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**Hannah Arendt and
Modernity: Revisiting
the Work *The Human
Condition***

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HANNAH ARENDT AND MODERNITY: REVISITING THE WORK *THE HUMAN CONDITION*

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju *

Abstract

This article argues that Hannah Arendt's major work 'The Human Condition' has strict limitations when applied in the context of societies which cannot fall back upon the history of either ancient Greek Polis or Roman res publica. The entire political philosophy developed by Arendt in that text relies particularly on ancient western history. Added to the spatial dimension is the factor of time when considered with the conditions prevailing in the twenty-first century. The work's major limitation is that ever since the text was written, the public sphere in the West and in the developing world has undergone a phenomenal expansion. Thanks to the development of digital technologies and various media for a, such as the social media. In this context this paper revisits the text 'The Human Condition' both from the perspective of a developing country, such as India; and secondly from the stand point of the twenty-first century.

Key Words: Hannah Arendt; Labour; Work; Action; Political Participation; Greek Political Thought; Marx

Introduction

In historical time and space the word modernity has come to be accepted as including three processes: Industrial revolution, French revolution and the Enlightenment. All three begun in Europe but have spread, and have been spreading, throughout the world. Usually the world that has ushered after these three processes is called the modern world. Of these, Industrialisation is an economic process while the French revolution and Enlightenment are social and political processes. However, text book definitions of modernity, such as these, do not include colonialism. That is why by definition, 'modernity' is a western product and process and the rest of the societies have only been adapting to it. Usually western political philosophy, that has been produced after 16th and 17th centuries, has usually been considered as 'modern' political philosophical thought (Robertson: 2015). Hannah Arendt's text *The Human Condition* (Arendt: 1959), which we discuss here also falls within this modern western philosophical tradition. Although the book is titled '*The Human Condition*' the condition discussed therein is largely in the western tradition. Within the western tradition, she falls in the philosophical schools of existentialism and phenomenology. Existentialism holds that 'existence is prior to essence' that there are no pre-given absolutes to human existence. Existentialism also is extreme subjectivism about reality. In pursuit of 'existential' individuality, individuals can cross all barriers and givens of human condition. Ethics set by society are no bar for individuals in search of overcoming alienation or self-fulfillment. Though Arendt is supposed to have been more than an existentialist and saw herself as a political philosopher, she only applies existential philosophy and some ideas of Marx such as alienation to reality. Even in this she is quite against the spirit and letter of Marx in many ways. Perry Anderson and David McLellan (Anderson: 1976; McLellan: 1979) while discussing western Marxism have commented that while Marx moved from philosophy to political economy, entire western Marxism

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moved away from political economy to philosophy. Arendt is an example *par excellence* of the same tendency.

The text discussed here focuses on a threefold division of human existence into labour, work and action. Privileging and holding up action as most superior. We will see the discussion of the same in the following.

Non-western societies have their own histories and complexities not knowing which is Arendt's major limitation. Two things are important to note: non-western societies have not gone through the similar social, economic and political processes that western societies have undergone. Their history is different. For example, we in India have a different ancient, medieval and modern past which has shaped the enormous complexity of our society. With the above proviso the discussion presented here is somewhat exegetical but also critical while appreciating her attempt to think through the categories of labour, work and action, this scholar remains thoroughly critical of the entire attempt. Not only are her distinctions problematic from the point of view of Marxian thinking, whatever sympathy she may have had for Marx, but they are problematic even from a simple egalitarian and humanist perspective. All said, one can be more appreciative of the labour of *animal laborans* and *homo faber* than of abstract theorisation whose utility in the context of developing world where there is a lot of material misery and poverty to be alleviated, is doubtful. However, the task having been undertaken, we suffer through it in the following text.

