world for contemplation, rendering it meaningless.

Nevertheless, Arendt explores this field in her last fundamental philosophical work, *The Life of the Mind*. After studying the active way of life in *The Human Condition*, she turns to the notion of passive and solitary *vita contemplativa*. Earlier, we discussed the glance of contemplation which can be found in the craftsman's experience, but this is just a minor part of a broader subject she presented in her *The Life of the Mind*. Some crucial points of this topic must be considered in this work, as our aim is to see the correlation between Arendt's view and Virno's interpretation of her ideas.

Vita contemplativa includes three autonomous capacities, those of thinking, willing, and judging. The last is the unfinished part since Arendt died after she wrote the parts concerning thinking and willing. Contemplation is connected with the capacity of thinking, but these parts are still different. Thinking is an activity of the inner dialogue with the inner self, while contemplation is the most passive state, being the cessation of all activities. The next passage describes this process: "The thinking activity — according to Plato, the soundless dialogue we carry on with ourselves — serves only to open the eyes of the mind, and even the Aristotelian *nous* is an organ for seeing and beholding the truth. In other words, thinking aims at and ends in contemplation and contemplation is not an activity but a passivity; It is the point where mental activity comes to rest" (Arendt, 1981: 6). Hence, thinking led to contemplation as the highest stage before it became a servant of science in the modern age. However, while thinking can be silent, this inner dialogue needs speech to be activated. Thereafter, we think to construct consequences of sentences which create some meaning for us. In contrast to thinking, contemplation is a speechless beholding of the truth guided by intuition. The sudden insight of intuition withdraws us from the real world of the here and now to a place with no time and space where we can behold the truth. These sudden insights were known in many cultures and

have many names, like *satori* in Zen Buddhism; therefore, this state of the mind cannot be considered as thinking.

The most common condition for the life of the mind is the withdrawal from the world, which is a quiet and sheer condition, and where no public involvement can be seen. Thus, this withdrawal makes both contemplation and thinking parts of the private sphere. When I am actively engaged in public affairs, there is no place for thinking and contemplation since all my individual powers are oriented towards other people and their common goal. For example, an actor during the play cannot observe the play as a whole, as the actor's mind and action are concentrated on the virtuosic performance of the role. Arendt highlights that the *vita contemplativa* requires not only the position of the actor, but also the position of the spectator.¹ She even shows that the Greek word "theory" comes from the ancient Greek word "theatai," which means "spectator." Arendt writes: "From the Greek word for spectators, *theatai*, the later philosophical term 'theory' was derived, and the word 'theoretical' until a few hundred years ago meant 'contemplating', looking upon something from the outside, from a position implying a view that is bidden from those who take part in the spectacle and actualize it" (Arendt, 1981: 93). The actor in the scene is just a small part of a big play; the actor has their own role, but the performance of this role is guided by deeds and speeches. It follows that the performance is public. As it was discussed earlier, actions can be unpredictable: with a new beginning, it has a start, but the end is unclear. Hence, the position of actor does not allow us to observe the whole picture of what Hegel called "The cunning of Reason" — the idea that history has a rational end, and fulfills it in an indirect manner through the great deeds of heroes.

Thinking and contemplation also have a significant difference in terms of the very nature of their objectives. The objective of contemplation is stability and immobility, as it is very "similar to the beatific vision known from both Aquinas and Dante, the immediate knowledge of God, characterized by motionless awe" (Cirillo, 2014: 54). Indeed, contemplation itself has certain theological connotations: it is known that medieval philosophers saw the pure idea of contemplation as a communication with God. For example, Plotinus considers contemplation as witnessing Absolute Beauty in its integrity, for its purity is perfect. In the process of contemplation of this great beauty, we identify it as the apogee of our life. It is written in *Enneads* that "If he that has never seen this Being must hunger for It as for all his welfare, he that has known must love and reverence It as the very Beauty; he will be flooded with awe and gladness, stricken by a salutary terror" (*Enneads* I.6.7.). In contemplation as well as in thinking, there is also me and others, but while thinking is carried out through an inner dialogue with myself, contemplation is the motionless awe of God.

