

# **Our Morals and Theirs: Politics beyond the Biopolitical Subject**

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### **Abstract**

Biopolitics understands the problem of the human as the product of attempts to rise beyond our biologically-, and more broadly ecologically-, imposed conditions. The creative, aspirational, transformative aspects of the human, our specifically human qualities, are regarded as precisely the causes of the problems of the world. In taming this aspect, in problematising the subjectivity of the human subject, the human is continually being reduced to the biological, to its environment, at the same time, and in the same process, the political is reduced to the social. It will be argued here, that in the project of recovering the human as a political subject, Kant and Arendt are useful sources of inspiration. In distinction to dominant biopolitical approaches, they encourage us to remake the world rather than to remake the human. However, the precondition for remaking the world is that humans aspire to species progress and act as humanly as they can in the cause of the human, in terms of struggling to build human collective institutions of meaning and action. Building the human scaffolding that enable us to act as fully as subjects in the external world as is humanly possible. Rather than demonstrating the problem of the human through holding up the world as a mirror, Kant and Arendt suggest that the problem is the subjective lack of belief in the human as a collective, acting, rational and creative subject. This paper suggests that building on this belief today can enable us to imagine the political subject after biopolitics.

### **Introduction**

The title of this draft paper draws on Leon Trotsky's 1938 pamphlet 'Their Morals and Ours'. However, today's (petty-bourgeoisie) moralism does not ground itself in universal ethics but rather in the knowing deconstruction of any universals, as the world is dissolved into multiple and overlapping endogenous processes of social construction. Like the reactionary moralism of the defeat of class struggle and revolution (which Trotsky described in the 1930s), this moralism works on the basis of judging diverse political movements (from fascism to socialism), not on the basis of their political or subjective content but according to abstract principle which is merely secondary but of special value to the moralist (1968: 6). What is this abstract principle? The moral sacrilege of thinking that political power can be directed to achieve social ends. The moral sacrilege that man can act collectively as a rational agent in the world. The understanding that man is separate to the world and through his thought and his actions can shape that world to his needs and desires. Today's moralists argue that this is vain hubris and that man is embedded in his world, reproducing both himself and his world, but not in ways open to human understanding.

This paper argues that today's anti-human or post-human moral consensus derives from the attenuation of political struggle and contestation and the concomitant weakening of the man-made structures of collective organisation and meaning which gave institutional shape to our conscious and creative engagement with the

world. With the attenuation of this struggle and the weakening of these institutional frameworks, we confront the world as alien and unknowable, as complex and globalized. We comfort ourselves that we cannot know and cannot act in the external world and turn inwards, away from the world, searching for the answers to the world, not in the world, but in the mystery of the human. Not in our creative actions but in our behaviour and our thought processes. In this world turned inwards, we no longer see ourselves as creative and constructive subjects – as humans – but as thinking subjects ill-adapted to the processes in and through which we construct our lives and meanings. The morality of the biopolitical is always to divest us of the traces of our human hubris, our meta-narratives, our teleologies and our linear thinking. We live in the world of the biopolitical subject, the subject whose thoughts and behaviour need to be sensitised and adapted to the causes of peace, civility and sustainability. This is the only task remaining to governments: the administrative inculcation of resilience through good governance, the environmental- or choice-framing, which will enable both individuals and societies to adapt to a world which is alien and inhospitable to us.

In the following sections, I highlight the everyday consensus behind the morality of the biopolitical, extending this analysis to illustrate how even the most basic concepts and grounding norms of modern liberalism have been inverted and turned into biopolitical meanings. Next, this paper considers what a radical approach to this might be, based on a radical praxis, examples are given of the radical critical stances of Foucault and Nietzsche and it is suggested that, imbued with a critique of liberal modernity, these radical stances do not enable us to do more than reinscribe biopolitics with radical or critical potential. The following sections suggest that if we reject radical individualism or the deconstruction of all truth/power relations as possible grounds for the critique of the biopolitical then we are left with the uncomfortable and knowingly contingent choice of returning to a liberal metaphysics of the human subject. However, following Kant, and reading Kant through Arendt, it is suggested that a new metaphysical construction of the political subject, stressing the collectivity of the subject, rather than individual choices and decision-making, could re-enable a political critique for the biopolitical age and assert the possibility of the political subject.

### **Moralism**

Today's moralism argues that the 'meta-narratives' of the Enlightenment or of liberal modernity are merely products of subjective phenomenology. That our hubristic belief in man's reason and in man's capacity for progress sought to impose order and meaning in a world where these cannot exist. That in a world of complexity, multiplicity and contingency, the attempt to impose order and reason can only end in the barbarism of liberalism, with its oppressions, exclusions and genocides, in the name of grand totalising teleologies.