The Private and the Public Realms

Hannah Arendt starts her discussion of *vita activa*, meaning, *active life*, with her distinction between private and public spheres. Her main argument is that with the coming of modernity the public sphere has taken a back seat whereas the family and the economy have taken the primary importance. She also calls this the rise of the 'social'. By rise of the social, she means family and economy whereas by political, she means 'men acting in concert' or the public life. According to Seyla Benhabib (Benhabib: 1996), Arendt's conception of the public sphere is known as 'agonistic'; which takes its cue from the civic republicanism of the Roman times. It means civic virtue and republican virtue. The *Res publica* as the Romans called it, or the ancient *polis* of the Greek times is her model. According to this agonistic model of public sphere, the family and the economy belonged to the private realm. Whereas being public citizen and acting in concert with other men in the political realm was more important. This is also in consonance with her critique of the western philosophy since Aristotle, which holds *vita contemplativa* or contemplative life to be more important than life of political action or *vita activa*. According to her these two aspects: firstly, political philosophy since Plato and Aristotle focused more on *vita contemplativa* rather than *vita activa*, even though historically in ancient Greek and Roman times the importance was on being public citizen or participating in public life.

Secondly, modernity and capitalism reinforces this tendency by placing all the significance in life on family and economy whereas the direct participation of citizens in politics is rendered unimportant. Her critique is at two levels: at one level political philosophy itself is to blame; because it focuses on *vita contemplativa*. At another level, and in modern times, this theoretical tendency to deride *vita activa* has been reinforced by practical historical shift in the life process of citizens to withdraw from

public action and political life into family and economy. According to her, the true vocation of human beings is to be political, to participate in decision making and to take part in public life. Capitalism and modernity go against this fundamental human nature in rendering citizens incapable of participating in public life by making them private beings, and with their sole focus on acquisitive nature or even accumulation. Thus, to say it again 'the social' i.e., the family and economy, triumph in modern times over 'the political' or participation in public life. What becomes of modernity is 'society' or what she calls a 'consumer's society'. Society that ceaselessly labours, produces and consumes.

One should bear in mind that Arendt is essentially a philosopher and a political philosopher. Her criticisms and distinctions are fundamental. Interestingly, it is also the point made by Tocqueville that with the rise of modernity, private life takes precedence over public life of a citizen. In that sense, Tocqueville too shares the concept of agonistic public sphere with Arendt.

We need to invoke here the feminist arguments about the personal is political because their argument blurs the distinction between the public that is political with personal (Bryson: 2003). The distinction between private sphere and public sphere is usually drawn by liberal theory. Feminists, while attacking this distinction, equate the public with personal and personal with public and both with political. Arendt's discussion of the distinction between public and private is unique in the sense that in order to draw the line between the two she refers to ancients. This, however, runs counter to modern feminist concept of the political. Feminists extend politics to the personal as well. Therefore, for feminists there is no private sphere that is non-political. The distinctions that Arendt makes have no meaning for them. In fact, feminism also risks question on the opposite of making personal too political and leaving out the public. Interestingly, in the view of modernity as separating public and private spheres with the suggestion that modernity does not allow room for public life for all i.e., in distinguishing between the political and social, Arendt does not address the feminist question at all. It is regarding the more fundamental questions of public life, work and labour which Arendt goes on to elaborate as *vita activa*.

At its root, the basic concept of human nature that Arendt adopts is that of Aristotle who defined human beings as essentially political beings, as *zoon politikon*. Thus, Arendt is also known as Neo-Aristotelian. The point, however, is though Aristotle (Aristotle: 1995) defines man as political animal in his *Politics*, in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle: 1983) he defines him more in terms of *vita contemplativa* rather than *vita activa*. Thus, the distinctions that Arendt makes hold and she is only partly a Neo-Aristotelian.

***Animal Laborans* and Labour**

Hannah Arendt starts her theorisation of labour with a critique of Marx. Arendt says that only in the modern age that labour is elevated to supreme position. The labour that we do to secure the necessities of life has no value other than consumption. Arendt puts the onus of elevating labour to this situation entirely on Marx. The problem with elevating labour to the highest position is that much of the product of labour only ends up in mundane consumption. *Animal laborans* or labouring animal, according to Arendt, is always caught up in the realm of necessity never realising freedom. While Marx posits a difference between realm of necessity and realm of freedom, his realm of freedom too is fully

dependent upon the development of productive forces and fulfilling consumption. While Marx holds that man is a *homo faber*, he actually ends up by glorifying *animal laborans*. Here, Arendt makes a distinction between the produce of *homo faber* and the produce of *animal laborans*. According to her what *homo faber* produces is used whereas what *animal laborans* produces is consumed. That is, what *animal laborans* does is not creative labour whereas what *homo faber* does is creative labour.

