The Possibility of Politics:

The Shape of Political Philosophy Given the Reality of Pluralism
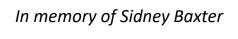
John Roger Baxter

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University of York

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In memory of Sidney Baxter

Abstract:

This thesis sets out to make sense of what it calls the reality of pluralism – the idea that the fundamental state between two people is some form of debate or disagreement rather than agreement. To do so it uses three very different thinkers who coalesce around the idea of pluralism despite their disparate political philosophies – Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre and John Gray. All of the thinkers address the issue of pluralism in some way, regardless of how positively they view it. This then leads to three different types of pluralism – a positive form of pluralism in the form of Arendt's "action", a much more negative form of pluralism in what MacIntyre calls emotivism, and the denial of pluralism that manifests itself in the form of totalitarianism. It also attempts to address the challenges that any politics based on pluralism almost has to face if it is to be a viable political status. Finally it address the question of whether there can be a politics based on the reality of pluralism by introducing a basic requirement for all those who might enter into pluralistic debate – a form of mutual respect based on accepting the other person in any discussion or argument has a right to their opinion, no matter how far that opinion, belief or general worldview might be from one's own.

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Preface

I started this because I was sick of being called left-wing by people who saw themselves as right wing and right wing by those who identified as left-wing, I was an economic liberal at the same time as being a social liberal, so those of left and right didn't really want to know about what I saw as consistent liberalism. This bothered me, and I felt the need to investigate further the contrary nature of the left / right political spectrum and how it might be overcome.

That investigation quickly showed that this was the sort of topic that has already been explored in much detail. From attempts to square the linear left / right political spectrum through to the works of Anthony Giddens and Phillip Blond, it had all already been done. With that realisation came a different sort of understanding – that political identity, regardless of where it sits on that left / right spectrum, often seemed to be very entrenched and not open to much negotiation even in an academic context, which struck me as strange given academia (on a personal level) should be about a quest to learn more through interaction with others rather than reinforcing one's already existing pre-conceptions.

As luck would have it, my MA dissertation led me in the direction of Hannah Arendt. An often criticized thinker on a number of levels (some of them justified) she still remains the philosopher whose views most clearly chime with my own. As a model for debate, learning, understanding and just being more human the idea of action strikes me as very potent yet often neglected. From there I went to the work of John Gray, a political philosopher again often maligned and dismissed, but one who for me has thrown down both in *Two Faces of Liberalism* and *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* fundamental questions that it remains very difficult to dismiss and should challenge many to think more not only about how they define themselves but also how they engage with others. From there I went to Alasdair MacIntyre, a thinker whose conclusions I personally struggle to agree with but

nonetheless a philosopher whose work brings up many relevant issues that, while writing this thesis, I have struggled with and still in all honesty need to think more about.

At its heart this project is fundamentally about pluralism and the idea that we are a fundamentally pluralistic species in that we disagree about almost everything all the time. In what is for me the best-case scenario we acknowledge this but try to work around it by respecting other opinions and trying to learn from – or at least try to evolve our own opinions based on – the ideas of others. This is pluralism for me – an Arendtian interpretation of it without a doubt, but nonetheless what I believe to be the best way for us as a species to communicate since, pretty much from birth, we all have different experiences that form different identities, belief systems and opinions. The alternatives seem to me to be what we often now have in the Western world (what MacIntyre sees when he discusses emotivism) where established political identities and views simply clash with one another without ever really trying to effectively engage or the nightmare that comes with the ruthless desire to only have one opinion that manifests itself most extremely in totalitarianism. Finally there is the misanthropy that the later Gray indulges in – this seems, whatever the merits of his case, to miss the point that as humans we do exist, we do have an impact on one another, and we do need to work out how to deal with all of those realities.

Every PhD needs on some level to show it is original, and hopefully the treatment of these thinkers on this topic will be enough to at least offer some sort of contribution to debates around pluralism and also to offer an interesting opinion – not matter how credible or otherwise – to these three thinkers. What this PhD will not do is reinvent the wheel or claim to be a radical break with reality. All it can offer is a commentary on what it will call the reality of pluralism, and a basic idea of why pluralisitic debate is actually so important. At the heart of this project is the notion that the idea of a singular, absolute truth is irrelevant – not because it doesn't exist, but because even if it did / does it would be eminently contestable from the moment it was uttered. So any suggestion that this thesis is going to try to answer fundamental questions about the nature of truth would fall foul of the

most naked of hypocrisies, and consequently the most it can offer is observations and the occasional, tentative, suggestions.

Is there anything wrong with such limited objectives for a work like this? I'd argue not. For any Research Student to be arguing that they have found the truth when every philosopher from Plato to the current day has managed nothing more than provoking further argument would be the very height of hubris, with the nemesis of the viva lurking just around the corner. Furthermore at essence of this thesis is the idea that dialogue – if it is allowed to happen – needs to be open, ongoing and intersubjective. I don't have the definitive answer and I strongly suspect anyone reading this does not have the answer either. Yet what we do have is the ability to communicate with one another, and to see where that takes us.

John Baxter

January 2016

Acknowledgements

It is very difficult to make any sort of acknowledgement section of any piece of work that readable – those who know they should be in it are reading it just to make sure that they are and those who know they will not be in it are skipping forward to the actual text. On the other hand to not have such a section would be to deny that any project like this – no matter what the quality of it – is the responsibility of one person in the form of the author but also a whole host of other people who have helped, advised, read work and just generally been there for the author. So onto thanking the relevant people.

Professor Matthew Festenstein has proven to be both a guide and a critic across the course of this project. While I have moved away from what I originally wanted to study quite considerably, often at Matthew's behest, the moves have all made sense and have helped to create a better end result than would otherwise be the case. Furthermore Matthew has shown himself to be capable of great empathy and support during the more difficult moments I have had across the course of writing this thesis. Doctor Tim Stanton has been a source of great ideas and intellectual insight – there are few people I know who are quite as demanding yet consistently correct in their analysis and criticism as Tim. I should also acknowledge Professor Matt Matravers, who as well as being a genuinely friendly member of the faculty also created, in the form of the Working Papers Group, one of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of studying political philosophy during my time at the University of York. Beyond the confines of that institution, Professor Roger Bromley remains one of the friendliest and approachable academics I have ever met – the sort of person who you meet with for a five minutes supervisory session and come away from an hour later feeling far more knowledgeable yet rewarded for your research and general academic endeavours. Doctor Neal Curtis is a very different breed of academic – one who is a welcome reminder that academia should not sit in its proverbial ivory tower and should instead engage with contemporary culture and politics.

Fellow students are just as important to a student's experience and there have been no end of great students I have studied with. In particular at the University of York James Hodgson, Beth Kahn, Luis Rodrigues, Robin Jervis and Marko Simendić have all been incredibly helpful towards this project and also more than occasionally distractions – which are essential in the general maintenance of sanity when undertaking a project like this. If we move beyond the University of York once more then it is worth tipping the hat to both Matthew Moore and Kerrie Grain who studied at the same time as me at the University of Nottingham – indeed, they almost sum up this project as two people who are almost diametrically opposite to one another yet still managed (for the most part) to be civil with one another despite the fact they basically disagree about everything.

Family and friends are also as important as academics and fellow students – my brother has proven to be solid and dependable despite some very difficult times for his family. As for friends, the list would be massive but a few names do spring to mind – Ross Manning, Mark Chalmers, Brian Klindworth, Bevan Walters, Delia Gray, Adam Bush, Mark Heath; you have all helped me to get to where I am with this thing whether you realise it or not. And Sarah Baxter has always been there, through good times and bad.

Finally I want to mention my son, Lyndon Peter Baxter. To say he has helped the project would be completely inaccurate – any little man born that prematurely is bound to cause a whole world of stress to his parents and beyond. But that is nothing to the general mayhem that the healthy toddler he now is can create, especially when one is trying to read *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* for the second time. Nonetheless I would dedicate, if I had to dedicate it to anyone, this whole enterprise to him.

Author's Declaration

This thesis is my work and my work alone – there are no other people who have contributed to it. It has also not been presented elsewhere. The only piece of writing I have done that could be linked to this thesis is the chapter I had published in *Politics in Crisis?* - a volume written by those who attended the conference of the same name at the University of Nottingham. The details are:

Baxter, John "The Promise of Politics: The Radical Alternative of Arendtian Political Philosophy" in Paxton, Marie; Kolpinskaya, Ekaterina and Jonasova, Jana (Eds.) *Politics in Crisis* (Newcastle; Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.)

1: Political Philosophy and Pluralism

Introduction

This introductory chapter will attempt to sketch out the fundamental problem that this thesis wishes to address – namely the reality of pluralism within political interaction between individuals; a reality which then leads to the need for political philosophy to acknowledge it – which is closely linked to the related topic of the limits of reason and the implications of those limits for politics. It will then move on to consider three thinkers who have, across their intellectual careers, addressed the reality of pluralism – albeit it in very different ways – and thus endeavour to sketch what their positions are and how they view this pluralism combined with the limits of human reason and what they believe to be are the implications of both – especially when it comes to practical politics.

The first political philosopher to be addressed in this introduction – and the subject of chapters two and three – will be Hannah Arendt. Her focus on pluralism will be demonstrated through her examination of the extremes created by the denial of that pluralism intrinsic in totalitarian regimes, which will then be combined with her critique of reason that is – in part – based on her belief that reason can (although does not necessarily have to) lead to the totalitarianism that much of her work is a warning against. It will them move on to briefly sketch the Arendtian alternative to totalitarianism; in other words, what Arendt considered to be a positive and fundamentally human version of politics in the form of what she terms to be "action" before noting that the reality of pluralism and the limits of human reason within Arendt's work are not meant to be utopian, nor necessarily a comforting political reality or even proactively prescribing a particular political settlement. Indeed, with Arendt's understanding of politics, action can result just as easily in negative outcomes as it can do in positive ones, and any account of Arendt's political philosophy needs to address the implications of this aspect to action.

The second philosopher that this chapter will introduce to the thesis is Alasdair MacIntyre. It will be noted that MacIntrye too deals with the reality of pluralism, particularly in the aftermath of

the Enlightenment, but does not have perhaps the same positive outlook on pluralism as Arendt. In doing so, this chapter will present MacIntyre's own distrust of what he calls emotivism, and then briefly consider his alternatives to what he diagnoses to be the problem with the pluralism of the modern age – namely, his embrace of Aristotelian philosophy and the subsequent need for the virtues – and then touch on the subject of whether this embrace is more credible than MacIntyre's own alternative to it; namely the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Furthermore, the chapter will also seek to raise something implied in the early work of MacIntyre on the relationship between and partial similarity in the human responses to Marxism and Christianity – whether there is an innate need for individuals to find something to believe in and if so what the implications of this are for the reality of pluralism.

Having introduced the relevant parts of MacIntyre's philosophy, the chapter will then go on to discuss the final philosopher that this thesis will focus on – John Gray. It will suggest that Gray's intellectual career is characterised by an increasing awareness of the reality of pluralism as well as an increasing scepticism about the capabilities of human reason – and that both of the strands in Gray's thought can be best understood as being underpinned by an instinctual but ever-growing form of philosophical pessimism, as defined by Joshua Foa Dienstag. It will then briefly sketch where this growing pluralism takes Gray as a thinker – toward a form of misanthropy as well as political and philosophical quietism – before introducing the idea that even within the often flawed constraints of Gray's own most recent arguments such an outcome is not the only possibility, and that there might be a place for – as counter-intuitive as the phrase may sound – a positive and proactive form of pessimism that takes into account the reality of pluralism.

Finally, in the interests of avoiding the need to read the final page of the thesis first - and thus following in the footsteps of Bonnie Honig and her rejection of the detective novel approach to political philosophy[1] - this introduction will momentarily touch on what the conclusions of this thesis will be – specifically, that any political philosophy that takes the reality of pluralism seriously needs to

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[1] Honig, Bonnie *Political Theory and the Displacement of* Politics (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1993) ix.

acknowledge that politics will need to be pluralistic rather than reductionist in its implications, and that any political settlement will need to reflect reality and thus be contingent and ever-changing in its nature. It will suggest that the most effective way of viewing politics is not as seeking an end to disagreement and the departure of pluralism in the face of an all persuasive (or perhaps persuasive for all) version of the truth, but rather as an acceptance of Arendtian "action" as the most human form of political action – perhaps enshrined through Gray's idea of a *modus vivendi* that is not only open to the reality of pluralism, but actually predicated on it. However, before the end of this thesis can be convincingly explained, it is clearly necessary to return to the start and to address the fundamental question being discussed here – in short, what is meant by the reality of pluralism and what implications this reality has for human reason.

The Reality of Pluralism

This thesis takes as its starting point the reality of pluralism in both politics and political philosophy. It asserts that the reality of political and philosophical interaction is underpinned not by convergence on a particular value, good, or belief – nor is it necessarily founded on any real form of consensus. Rather, the fundamental basis of political and philosophical interaction is discussion and disagreement that often takes the form of argument and conflict. The evidence behind this assertion is, quite simply, reality – if all of philosophy is a footnote to Plato,[2] for example, then it needs to be acknowledged that a substantial part of that footnote is fundamentally about disagreeing with Plato and the implications of his philosophy and political thought, not least from his pupil Aristotle. The examples of history do not lead a thinker grounded in reality to the notion of consensus but rather those examples have the opposite effect.