Today's moralism argues that in a humanised world, where there is no outside, we have made or 'manufactured' our risks and our uncertainties. That it was our sciences of nature that have led to the end of an external 'nature'. That in

'humanising' nature we have proved the falsity of the phenomenology of 'enlightenment', of 'science' and of 'progress'. There is no structure outside of our own social and subjective creations. We have made our own world and in doing so we have discovered that we as humans no longer exist distinct or separate from our environment and our eco-social systems.

Today's moralism argues that in such a world, we need to work on the one area that is open to human sciences – the understanding of our own behaviour and thought processes. That rather than adapting the external world to our needs and desires we need to learn to adapt our needs and desires to the external world. Today's moralism argues that if we are the problem, and if our problematic nature and problematic understandings and actions are revealed to us in the world we have created, then we need to pay more attention to, to learn from, that world. We need to adapt to the world not adapt the world to ourselves (Giddens 1994; Walker and Salt 2006).

Today's moralism is at the centre of dominant discourses of political power. It forms the governing rationality of states across the world and of international institutions (Joseph 2012). Today's moralism argues that states can no longer act as subjects in the world, but only do their best to govern so that their own citizens and others have more capacities to reflect on and to transform their actions and behaviours. States can no longer direct, control or directly manage their societies: the world is too diverse, too complex, too contingent for this. States can only administer the frameworks in which citizens make choices and decisions for themselves. States no longer play a political role. No longer act as collective political representatives of society. States play a social role of enabling or empowering their societies.

Today's moralism is the moralism of anti-politics, of post-politics, of the subsumption of the political into the social, of neoliberalism, of post-liberalism, of adaptive resilience: the moralism of biopolitics.

## **Politics**

It is difficult to underestimate the extent to which the moralism of biopolitics has overturned the traditional conceptions of political modernity. Let us briefly consider a few key concepts under the biopolitical gaze:

*Sovereignty* – no longer refers to a political and legal right to self-government, this is merely formal, de jure, empty if not dangerous. Sovereignty has become socialised, it refers to social capacities and capabilities for good governance. We have 'unbundled' sovereignty – taking out the autonomy sovereignty (Krasner 2004; 2005). We intervene today to build sovereignty as a social capacity; to fill the 'sovereignty gap' between de facto and de jure sovereignty (Ghani and Lockhart 2008; Ghani et al 2005). The international community intervenes to build the sovereignty-cum-social capacity of non-Western, post-colonial or post-conflict states.

*Democracy* – democracy no longer refers to the freedoms of citizens engaged in the public sphere of debate and contestation over policy goals. Democracy and the spreading of democracy are orientated around social capacities and capabilities. Governments want to give us more democracy, by which they mean equalizing social power, equalizing our capacities to behave and act as ‘active’ or ‘responsible’ citizens. Foucault, exactly pinpoints the genealogy or rather intellectual roots of this possibility in the ‘Platonic reversal’, separating democracy from reason, and the ‘Aristotelian hesitation’, where democracy shifts from the equality of the political sphere to a matter of the sharing and equalizing of power, leading to the modern discourses of transparency and the role of civil society (2010: 184). In the biopolitical world, democracy is not about reason and the exercise of power, but its limiting and dispersal within society (Graham 2002).

*(Em)power(ment)* – Once power was the goal of political engagement, as without power changing the external world was impossible. Today power is bad. We demand not power but empowerment, in fact political demands entrap us in power so empowerment is our only demand. We want to be listened to, included, valued but we do not want to join political processes with the responsibilities of party membership or of government. Biopolitics reverses the relations between states and citizens. Once citizens gave the state power as the collective representative of society, now states give citizens power as the social realm subsumes the political. Under the morality of biopolitics, states govern through society not over it (Foucault 2008). The axis of intervention where government meets society is the behaviour and decisions of the individual – how is the state able to act to influence their choices with regard to pensions, welfare, health, parenting, recycling, savings, educational choices etc. Under the morality of biopolitics, the state cannot order or direct citizen choices but merely educate, empower, include; merely inculcate the values of citizenship as adaptive resilience, as social capability.

The implosion of politics, its subsumption into the social, the dominance of the morality of the biopolitical has a multitude of causes, it has a history of political contestation, a genealogy. It has a material reality. It has a truth. Biopolitics has a truth, which is the existence of biopolitical frameworks of meaning across the social sciences – social constructivism, new institutionalism, organisational theory, new economics, resilience thinking, non-linear understandings etc. It has a truth, which is the policy practices of international and domestic politics, armed with the goal of the equalizing of power, of capacity-building and social empowerment.