Thinking, on the contrary, is very mobile and versatile. Opposite to science, which is just a more developed version of common sense for Arendt, thinking is aimed at finding meaning, while science is based on positive knowledge. For science, the result is the most important thing, but thinking is a more hermeneutic process which requires some kind

1. A detailed investigation on this issue, see Khreiche, 2015.

of circular movement of the interpretation of meaning. This meaning is a very slippery object, and the mind of the philosopher must be very active to hold it since it always fades away: “Compared to an object of contemplation, meaning, which can be said and spoken about, is slippery; if the philosopher wants to see and grasp it, it ‘slips away’” (Arendt, 1981: 122). Thinking as a circular activity must be repeated again and again as the mind is inclined to ask questions that science is not able to answer. Many philosophers appreciated this desire for metaphysics as the most significant feature of the human mind, but it also makes us strangers to this world of appearance. In becoming detached from the world, the still-active ego moves through universalities, while actions deal with particularities. Thinking is a home-less activity; it cannot be localized in space, and creates a gap between the past and the future as well.

Social or Public Intellect?

As mentioned above, Virno’s aim is to show that work attains similar characteristics to action, or perhaps it is better to say that he wants to demonstrate the fact that the dividing line between work and action is blurred. Virno adds that work becomes similar not only to political action, but it also includes the spheres of intellect and thinking. Here, he refers directly to Arendt’s work *The Life of the Mind*, and argues that thinking, which does not participate in public affairs, is now transformed under new modes of production. The paradox is that thinking combines with work, and thereby becomes public. To define the notion of thinking, he uses the concept of “General Intellect,” which originates from the works by Marx. In addition, Virno also uses the term “public intellect” (*intelletto pubblico*). By using these terms, Virno aims to oppose his concepts to the classical tradition whose intercessor is Arendt; there, the intellect and mental activities are presented as a solitary activity opposed to *praxis* (public actions). Therefore, for Virno, the thinker is a public figure who does not reflect alone and is always in communication with others. As for the concept of “General Intellect,” it was taken from the *Grundrisse* by Marx, where the term was originally used in English to emphasize that intellectual activity takes a collective character and serves as the basis of social production. “General Intellect” for Marx is a science embodied in social production. However, according to Virno, Marx does not accord enough attention to the fact that the intellect is public in a sense that different people communicate with each other, and perform various tasks based on their equal access to scientific and technical knowledge.

Nevertheless, it is worth asking whether such an expansion of the intellect and the elimination of the sphere of the private using of the intellect is turning it into a public space. When the intellect becomes universal and open to all, and science becomes part of social production, such a situation is often described as cognitive capitalism or the information society. In this case, the intellect really generates a certain collectivity because it provides a universal access of knowledge for all. Moreover, Virno shows how the general intellect becomes the conductor of protection and orientation in the world when all other traditional landmarks collapse: “Thus, we could say that the ‘life of the mind’ becomes,

in itself, public. We turn to the most general categories in order to equip ourselves for the most varied specific situations, no longer having at our disposal any 'special' or sectorial ethical-communicative codes. The feeling of not-feeling-at-home and the preeminence of the 'common places' go hand in hand. The intellect as such, the pure intellect, becomes the concrete compass wherever the substantial communities fail, and we are always exposed to the world in its totality" (Virno, 2004: 37). However, such collectivity does not mean creating a public sphere where people experience togetherness with their diversities preserved. The commonality of linguistic and cognitive patterns provided by the general intellect creates the basis for the realm of the social as a space of collectivity where everyone is the same, but not united by common interests and the desire to deliberate on public matters.

It is more likely that such a general intellect will create less space for uniqueness and discussion since it provides everyone with the same forms of knowledge and communication. The "General Intellect" is rather a social intellect. It will certainly be an effective means for a solution to what Arendt calls a social question. As a metaphor, "General Intellect" and thinking can be opposed to each other as *Verstand* and *Vernunft* are in German classical philosophy. The first ability is suitable for communication, and the use of common logic for all reasoning and problem solving according to criteria that is understandable for all. The second ability is a synthesizing activity that implies solitude and concentration of thought on itself, where social intellect will be a cognitive administrative resource for solving social problems. Moreover, it is not for nothing that the modern sphere of social security and services provided by the state is increasingly becoming part of the "General Intellect," moving into a publicly accessible format, and becoming part of the information field. This creates the possibility of direct access for every citizen in this area of social intellect.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, it is necessary to highlight the key points where our analysis of Virno's interpretation of the main concepts of Arendt's political philosophy. First of all, Virno considers Arendt's theory to be an expression of a long tradition of political thought which originated with Aristotle. This tradition, which describes the relationship between work, action, and intellect, has nowadays become the common pattern of thought. Virno believes that the modern conditions of production create a completely different experience of these basic human capacities in which work resembles the characteristics of action and conjoins with the intellect. So, the general approach to this tradition in Virno's conceptual framework is not to separate the various concepts and categories, but to show how they can be mixed, and what can come out of it.