From the start, however, it is worth noting what the reality of pluralism is not trying to state. It is not attempting to claim that discussion, disagreement, argument and conflict are fundamental to the human condition or the only way in which humanity can or will ever exist. It is not stating that pluralism is a fact that has always existed and will continue to exist in perpetuity – although this may yet prove to be the case and Arendt points to the deeply negative implications of what happens when pluralism ceases to exist in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – but rather that engagement with reality suggests that the disagreements flowing from pluralism defy convergence on one truth. Indeed, John Gray makes a valid point when he writes that "(n)ow and in any future we can envision, communities and states will be divided by rival claims about justice and what makes human life worth living"[3] – in other words, the reality of today and what that reality might indicate about the future is the dissension inherent in pluralism rather than the expected consensus of much political philosophy. Thus the reality of pluralism is not attempting to deny that there may be *a* truth that is objectively applicable to all under every circumstance, but rather – following the likes of Raymond Geuss[4] – it asserts that if such

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[2] Whitehead, Alfred North *Process and Reality* (New York; Free Press, 1979), p.39.
[3] Gray, John *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge; Polity Press, 2000), p.136.
[4] Geuss, Raymond *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2008), p.10.

a truth does exist and is identifiable then the reality of pluralism does not fade away simply because that truth will not necessarily be able to persuade all. In short, the reality of pluralism does not fall in to the trap of denying a universally applicable truth at the same time as asserting one in the form of pluralism; it simply seeks to reflect the reality of diversity in philosophy and politics that history makes so plain. Thus the reality of pluralism becomes, to adapt the famous definition of post-modernism by Jean-*François* Lyotard, not the rejection of meta-narratives, but rather the suspicion of the universal acceptability of such meta-narratives.[5]

It is also important to highlight at this point that pluralism is not necessarily a good thing or an aspirational future settlement to which humanity should seek to move toward. Indeed, the reality of pluralism is neutral in that regard; it promises neither a denial of a negative yesterday or a promise of a better tomorrow. As will be demonstrated below in the discussion of Arendtian action, pluralism can be a positive part of life, and may yet be a crucial part of the human condition. However, given it, by a very nature that is based on disagreement and often conflict, does not always manifest itself in positive ways and, as the use of the term "conflict" should strongly imply, it does not always lead to a desirable outcome. Thus, acknowledging the reality of pluralism is not, to use the words of Honig, to "affirm the perpetuity of conflict" and thus "celebrate a world without stabilization" – it is, rather, "to affirm the reality of perpetual contest… and to identify the affirmative dimensions of contestation."[6] Indeed, one of the aims of this thesis is to identify what might constitute an acceptable political settlement given this reality of pluralism within the political, philosophical and perhaps even all human spheres of experience.

Having explained what the reality of pluralism is not, it is worth noting something else that this thesis will not attempt to do – namely, to claim that the reality of pluralism is an original observation. It has been addressed in many different ways by very different thinkers. One example of a philosopher who has considered this reality of pluralism and its implications in detail is Isaiah Berlin,

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[5] Lyotard, Jean-Francois *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.
[6] Honig, *Op. Cit*. p.15.

who claimed that "the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them, and the pluralism of values connected with this, is only the late fruit of our declining capitalist civilization" and that the "very desire for guarantees is that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a craving for the certainties of childhood or the absolute values of our primitive past."[7] The latter quote is extremely telling of Berlin's attitude who might deny the reality of pluralism; they are implied to be denying the adult world and seeking an antediluvian denial of contemporary human experience. Indeed, Berlin's understanding of pluralism will become crucial in the chapters on John Gray, who arguably digests Berlin's understanding of pluralism and takes it to its logical – and perhaps, given the most recent tone of Gray's work, nihilistic – extremes. However the important point to note at this juncture is not that the reality of pluralism is an original observation; rather what this thesis hopes to achieve is to create an understanding of what political philosophy might look like given the different and often conflicting philosophies of Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray.

At this point a critic might raise the question of precisely why such an understanding is important in the first place if it is simply a statement of part of the human experience that has already been explored in depth by other thinkers – in short, why consider the reality of pluralism at any length if it is nothing more than an already considered reflection of reality? The response to this would be to suggest that a fundamental assumption of much philosophy (political or otherwise) is that pluralism can be safely ignored and that the one universally acceptable or applicable truth can be found, by whatever the method – and with this discovery of the one most plausible truth comes the notion of applying this truth to all. Thus the quest to define justice as fairness or to find a form of neoliberalism that can underpin both the global economy and individual national economies globally deny, at least on some levels, this reality of pluralism. The former seems to suggest that with the right hypothetical tool a particular definition of justice could be universally agreed on by all rational people while the latter assumes that a particular form of economics can be universally applied, regardless of national

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[7] Berlin, Isaiah "Two Concepts of Liberty" in Berlin, Isaiah *Four Essays On Liberty* (Oxford; Oxford University Press) p.172.

circumstance. Thus, what these two (very different) projects share is a notion of universality implicit – at the very least – within their outlook. While projects underpinned by such this notion of universality may have some merit from an academic or a philosophical standpoint in terms of leading to a particular definition or a truth in a particular sphere on a theoretical level, this thesis will argue that they are always going to be of limited merit when it comes to the test of practical applicability since they will be defied by the reality of pluralism within politics and, on a wider level, human experience. Therefore, the answer to the critic identified at the start of this paragraph could simply be that the reason why the reality of pluralism should be examined is precisely because this reality is often neglected when it comes to political philosophy.

Indeed, by denying the reality of pluralism, much political philosophy does not actually engage with politics. This is one of the observations that Glen Newey makes in his book *After Politics* – namely, that those political philosophies that aspire to arrive at a definitive definition or a universally applicable political settlement and/or set of norms actually miss the point of politics, which is (at least on some levels) debate and argument over precisely what those definitions, settlements, and norms should be. Much of contemporary political philosophy has become, to use Newey's terminology, "anti-political" since it aspires to an end state where this pluralist reality of politics is fundamentally denied.[8] Thus, on Newey's account, thinkers such as Rawls and Habermas are actually side-stepping something fundamental to politics as they attempt to create and ground their individual political philosophies. Newey's argument shares some common ground with that of Bonnie Honig's idea of the displacement of politics; she argues against those she calls the virtue political philosophers who "yearns for closure" and look to "politics… to provide and maintain"[9] that closure in favour of her "arguments of the perpetuity of political conflict".[10] Both thinkers, therefore, stand in opposition to this notion of

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[8] Newey, Glen *After Politics: The Rejection of Politics in Contemporary Liberal Philosophy* (Basingstoke; Palgrave, 2001), p.7.
[9] Honig, *Op. Cit.* p.3.
[10] *Ibid*, p.14.

political philosophy as being predicated on the denial of conflict and instead see debate, argument and conflict as fundamental to politics.

Implicit within this understanding of the reality of pluralism is an acceptance of the limits of human reason. Whereas a theory such as justice as fairness might argue that the correct application of human rationality will bring the individual thinker in line with its central tenets, the reality of pluralism would suggest that the application of human reason does not necessarily bring that thinker in line with justice as fairness or any other philosophy that might celebrate human reason. The reality of pluralism suggests that human reason is limited, if only in the sense that one of its limits is that it does not necessarily lead to agreement between individual thinkers. This limit could be ascribed to the inability of human reason to divine universally acceptable truths or definitions – that there is an objective truth or truths out there, but human reason is simply not capable of uncovering what those are or of convincingly communicating them to all. Equally, it could be argued that this limit of human reason can simply put down to the fact that pluralism extends to the outcome of inquiries that use human reason – in a sense, therefore, use of human rationality leads not to conformity or convergence on one truth, opinion or view but rather to pluralist outcomes. The end results of human reason do not persuade all the users of that reason.

Indeed – as will be brought into stark relief when Arendt's views on reason and totalitarianism are considered in the next chapter – there is a sense in which reason is often invoked as a means of negating dissension and of closing down a conversation or political debate. Therefore, when a theory such as justice as fairness claims to be rational and the outcome of the correct use of human reason,[11] it – at least implicitly – makes a claim about those who would dissent from that theory: namely, that they are being unreasonable or irrational. This sort of move brings to mind Jean-*François* Lyotard's idiosyncratic understanding and expansion of the concept of terror. According to Lyotard terror is "the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one

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[11] As first explain in Rawls, John *A Theory of Justice (Revised Edition)* (Harvard; Harvard University Press, 1999).

shares with him."[12] This conception of terror simultaneously encompasses a more standard definition

of terror as an act that seeks to permanently silence an opponent – through death, cruelty and fear –

with a philosophical ramification, whereby it is an act of terror to close down a philosophical argument

through constraining the terms of it using concepts such as a particular formulation or definition of

reason. While some may find this a rather hysterical definition of the term, this invocation of the

concept of terror does imply that a theory that invokes reason as one of its founding principles could

be construed to be implying that those who do not conform to that theory are being unreasonable,

and therefore cannot participate within that particular debate. Therefore the assumption that human

reason leads to convergence on one truth not only defies the reality of political interaction, it also

could be used to silence dissenting voices when it comes to that supposed truth. In this sense, reason

becomes not just a tool in the pursuit of truth, but also an attempt to coerce those who, in a pluralistic

reality, do not and cannot – for whatever the reason – conform to that version of the truth. In that

sense, Lyotard's definition of terror becomes perhaps less hysterical and more a valid critique of any

theory that seeks to silence its opponents using its own fabricated parameters.

At this point, the critic might ask whether there is any point to a political philosophy based on

the reality of pluralism beyond the simple task of reflecting that reality. After all, if there is no

universally applicable truth or political settlement then political philosophy loses much of its

normative power; it cannot guide humanity but instead can only offer insights on the experiences of

some human being at some points in history. One response to this might be to adopt the position of

a thinker like Geuss and to reject the notion that a "philosopher (or theorist) must be "positive," i.e.,

that one may criticise some doctrine or institution only if one has a positive alternative to it to

propose"[13] and instead argue that a realist political theory does not have to prescribe an alternative

to the status quo; rather, it can reflect on that status quo and be used to highlight the problems with

the contemporary nature of practical politics. However, this thesis will instead respond to such a critic

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[12] Lyotard, *Op. Cit.*, p.63.
[13] Geuss, *Op. Cit.* p.95.

by stating that what political philosophies based on the reality of pluralism can offer is alternative conceptions of what politics actually should be. Such philosophies may not be able to offer a final goal or definite settlement for those involved in politics: rather, what they all can offer is a way of understanding and undertaking political action that is sensitive to the reality of pluralism. This can be seen through the work of the three thinkers that this thesis will examine in depth: Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre and John Gray. It is the task of introducing the first of these thinkers that this chapter now turns to.

Arendt

Arendt's work shows an understanding of politics that is based on two related themes: the inter-subjective nature of political interaction and its consequent fundamental unpredictability. For Arendt, politics can only exist when individuals come together and interact in what she terms to be "action". It is not a solitary activity – action can only occur with the presence of two of more people. However, because there can be no guarantees of what outcomes will be reached when different individuals come together, the reality of action is fundamentally uncertain. Arendt's philosophy is based, then, on a pluralist understanding of politics: she does not believe that those coming together to undertake politics will necessarily converge on one viewpoint, and given the discursive and dialogical nature of her understanding of politics it is likely that precisely the opposite will happen. Disparate views will be heard, there will be as much disagreement as agreement and outcomes that are both unforeseen and unpredictable are more than possible. This is the reality of a truly human version politics for Arendt, and it is a reality that she both relishes and is concerned about in equal measure.

However, the analysis of Arendt will begin in the next chapter with a look at what Arendt saw as the opposite to this pluralist version of politics embodied in action; the denial of human individuality under totalitarianism.[14] It will explore how Arendt actually defined totalitarianism and will note its comparative rarity. Then, the chapter will explore the implications of the totalitarian rejection of pluralism, arguing that such Arendt saw such a rejection when taken to its extremes as leading inexorably to the spectre of the concentration camp. It will also note that implicit within this concern about the rejection of pluralism is a critique of human reason, and that the use of that reason can lead humanity towards totalitarianism. This is not to claim that it *will* lead in that direction, but rather a warning based on both the experiences of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist era Soviet Union of where

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[14] The move towards and then exploration of this is most thoroughly undertaken by Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. See Arendt, Hannah *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London; Andre Deutsch, 1986).

it *could* lead. Thus for Arendt reason is neither an absolutely good nor an entirely bad thing; instead, it is a part of the human experience that can create both good and bad realities.