### **Real Truths**

Biopolitical approaches are not an error or falsehood. As Foucault might argue, they are not an ideological error imposed on the knowing subject from outside. Biopolitics is not somehow a conscious choice of power, in order to interpellate us as compliant neo-liberal subjects. Biopolitics is the truth of the world in which the human is no longer separate as a subject, confronting a world which is its object.

Foucault can tell us the truth of biopolitics. In fact, it could be argued that he told us the truth of biopolitics before anyone else (although Arendt could be a competitor here). What Foucault cannot do (although later it will be suggested that Arendt may be able to) is to pose an alternative truth to that of the biopolitical. In fact, Foucault seems happy that the truths of biopolitics pose the world as complex, chaotic and non-amenable to human reason or human dominion. For the truth of biopolitics is that there is no truth. That humanity and nature are intertwined, that politics, economics and social science are self-constituting, socially constructed disciplines, constructing and disciplining the human subject.

For Foucault, without metaphysics, without God giving reason to the world, the phenomenologies of the human mind, the universalising and teleological reason-making faculties of the human, could not have been formulated. Foucault seeks to follow Nietzsche in arguing that in an arbitrary and chaotic world, where all human knowledge is therefore necessarily an act of violence and power 'then it is not God that disappears but the subject in its unity and sovereignty' (2000a: 10). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes the 'death' or the 'unmaking' of man, in the human sciences, with amazing prescience, as he outlines the stakes involved in the truth of biopolitics:

...the double articulation of the history of individuals upon the unconsciousness of culture, and of the historicity of those cultures upon the unconscious of individuals, has opened up, without doubt, the most general problems that can be posed with regard to man. (2002: 414)

In the world become biopolitical, we understand that individuals construct their worlds unconsciously rather than consciously. Where there were once structures of social relations, which constituted an outside to be known and transformed, now there is only the unconscious imagination of an outside (it is unconscious, because we are no longer fully conscious of our cultural social constructions which now constitute and bound our rationalities). We create our understandings of ourselves and our relationships to an outside as we create ourselves in a set of culturalised social processes, which reproduce our differences as bounded rationalities, which we can never fully comprehend as we can never fully consciously reflect on our own civilizational boundedness (Berger and Luckmann 1979).

The biopolitical understanding can never work forwards – assuming humans as subjects or as a subject species with its liberal teleologies of knowledge and progress. The truth of biopolitics can only ever work backwards, our bounded rationalities, our problematic choice-making, can only ever be known post factum in the world as it appears. And the reasons for the problematic choices and decisions of the human can only be understood through the process of working backwards through the trail of individual and cultural unconsciousness. As Foucault writes, it is in the biopolitical science of the human that 'we see the destiny of man being spun before our eyes, but being spun backwards; it is being led back, by some strange bobbins, to the forms of its birth, to the homeland that made it possible' (2002: 416).

We are all Foucauldians today (even more fervently than we were Marxists yesterday) precisely because of the overwhelming truth of biopolitics: that there are no truths, only fictions with different effects; that there is no justice only conflict; and that there is no teleology towards harmony only arbitrary events. The deconstruction of our phenomenological understandings of the human is a process without end and, for radical academics in the service of the academy, Foucauldian insights provide a wonderful service to the science of biopolitics.

Before the world was biopolitical, Nietzsche already argued the possibility that the biopolitical truth of man's 'extravagant error of human conceit and irrationality' - of man as sovereign subject with the world as object - could be revealed:

The whole attitude of "man *versus* the world", man as world-denying principle, man as the standard of the value of things, as judge of the world, who in the end puts existence itself on his scales and finds it too light - the monstrous impertinence of this attitude has dawned upon us as such, and has disgusted us - we now laugh when we find, "Man and World" placed beside one another, separated by the sublime presumption of the little word "and"! (2006: 160)

We could laugh (or more often feel disgust) with the Foucauldians (if not necessarily with Foucault) over the human hubris of constituting truths or knowledge of the world and, even more *de riguer*, use Nietzsche's work to do this (for Nietzsche, only the weak, who lack the freedom of will to be self-determining, needed faith or belief in metaphysical truths). However, Nietzsche does flag up (merely to dismiss) the 'terrible alternative' that beckons, as the passage quoted above continues:

But how is it? Have we not in our very laughing just made a further step in despising mankind? And consequently also in Pessimism, in despising the existence cognisable by *us*? Have we not just thereby awakened suspicion that there is an opposition between the world in which we have hitherto been at home with our venerations - for the sake of which we perhaps *endure* life - and another world which we ourselves are: an inexorable, radical, most profound suspicion concerning ourselves...and could easily face the coming generations with the terrible alternative: Either do away with your venerations, or - *with yourselves*! The latter would be Nihilism - but would not the former also be Nihilism? That is *our* note of interrogation. (2006: 160)