Virtuosity, which Arendt attributed to political action, now arises in the work experience. According to Virno, this is due to the fact that work changes its orientation from the production of goods and the interaction with the world of nature to the modulation and production of the communicative ability itself. Work requires the presence of oth-

ers, and its product cannot be separated from the execution of the act. The figure of the worker acquires a political character. Virno takes another important step by showing that virtuosity does not only relate to a political figure or an artist on the stage, as was the case with Arendt; it is also the virtuosity of a linguistic act, which is a matrix of political action.

From this approach of Arendt's political philosophy, Virno will mainly focus on those concepts that help him describe this new, unified experience of human capacities that the *multitude* can possess. He will ignore other important distinctions of her theory since they do not help him solve the issues he imposes. He overlooks the distinction between the social and the political, which, for Arendt, is connected to the problem of the possibility of action in the modern world, and its replacement with behavior. For Virno, the problem is rather how to manifest the full potential of virtuosic work when the state with its bureaucratic apparatus absorbs this opportunity. It is also worth mentioning that Virno disregards the distinctions between labor and work and between the figure of *animal laborans* and *homo faber*. Virno uses the concepts of work and labor synonymously, as it is much more important for him to consider the relationship between *poiesis* and *praxis*.

Virno considers the sphere of intellect in a similar way, but the fact that he ignores the distinctions between the social and the political affects this interpretation. For Arendt, thinking cannot manifest itself in a public way for this is what happens inside a person, representing an internal dialogue with himself. For Virno, the intellect is the basis of modern production; the general capacity to think is accessible for everyone. Hence, in his opinion, there arises the publicity of the intellect, since it serves as a general "score," due to which the virtuosic acts of the workers are performed. However, proceeding from the social problem of Arendt, the concept of the "General Intellect" for Virno can be interpreted as social intellect since it participates in the reproduction of a certain collectivity, in which common patterns of thinking and knowledge are realized, and where science serves as the basis of production. "General Intellect" creates social, but not a political collectivity which is built on the basis of not diversity, but rather the uniformity of behavioral patterns. Overall, in Virno's theory, the classical idea of dividing human experience into the three components of labor, action, and intellect is generally presented in such a way that they are mixed and placed in some single space, the key point of which is work. Such tactics are unable to disclose all the problematic nodes of the Arendtian philosophy fully, since many issues simply fall out of Virno's scope of consideration.

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Жизнь труда: рецепция Вирно в политической философии Ханны Арендт

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Политическую философию со времен античности занимал вопрос об основных человеческих способностях, которые подразделялись на труд, действие и интеллект. Определение и предназначение этих способностей, а также их связь с основными человеческими

добродетелями были описаны в «Этике» Аристотеля. Следуя Аристотелю, Ханна Арендт определяет две основные сферы, в которых эти способности локализируются: *vita activa* и *vita contemplativa*. Попытка на основе марксизма переопределить основные понятия этой традиции была предпринята итальянским политическим философом Паоло Вирно. В данной статье автор рассматривает, каким образом происходит интерпретация основных понятий политической философии Арендт в работах Вирно, как его подход помогает справиться с основными проблемами, которые она ставит в своей политической теории. Итальянский мыслитель описывает ситуацию, когда труд начинает демонстрировать качества, традиционно приписываемые политическому действию. Вместе с этим жизнь ума, мышление помещается им в центр трудового процесса, а интеллект становится средством публичной коммуникации. В то время как Арендт проводит важные для анализа нашей политической реальности различия, Вирно концентрируется на объединении различных сфер и установлении новых отношений между категориями политической философии. По мнению автора, такая стратегия не всегда позволяет точно охватить все аспекты политической мысли Арендт. Объединение интеллекта с трудом и действием подрывает саму возможность опыта мышления и созерцания. Игнорирование различия между социальным и политическим приводит к тому, что публичность интеллекта можно интерпретировать как то, что интеллект становится социальным, а значит, более пригодным для решения «социального вопроса».

Ключевые слова: Ханна Арендт, Паоло Вирно, действие, интеллект, созерцание, множество, виртуозность, труд