Having examined the extremely negative implications that the rejection of pluralism can create according to Arendt's philosophy, the third chapter will look at what her more positive understanding of politics actually is by unpacking the distinction she makes between "labour", "work" and "action".[15] As stated above, it will show that this third category of action is the crucial one when it comes to understanding what makes up a fundamentally human version of politics, and it is the task of practical political action to find a political settlement that is respectful of this profoundly pluralist reading of politics. Therefore, the next step will be to consider what for Arendt might constitute a form of political settlement that does allow for action. It will suggest that while the Athenian *polis* is one such model, it is not the sole one for Arendt and that she was also well aware of the limitations of that particular regime. Rather, it will look at the importance in Arendtian philosophy of both the founding of the United States of America[16] and the brief alternative to communist rule seen after the Hungarian revolution of 1956,[17] and what these two versions of politics reveal about action. Chapter three will also examine one of the essential tensions in Arendt's philosophy; namely the desire to have a form of politics that allows for inherently unpredictable action at the same time as providing for the stability people need to undertake action, and therefore the centrality in her political philosophy of the human ability to both promise and forgive.

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[15] Making and the exploring these distinctions makes up much of what is perhaps the best exposition of Arendt's political philosophy, namely *The Human Condition*. See Arendt, Hannah *The Human Condition (Second Edition)* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[16] The founding of the United States of America in the aftermath of the revolutionary war is discussed at length and compared to both the French and Russian revolutions in *On Revolution*. See Arendt, Hannah *On Revolution* (London; Penguin Books, 1973).

[17] As discussed in the article Arendt, Hannah, "Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution" in *The Journal of Politics* Vol. 20, No. 1, (Feb 1958), pp.5-43.

MacIntyre

The thesis will then turn to another political philosopher who has sought and found inspiration from the classical world – Alasdair MacIntyre. The fourth chapter will focus on what MacIntyre sees as the crisis within modernity as discussed in his important work on the subject, *After Virtue*[18] – namely, the rise of relativism and the damage done to human interaction and philosophy in general by what he calls emotivism. This chapter will focus on what MacIntyre believes to be the implications of the prevalence of pluralism in modern political and philosophical discourse; namely, the inability of those in many debates to even agree on the nature of those debates at the same time as being unable to back up their claims with anything other than recourse to emotion, despite the reverence for reason in the Enlightenment era. It will then consider two different paths he charts for political philosophy in the aftermath of the Enlightenment – that of embracing Nietzschean or Aristotelian philosophy, before considering why MacIntyre chooses the latter over the former as well as bringing into question whether the path chosen by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* is actually the most convincing one, even within the confines of his own argument.

The fifth chapter will consider the apparent tension within MacIntyre's work between his more recent embrace of Thomist Catholicism and his vision of competing communities with very different understandings of what the best way of living is.[19] This tension leads to the question of how there can be pluralism within communities in a philosophy that has a clear understanding of what is the best way to live, and whether one fatally undermines the other or leads to the conclusion that the implications of MacIntyre's philosophy do not have to be his reversion to a particular version of Catholicism, but an alternative vision of the best way to live that MacIntyre might not agree with. In short, the chapter will bring into question whether the method of dealing with pluralism in MacIntyre's philosophy has merit even if the final conclusions he reaches are not, ultimately, convincing.

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[18] MacIntyre, Alasdair *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (Third Edition)* (London; Bloomsbury, 2011).
[19] The key text for this discussion will be what MacIntyre saw as his "sequel" to *After Virtue – Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* See MacIntyre, Alasdair *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London; Duckworth, 1998). He acknowledges it is the sequel to *After Virtue* on page ix.

Across the chapters on MacIntyre, a further question implicit in his philosophy, particularly in his early work on Christianity and Marxism, will be explored – namely, whether there is a basic human need to believe in something – be it a secular ideology such as Marxism or a theistic belief system such as Christianity.[20] It will further examine what the consequences of this need for belief might be if it is in fact true by looking in particular at whether it will, regardless of MacIntyre's arguments, ever allow for a move beyond the emotivism he perceives to be such a problem since the Enlightenment. For if the examples of Marxism and Christianity are considered, then there is little room for followers of the individual belief systems to reach any mutually acceptable understanding of truth since – even in an account such as MacIntyre's which seeks the common ground between the two different ways of thinking – there remain fundamental and possibly incommensurable differences between the them. In other words, an underlying theme of the two chapters on MacIntyre and his philosophy will be whether emotivism is the logical (or even the only possible) outcome of pluralism, and ultimately whether MacIntyre's canon of work is best taken to be offering a compelling diagnosis of the problem that is central to this thesis without being able to offer any viable solution.

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[20] This is perhaps most explicitly dealt with by MacIntyre in his related works *Marxism* and *Marxism and Christianity*. See MacIntyre, Alasdair *Marxism* (London; SCM Press, 1953) and MacIntyre, Alasdair *Marxism and Christianity* (New York; Schocken Books, 1968).

Gray

The next two chapters will centre on another thinker for whom incommensurable differences in political argument has become essential in their political thought through examining the eclectic and changing thought of John Gray, and will seek both to chart potential explanations for the changes in his political philosophy at the same time as demonstrating the theme that underpins his work – namely, an increasingly focussed engagement with the nature and implications of pluralism in political philosophy. As such, the first of the two chapters on Gray will consider his relationship with liberalism, and how his understanding of pluralism meant that he changed from being what could be perceived to be an advocate of neoliberalism[21] to backing a very modest version of liberalism that centres on the need for (and the only possible end of politics being) a *modus vivendi* that allows for the peaceful coexistence of differing versions of the good life.[22] In doing so, this section of the thesis will argue that a succession of liberal political philosophers ultimately failed in Gray's eyes precisely because they failed to convincingly engage with the nature of the pluralism that he regards to be central to politics. Underpinning this changing canon of political philosophy is an understanding of the limits of human reason, and how successive philosophers with whom Gray initially finds considerable merit ultimately do not convince him because of their over-reliance on human reason. As this chapter will show, the example of Hayek is crucial to illustrating Gray's thoughts on reason; the initial appeal of Hayek is that philosopher's circumspect views of human reason – yet it is concerns over Hayek's own use of reason that leads to Gray turning away from Hayekian philosophy.

The seventh chapter will look at the more recent stages in Gray's intellectual career, where he has moved beyond liberalism to a position that is best characterised as both misanthropic and arguably anti-philosophy.[23] It will examine both the reasons for this move and the efficacy of those

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[21] The neoliberal Gray is perhaps best represented by his pamphlet for the IEA. See Gray, John *Limited Government: A Positive Agenda* (London; Institute of Economic Affairs, 1989).

[22] As discussed extensively in Gray, John *Two Faces of Liberalism*.

[23] While this newer attitude underpins much of his more recent work, perhaps the best example of his growing misanthropy can be found in Gray, John *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London; Granta, 2002).

reasons while simultaneously questioning whether, even in the confines of what will be shown to be a flawed argument, the recourse to political and philosophical quietism is actually the only possible outcome of Gray's most recent and most negative philosophical considerations or whether his own argument leads to a more urgent need to engage in practical politics.

In a similar manner to the sections of MacIntyre briefly touched on above, the chapters on Gray will examine an underlying theme that this thesis will argue underpins and helps to understand his ever-changing philosophy – however, rather than the need or desire for belief that individuals have that perhaps flows through aspects of MacIntyre's philosophy, here the question will be whether Gray's career is founded on an ever-increasing form of what Joshua Foa Dienstag terms philosophical pessimism,[24] and how the increasing pessimism of Gray (particularly in his most recent work) could be contrasted with other pessimistic but more proactive political thinkers, such as Albert Camus.[25] In doing so, the chapters on Gray will engage with the question of whether the natural outlook for a pluralistic political philosophy is a pessimistic one in the manner of Dienstag's eclectic characterisations of it, and whether there is a real possibility for what might be termed – no doubt counter-intuitively for some – a positive form of pessimism. The negative trajectory of Gray's career is not the only possibility for pessimistic pluralists; proactive political engagement is equally possible for that pessimistic pluralist.

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[24] As developed in Dienstag, Joshua Foa *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2009).
[25] Such as in Camus, Albert *The Rebel* (London; Penguin, 2000).

Introducing the Conclusions

Having examined the disparate and often contradictory political philosophies of Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray the thesis will then attempt to reach some conclusions that arise from this examination. In particular, the conclusion will focus on whether there can be a form of political philosophy that is simultaneously sensitive to, respectful of and functioning in the face of the reality of pluralism. It will demonstrate that no one of the thinkers that this thesis engages with possesses *the* answer to this central question about the possibility of political philosophy in the face of the reality of pluralism, but – and perhaps in true pluralist fashion – each of the different thinkers is able to offer different insights that, without being comprehensively convincing, does at least allow for the possibility of a political philosophy not reliant on the assumption of the eventual convergence on a universal definition of a particular value or on a particular political formulation of the best set of political arrangements.

When it comes to Arendt, the conclusion will argue that she has perhaps the strongest arguments when it comes to both the reality of pluralism and – crucially – the extremes of what can happen when pluralism is denied. In terms of the latter, the lethal implications of what happens when totalitarianism pursues an active campaign against pluralism in political life brings into sharp relief the need for a form of politics that is sensitive to pluralism. Furthermore, it is through Arendt's understanding of the distinct areas of human activity that she defines as "labour", "work" and "action" in *The Human Condition* that the dangers of the totalitarian denial of pluralism are further accentuated while at the same time an alternative to this denial is revealed in the form of the intrinsically human and political arena that Arendt sees in what she calls "action". This is not to deny that action is a fundamentally uncertain and challenging manifestation of politics, and it is this that leads to the idea that most challenges Arendt's political philosophy – namely, providing a persuasive manifestation of what Arendtian action might actually be.

While acknowledging that there is shared ground with Arendt – not least in their recourse to Ancient Athens (albeit it in different ways) for a solution to the problems of modernity and the

centrality of the notion of interdependency to their thought – the conclusion will show how MacIntyre moves from a position of acknowledging the reality of pluralism to seeking a fixed alternative to this reality in the form of both the pursuit of the virtues and Thomist Catholicism. The conclusion will refer back to the argument both touched on above and considered in detail below that the Nietzschean route shunned by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* is just as persuasive – if not more so – than the Aristotelian one, and that perhaps the great insight that MacIntyre can offer to this particular project is that humans naturally need something to believe in. This latter thought is crucial to any attempt to engage with the reality of pluralism, since it reveals that the opinions held within a pluralist society are not simply arguments in need of effective critique or even refutation, but rather deeply held beliefs that are fundamental to the basic human nature of many individuals. These beliefs are emotional responses to life just as much as they are intellectual positions. In a similar vein to Arendt's understanding of the lethal implications of the totalitarian denial of pluralism, this insight demonstrates the propensity for real conflict within politics, since the conflict in values is more than just a conflict in opinions, and instead takes on the form – at least in some cases – of a far deeper and more fundamental conflict between intrinsic beliefs.

It is here that the later liberalism of John Gray has something to offer this examination of political philosophy given the reality of pluralism. In moving away from the certainty that partially characterised his earlier engagement with both Mill and Hayek towards an advocacy of *modus vivendi* as the only real political possibility in the face of what Gray refers to in *Two Faces of Liberalism* as the "fact of value pluralism",[26] Gray demonstrates the need for a political settlement or settlements that are sensitive to the plurality of opinions and beliefs that both Arendt and MacIntyre see in action and emotivism respectively. Furthermore, while Gray's ultimate recourse to overt negativity, passivism and political quietism might be one possible route given the failure of human reason to arrive at a true understanding of life, there are other routes that this philosophical pessimism can take – routes that

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[26] Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.12.

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make the need to find a *modus vivendi* more urgent than ever, thus making this pursuit of *modus vivendi* central to political philosophy.

Finally, the conclusion will concede that the philosophical pessimism identified by Dienstag, and perhaps best demonstrated in the three thinkers discussed in detail below in the work of John Gray, underpins the entire project. The limits of human reason and the consequent inability of humanity to find an ideal or a truth to converge on (let alone achieve) leads to the realisation that political philosophy should be less about finding the perfect set of normative prescriptions for a particular society or definitive definitions of politically loaded terms such as justice and instead more about creating a political settlement that allows for disparity, difference and conflict between values, opinions and beliefs. Thus the thesis will ultimately embrace Arendt's definition of action and how essential it is to meaningful human existence at the same time as arguing that the fundamental tension in Arendt's work between the need for humans to create and the human need for stability is best answered by Gray's understanding of *modus vivendi* – so not to find *a* political settlement that will allow for action at all times and in all places, but rather understanding that action will require different forms of *modus vivendi* to allow for peaceful co-existence that match differing times and differing circumstances. In short, political philosophy should be more about providing a framework whereby questions can be asked, rather than attempting to provide definitive answers that will forever stand the test of time while defying the reality of pluralism.

In order to demonstrate how a fusion of elements of the political philosophies of Gray and Arendt – via the thought of MacIntyre – provides some sort of meaningful response to what this thesis calls the reality of pluralism, the next step is to consider in detail the thought of Hannah Arendt, and in particular to begin by examining why she saw the denial of the reality of pluralism in the form of totalitarianism to be such an fundamental problem that it effectively renders humanity as something less than human. Therefore the next chapter will look to examine Arendt's understanding of and concerns around totalitarianism.