For Nietzsche, the problem was the metaphysical faith in human perfection and the teleological assumptions of liberal progress. His alternative was the radical unknowability of chaos and complexity (which we would later call 'globalization') - the truths of the biopolitical. In Nietzsche's assumption of the freeing of the radical self-governing, self-determining individual, he argues that the biopolitical is not necessarily nihilistic but rather is emancipatory. In Nietzsche, we can already see the 'return to agency' and the abolition of structures, which are the moral truths of

biopolitics. Contra Nietzsche; biopolitics is in fact nihilistic. The truth of the deconstruction of all truths does not set us free. Perhaps, this is why Foucault breaks with Nietzsche's radical individualism to argue that we cannot escape relations of power and truth, merely attempt the 'ethos' of critique by trying to disarm the power of truth, the constructions through which truth operates to reinforce existing power hegemonies (2000b: 131-3).

### **Our Morals: Practical Truths**

While Foucault argues that we should disarm the power of all truths, which can merely act in the service of power, he does not suggest that we counter the truths of power with our own truths. I want to suggest that this is precisely what we need to do. However, I do not suggest we have a naïve approach to the truth but a practical political approach to the truth. *The stakes of our ability to build an alternative practical political truth will be those of the political subject during/after biopolitics.*

While it might be unfashionable, I think that it is in the work of Immanuel Kant that we find the possibility of the truths we need to forge a political critique of biopolitics, a struggle for the political subject. We cannot assert as empirical fact anything that exists in the conceptual world of philosophy, politics and political theory. The idea that humans are rational subjects confronting an external world amenable to human control and dominion is not a fact: 'It is in fact merely an idea of reason, which nonetheless has undoubted practical reality.' (Kant 1970: 79) For Kant, for example, there is no original social contract, in which individuals in a state of nature constitute a sovereign, however as liberal political subjects we would need to act as if this act had occurred: 'it is the Idea of that act that alone enables us to conceive of the legitimacy of the state' (1999: 146). *It is an act of a priori reasoning which allows us to posit the Idea of the political subject.*

The fundamental point is that if we live in a biopolitical world, we cannot derive the political subject from the fact of its existence. We cannot give the human goal of becoming human a material political force. We do not live in the world of Karl Marx, with a coming into being of a revolutionary subject with the promise of giving what was a metaphysical set of *a priori* Ideas a practical and material and transformative reality. As long as this subject was engaged in the process of struggling to make the world human, metaphysical conceptions of the subject idealised as a set of *a priori* categorical injunctions could only act as a critique of the real process of change. Today, however, we do not live in a Marxist world, we live in a Kantian one. We face the problems that Kant faced, of deriving the political subject from the metaphysical Idea rather than the concrete and material reality. We need a metaphysical conception of the human as political subject in order to keep alive even the possibility of critique. The possibility of the return of the human as a real political subject in the world is not something that can be purely addressed as an academic or philosophical question, but is one of practical politics. However, maintaining the stance of the critique of the biopolitical is a fundamental requirement for this return. But today that critique cannot take a practical political form, without an existing

political subject it can only be a moral critique based on practical political reasoning of the necessary Idea of the political subject.

Our experience of the world is the experience of the biopolitical subject: our truths are its truths and our morality its morality. In this world, as Kant argues 'experience cannot provide knowledge of what is right' (1970: 86). It is only through starting with a set of a priori assumptions, which assume the possibility of the existence of the political subject that political critique could be possible. In Kant's own day, his view of the possibilities for human reasoning and progress were roundly critiqued on the basis of the chaotic, irrational and conflictual empirical world around us. Kant argued that his perspective was based not upon empirical fact or truths of the world as it exists but upon his:

...inborn duty of influencing posterity in such a way that it will make constant progress (and I must thus assume that progress is possible), and that this duty may be rightfully handed down from one member of the species to the next... And however uncertain I may be and may remain as to whether we can hope for anything better for mankind, this uncertainty cannot detract from the maxim I have adopted, or from the necessity of assuming for practical purposes that human progress is possible... It is quite irrelevant whether any empirical evidence suggests that these plans, which are founded only on hope, may be unsuccessful. (1970: 88-9)

For Kant, we have to act as humans with an *a priori* set of assumptions of what that would mean, in order to construct ourselves as humans in reality. In effect, that by our own act of will (based upon our metaphysical assumptions) we can free ourselves from the limits of the present through critique of the empirical realities from the viewpoint of the practical necessity of the future human. This is why Kant holds fast to the teleology of human progress, suggesting that this does not depend on the actions or even the beliefs of individuals in the present. For Kant, reason works through human conflict and contestation, reason and progress are social products, which we are compelled towards through our engagement in the world. The opportunity for reason ever arises anew as we confront our world and its problems. Reason comes from our social struggle in the world, not from individual thoughts or actions, but from the social and political problems posed by our struggle as humans, by 'nature' or '*providence*' (1970: 90). As long as we are engaged with the problems of the world, rather than with the problems of individuality and our own personal subjective states of happiness, we are able to progress collectively.