Arendt makes this distinction between *homo faber* and *animal laborans* with regard to the ancient Greek world where the necessity of labour had to be left to the slaves in order to be fully a public citizen. That is the realm of necessity of mundane labour had to be necessarily left to slaves, whereas full participation in public life required freedom from that labour. Arendt thinks that with the coming of modern age the two distinctions disappear: One the citizen and the labourer, and two, work and labour. According to her what *homo faber* does is work and what *animial laborans* does is the menial labour. The former is durable, whereas the latter disappears in consumption. The former is produced by the craftsman the latter is by labourer. With the coming of modern age the distinction between *animal laborans* and *homo faber* disappears because of mass production of things. The focus shifts to the 'productivity' of labourer and all professions are treated on par as the labour of *animal laborans*.

For Arendt the main problem with Marx is that while Marx defines the realm of freedom as freedom from labour, the freedom from producing the necessities of life, his view of realm of freedom is when man's productive powers have reached their highest stage. That is, he still remains, according to Arendt, in productive slavery. Arendt's point is that the realm of freedom that Marx expected was not a 'consumer's society' that ceaselessly labours to consume. It is a place where freedom is actually obtained from labour itself. Arendt wrote, as she did in mid twentieth-century, the experience of socialism as it came to be was no different from the then existing capitalist consumer society. Fascist totalitarianism in capitalist countries and socialist totalitarianism of the Stalinist variety both in the end seem to foster the same commodity fetishism.

We cannot understand Arendt's critique of Marx unless we understand her distinction between ancients and moderns. According to her point of view, labour and securing the daily necessities of labour was never glorified in the ancient world. What was important, and perhaps all too important, was the participation in public life. That is why Plato (Plato: 1993) strictly emphasises a three class society whereas Aristotle too glorified contemplative life rather than laboring life. Arendt thinks that with the moderns the reverse is true. Modernity emphasises both egalitarianism, and labouring life along with its productivity. In this, the realm of freedom that Marx emphasises, she thinks it would not be any different. Problem is not with Marx. Problem is with modernity, both capitalist and socialist, which emphasise or glorifies labour and productivity at the expense of participation in public life. Plato (Plato: 1993) in his Republic holds that an ideal republic would be the one where there would be three classes: peasants, soldiers and guardians (Plato: 1993). All three specialise in their respective spheres. And the harmony between these is akin to the harmony of the body, spirit and mind. Therefore ancient political philosophy, even when it contemplated an ideal society, emphasised on hierarchy; whereas modernity is different. Modernity, even capitalist modernity, focuses on equality and democracy along also with liberty. Liberty perhaps is the soul value that links the moderns with the ancients. The other

philosophical standards of evaluation of ancients do not go hand in hand with modernity. This is the entire point that Arendt is stressing upon. And Marx is also included in this critique. Therefore, one does not understand Arendt unless one understands her distinctions and historico-philosophical depth of Arendt's theorisation. By historico-philosophical depth we mean that Hannah Arendt draws on both ancient western history and philosophy at the same time.

Indeed, it is rather easy to critique Arendt's point of view citing Marx's view of future socialist society in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' that whereas in early socialism it is 'from each according to his labour; to each according to his work' while it is in later, advanced stage of communism that the realm of freedom appears as 'from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs'. Arendt's point therefore, that even the advanced society does not free society from labour, would always be contingent, as is the case with Marx, on the development of productive forces at that stage.

The point, however, is, whether humanity will ever step into realm of freedom or not, the gross inequalities and injustices persisting in it can be substantially reduced with the existing level of development of productive forces under capitalism. There cannot be two view points about this. However, we have to note that Arendt's detour into phenomenology blinds her to these inequalities. She is a quintessential theorist of human freedom, that too individual freedom from drudgery and labour of every day existence. Had she not been in the end a liberal political philosopher she would not have critiqued totalitarianism of both Stalinist and Fascist variety. Besides, had she not been a Marxian political theorist she would not have critiqued modern world in terms of freedom from labour and drudgery, particularly to participate in public life. According to her, freedom from every drudgery to participate in public life did exist in ancient West and to articulate which is the entire burden of the text. She perhaps can be excused on those grounds.