2: Totalitarianism and the Denial of Pluralism

Introduction

The work of Hannah Arendt is broad, eclectic, often idiosyncratic and equally often controversial. A look at some of the topics she wrote about – from totalitarianism through to the importance of the *polis* via topics such as Eichmann's trial and various political events in the United States of America and elsewhere might lead a reader only casually acquainted with her work to see it as a body of work lacking a sense of an over-arching project or fundamental themes, even if merit can be found in the way in which Arendt dealt with some of the issues important to her. It will the task of the next two chapters, following the lead of Arendtian scholars such as Margaret Canovan and Bernard Bergin, that there is a key theme underpinning her work and that, tying in with the theme of this thesis, is a deep concern with the reality of pluralism.

The first chapter will consider Arendt's views on the political condition of totalitarianism, and in doing so will argue that one of the major concerns that Arendt had with totalitarianism was its denial of essential human pluralism, before the second chapter offers an examination of what an embrace of the idea of plurality as part of the human condition might actually look like. In both chapters the argument will be advanced that an understanding of pluralism is at the heart of Arendt's broad canon of work.

The analysis of Arendt's work will begin by looking at what she meant by the term "totalitarianism" noting that, for Arendt, the term is not just a casual pejorative to be used against any regime that does not match her own political expectations but rather a particular form of political regime that is uniquely modern. This section of the chapter will look at the characteristics that Arendt sees in regimes that make them totalitarian – namely the arbitrary use of terror, the sustained assault on reality in favour of ideology and the introduction of the idea that syntheises the two and addresses the an issue crucial both to the nature of totalitarianism and the argument being addressed across the course of this thesis – the idea of the denial of the reality of pluralism. Throughout this section of the chapter, in order to shed light on exactly what the term meant for Arendt, examples from the two

regimes she identified as totalitarian in her lifetime – Nazi Germany and the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union – will be used. However, at this point the Arendtian assertion that both of those regimes had ceased to exist when she was writing her most detailed account of totalitarianism will be used to raise the question of why totalitarianism should be considered to be more than just a historical explanation of two of the most brutal regimes in human history.

The answer to this question forms the basis of the second part of the chapter, which will seek to answer the challenge of why, if the number of genuinely totalitarian can be counted using only part of one hand, the concept in the Arendtian understanding of it is so important. It will look to move beyond the crude defence of pointing to the death tolls that such regimes create and instead begin by arguing that, even if the two totalitarian regimes in existence in Arendt's life-time had fallen from power, it does not mean that there has been no repetition of totalitarian regimes since Stalin's death. Indeed, this section of the chapter will argue that there have been two political regimes that have had distinctly totalitarian elements to them in the forms of Democratic Kampuchea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It will then go on to note that, for Arendt, the move to totalitarianism is not a sudden break or rupture with the past, but rather that – in retrospect – the road to totalitarianism was marked by various historical developments. This then leads to the argument that just because the majority of totalitarian regimes have ceased to exist it does not mean that the potential recurrence of totalitarianism at some time in the future can be dismissed. Tying in with this the chapter will consider thinkers such as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl and Seyla Benhabib who have used Arendtian thought to address contemporary political problems and concerns.

The final section of this chapter will develop the idea that one of the reason why Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism is so crucial is it represents an extreme – the absolute denial of the reality of pluralism identified in the first part of this chapter. In being such an extreme – a polar opposite to a reality based on pluralism, in other words – it sheds light on some of the component parts of that extreme and thus, in particular relation to political philosophy, it illustrates those philosophies or theories that seek to deny or try to ignore the reality of pluralism. Part of this section of the chapter

will look at the problems Arendt had with Marxist thought and how these tie in with the failure to treat pluralism with the seriousness that it deserves. A link with the work of John Gray on different forms of liberalism will be raised, since one analysis of Gray's work – which will be explored fully in Chapter Six – is that it is best understood as a growing rejection of manifestations of liberalism that do not take what he calls the fact of pluralism seriously enough, including the work of both Mill and of Hayek. The claim being made here is not that the likes of Marx, Mill and Hayek are proactively advancing totalitarian ideologies or philosophies, but rather that, if they are not taking the reality of pluralism seriously enough, they are what least on some level involved in what could be called the denial of pluralism and thus sharing a tendency that finds its most extreme form in totalitarianism.

However, before such claims can be seriously discussed, it is necessary to examine the question of what totalitarianism is and, in particular, what Arendt meant when she used that term according to her own idiosyncratic definition of it.

The Nature of Totalitarianism

As is often the case across the course of her writings, Arendt uses terms in common usage in atypical ways. While her account of totalitarianism might share with a broader definition of it as being an extreme and deeply troubling state of affairs where concepts such as individual liberty are completely dispensed with, it does not mean that she uses it as a simple way of showing disdain for regimes or political settlements against regimes with which she does not agree. Furthermore, for Arendt, it is not synonymous with other terms that are also used to cover regimes that do not respect concepts such as liberty – for example, the word authoritarian. Rather, for Arendt, it refers to a rare and uniquely modern phenomenon that, during her lifetime, had only manifested itself twice – in Germany under Hitler, and in the USSR under Stalin.

How, then, can totalitarianism be defined using Arendt's understanding of it? It is a rare state of affairs, but across the two regimes that Arendt claims to be totalitarian some core similarities that take on the appearance of fundamentals can be identified. For example, both regimes share a deep disregard for individual liberty and were more than happy to use lethal force against their own people. Yet this alone does not distinguish their regimes from others that Arendt does not see as totalitarian. For example, the USSR either side of the Stalinist era saw no problem with using force against dissenters and certainly did not seem to value individual liberty as, at the very least, an ideal that should be at the central force in politics. However Arendt is at pains to point out that it was the Stalinist regime in the USSR – not those regimes that surrounded that era – that were totalitarian. How can the distinction be made between the different eras? In short, what is different about the totalitarian use of force against the state's own people with the use of similar force by other regimes?

The answer, Arendt seems to suggest, is in the victims of the state's force. In other regimes, those persecuted, imprisoned, disappeared or executed were singled out because they were seen as enemies of that regime and thus were threats to the stability and perhaps futures of those regimes. However, in the two Arendtian examples of totalitarianism, the use of force – or terror, as she prefers to term it – was arbitrary. The distinction lies in the fact that force and terror in, say, Apartheid era

South Africa were primarily directed against those deemed to be threats to the state while those who were compliant had a degree of security even at the cost of liberty. However, under Hitler or Stalin, the threat of terror hung heavy over everyone, and there was no way of ascertaining who the instruments of terror might be turned against next.

Two examples of this arbitrary use of terror can be seen in the Show Trials of the Stalinist era and the treatment of the Jews under the Nazi regime. Taking the former example first, the Show Trials were often the use of terror not against the actual enemies of the state, but against the loyal followers of the regime. In the full gaze of a state machine that knew those on trial were confessing to crimes of which all involved knew they were innocent, those loyal to the regime dutifully performed their part in a performance that would lead to their own executions. The ludicrous yet lethal performance shows two crucial parts of the nature of totalitarianism. Firstly, if the loyal party members fall victim to terror, how can anyone feel secure? Secondly, the false evidence for which they were "tried" represents another facet of totalitarianism – the rejection of reality, and as this chapter will go onto to show, that forms another fundamental of totalitarianism in Arendt's understanding of the term.

Another example of the arbitrary use of terror is the fate of the Jews under the Nazi regime. The removal of large swathes of the population based on their Jewish inheritance is one of the most notorious examples of the use of terror, and there are no real meaningful arguments that can be advanced to the contrary. However, the claim that this was an *arbitrary* deployment of terror is perhaps less clear. There is a sense in which the sheer effort that went into the Nazi attempt at genocide based on the classification of a people as Jewish is far from arbitrary – quite the opposite, it was intentional, deliberate and therefore anything other than arbitrary. Yet this misses several crucial details. First of all, it was not simply the Jews who were victims of the Nazi regime; other groups were also deemed to be worth nothing more that condemnation to the living hell of the death camps. The Nazi terror was about the selection of different classifications of people within that society for extermination; the arbitrary of that terror, then, lies in the fact that one day an individual might sit in

a group of people that the Nazi government deemed worthy of life. However, there would be no guarantee that this group would still be allowed to go on living the next day.

Furthermore, while there were some Jews who did attempt to resist, the vast majority of those who ended up in the death camps did not fight the state. Indeed, one of the more controversial points that Arendt makes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is about the way in which some Jewish community leaders abetted, however reluctantly, the Nazi government as it removed their people first from mainstream German life, then from the ghettos to which it consigned them, and then finally to the Concentrations Camps. The point here is not to provoke the question of "what else could those leaders have done?" – a question that remains hauntingly difficult to answer given the sheer power and control that the Nazi regime had over Germany at the time. Rather, it is to make the distinction between terror that focuses on the enemies of the state – of those who resist the regime, seek to destabilise it and so forth – and the Nazi terror that dedicated massive resources to an attempt to exterminate an entire people at a time of war. The Jewish people, for the most part, were not enemies of the state in the traditional sense. The only real way in which they were was if the empty and repellent rhetoric of the Nazi regime and its anti-Semitic predecessors was taken seriously. Thus, combining with the persecution of loyal followers, the arbitrary nature of the internal war against the Jews (and other social categories condemned as undesirable) clearly demonstrates the arbitrary nature of totalitarian terror. It is not about fighting opponents of the regime since, as Michael Bittman notes, "[u]nder totalitarian regimes terror increases in inverse proportion to the existence of opposition."[27] It is about terror in perhaps its purest form; not just to scare individuals into compliance but also to make it clear that no one individual is above sacrifice to the state if it so demands it.

Another sense in which this use of terror became arbitrary is down to the fact that the justifications for it – much like the hollow, false confessions to invented crimes that were the lifeblood of the Stalinist Show Trials – were based on nothing more than invented lies. Arendt does much to

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[27] Bittman, Michael "Totalitarianism: the career of a concept" in Kaplan, Gisela T. and Kessler, Clive S. *Hannah Arendt: Thinking, Judging, Freedom* (Sydney; Allen & Unwin, 1989), p.63.

explain the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in the period leading up to the Hitler regime, and there is not the space here to rehearse that account. Rather, Bergin cites an example of a highly successful 1918 novel by Artur Dinter that tells the story of an Aryan woman seduced by a Jew. While the woman in the story later goes on to marry an Aryan man, she still has children who look Jewish. The implication is that her ability to produce Aryan children was corrupted by a sexual liaison with a Jewish man. The anti-Semitic nature of the novel is clear, as is its reality defying logic whereby biological fact can be corrupted. Yet this sort of anti-Semitic rhetoric is all the more damaging owing to the simple fact it is clearly nonsense. If such nonsense is not only read but becomes popular, what possible hope is there to effectively refute it by recourse to a scientific reality being denied? And what could be more arbitrary than a terror based on such aberrant, reality-defying nonsense? Furthermore, as Bergin points out, there is the further problem that those undertaking the task of creating the perfect Aryan race were far from Aryan themselves, but that did not matter as they were "the will" that would create that Aryan tomorrow. Thus the lethal Nazi campaign against the Jewish people was arbitrary on a number of levels, not least the fact that the anti-Semitism that fuelled it was effectively nothing more than prejudiced nonsense. It had no problems with rejecting reality in favour of preferred rhetoric and cant.

Yet to try to explain the origins of the Holocaust using anti-Semitism in German fiction would be to fail to take seriously the complex nature of events that led to that horrific event, as well as missing the point that fiction is not meant, almost by definition to accurately reflect reality. Furthermore, it would also fail to take into account crucial elements of the Arendtian account of the nature of the anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust. One such element, which ties in with this notion of totalitarianism denying reality, is the gulf between what the perception of the Jewish role in society was and what it was in actuality according to anti-Semitic rhetoric. Arendt sees this gulf between rhetoric and reality in the idea that the Jews were seen as malign influencers in society – those who held real power behind the thrones of Europe – and the reality that elements of the Jewish part of society did have some financial influence but lacked any real political power. Indeed, in a move that

perhaps prefigures some of the controversial claims she would make about the role of some Jewish community leaders in the machinations of the Nazi state in the run up to the Holocaust, Arendt sees a naïve failure in understanding real politics in the failure to use wealth to create a surer political footing within society. The fact that the Jews remained part of society yet lacked the solid security that came with state acknowledged rights made them easy targets for the mob mentality that arose under the conditions of imperialism. The crucial point, though, when it comes to identifying another gulf between reality and the rhetoric that contributed to totalitarianism is how the reality proposed by the rhetoric was clearly divorced from political reality of the time.

This denial of reality is another key facet of totalitarianism on the Arendtian account. Arendt argues that totalitarian regimes simply reject reality and its implications when it does not suit their ideological purposes. This, she argues, is an off-shoot of the claim by Rhodes that he would colonize the stars if he could, as it is a claim that sees no limits to human ambition regardless of what reality might actually be indicating. Thus while Rhodes acknowledged the limits that came with human capabilities, totalitarianism saw no reason to accept such a limitation. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that the Nazi regime was happy to fight a war on several fronts while simultaneously eradicating millions of people who might have been able to contribute under duress to a country increasingly on the losing side of a war. It can also be seen in the Stalinist technique of literally trying to eradicate those who had fallen foul of the regime from history – hence Trotsky being eliminated from any moment in the history of the Russian revolution that might have shown him in any positive light. The rational idea that a war effort might be better without mass exterminations or that fact that Trotsky's contribution to the Russian revolution might be remembered by most of the adult population appear to be ideas that were not considered relevant by their respective totalitarian regimes. What the regime said became reality, even if what many would call actual reality said something very different.