Today, the metaphysical assumptions we need are not necessarily those posed by Kant. The moral truths of Kant were derived in a very different context from today's. The tasks of thinking through the political subject after biopolitics poses specific questions of our time, in terms of what this act of practical reasoning would involve, if the political subject had indeed been displaced or subsumed by the biopolitical subject and we sought to maintain a critique in the absence of this subject and/or in order to constitute ourselves as political subjects. What are the moral or practical truths that are essential in today's political context? I would like to suggest three,

interlinked, practical truths that are crucial for critique on the basis of the possibility of the future political subject:

*The Structure/Agency Distinction* - Biopolitics abolishes the distinction between structure and agency. In freeing individuals from the 'truths' of structures, the world is reduced to human agency as a product of past human agency (Wendt 1992). Problematic and bounded choice-making in a world structured by previous problematic and bounded choice-making. In the biopolitical world, we make our own capitalism, we make our own conflicts and our own poverty. Without structures as practical political Ideas we cannot begin to distance ourselves from the world and to act on it. Politics cannot exist as the contestation of ideas if we have no conception of humans as agents and collective actors able to shape their circumstances.

In the biopolitical world, structure and agency is reduced to process, in fact to endogenous or self-reproducing processes. These processes have no director, no centre of power. These processes are multiple and overlapping and as process-based thinking is an approach, can be understood to operate at all levels, from the individual human brain, to peer groups, communities, states to the global level. In a world reduced to processes, there is only agency. However without structures, this agency is no longer the conscious agency of a political subject transforming an external object. The agent-centred world removes structures and therefore can only work on the behaviour and choices of individuals, understood as producing and reproducing problematic outcomes.

A precondition for critique without a political subject is the Idea that it is possible to exert conscious transformative power in the external world.

*The Public/Social Distinction* - Biopolitics sucks the liberal world of law and politics and rights and freedoms into the inequalities of the social. In order to defend the sphere of autonomy and rights we need to separate the sphere of public contestation, requiring the fullest freedoms of speech and organisation, from the world of social and economic inequality. We can only equalise our social and economic power by transforming the social relations of capitalism. Posing economic and social questions as problems of empowerment, of a lack of democracy and a lack of capacity, does not give agency to the marginalised and excluded but moral responsibility.

Biopolitics seeks to subsume the public sphere into the social sphere. Our engagement in the public sphere is predicated on this sphere being emptied of contestation over the truth. The truth that there is no truth enables us to articulate our voices and gain recognition and self-esteem from others and learn from them in open-ended conversations. The public sphere is emptied out and the consequence is that the social sphere becomes the public sphere of change and engagement. Participatory democracy suggests that our lives in the economic and social sphere become empowering. That our choice-making, our democracy, is about the informed choices we make and the information we receive as individuals in our everyday lives

and relationships. Our public lives, our good and active citizenship, concern our everyday decision-making in the social sphere.

A precondition for critique without a political subject is the Idea of a universal public sphere of freedom and equality: a sphere of community and shared interest beyond the divisions and inequalities of the social sphere.

*The Theory/Practice Distinction* - For biopolitics there is no such thing as meta-theory. There can be no theories because the world is full of multiplicity and complexity. Instead of theories, biopolitics poses mid-range theory or approaches attuned to the analysis of difference and complexity. These theories with no *a priori* assumptions can only work backwards to analyse the path-dependencies, norms, knowledge gaps, which can explain events after the fact. These theories are practice-based, micro-theories, relational theories, actor-based theories, knowledge distribution theories. For biopolitics there is not and cannot be anything beyond the world of appearances.

There can be no critique without a moral or metaphysical construction of a species human, with universal and rational attributes. The struggle to raise the importance of practical political truths has been generally ignored by critical thinkers, especially those focused more upon the destruction of truths than the construction of them. It seems to me that our starting point today, if we do indeed wish to consider the possibility of politics after the biopolitical, rather than merely affirm the morality and truth of the biopolitical, is a reconsideration of our political and philosophical tradition from the standpoint of today's crisis of the political subject. This re-evaluation, as intimated above, would force us to reconsider positions which appeared to have been made redundant by radical critiques of classical liberalism.