What Arendt does not take head on is capitalism and its distribution of realm of freedom for a few and realm of necessity for many. At the existing level of productive forces and accumulation of capital, the realm of freedom should have been become possible for many, if not all. Arendt, unlike a political economist, does not locate these questions in accumulation. These questions are never addressed by Arendt. Arguably, she defined herself as a political philosopher rather than a critical political economist. Therefore, is her critique of realm of necessity valid? Her major problem is that in the modern age, all types of work have become that of *animal laborans* and treated as such.

Added to her strength are the critiques received by actually existed socialism. If one remembers the debates in the media at the time of the collapse of the USSR, one often cannot miss the point that the socialist society could indeed not compete with the capitalist society in providing consumer goods to its people. The people were provided social security, the burden of every day inequality having been reduced, but it was still a society that aspired to be a consumers' society. This, in the context of the competitions with capitalism in all spheres, including war, has actually led to the collapse. It is interesting to note that in today's socialist China too, the post-revolutionary society has bowed to the needs of consumer society. There are two points to make here. One, Marx may have philosophically aspired for a realm of freedom for all. But the main point of Marx was the abolition of current oppression and exploitation in a society that was in the frenzy of 19th century industrialisation,

urbanisation and rapid change. The context of 19th century was remarkable for Marx to have hoped for the abolition of those circumstances. And the societies that have actually become what they came to be called socialist have indeed attained the abolition of those extreme circumstances of oppression. These in fact have not ushered in a realm of freedom for all though they have certainly reduced the monstrous burden of inequality in those countries where it existed. Therefore, Arendt's critique of Marx is only partly validated by history and her silence on actually existing reality of capitalism is difficult to understand. This entire gloss over on the historical transition on one hand makes Arendt blind to the then existing reality in her time, but on the other one needs to wonder whether she was prescient? It is indeed easy to dismiss the critique of Marx on the above grounds. And then, where was that she was prescient? Certainly, in looking beyond her own times--in the extra-ordinary foresight that she had on the nature of the developments. But all this still makes her criticism of *animal laborans* and consumption being weaker in argument. In the sense that the production of goods and consumption of goods and services which consumer society developed also in many circumstances satisfied the needs, often basic needs of the people. What is in that case wrong, if needs, which have historically never been fulfilled, got fulfilled. After all, Marx also held man to be an objective being and consuming being? And also after all, is not really existing capitalism to be blamed for denying millions of people even their basic necessities? Keeping them in ignorance, exploitation, oppression and degrading circumstances? Is not then Arendt being aristocratic in dismissing labour and consumption? That *animal laborans* is after all a material being who consumes material things? Did not Marx, after all, focus on the materialist side of life? It would be wrong to underestimate Arendt to have ignored this argument. The problem is elsewhere. In the definition of human nature that Marx takes, he was not only a objectivist materialist, but also argued for freedom from labour. He expected much like him all others would work in the freedom to realise their higher selves. Marx did not expect the emancipated to become, to put in Arendt's words, 'animal laborans'; he expected the emancipated to be not merely a materialist consumer but also as someone who strives to realise his higher self. It is well to remember while critiquing Arendt over the concept of 'animal laborans' who produces and consumes ceaselessly, the commodities of capitalism, that Marx too begins his critique of capitalism in Vol 1 of *Capital* (Marx: 1906) with the critique of commodities. The 'magic and necromancy' of commodities; we cannot simply forget the concept of 'commodity fetishism'. How far Arendt's critique of 'animal laborans' and 'consumers society' is from 'commodity fetishism'? In fact, both end fairly close in this matter. Both are, in the ultimate sense, philosophical critiques of capitalism and its un-freedom and enchainment not only to labour but labour that never elevates one from his or her lower self. Even in egalitarian Marx, there is therefore, a clear concept of higher self and lower self. The purpose of socialism is to realise one's higher self and not get lost in the mire of the same 'commodity fetishism' that capitalism produces. Both the émigré Germans agree on this.

Homo Faber and 'Work'

According to Arendt, 'work' means the product not of *animal laborans* but *homo faber*. It involves fabrication with hands, a certain solidification and reification. It is also durable and has lasting value. The appreciation of which also involves plurality. It is an objectified labour that lasts. Also a work is not

something which can be immediately consumed and lost in the life process. A work of art, for example, which stands enduring the ravages of time and can be reached time and again. The work of art cannot also be rated according to the exchange value or in terms of labour theory of value. It can be only priced, what Arendt calls, 'arbitrarily' and defies the logic of the market.