The radical disconnect with reality helps to explain why, given Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism, regimes based on this modern phenomenon tend to disappear almost as soon as their

respective leaders have fallen from power. Thus Nazism did not outlive the death of Hitler and the demise of Stalin allowed the USSR to move in the direction of a more authoritarian rather than totalitarian political settlement. Of course, the end of such totalitarian regimes were not solely based on the death of the leader; the invasion of Germany at the end of the Second World War and the ultimate crushing of the Nazi war machine in battle clearly contributed to the absolute undermining of National Socialism as a political creed for example. Yet the fact that such regimes are based on a radical disconnect with reality creates a sort of house of cards effect, and when one element of the unreality is removed then reality infects the whole edifice and ultimately undermines it. The cult of personality is a crucial part of that edifice, and, as we shall see, has interesting implications when it comes to more contemporary forms of totalitarianism.

It would be remiss of this thesis on the reality of pluralism not to examine a crucial element of the denial of reality under totalitarianism that comes with the denial of the reality of pluralism. Under totalitarianism there is no respect for the idea of pluralism. Indeed, the exact opposite of the pluralism is an essential predicate of totalitarianism; there is one truth, and it is a truth to which the whole of society must be devoted. All individuals become one entity, regardless of whether or not they agree with the aim of the totalitarian state. All become as one, in short. Debate, discourse and difference are all utterly suppressed, leading to the ironic position of, on Arendt's account, individuals with a mass society all existing in perfect isolation despite their proximity to one another as they are unable to communicate with one another. The next chapter will look at why, for Arendt, this ability to interact with others is so crucial to the humanity of any individual; for now it is worth stressing the Arendtian idea that totalitarianism denies the reality of pluralism and in doing so denies humanity for all who live within that society. While it is easy to see the dehumanisation of the individual consigned to the hell on earth, to Arendt's phrase, of the concentration, she also argues that totalitarianism robs all of their humanity or – as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl puts it – what Arendt sees as "radical evil" is the "disappearance of politics" through "a form of government that destroys politics, methodically eliminating speaking and acting human beings and attacking the very humanity" of all groups before

"making people superfluous as human beings."[28] In short, without the possibility of pluralism, all become as one in the denial of their humanity. The only hope, Arendt argues, lies in the fact of natality – in the idea that there will always be future actions and future humans who may, somehow, be able to provide a viable alternative to any totalitarian status quo.

Indeed, this fact of natality and the hope for a better future for humanity even under totalitarianism is borne out by the Arendtian argument that, with the death of Stalin and the subsequent end of the Stalinist regime in the USSR, both of the regimes that she perceived to be totalitarian had ceased to exist. The nightmare of totalitarianism became part of history rather than contemporary reality even as Arendt wrote her famous account of the phenomenon. So while Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism might have clear historical merit for students of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, the question at this point does arise of what contemporary relevance Arendt's work on totalitarianism might have. Dealing with this question forms the basis of the second part of this chapter.

Before this question is addressed, though, it is worth considering an argument put forward by, among others, Carole E. Adams, that there is nothing inherently original in Arendt's definition of totalitarianism and it is, as Adams puts it herself, a failure "to recognize totalitarianism as tyranny in 20th century garb."[29] This sort of argument seeks to deny that there is anything uniquely modern in totalitarianism, and it is instead the sort of authoritarian and tyrannical politics that can be seen throughout the history of humanity. In her essay, Adams raises a number concerns with Arendt's account, one of the key ones being that Arendt fails to take human agency seriously. Adams points to the rise of anti-fascist groups in the aftermath of World War Two as an example of the inability to crush human spontaneity.[30] Adams does acknowledge Arendt's apparent attempt to rectify this failure to take human agency seriously in her earlier work on totalitarianism in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* when

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[28] Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth *Why Arendt Matters*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2006) p.39.
[29] Adams, Carole E. "Hannah Arendt and the historian: Nazism and the New Social Order", in Kaplan and Kessler, *Op. Cit.*, p. 36.
[30] *Ibid*, p.37.

"she affirms human agency [by] writing of the individuals who took action to save the lives of others."[31]

As an aside, it is also worth nothing in that book that Arendt also highlighted examples of those who were willing to directly oppose the Nazi regime, no matter what the cost. Yet Adams seems to misunderstand the argument that Arendt is trying to make here; she does not wish to deny the possibility of human agency – indeed, the possibility of it in the fact of natality is precisely the point that allows for some sort of hope in the face of totalitarianism. Her concern is precisely that the sort of spontaneity seen in those who would oppose fascism or attempt to save the lives of others under totalitarianism is one of the clear targets of totalitarianism and one of the factors within human individuals that totalitarian regimes wish to eliminate. The need for human creativity and spontaneity is at the very heart of Arendt's understanding of a more positive and human version of politics, as will be seen in the next chapter. She does not see its demise under totalitarianism as Adams seems to suggest, but rather an attempt to do so that, while not completely effective, does have massive and devastating implications for it.

Tying in with the above critique of Arendt, Adams argues that Arendt posits "an inexorable historical process that denies an historical reality, a reality of individual and class-based political action, of which she herself was aware."[32] This criticism can be dispatched in a similar manner to the above one by suggesting that Arendt does not seek to deny the historical reality that Adams identifies, but rather wants to demonstrate the extent to which it was under a radical and new form of threat through the modern phenomenon of totalitarianism. An Arendtian might argue that it is Adams who is not facing up to historical reality since she is not taking seriously the threat to political action posed by totalitarianism. This further links to the flaw of the final critique from Adams that will be considered here – namely that totalitarianism has an ultimate aim in the form of "absolute domination." Adams argues that this "implies a degree of rationality and purpose and the existence of a leader seeking power – all of which are indices also of tyranny."[33] These may be indices of tyranny, but they could

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[31] *Ibid*, p. 40.
[32] *Ibid*, p.41.
[33] *Ibid,* p.40

also be indices of any ambitious politician in a modern liberal democracy as well as the faceless, monolithic bureaucratic totalitarian state. The way of distinguishing them is to consider the objectives of the different leaders seeking power, and it is the desire for absolute domination that distinguishes the totalitarian from other forms of political leaders. The totalitarian does not seek control over a government to implement certain policies or total control over all potential opposition for the perpetuation of their own power. Rather, they seek absolute domination over realty itself, and that includes denying the reality of pluralism that can be seen, in part, through human agency and spontaneity. That is what makes totalitarianism unique; the modern belief that all can be bent to the will of the right human creed or belief. It comes with the arrogance and belief of modern humanity that all is possible, and distinguishes itself from – for example, tyranny – in precisely that way.

Yet it is not enough for the purposes of this thesis to show that Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism has been a problem; it is necessary to show that her account still has contemporary relevance beyond the task of historical analysis and political definitions and helps to offer insights into the possibility of political philosophy in the face of the reality of pluralism. The second part of this chapter will address these problems.

Totalitarianism in Perspective: Why It Matters

To repeat the point, the question facing the second section of this chapter is why Arendt's definition of totalitarianism still matters. It is a question that is based on two observations from Arendt herself, namely that if totalitarianism is a house of cards that can disappear as soon as it is fundamentally challenged combined with the end of the two regimes that could be classified as totalitarian by Arendt. If the phenomenon had ceased to exist in contemporary reality during Arendt's life, then why should it still matter as a source of ongoing political study?

An obvious response to this would be to point to the massive human cost of these regimes, not only owing to the wars they pursued against other nations but also against their own people. Those regimes had a massive impact on human history, and that impact should be studied both out of respect for those who died because of the actions of those regimes and also to understand how such regimes could come to power and then maintain that power for as long as they did. It would be incredibly short-sighted to see the fall of Nazism and Stalinism as the answer to the myriad questions and problems the very existence of those regimes in the first place, let alone their horrific actions, raise. This idea ties in with a view Young-Bruehl holds of what she describes as "political analysis" – Young-Bruehl argues it was for her "less a matter of culling lessons from the past than of being able to identify what was new, which calls for a new, creative response."[34] With regard to this idea, then, contemporary examination and analysis of totalitarianism are relevant as they could shed light on new political dangers and what needs to be done about those dangers.

Furthermore, if the idea of Arendt's that totalitarianism is a modern phenomenon is taken seriously, then the fact that there had been only two such regimes that fall into her classification perhaps becomes less of a limiting factor, since the modern nature of totalitarianism thus precludes numerous other examples of these types of regime across history. However, since the conditions of the modern age have not receded with the fall of Hitler and Stalin, the idea that there could be further totalitarian regimes not identified or even witnessed by Arendt arises – and using her understanding

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[34] Young-Bruehl, *Op. Cit.* p.61.

of totalitarianism at least two other regimes can be seen that have considerable similarities with the way in Arendt defines the term. It is worth spending some time considering these examples, since they not only show that Stalinism and Nazism did not represent the be all and end all of totalitarianism but also help to further illustrate Arendt's understanding of the phenomenon.

This first regime that arguably could be called totalitarian in the Arendtian sense that will be considered here is Democratic Kampuchea, that regime that ruled Cambodia under the leadership of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge from 1975-1979. A detailed account of that regime is clearly impossible in the piece of work. Instead, some of the ways in which that regime showed totalitarian tendencies will be explored here. It is however telling that, for example, Elizabeth Becker's account of the Khmer Rouge regime repeatedly references Arendt in her analysis of the regime, such as when she writes that people "must be separated from each other and forbidden normal ties and relationships, something the Khmer Rouge achieved with the evacuations and the cooperative system."[35] Building on this insight, from an Arendtian perspective there was the denial of reality; soon after achieving victory and seizing control of Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge spread the fabricated rumour that the United States was preparing to bomb the cities and that the only possible course of action was for the regime to evacuate those cities and take the people to the countryside.[36] There was a promise to return the people to the cities when the threat had passed, but this was ultimately not to happen as the evacuation appears to have been part of a wider project of returning the country – or perhaps creating – a "Year Zero"; a rural utopia that would replace what had gone before in Cambodia. Here the radical disconnect with reality, at the very least in the idea that the people would be safer from a rumour of foreign military information through risking starvation in a mass evacuation to rural sites unable to sustain them, is clear, as is the false belief that modern humanity can defy reality and do whatever it wishes. Yet, also implicit in the human cost of the exodus, is the further link to totalitarianism seen in the flagrant disregard for individuality seen under the Pol Pot regime.

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[35] Becker, Elizabeth *When The War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York; Public Affairs, 1998), p.210.
[36] *Ibid*, p.20.

The notorious Khmer Rouge slogan of "to keep you is no benefit, to destroy you is no loss" is perhaps one of the most striking statements of the denial of both pluralism and human individuality, Those who do not conform and serve a role for the wider goal of the society could be casually dismissed in cold, inhuman terms; their demise and destruction does not even form a pressing priority of the regime; it simply becomes something that will happen as other priorities are achieved. This attitude ties in with the almost casual way in which individuals were left to die in that mass exodus to the countryside, and how starvation played such a crucial role in the Cambodian genocide. Yet the regime was not afraid to use terror as part of its *modus operandi*, and both the brutality of the treatment of the supposed enemies of the regime combined with the arbitrary definitions of who could fall foul of the regime seems to mirror the arbitrary nature of the use of terror in the regimes examined by Arendt. The desire to create conformity and suppress pluralism can be seen in the oppressive and controlling reality faced by even those who escaped the fate of consignment to the detention centres.

The Khmer Rouge regime would be, in the manner of the Nazi one, of a government crushed in military defeat. Yet this did not remove the Khmer Rouge as a political force – or more properly threat – in Cambodia. How can this be reconciled with the collapse of National Socialism after the fall of Nazi Germany? One factor may well be the fact that Pol Pot lived on while Hitler died in his bunker. A figurehead for the totalitarian regime, and therefore a totem for support for the Khmer Rouge, lived on even after that regime lost control of the country. Furthermore, there has been a (perhaps understandable) limit to the desire of the Cambodian state to face up to the reality of the Khmer Rouge regime – as Philip Short – writes those in power in modern Cambodia (often those involved in the Khmer Rouge regime) "have no interest in raking up the past."[37]. However the problems of Cambodia's attempts to reconcile itself to the murderous legacy of the Khmer Rouge does not change the fact that said regime shared clear common ground with the two that Arendt saw as totalitarian.

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[37] Short, Philip *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare*, (London; John Murray, 2004), p.13

The second potential example of a more recent – and still existing – totalitarian regime is that of the Juche regime in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). As with Democratic Kampuchea, it does seem to have certain core similarities with the totalitarianism as defined by Arendt. The denial or reality is perhaps one of the clearest similarities of which incidences abound. On a macro scale there is the mantra of the people of that state having nothing to envy on a global scale – even in the face of mass poverty and starvation. On a micro level there is the use of spurious propaganda by the government, such as the claim that international aid – especially from the United States – actually represents reparation from the US for the Korean War well over half a century after that conflict ended in stalemate. Interestingly, a recent report argued that one of the biggest threats to the future of the Juche regime in the DPRK is the people gathering information about reality from the South – and the draconian punishments faced by those who listen to radio programmes or watch TV shows from the South demonstrates the extent to which the regime sees this as a problem.