A precondition for critique without a political subject is the metaphysical assertion of meta-narratives, the phenomenal construction of meaning beyond the finite life of the individual.

Biopolitics has a modernist and cutting-edge ring to it. We might easily think that the ideas behind the subsumption of the political into the social are new or post-modern or the product of recent transformations in neoliberal or biopolitical capitalism. Radical Foucauldians have done a lot to give this politics of petty-bourgeois reaction a veneer of intellectual radicalism, even doing self-styled 'biopolitical' critiques of current affairs and predelictions. Biopolitics is, in fact, much better understood as a return to a post-Enlightenment romantic understanding of the world, where nature, irrationality, emotion, tradition, evolution, cultural difference and social embeddedness are at the centre of our understanding rather than a universalist or rationalist understanding. This is why the theorists of the truth of the biopolitical often go under the name of 'new' institutionalism. This is old institutionalism, of racial and cultural difference, of the limits of science and rationality, but without the overtly racialised understandings. Instead of cultures, producing and reproducing hierarchies of difference, we have endogenous processes of norm and knowledge production.

In the biopolitical world, our critiques of liberalism have become transformed, from a left critique, on the basis of the development of the liberal project beyond the contradictions of capitalism, to a much more romanticised and backward-looking critique of the aspirations of progress embedded in the liberal project. We critique liberalism precisely for its progressive aspirations rather than for its limits to progress. In a world without a political subject it seems to me that we have to take a much more distanced view from the work of Marx, in fact, to become reluctant anti-Marxists. We have to become enthusiastic anti-Foucauldians (despite the enticing power of Foucault's description of our world), precisely because Foucault's war on universal truths and the sovereign subject (radical and revealing in a liberal age) can only resign us to the reality of biopolitics. Also we have to become reluctant Kantians, perhaps contingent Kantians, where we realise that the categorical imperatives of the Idea are a model for critique without an empirical subject. Say what we like about 'the great Chinaman of Königsberg' (Nietzsche 1997: 82), he stands out as an example of how to undertake critique as an ethical project without a political subject.

### **Arendt and Practical Truth**

Perhaps the only modern thinker to have thought about the importance of practical political truths as the preconditions for politics in response to (what we today call) the rise of biopolitics is Hannah Arendt. In a register sometimes similar to that of Foucault, Arendt provides a narrative of the rise and fall of the human or liberal subject and the rise of the social or biopolitical subject. Arendt's point is that the biopolitical subject looks into the self for answers and meaning rather than seeing itself as a subject in the world. That there can be no politics if humans are alienated from the world, for the search for the problems of the world in the sphere of life, in the sphere of human behaviour and decision-making can only radically divide us from one another. She worried that the truth of biopolitics - that there is no truth and no human - would come true unless human/political subjects were able to continue to constitute themselves as subjects. For Arendt the preconditions for politics, the existence of political subjects, were something that was contingent on individuals acting as human subjects and humanizing the world. Only as human political subjects can we construct a meaningful human world in which politics is possible.

For Arendt the key aspect of humanity is that it is a plurality of interacting individuals. It is our plurality, our plural actorness or agency which means that politics or government cannot work backwards or be reduced to a science or set of biopolitical techniques. It is the interactive nature of politics, which makes the outcomes unpredictable, and it is the creativity of human beings which means that there are always new and unimagined possibilities. These outcomes and possibilities are not preconceived, planned or intended but are a result of the complexity of human interaction.

For Arendt, contingency and uncertainty are part of the human condition and are not an indication of human hubris or externally imposed as part of human nature to err or not understand. Rather than understanding the problem as one of the advance of science and technology – a humanising of the external world which means that humans and their environment are interlinked in complex adaptive systems of self-reproduction, the problem is exactly the opposite: of a confusion in the mixing of science and politics and therefore in a mistaken thinking that the limits of science are the limits of politics. In this framework, biopolitics can be understood as a way of thinking which both internalises and externalises the human condition. It understands the problems of plural and interactive humanity as either being an internal problem of the limited rationality of individuals or of the unknowability of the external world. Instead of living with contingency with the plural clash of wills and aspirations and the creative processes generated through this, we seek to remove or naturalise contingency. Biopolitics does both, asserting that contingency is a part of our external world – a product of globalisation – and therefore natural, but also that the effects of contingency can be minimalised through being aware of the problems of rationalist thinking. In the biopolitical framework, human agency is problematised, instead of science, which can never have all the answers (to globalisation or the human mind). Rather than constituting the problem or understanding contingency as a problem per se, for Arendt, human agency is the solution to the problem of coping with contingency. Contingency, as a fact of the world, can be managed through an appreciation of the human capacity for politics, for conscious intervention and organisation. This is precisely where politics becomes important. By acting as rational and responsible citizens we come together to bind ourselves to each other and to collective projects of meaning, through our promises, contracts, treaties and constitutions.