To repeat, 'work' is what is created by *homo faber* whereas according to her *animal laborans* only produces what can be immediately consumed. To see man as a tool maker or *homo faber* is still not appreciated by Arendt. Even 'work' is inferior when compared to political action and public participation. Consider the following paragraph from Arendt (Arendt: 1959):

'Marx—in one of the many asides which testify to his eminent historical sense—once remarked that Benjamin Franklin's definition of man as a tool maker is as characteristic of "Yankeedom", that is, of the modern age, as the definition of man as political animal was for antiquity. The truth of the remark lies in the fact that the modern age was as intent on excluding political man, that is man who acts and speaks, from its public realm as antiquity was on excluding homo faber' (pp 138-39)

According to Arendt, man becomes a tool maker only under capitalism. Human nature is not fundamentally that of a tool making animal. She is not satisfied that tool making animal produces useful commodities that last for a while but they only have what Marx calls 'use value'. And she stresses on the point that Marx uses the term in a slightly downgrading manner. Arendt traces Marx's sense of applying this term with reference to Protagoras' dialogue with Plato, wherein Protagoras says that 'man is the measure of all things', while Plato replies to this by saying that 'god is the measure of all things'; that is to say, the looking down upon the usable objects of *homo faber* was inherited by Marx from the Greek philosophy of Plato. Therefore, while Arendt devotes considerable attention to discussion of *homo faber* nature of man and the products of use that he produces, she essentially does not take a favourable stance towards *homo faber* even. *Homo faber*, even the highest sculptor of Greek antiquity, was seen by Greeks as a 'philistine'. That is, the one who makes or produces durable objects of value but nevertheless not pertaining to the genuine or highest possible that of human nature. These objects have some durability but do not have permanence in the world.

Work of art on the other hand has permanence and should actually be called work. Arendt (Arendt: 1959) says in the following paragraph that:

'Because of their outstanding permanence, works of art are the most intensely worldly of all tangible things; their durability is almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes, since they are not subject to the use of living creatures,, a use which, indeed far from actualising their own inherent purpose—as the purpose of a chair is actualised when it is sat upon—can only destroy them. Thus, their durability is of a higher order than that which all things need in order to exist at all; it can attain permanence throughout the ages' (pp 146-47)

According to Arendt of all art works, poetry is closest to human thought. Therefore is closest to human existence. This is in fact strange because poetry is actually about human feelings rather than thought or contemplation. Though Arendt says that even poetry is eventually a 'made object' through

remembrance and writing down, she does not pay attention to the remarks Plato precisely made regarding poetry. Plato says in the *Republic* that poetry is too close to human feelings. So much so, that it can carry away the listener or reader. And thus Plato advises us to be not too carried away by poetry. If not avoid it altogether in pursuit of pure *vita contemplativa*. In this probably Plato means by poets, not the modern poets, but someone of his time such as Homer.

However, it is clear that Hannah Arendt takes *homo faber* to be creating more durable and permanent artifacts. And that, even work of art too are but creations of certain *homo faber*. And that these have relative permanence in the world. They last for ages. Therefore, Arendt's philosophical standard of judgment is that *animal laborans* is lesser than *homo faber*. And that among different types of *homo faber* the one who produces most durable is the artist or producer of the art work. Artist, thus, is the highest among all the types of *homo faber*. And art, which modern utilitarianism consider to be 'useless' is actually the highest form of production of *homo faber*. And therefore, it alone should be considered as 'work' and of all the types of the latter, poetry is the highest and most close to human thought and existence.