The human rights record of the DPRK is notorious, with – despite the secrecy that surrounds the regime – several harrowing accounts of the treatment of political prisoners emerging.[38] The argument that the regime primarily focuses on its opponents when it comes to the use of its instruments terror might seem to suggest that the regime is more typical of an authoritarian regime than a totalitarian one. Yet the broad range of crimes that could result in one falling foul of the North Korean security state – as the example of watching the wrong sort of television programme cited above – could be construed as to be so broad as to be moving in the direction of the arbitrary. Furthermore, the very fact that it is not just the perpetrator of the so-called crime who ends up facing the full force of the state but also their families (including children) moves the use of terror beyond being simply a means of suppressing opposition, and instead has become an instrument of absolute domination of those in that society. Furthermore, even if the elimination of family members can be

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[38] Two indicative and powerful accounts are Harden, Blaine *Escape from Camp 14: One man's remarkable odyssey from North Korea to freedom in the West* (London; Mantle, 2012) and Kang, Chol-Han and Rigoulot, Pierre *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* (London; Atlantic Books, 2012.)

construed as an extreme instance of the need to suppress opposition in that society, it should be clear to all precisely how little regard that regime holds the idea of pluralism and of human plurality.

However, it was noted above that another feature of totalitarian states tends to be their rapid decline after the demise of their leader; Stalinism ended shortly after Stalin died, Hitler's death – along with the defeat of Nazi Germany on the field of battle – helped to hasten the consignment of National Socialism to the dustbin of history, and the fact that Saloth Sar outlived Democratic Kampuchea may well have helped the perpetuation of the Khmer Rouge after the demise of Democratic Kampuchea. Why, then, has the DPRK survived not only the demise of its first ruler, but also the second one as well? How can it be considered to be totalitarian if the regime remains surprisingly immune to the deaths of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il? It is not enough to simply point out that the regime has not been discredited through defeat in war, and that despite its bellicose behaviour it seems determined to avoid all-out war with those powers that could credibly defeat it. After all, on the Arendtian account, Stalinism faded after Stalin despite the victory in World War Two and, as the noted above, the Khmer Rouge did not disappear after the Pol Pot regime lost power. Yet neither of the movements behind those regimes – or the one led by Hitler – truly survived the death of the leading figure around whom the cult of personality was built. The question then become how has the DPRK managed to become a dynastic form of totalitarianism?

The personality cult that can be seen with regard to (among others) Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot has taken on an intergenerational aspect. Each successive member of the Kim dynasty has been intentionally set up as more than human – as a benevolent earthbound deity beloved by all and capable of performing miracles. They are detached from the problems that the country faces, and all loyal citizens must devote themselves to the state in order to please the parental – curiously, maternal, according to the analysis of B. R. Myers[39] – leaders of the DPRK. Thus the leading family of the DPRK have become the cult rather than the just the founding member of that dynasty. The figurehead of

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[39] Myers, B. R. *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*, (New York; Melville House Publishing, 2012), pp. 48-49.

the cult can be changed, albeit it with much careful preparation, while the cult has survived death, war, famine and deterioration in the living standards of the people. It is also interesting to note the rhetoric that surrounds the personality cult; according to the state propaganda of the DPRK, death has not stopped Kim Il Sung in his leadership abilities – he remains Eternal President. Thus the personality cult defies human mortality and allows those who follow the first ruler of the DPRK to be following in his divine mission, and there are few quite as striking examples of the denial of reality in the totalitarianism of the North Korean regime than the idea that a man who died in 1994 remains, apparently in perpetuity, as the Eternal President of the Republic.

Thus any claim that totalitarianism ended with the two examples proposed by Arendt in her lifetime appear, at best, to be flawed. Furthermore, the ongoing existence of the DPRK shows that, for one nation at least, the totalitarian nightmare is ongoing. Yet the extremes of Democratic Kampuchea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are not the only reason why Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism remains relevant. If Arendt's work on totalitarianism is seen as more than simply descriptions of particular regimes and instead – as the structure *The Origins of Totalitarianism* clearly seems to suggest was the intention – as an exploration in part of how totalitarian conditions are arrived at, then there arises the potentiality of analysing the contemporary and identifying any potential examples of totalitarian behaviour or, perhaps, the drift towards totalitarianism. The argument is that Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia – as well as the DPRK and Democratic Kampuchea – did not emerge from nowhere, but were rather the results of a conflation of particular historical circumstances. So, while there is nothing in the Arendtian account of totalitarianism to suggest an inevitability in any drift towards totalitarianism – if anything the opposite is true in that her account of politics denies history as purely a process – but rather that is the process there are actions or patterns that might display totalitarian possibilities then an Arendtian political philosopher should be resistant to them because of the destructive path they could – rather than automatically will – lead a nation down.

An example of this from Arendt's own work can be found in her analysis of the impact of the PR industry on the USA, in particular on the impact of that industry in the way in which it influenced the presentation of the Vietnam War in that country. Arendt clearly sees the negative implications of that industry as, in part, the starting point is not reality – not the actuality of what was occurring in the Vietnam conflict – but rather the presentation of that conflict in a positive light regardless of whether the circumstances warranted such a presentation. There is a clear link between this sort of attitude and that of the attempts to subvert or deny reality in totalitarian regimes; if reality is not convenient for whatever the reason, then it gets altered. Of course this is not to state that those involved in the attempts to alter the public perception of the reality of the Vietnam War were in any way totalitarian in their thought or aspirations. Yet there is a clear human cost to the actions to the actions of those who would subvert reality in the form of a perpetuation of a war on false premises. It attempts to create the circumstances against which a lethal conflict could continue through the deception of the people in whose name it was arguably being fought. Furthermore, the deception affects pluralism in that those who attempt to engage in pluralistic politics could be denied the facts needed to proactively debate reality. So, while there is a huge gulf between what a totalitarian regime might do in relation to political reality and what elements of the PR industry might have done during her later years in the US there is some overlap in both the human cost of deception (albeit on a very different scale) and the detrimental impact on genuine politics. Writing on deception in relation to the Pentagon Papers Arendt argued that "(i)mage-making as global policy – not world conquest, but victory in the battle "to win the people's minds" – is indeed something new in the huge arsenal of human follies recorded in history"[40] and later in the same piece in relation to freedom of the press that "(w)hether the First Amendment will suffice to protect this most essential political freedom, the right to unmanipulated factual information without which all freedom of opinion becomes a cruel hoax, is another question."[41] The PR industry and intrusions into the idea of a free press are concerns

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[40] Arendt, Hannah, *Crises of the Republic: Lying in Politics; Civil Disobedience; On Violence; Thoughts on Politics and Revolution* (New York; Mariner Books, 1972), p.18.
[41] *Ibid*, p.45.

for the later Arendt that may not be as destructive as the result of a full descent into totalitarianism but nonetheless they are potential pointers to political ill-health that would clearly damage the pluralism Arendt so clearly valued. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl expands on elements of this idea in her work on why Arendt remains relevant in this day and age, particularly in her discussion around the insights as to what Arendt might have made about the response of the USA to the events of September 11th, 2001, albeit after earlier noting in her book "(N)either I, her biographer, nor anyone else should presume to *know* what Hannah Arendt would have thought about any event, trend, idea, person or group that she did not look upon with her own fiercely observant and the eyes of her uniquely and inimitably brilliant mind" but rather what she can do is "wonder"[42] what Arendt might have thought. However with this Young-Bruehl writes a "huge governmental reorganization brought the Department of Homeland Security into existence, vastly extending the scope of the Executive Branch of the government, while the Secret Service began to operate like a shadow government, that is, in ways that Arendt had identified as proto-totalitarian during the McCarthy era and the Vietnam War."[43] Again, the point here is not to call the administration of George W. Bush totalitarian, or even aspiring totalitarianism. Rather it is the idea of slippage towards an undesirable future and with it the inherent risk that authoritarianism will rise and the possibility of a totalitarian future becomes marginally more likely. It was an ongoing concern of Arendt in her later life even after the fall of Nazi Germany and the end of the Stalinist era and there are reasons to think both because of the existence of totalitarian regimes since her death and ominous turns in political policy in countries like the USA that it should remain a concern.

What then does Arendt's analysis of the nature to totalitarianism tell us about the reality of pluralism? Quite simply the nature of totalitarianism brings into sharp relief what happens when the natural debate, disagreement and conflict that appears to be innate within free thinking individuals is considered to be a problem. It acts as the extreme, almost polar, opposite to what constitutes the

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[42] Young-Bruehl, *Op. Cit.* p.16.
[43] *Ibid*, p.64.

reality of pluralism. The extreme nature of what totalitarianism is comes in part through the way in which it deals with those who would challenge the ersatz totalitarian truths. As shown above the response is not one of disagreement, nor of wishing to silence the dissenters through traditional legal means. Ultimately those who do not fit owing to reasons real or imagined go through the process of dehumanisation that tends to end in removal of society, total destruction of their individual identities, and ultimately death and where possible their absolute removal from history. The next chapter will look at the potential uncertainty that Arendt's reading of pluralism in the form of action in the public space, but for now it is enough to know the awful brutality of life under totalitarianism – on top of the rest of the misery that such regimes inflict on their own people in pursuit of compliance, totalitarian regimes deny pluralism and this forms part of the way in which they render those they rule as less than human. If it were not already immediately apparent how monstrous totalitarian regimes are then the above should demonstrate why, for Arendt at the very least, they constitute such a problem. The next step is to apply this directly to political thought.

Totalitarianism and Political Thought

The first point to consider in relation to totalitarianism and political theory is that there are very few political philosophies that would directly call for practical political totalitarianism. The four regimes discussed above are either based on distorted versions of Marxism redesigned by differing revolutionaries according to the circumstances they were in and the actions they needed to justify – for example Lenin's discussions about the need for a vanguard party of the proletariat in a Russia where Bolshevik supporters were far from in the majority – or based on crude racism and anti-Semitism which manifested itself lethally in the form of Nazism. Yet as noted in the previous section it is not just the realisation of totalitarianism that perturbed Arendt, it was also the potential slippage of regimes and systems of thought in the direction of totalitarianism that deeply concerned her as well. In terms of political philosophy this is the danger of slippage into totalitarian ways of thinking as a corollary of the concept of slippage mentioned above and the lure of the absolute truth eliminating all conflict.

Margaret Canovan, in particular in her analysis of an incomplete Arendtian account of Marxism, discusses at length the slippage of Marxism into at least authoritarian if not outright totalitarian thought and states that "unlike the anti-Semitism that had acted as the 'amalgamator' in Nazi totalitarianism, Marxism was unquestionably a product of the mainstream Western tradition of political thought. Consequently if there were indeed totalitarian elements to be found in it, this must have wider implications."[44] Canovan argues that Arendt saw that the totalitarian seeds in Marxism can actually be seen in those of earlier thinkers who were clearly very influential on Marx. She writes "(a)lready in Hegel's theory then, we can see one of the elements that would according to Arendt make Marx's historical theory a basis for fir totalitarianism: the idea of history as a *process*, with its implication that individual lives are only parts of a large whole."[45] The denial of individuality in Hegel becomes the denial of the reality of pluralism which Marx would build on at the same time as focussing

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[44] Canovan, Margaret *Hannah Arendt: A Re-Interpretation of her Political Thought* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.64

[45] *Ibid*, p.76-77.

on what Arendt terms Labour – the subsistence level that all humans have to meet overcomes the far more human and pluralistic action. What Canovan is attempting to tease out from Arendt's is that Stalinist totalitarianism had its seeds in what Marx (and those before him) wrote – she is not trying to say that Marx was totalitarian, but that there was that totalitarian tendency in elements of his writing or, as Canovan herself puts it, Arendt "does not accuse Marx himself of unleashing terror, merely of making it much easier for Stalin to do so." [46] It is not the case that Marx set out to create the sort of nightmarish reality in the Soviet Union under Stalin, Democratic Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge or the Democratic People's Republic under the Kim Dynasty. Rather there is a strong element of a law of unintended consequences coming into play with the best intentions of Marx to demonstrate the relentless march of history towards a better tomorrow after the fall of capitalism unintentionally created a future in different parts of the world that was radically disassociated from what Marx would actually, at least according to some of his written work, radically disagreed with.

Marxism, then, becomes a key and striking example of what can happen if political philosophies are unaware of the totalitarian tendencies within them or at the very least do not take them seriously enough. Crudely put, the move from the dictatorship of the proletariat to the vanguard of the proletariat to the model of Stalinist dictatorship is not the only way in which Marxism could move but it is clearly one way in which it could have been practically implemented. However the idea of unintended consequences from the best of aspirations can arguably be seen elsewhere. Owing to the comparative (and mercifully) limited numbers of totalitarian regimes it is difficult to show other recognised political philosophies that have either created or helped to create totalitarian regimes. However it is still possible to point to different political philosophies and suggest that an unintended possibility for increased authoritarianism that could lead towards totalitarianism if not checked.