For Arendt, biopolitical thinking, the attention to adaptation to others and the external world was the opposite from the aspiration for human freedom. The public sphere of the political process was precisely distinguished from the sphere of external necessity. The social sphere was that of necessity and inequality, whereas the polis was the sphere of free engagement among equals (1998: 32). Arendt argues that it was only in the public sphere that individuation mattered, where individuals could be distinguished by actions and deeds. In the social sphere, all that mattered was the mass, to which could be applied the sciences of economics and the methods of statistical analysis, ruling out of the picture, creative individuals (1998: 42-3). Once the public sphere is reduced to the social and the management of society, then politics and the state give way to 'pure administration'. We have a 'withering away of the state' as predicted by Marx, but not through the mechanism of revolution (1998: 45).

Arendt presciently notes, that when the social displaces the public sphere, there is no longer personal responsibility for deeds and words (action), people are judged according to their behaviour. She notes the development of 'the all-comprehensive pretension of the social sciences which, as "behavioural sciences", aim to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal.' (1998: 45) Perhaps even more pertinently noting: 'through society it is the

life process itself which in one form or another has been channelled into the public realm.' (1998: 45) The realm of necessity, of the natural, then predominates over the human. In this world, it seems that our sciences of the social and the political, lag far behind our achievements in the natural sciences, that the human is the problem despite science and technology. Arendt argues:

...this criticism concerns only a possible change in the psychology of human beings – their so-called behaviour patterns – not a change of the world they move in. And this psychological interpretation, for which the absence or presence of a public realm is as irrelevant as any tangible, worldly reality, seems rather doubtful in view of the fact that no activity can become excellent if the world does not provide a proper space for its exercise. (1998: 49)

She argues for the resurrection of the public realm as the alternative to biopolitical thinking which insists that politics be reduced to the administration of 'behavioural change'. The removal of the public sphere means that we live together in the world without bonds of connection. The public sphere is an artificial world, but one which is common to all of us, a human construction or artifice, which brings us together as equals by virtue of separating us from our private lives and existences but at the same time makes us separate and individuated as responsible actors (1998: 52-3). Without a public realm, human life really is embedded in overlapping complex adaptive systems within which the human is reduced to a fleeting individual life.

The subject or problematic of politics today becomes the 'inner subjectivity of the individual', which was previously outside the realm of the public and was a private concern. Arendt sees this as 'a flight from the whole outer world' (1998: 69). The focus on the inner world denies what was core to the human subject in traditional political thought. In biopolitical thinking we are all subject to necessity and called upon to adapt to this. In this world there is no separation of the public from the private. As Arendt notes, for Aristotle, the slave lacked the freedom essential to the human condition, especially two essential qualities: the capacity to deliberate and decide; and to foresee and to choose. The slave was reduced to the status of a non-human or animal-like existence because the slave was subject to necessity (1998: 84).

Arendt detects in the Socratic rejection of politics and the public sphere a renouncing of human capacity for action, for creating: 'It is as though they had said that if men only renounce their capacity for action, with its futility, boundlessness, and uncertainty of outcome, there could be a remedy for the frailty of human affairs.' (1998: 195) The power of public reason, for Arendt, was something that could not exist independently of practice:

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organised. Its peculiarity is

that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears...with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. (1998: 199)

...power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. Where power is not actualized, it passes away... Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. Because of this peculiarity, which power shares with all potentialities that can only be actualized but never fully materialized, power is to an astonishing degree independent of material factors, either or numbers or means. (1998: 200)

The power of public reason is a social product, which can only be further attenuated by being bypassed. Our ability to construct our world as a human one, one which is amenable to human understanding and intervention, is therefore contingent on our subjective constructions of political collectivity, which in turn shapes our subjectivity and understanding of ourselves in relation to our external world. For Arendt, the dominance of the biopolitical subject is neither a trick of ideology nor a product of the external world, but rather the real, but contingent, reflection of our lack of human activity and engagement in constructing a human world.