***Vita Activa* and the Modern Age**

'What ushered in the modern age was not the age-old desires of astronomers for simplicity, harmony, and beauty, which made Copernicus look upon the orbits of the planets from the sun instead of the earth and the world, with its rebellion against the rationalism of medieval scholasticism; this love of the world, on the contrary, was first to fall victim to the modern age's triumphal world alienation'...(Arendt, 1959: 240-41)

Arendt attempts to trace the genealogy of modernity to 17th century Europe, and argues that the modern age began not with Galileo but with Descartes and the Cartesian axiom '*de omnium dubitandum*' or 'doubt everything' has become the credo of the modern age. This has resulted in the 'age of suspicion'. Finally, this has resulted in the triumph of the introspection that the modern age has driven the Archimedean point into the mind of man which consequently led to the development of mathematics, physics and experimentation; that with this, the triumph of natural sciences. This is the reason why Arendt (Arendt: 1959) says:

'Since then, scientific and philosophic truth have parted company; scientific truth not only need not be eternal, it need not even be comprehensible or adequate to human reason. It took many generations of scientists before the human mind grew bold enough to fully face this implication of modernity' (pp 264-65)

With the triumph of the natural scientific method what has resulted is the triumph of *techne* over *theoria*. (Interestingly, Arendt does not use these two ancient Greek words, or uses the word *Theoria* but not *Techne*, the distinction, for example, Aristotle uses frequently.) *Vita activa* triumphed over *vita contemplativa*. And this triumph of *vita activa* has resulted in what she calls 'world alienation'. Arendt (Arendt: 1959) says the same in the following words:

'Perhaps the most momentous of the spiritual consequences of the discoveries of the modern age and, at the same time, the only one that could not have been avoided, since it followed closely upon the discovery of the Archimedean point and the concomitant rise of Cartesian doubt, has been the reversal of the hierarchical order between the vita activa and vita contemplativa' (pp 262-63)

Another point that Arendt makes is that philosophy itself becomes increasingly a technical enterprise and gradually psychology replaces philosophy and experimental psychology replaces psychology. She does not say the latter but almost means it. The result, therefore, is that the entire tradition of philosophy itself declines. In a way, philosophy with its Cartesian triumph calls for an end of its own tradition. Arendt (Arendt: 1959) for example says,:

'It was not in the Middle Ages but in modern thinking that philosophy came to play second and even third fiddle. After Descartes based his own philosophy upon the discoveries of Galileo, philosophy has seemed condemned to be always one step behind the scientists and their ever more amazing discoveries.' (pp 266-67)

Arendt (Arendt: 1959) also says at another place:

'Obviously, philosophy suffered more from modernity than any other field of human endeavour;' (pp 268-69)

The result of all this is that *homo faber* triumphs. *Vita Activa* of certain kind came to dominate all other fields resulting more in the development of applied sciences. Two aspects came to the fore with this: One at the level of knowledge itself. Technical knowledge became more dominant. Secondly, this consequently has given birth to scientific discoveries and scientific discoveries in turn have given impetus to technology which has resulted in the triumph of *homo faber*. The ultimate triumph of *homo faber* has resulted historically from owing to the development of science and technology and their application to production processes. Man the fabricator, triumphs over man the thinker. The result is the development of manufacture spinning jenny, steam engine and industrialisation. Therefore, at the root of the industrial modernity is the triumph of *homo faber*, or manufacturing man. This has resulted in industrialisation. What Arendt, however, does not say, and what is more important in our part of the world, is that this has also resulted in colonialism. And western modernity therefore is inextricably intertwined with both industrialisation in the colonising world and colonisation and consequent de-industrialisation in the developing world. We, however, cannot expect Arendt to say this. And it is not proper to expect this in *The Human Condition*, for her purpose is to probe the existential condition of western humanity in the mid-twentieth century and trace its genealogy.

A Critique

There are two major limitations to the work of Arendt in *The Human Condition*. One without the model of the *polis* and the Roman *civitas* in the background, the argument developed by Arendt may not be applicable. The entire text is inextricably embedded in western history and philosophy. What, for example, of non-western societies? Which did not, perhaps, have a model public sphere in the ancient