An instructive example here might be of John Stuart Mill and his Harm Principle. This example is potentially very powerful as one of Mill's clear intentions in creating the Harm Principle to maximise liberty and freedom. One of the key strengths of his principle is that is as broad as possible and would

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[46] *Ibid*, p.89.

enable people to undertake what he called "experiments in living." He wanted to maximise people's freedom through setting as the limit on individual behaviour as causing harm to others. Therefore to argue that his Harm Principle contains any sort of seed of totalitarianism seems counter-intuitive in the extreme given its commitment to the maximisation of liberty. Yet two caveats can still be built into the Harm Principle. First of all the maximisation of liberty mirrors the minimisation of factors that could limit liberty – but the idea of something being minimised on a definitional level means reduced as much as possible, not removed altogether. The second point is perhaps more pertinent to the argument being extended here – while it is hardly novel to point out that the definition of what constitutes harm is deeply subjective, it is nonetheless an important point because the concept of harm could be presented in an extremely limited way (which would be in keeping with Mill's line of thought) but could equally be framed in very broad terms. An example might be around the notion of the infliction of verbal harm. While many would take harm to be manifested physically, it is equally clear that verbal communication – be it through bullying, hate speech, threats and so on – can be extremely harmful to individuals. Harm does not have to be the result of a physical interaction – it could be the result of negative communication. The implications of this on the Harm Principle are broad – it could be used to restrict the freedom of expression of individuals. The rejoinder to this could be that this would restrict phenomenon such as hate speech and therefore should not be lamented. However what the notion of hate speech actually is – or even just the speech that might cause harm to another individual – is again deeply subjective. A Christian might see criticism of their religion as blasphemy to their religion and therefore harmful to the speaker, potentially to them as the person who hears the blasphemy and perhaps even to their God. It could be used to close down pluralistic debate into Christianity; while this would hardly be totalitarianism it does tie in with the notion of slippage mentioned above – not a sudden rupture into a totalitarian state but rather a sort of death of thousand authoritarian cuts that slowly bleed into creating that totalitarian state. Based on his writings Mill would have resisted totalitarianism, and he would not have wanted his philosophy to form a justification for it. Nonetheless even a parameter designed to be as liberal as possible does

have the potentiality to be able to justify more authoritarian behaviours that could be damaging to pluralism.

At this point it is worth briefly exploring a counter-argument to the above – yes, the Harm Principle is not perfect and could be mis-used or just used in such a way as to be contrary to its creator's preferences, but there has to be some sort of cut-off point in relation to the individual's behaviour. To suggest otherwise would be to advocate anarchy. It could further be argued that there is the world of difference between a Marx advocating a dictatorship and a Mill advocating the Harm Principle – the former is far more likely to facilitate a drift towards the totalitarian than the latter. There is a need for a follower or supporter of Mill to be extremely vigilant to the idea of slippage in the implementation of the Harm Principle and indeed how broadly the term harm is allowed to be defined. However there is a clear need for some sort of line to be put in place even if any sort of coherent debate or interactions are going to happen. This is an idea that will form part of the concluding chapter as even the reality of pluralism requires a basic requirement of participants to avoid an anarchic free for all. Clearly – as shown across this chapter – totalitarianism is the absolute opposite that destroys pluralism. However that does not mean pluralism is the polar opposite to totalitarianism. It is not synonymous with anarchy. The next chapter – which analyses the Arendtian version of pluralism in the form of action – will also start to suggest the confines in which pluralism can and has been defined.

3: The Arendtian Alternative

Introduction

This chapter will seek to build on the exposition and analysis of the previous chapter by looking at what Arendt argued to be the best alternative to totalitarianism; namely, the form of politics examined in detail in her work *The Human Condition*. For Arendt, the form of politics most sensitive to the reality of humanity as a collection of inter-subjectively linked individuals is embodied in what she calls "action". For Arendt, this is the fundamentally human activity distinct from two other categories of human activity, which she terms "labour" and "work". The chapter will look at each category in detail, explaining what Arendt meant by each term before examining some of the implications of her sometimes idiosyncratic use of each of the terms. It will then seek to further explain "action" through looking at the distinction Arendt makes between strength and power, before turning to look at the importance of both promising and forgiveness in the Arendtian account of action – since both her treatment of both of these activities reveal important facets to her understanding of "action". From there, the chapter will look at some of the implications of this definition of politics as "action" for contemporary political settlements such as liberal democracy, and will show how the Arendtian understanding of "action" actually shows just how apolitical the majority of individuals are in such liberal democracies.

Having explained the relationship between the concepts that underpin Arendt's understanding of politics, the chapter will then turn to the potential problems within that understanding. It will start by considering just how strict the divide between the categories actually is, and whether there could be substantial overlap between them – something perhaps hinted at by Arendt's own discussion of the creative arts in *The Human Condition*. It will then look at the broad nature of Arendtian politics, raising the question of what forums can actually be considered to be political given the nature of "action", and what the broad scope and range of those forums might mean for the Arendtian political alternative. Then the chapter will consider what the lack of end of

concrete end goals means for "action", and whether, when the message of *The Human Condition* is combined with Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism discussed in the preceding chapter, her political philosophy is best understood as offering negative prescriptions within politics – in other words, what needs to be avoided and why – rather than positive ones. Finally, the chapter will offer some thoughts on how that political philosophy can be considered an alternative if it is so lacking in positive prescriptions.

The first step, then, when it comes to considering the Arendtian alternative to the denial of pluralism that occurs under totalitarian regimes, is to look at precisely what the alternative is and how Arendt understands and defines the core activities that underpin human life. Arendt offers her thoughts on this most clearly in her book *The Human Condition*, and this chapter will begin by looking at the three distinct categories of human activity that Arendt identified in that work; labour, work and action.

Arendt defines labour as those "occupations", undertaken by slaves in the time of the "ancients", "that served the needs for the maintenance of life."[47] Labour, in the scheme of the human condition proposed by Arendt, constitutes the activities needed to sustain both individual humans and the human race; activities such as the production of food. This leads to two important implications for labour that Arendt acknowledges – the fleeting nature of its produce and the dependence of humans on it. On the first point, Arendt writes that it is "the mark of all labouring that it leaves nothing behind, and that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent"[48] – making it clear that, in her view, the results of labour are transitory by their very nature. Yet the transient nature does not change the fact that within the Arendtian scheme of categorisation labour remains essential, since she notes that "this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends on it"[49] – humanity needs the produce of labour to sustain existence. She also uses the phrase "*animal laborans*" – partly in her critique of Marx and other thinkers in the modern age who elevate "*animal laborans* to the position traditionally held by the *animal rationale*"[50] – to describe the individuals undertaking labour, thus raising the question – discussed in detail below – of whether there is anything distinctly human in the activities that make up labour. In summary, what is clear from these quotations is that labour constitutes the sort of subsistence level activity that human individuals very clearly need in order to be able to survive. This leads to a number of further conclusions – and raises a number of additional questions – about labour.

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[47] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.83.
[48] *Ibid*, p.87.
[49] *Ibid*, p.87.
[50] *Ibid*, p.85. She begins her chapter on labour by plainly stating "(i)n the following chapter, Karl Marx will be criticized. See p.79.

Firstly, while Arendt is critical of thinkers such as Marx who would prioritise labour over action – noting, for example, that "in all stages of his work" Marx "defines man as an *animal laborans*"[51] this is does not lead to an Arendtian rejection of labour, nor does she underestimate the importance of the activities that constitute labour. Indeed, to do so would be incredibly naïve, as the proceeds of labour are essential to perpetuating human existence. Without the fruits of the activities that make up labour, and the toil of those who undertake it, human life would be very short and individuals would be completely unable to undertake either work or, more importantly, action. Put simply, a world without labour would be a world plagued by starvation. Given this shows how important labour is, why does Arendt appear so critical of those who might afford it primacy in their accounts of politics and the wider human condition?

One answer to that question is the transient nature of the proceeds of labour. After all, as an activity it creates articles to be consumed; as a result it offers little of permanence. A loaf of bread baked today will be unlikely to exist in a week's time. Furthermore, that loaf of bread, even if left for longer periods of time, has an in-built form of expiry when its natural shelf-life is considered. The loaf of bread shows the two-fold transitory nature of many of the proceeds of labour – consuming it obviously means it ceases to exist, but leaving it to expire means that it ceases to be able to usefully fulfil its primary function as something for humans to consume. While products with a much longer shelf-life may not have the second problem to quite the same extent, they do still suffer from the first – once they have been consumed, they are gone and, crucially, need to be replaced. This, then is part of the problem with labour – it creates a life based on impermanence and also, given the inevitable consumption of what it brings into the world, it creates a need for perpetual repetition as further labour is required to generate further products for consumption. Given this, Arendt sees labour as "endurance" and "what makes the effort" of labour "painful is not danger but its relentless repetition."[52] A life without labour would surely be short and unable to allow for any further forms of

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[51] *Ibid,* p.105.
[52] *Op. Cit.* p.101.

activity as noted above. However, as Arendt makes clear, a life based solely on labour would be dull and repetitious, ultimately allowing the individuals undertaking it little if anything at all of substance and permanence. It is this that leads to the need for work, as discussed below.

Another reason why Arendt might be sceptical of those who wish to privilege labour is because there is nothing within it that is intrinsically and fundamentally human. Given it is an activity based on the need for sustenance it is crucial for all human beings to have access to the fruits of labour; however, the same is true not only of humans but all members of the wider animal kingdom not kept in captivity. They all undertake activity to provide them with the means to sustain themselves. Two good examples of this would be animals hunting and animals foraging for food. By the Arendtian understanding, they are all part of the activity she would call labour as they are all looking for the means to subsist. Arendt's use of the phrase *animal laborans*; she makes it clear that labour is associated in her way of thinking with the animal kingdom rather than just the human realm. Indeed, she goes as far as to state that labour is what "men share with all other forms of animal life."[53] Therefore, a life built solely on labour would leave humanity as indistinguishable from other animals.

In short, for Arendt labour is essential for humans but it is not by itself enough to make individuals distinctly human, nor is it enough to give them meaningful and rewarding lives. In order to achieve this, there is the need for two further forms of human activity; work and action. While the former is not, as will be explained, a distinctly human activity either, it is essential for human individuals to be able to bring some form of permanence into their lives and therefore to move them to a position where they can undertake action. Therefore, the step this chapter will take is to consider in detail what Arendt's definition of the term work actually is.

To use Arendt's own words, work is the process of creating "objects for use" and that "(t)heir proper use does not cause them to disappear and they give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man."[54]

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[53] *Ibid*, p.84.
[54] *Ibid*, p.136.

Thus work offers "mortals a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than themselves"[55] – the produce of work does not have the same transitory nature as that of labour. As such, it is a form of human activity which creates products with more permanence than the end products of labour. It is important to note that the products of work are not immortal; like everything, they will eventually succumb to the ravages of time, but the crucial distinction is that they are more permanent than the products of labour. As Arendt herself notes that "usage is bound to use up these objects, this end is not their destiny in the same way as the destruction is the inherent end of all things for consumption."[56] A good example of this might be a comparison of labour designed to create firewood from a tree and work designed to create a wooden chair from the same tree – in the former example, the end result of labour will exist only so long as it is not put to the purpose for which it has been selected; once it has been used to help human subsistence through creating warmth through a fire, the firewood will have ceased to exist. However the wood used to fashion a chair will continue to exist for far longer and, crucially in terms of distinguishing labour from work is that the end result of the latter activity can be used repeatedly while the results of the former cease to exist as they are consumed. Arendt makes this distinction even clearer by pointing out that the distinction "between a l(oaf of) bread," whose "life expectancy" in the world is hardly more than a day, and a table, which might easily survive generations of men, is certainly more obvious than the difference between a baker and a carpenter."[57] This distinction from Arendt highlights that while individual humans may undertake both labour and work, the best way to identify which category their toils fall under is to consider the longevity of the output of those toils.

Work does, in the Arendtian sense, potentially require more use of human creativity and ingenuity. For example, in order for the chair to fulfil its purpose, there needs to be the injection of some sort of design ability into it, otherwise it would run the risk of not being at the very least functional as a device for individuals to sit. Furthermore, if the chair goes on to exist for a number of

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[55] *Ibid*, p.152.
[56] *Ibid*, p.137.
[57] *Ibid*, p.94.

years, it is likely that it is more than just a device for sitting on, perhaps through being comfortable or through being aesthetically pleasing, and thus almost certainly would have required more human ingenuity. Yet there is a real sense in which labour and work have one crucial similarity that is worth noting; neither one of them constitutes a uniquely human activity. Just as various animal species indulge in what could be construed as labour, so many of them also take part in activities that look a lot like work. For while a modern, semi-detached house may be more sturdy and more fit for purpose to a human being than a nest built by a bird or a hole dug by a fox for obvious reasons, it should still be noted that the instinct that leads to all three habitations is to create something that protects the creator from the elements and gives a sense of permanence through providing a solid base in a way that labour is not able to do. In short, there is nothing uniquely human about work.

At this stage it might well be asked precisely what either of these concepts have to do with politics. An Arendtian answer might be that, quite simply, they do not have anything to do with politics – which is precisely the point that Arendt wishes to make. There is nothing uniquely human or intrinsically political in labour or work. It is the third category of human activity that provides the political content of Arendt's philosophy – that of action, which this account if the Arendtian political alternative will now turn.