Arendt suggests that in the shift to the social away from politics as a public sphere, power becomes less visible, that the connections between individuals become less clear, and that politics becomes reduced to the administration of natural or social processes. Where her critique is more sensitive to her times and less applicable to today is in her understanding of the social as the rise of 'making' over 'action', by which she means that the attempt to erode or bypass politics is informed by ways of thinking more applicable to the natural sciences and man's control over nature. She suggests that: 'This attempt to replace acting with making is manifest in the whole body of argument against "democracy", which, the more consistently and better reasoned it is, will turn into an argument against the essentials of politics.' (1998: 220). She argues further that:

The calamities of action all arise from the human condition of plurality, which is the condition *sine qua non* for that space of appearance which is the public realm. Hence the attempt to do away with this plurality is always tantamount to the abolition of the public realm itself. (1998: 220)

Biopolitical discourses can be understood as a 'making' discourse but only in the sense of an attempt to manage and remove the contingencies of human existence. In reducing power as human freedom, through limiting contingency through a body

of laws through which the public sphere of creative agency could be restricted (1998: 194-5). However, Arendt goes further to highlight the deeper problematisation of the human subject itself, once contingency becomes a problem because we have lost a sense of public reason and public power as a way of managing contingency. She puts the problematic well in that the actions of the human are unique in that our unintentional actions result in the making of a world that cannot be undone:

That deeds possess such an enormous capacity for endurance, superior to every other man-made product, could be a matter of pride if men were able to bear its burden, the burden of irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength. (1998: 233)

However, if we are unable to take pride in uncertainty and contingency, the inevitable result is that:

All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom, which by producing the web of human relationships, seems to entangle its producer to such an extent that he appears much more the victim and the sufferer than the author and doer of what he has done. Nowhere... does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom and in that realm which owes its existence to nobody and nothing but man. (1998: 233-4)

In a world dominated by biopolitics, man appears to be unfree and the presuppositions of the political and public sphere seem to be hubristic and false. Biopolitics draws out this disappearance of man, charted by Arendt in terms of the natural and social sciences whereby 'man began to consider himself part and parcel of the two superhuman, all-encompassing processes of nature and history' both of which produced contingencies 'without ever reaching any inherent *telos* or approaching any preordained idea' (1998: 307). In these framings, rather than humans as active and creative subjects, the understanding of the human becomes one of the processes in which they are embedded subjects, open to the understandings of behaviouralist and natural sciences. The solution to the problems of the world then becomes sought inside the human head and in the processes within which the human is entrapped, with the serious danger 'that man may be willing and, indeed, is on the point of developing into that animal species from which, since Darwin, he imagines he has come.' (1998: 322)

## **Conclusion**

Humans make the world but not in conditions of their own choosing, as we know from Marx (1852), of course. The important point, which we gleam from Kant and Arendt, is that of the contingent consequences of the choices we make in response to these conditions. We do not choose the consequences, in the sense that we can be held responsible for the outcomes. In our choices we do not produce the world,

we merely provide the basis for myriads of other choices and responses and ideas. The world is full of opportunities for us to make new choices and to experiment with new ways of thinking. For biopolitics, the problem – the point of social intervention - is always in working back from the world to adjust the choices and decisions which the individual makes or does not make. The world as it exists is always limited and separated into discrete processes, which can always be directly traced backwards to the decision of individuals, and then further backwards to the brain patterns and unconsciousness of the individual as it is shaped by experience and the internal and external environment of the human individual. We start from the consequences, from the world, and work backwards to unmake or remake the human as the object of intervention.

Kant and Arendt take us out of the concern with unmaking or remaking the individual as decision-maker, to the social processes and social and plural reality, which is the context in which these individual choices are made. They encourage us to view the collective human project as one which works behind the backs of individuals (as a 'process without a subject' as Althusser (2008) would argue). They encourage us to remake the world rather than to remake the human. However, the precondition for remaking the world is that humans act as humanly as they can in terms of struggling to build human collective institutions of meaning and action. Rather than demonstrating the problem of the human through holding up the world as a mirror, Kant and Arendt suggest that the problem is the subjective lack of belief in the human as a collective, acting, rational and creative subject.

The human project, as a practical political truth, as a moral or metaphysical grounding, has to be always an open and contingent one; always open to new problems and new situations and new solutions and new ways of thinking. The project of perfecting the human can never be inward or closed, can never reach an end or final goal, can never be judged by or derived from external circumstances or truths, because what it means to be human can only ever be known in struggle and is therefore open-ended. In the world of biopolitics, the human project is assumed to be dead, a mistake, a hubristic error. Biopolitics understands humans purely in their biological aspect because the creative, constructive, subjective aspect of the human is regarded as precisely that which needs to be tamed. In taming this aspect, in problematising the subjectivity of the human subject, the human is continually being reduced to the biological, to its environment, in the same way that the political is reduced to the social. There could not be two more sharply opposed moral standpoints. The precondition for political struggle is the taking of an affirmative moral position on the human subject.

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