past that Arendt invokes? African, or Asian societies for example. Or for that matter, all the non-western societies. This is a major limitation of Arendt's argument and distinctions. Particularly the distinction that Arendt makes between *animal laborans* and, freedom and free public sphere, which depended on slavery, is highly problematic when it comes to societies with steep hierarchies which are striving for modernity along with the two values of French revolution -- liberty and equality. She sounds either elitist, aristocratic or totally conservative to the modern mind, despite all her subtle distinctions. In the present context in these societies, what is demanded is not even qualified acceptance of Marx and equality, but a total chorus of agreement over those values that Marx championed and that egalitarianism upholds. What Arendt was faced with was only an initial phase of technological revolution and modernity; the rest is still an unfolding story in time and in different parts of the world. The candidates for this change are gender, caste, class and race and ethnicity and environment. Egalitarianism is a moral and political force that modernity unleashes with all its power. Modernity creates social and political equality while denying economic equality. That is the typical feature of the bourgeois modernity. The moral and political force that this brings about is resisted no doubt, but the former still matters virtually in all issues concerning modern human existence. For example, the current discussions of caste in India clearly point to the moral and political force of egalitarianism. So is the case with gender in India. These clearly point to the force of egalitarianism even in a liberal democracy. Evidently, Arendt was not aware of these complexities of the non-western world. These are different from the mid-twentieth century discussions of the same. These now are recreating the public sphere in a totally different egalitarian sense. In the face of the uprisings of these long oppressed people for egalitarianism, the deriding of *animal laborans* by Arendt does not make sense at all. And this is all added to the age-old questions of class. And the reality of non-western worlds is much more complex, wherein majorly, caste, class and gender militancy for egalitarianism trumps all calls for turning against modernity.

In India, in particular, where democracy and universal franchise came much before industrialisation and other forms of modernity, added and fuelled by the freedoms in the public sphere - - a sphere where public matters are discussed by private individuals without any power impinging upon the discussion (Calhoun: 1996; Grisprud *et al.* 2010) -- what this specific call for modernity creates is a near revolutionary situation. The older varieties of revolutionaries themselves are also adapting to these realities; and this totally leaves the public sphere more and more with a crying rally for egalitarianism. What is demanded is not just economic egalitarianism, but a social egalitarianism. Which is what Arendt precisely felt would not help liberate humanity from the necessity of labour. In other non-western societies, the questions are that of race, class and gender. Therefore, the genie unleashed by modernity and the French revolution, consumes all forms of in-egalitarianism. These forms are social, economic and political. The human condition in these societies today is much, much more complex than Arendt could have even thought about. Traditionally the steeply hierarchical and complex societies did not have any traces of agonistic conceptions of civic virtue, with rare exceptions. It falls on the states to create this modern, agonistic civic virtue. Now the moral and political force of egalitarianism in India is raising the clarion call for leveling of all distinctions. All this creates not a civic virtue or agonistic conception of

society but a bitterly contested public sphere and also to add, a bitterly contested private sphere — thanks to the personalisation of politics by feminists. Arendt, however, is ignorant of all this.

Secondly, we should bear in mind that the work *The Human Condition* was written in mid-twentieth century. Since that time, many changes have taken place. The late-twentieth century and the twenty-first century have seen many revolutions such as information and communication technologies, which have in fact expanded the public sphere. The fora in which individuals can participate, speak and express themselves, have multiplied many fold in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Therefore, this is a time perhaps Arendt, if she were around, would have rejoiced. This public sphere, particularly the digital public sphere which has expanded many fold may not be an equivalent of ancient Greek *polis*, and may still be very superficial for that, but it is well to remember that the *polis* or city-state was one, for which public sphere of citizens, even Plato and Aristotle put strict numerical limitations.

The point we are trying to make is, today's expanded digital public sphere certainly has potential to expand civic virtue or the kind of agonistic concept of public sphere that Arendt has so persuasively championed in *The Human Condition*. Condition of the humans itself has not changed but the same has many dimensions which have changed. In this case, particularly globalisation and technological revolutions of the twenty-first century, stand out as exceptional factors for rebuilding the public sphere. While economic globalisation has been uneven, and has been unequal too, politically, so far as public sphere is concerned, it has become global. Nation-state as a power bloc has not disappeared, but the boundaries of its public sphere have become blurred if not leveled altogether.

So far as the text *The Human Condition* is concerned that too is nothing but thinking on some western historico-political categories. The text too is philosophical thinking, in as much as that it too is an exercise in *vita contemplativa*. In as much as it is that, she has no case whatsoever to complain that any philosophical tradition exclusively focuses on *vita contemplativa*. As she herself says at one place:

'Obviously, philosophy suffered more from modernity than any other field of human endeavour;' (pp 268-69)

Hannah Arendt while focusing on *vita activa* does that argument extremely philosophically. She, though emphasising political action, by no means subscribes to voluntarism or actionism.

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