Defining "Action"

Action is presented by Arendt as being based on "(h)uman plurality"[58] that is based on the "(a)ction and speech", which Arendt writes are "closely related" owing to the "primordial and specifically human act that must contain the question asked of ever newcomer: 'Who are you?'"[59] This is at the heart of action for Arendt; it takes place in the space of appearances, where one human appears in the public space with other humans, and undertake the inter-subjective dialogue with those others. The question Arendt cites – who are you? – is crucial as it allows an individual to represent themselves to others through their response. Action is also the fundamentally human activity, since a "life without speech and without action… is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men."[60] This notion of action as a plural activity is made even more categorical by Arendt when she writes that "(a)ction, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act."[61] In short, action is not possible for the individual, only a multiplicity of individuals. Furthermore, action is the site of human creativity and also of human courage, since Arendt writes that the "connotation of courage… is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own."[62] Action requires courage, but it also enables the individual to create their own story through interaction with others. In *The Human Condition* Arendt does offer some insights into what a political settlement sympathetic to action might be through her citing of the *polis* of Ancient Athens as a potential model for what she understands to be action in practice. She writes that the "*polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win 'immortal fame,' that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in

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[58] *Ibid*, p.175.
[59] *Ibid*, p.178.
[60] *Ibid*, p.176.
[61] *Ibid*, p.188.
[62] *Ibid*, p.186.

his unique distinctness"[63] – in short, the *polis* creates the forum for action and the chance for others to achieve greatness through this forum for action. This use of the *polis* as an exemplar of action does create problems which, to some extent, Arendt does show awareness of and will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter. For now, it is worth further fleshing out what action actually is and what its distinctive characteristics might be.

The first, and one of the most striking features of Arendt's definition of action is that it is fundamentally an inter-subjective activity. It is something that requires not only the presence of others, but the chance to interact with others. On this account of politics, it is not possible to undertake political action by oneself; an individual has to be in the presence of others in order to act politically. Therefore, this leads to the realisation that this is, at least on the base level, a fundamentally pluralist understanding of politics since it requires a plurality of human beings for politics to actually occur. This links in with the notion of the radical isolation caused by totalitarian singularity discussed in the previous chapter; for Arendt a more positive form of politics starts from pluralism whereas the totalitarian extreme is predicated on its denial. Ultimately, this is the reality of pluralism, discussed in the first chapter, surfacing in Arendtian philosophy – given her understanding of action, politics is only possible in concert with others. An individual cannot undertake politics alone; it has to be within a system that allows for pluralism in the form of contact and free discussion with others.

In order to expand on what is meant by action and how it is fundamentally inter-subjective, the distinction that Arendt makes between power and strength is helpful. For Arendt, as discussed in both *The Human Condition* and her later essay *On Violence*, strength is something an individual can possess, but power can only exist between individuals. As Arendt puts it, "(w)hile 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"[64] – power, then, is only possible in a condition of pluralism. Thus the person who is physically strongest in a room might be able to overpower those

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[63] *Ibid*, p.197.
[64] *Ibid*, p.200.

who are weaker, but if a group of individuals in that room join together they ultimately have power over that strong person through agreeing to work in concert with one another to further their interests rather than allowing the strongest in the room to use their strength to further his or her individual interests. Power, then, becomes an inter-subjective activity only possible through two or more individuals; strength is confined to those individuals. As such, power is fundamentally political, using Arendt's definitions, which strength is not. In order to illustrate this, the example above could be adapted by removing the strongest person in that room of individuals and replacing them with an angry lion. The lion might become the strongest entity in that room but as it went about its irate activities it would be difficult to argue it was acting politically; however, the humans in the room could be said to be acting politically as they underwent (probably rather fraught) conversations between them as to how to deal with the strength of the lion.

Of course, there is no guarantee in this example that those individuals would be able to successfully deal with the problem of the lion and its relative strength; indeed, unless there were a zoo-keeper or a lion-tamer present, then the opinions of those present might be of limited value, be as might any solutions put forward. There would, despite the power the individuals working together, no guarantee that their action in the Arendtian sense would actually lead to a viable solution to the pressing problem facing those individuals. This is something Arendt herself acknowledges, both through her acknowledgement that some seek as the situation where individuals seek to be "isolated from all others [and] remains master of his doing from beginning to end" in order to seek "shelter from action's calamities"[65] and her claim that action "reveals itself fully only to… the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about that the participants."[66] This realisation – that "action" does not guarantee success even if it matches the criteria Arendt creates for it – is crucial to understanding its nature. It is not about individuals creating the perfect political settlement in perpetuity. It is instead about dialogue between individuals in a public space whereby

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[65] *Ibid*, p.220.
[66] *Ibid*, p.192.

they can represent themselves to each other, debate based on their experiences and thoughts, and reach whatever practical actions might come. There is the space for great deeds, but there is also the space for failure. Action does not dictate what the future would look like or what it holds; rather, it accepts the fundamental unpredictability of human existence. To return to the strength and power example one last time, Arendt's understanding of action cannot guarantee a successful outcome to the lion problem, and there is always the possibility that the actions of our individuals agreed inter-subjectively might make the problem worse through making the angry lion more irate. In short, the fact that they are undertaking action does not mean, on Arendt's scheme of things, that they will succeed.

This realisation leads to two further, and crucial, parts of Arendt's understanding of politics, in that it creates the need for both the capacity in individuals to promise and to forgive. Given the nature of action does not guarantee any particular outcome for its participants, there is the need for some sort of process of stabilisation with action when it comes to the future. This is the human ability to promise: to acknowledge the fundamental lack of certainty which underpins human existence – what Arendt describes as "the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act" and also what Arendt calls "the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee who they will be tomorrow."[67] At the same time it allows individuals to make a firm commitment that the pursuit of a certain idea within the confines of the public space that makes up action will lead to a positive outcome for those involved. As a result, promising cannot guarantee a better tomorrow, but it does allow for those involved in that promise to hope for a better tomorrow. However, since it cannot guarantee it, there remains the possibility that something could go wrong, and that then leads to the need for the potential within humanity to forgive.

Forgiveness, for Arendt, takes its cue from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This does not necessarily make her account a Christian one, and there is much merit in Margaret Canovan's idea

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[67] *Ibid*, p.244.

that Arendt was seeking to demythologise Christ as a figure and a thinker. Factoring in the teachings of Jesus as an individual as opposed to a Messiah through noting that the "discoverer of the role of forgiveness was Jesus of Nazareth",[68] in *The Human Condition* she sees forgiveness as a creative act that allows for an individual to forgive another individual and, therefore, more on in their relationship. She writes that "(w)ithout being forgiven… our capacity to act would… be confined one single deed from which we could never recover" and since forgiveness requires the presence of at least one other both forgiveness and promising "depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no can fell bound by a promise made only to himself."[69] Furthermore, she notes that forgiveness "is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."[70] Just as the fact of natality allows some sort of hope in the face of totalitarianism, so the capacity to forgive allows for some sort of hope in the face of unrealised promises that occur in action. Thus the relationship between promising and forgiveness becomes clear – given there is no guarantee that the content of a promise will be realised in reality, there needs to be the capacity for those involved in the promise to move beyond it if said promise ultimately ends up being broken – and this then leads to the need for the human ability to forgive. Furthermore, both faculties reflect the reality of pluralism, in that they require more than one individual to be present if they are to be in any way meaningful. It is crucial to acknowledge at this point that both of these corollaries of action are creative, since this acknowledgment ties in with an overall theme within Arendtian philosophy – that there are no guarantees to the outcome of any form of action. The outcomes of promising cannot be guaranteed and it is even possible that no-one will even make a promise, just as there are no guarantees that even if forgiveness would be useful that those who should forgive will be willing or able to do so. In short, action in all of its forms, including promising and forgiving, is a human activity rather a prescribed

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[68] *Ibid*, p.238.
[69] *Ibid*, p.237.
[70] *Ibid*, p.241.

outcome. Therefore, her understanding of politics is more about the act itself rather than where the

act might take those undertaking it. This crucial understanding of Arendtian politics leads to a number

of important implications, which the next section of this chapter will consider.

The Implications of Action

Given the centrality of action to the Arendtian account and understanding of politics, it is worth spending some time exploring the implications of it – and the questions and problems that arise from those implications will be explored in the final section of this chapter. The first implication of action is that it is not about arriving at an end state, but rather about creating a forum in which individuals can interact with each other. Action is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end that cannot and should not be predicted, since the state of action should be allowing for the full realisation of human creativity. If humans are truly allowed the opportunity to interact freely then no-one can necessarily predict what will happen. Therefore, Arendtian pluralism represents a politics of possibility; the public space that she believes is most conducive to both humanity and politics is not centred on one objective, but instead fundamentally acknowledges that there is plurality of potential objectives and therefore outcomes.

This leads to a curious tension in Arendt's work – she seems simultaneously to be calling for perpetual creativity at the same time as advocating a permanent state that will allow for the pluralism that will allow for this perpetual creativity. She seems to be looking for a political settlement that can acknowledge the unsettled nature of human existence. She wishes to embrace human creativity at the same time as reifying it, or, as Honig puts it, "(f)or Arendt… the problem of politics in modernity is, how do we establish lasting foundations without appealing to gods, a foundationalist ground, or an absolute?"[71] The foundationalist ground, the absolute, or the recourse to the divine would surely lead to a restriction of action and what action could be allowed to achieve or, as Honig puts it, "(a)bsolutes occlude the contingency that is the quintessential feature of the public realm, the feature in virtue of which political freedom and human innovation are possible."[72] The answer for Arendt seems to lie in the need for a founding document, such as a constitution, that creates a sense of stability – or at the very least a baseline – which individuals can then use a forum for inter-subjective debate and as a

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[71] Honig, *Op. Cit.* p.97.
[72] *Ibid*, p.98.

means to be creative. Thus there is a need to create something that is a stabilising footing that can allow for future creativity; in Arendtian terms, a document such as a constitution is not closing off future debate, but rather producing the foundations on which those debates can happen. Within in the nature of creating a constitution along the lines of the US example is, according to Honig, "the world-building act of foundation is the speech act itself, the declaration of the 'We hold.'"[73] The way, then, that the act of constituting can still be action is because it is an action undertaken between people, and is about "we" rather than "I". The implications of this would be that a constitution that comes from the people is a legitimate foundation for action, whereas one that is forced upon the people is illegitimate. Thus the US constitution is debatably a sound basis for action, while the 1936 Soviet constitution is anything but. This line of argument is not without its tensions and potential problems, not least when it comes to the possibility of the results of action fundamentally challenging the foundation or the problem of whether each new generation would need to constitute their own settlement for action lest the charge of an action-restricting constitution being pushed onto them is left open to them. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address these issues, and the current argument can consequently do little more than conceding that these concerns exist. Ultimately, though, Arendt is advocating a form of stable state of human creativity; a forum in which individuals feel confident in being able to undertake action. The important point for this thesis, especially when Gray's commitment to *modus vivendi* is addressed in a later chapter, is that this leads to the need for some sort of legislation or constitution that creates a framework for the creation of that stable state.

Given the Arendtian understanding of politics detailed above the nature of legislating needs to be clarified. She notes that "the Greeks" – who provided one of the historical realisations of action – "did not count legislating among the political activities" and that, to them, "the laws, like the wall around the city, were not the results of action but products of making."[74] This ties in with a wider point that for Arendt, law-making is not actually a part of "action", but rather "work", since laws are

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[73] *Ibid*, p.101.
[74] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.194.

fabricated to provide a sense of stability to human existence. This leads to the implication that any sort of foundational document such as a constitution is not an example of "action" but rather of "work" – those who create the forum for "action" do so through, rather curiously, a process that is not political but rather creating a political realm. However this classification of law-making as non-political "labour" means that much of what is undertaken by elected politicians in modern liberal democracies is not actually political "action" but instead "work" – and therefore would not be perceived by Arendt to be politics at all. While it may at first be counter-intuitive to claim that politicians are not under-taking politics, it becomes less so when some of the more pejorative terms used against modern politicians – such as being "lobby fodder" or "careerist" – are taken into account since Arendt's account of politics would argue that those who enter politics simply to do what they are told to do by a political party in order to begin and maintain a political career are not acting based on inter-subjective debate with others. Instead they are thoughtlessly following a preordained process designed to fabricate laws based on the commands of those higher in a particular political organisations for reasons that could largely be described as self-interest.

This gives rise to a further question – namely, if Arendt would argue that many modern politicians are not participating in politics despite it being their job, then what of the wider population in a modern liberal democracy? To what extent can they be considered to be part of politics? The answer, sadly, is to a very limited extent at best. If the primary political action of most citizens in a modern liberal democracy can be taken to be entering a voting booth once every four to five years and putting their cross next to the name of a candidate from a very limited selection of candidates then it is difficult to see who this could be considered to be action in the Arendtian sense of the term – not least because the act of voting is an inherently solitary one, where, as pre-requisite of anything that could be classed as action there needs to be interaction with others. The Arendtian analysis would suggest, therefore, that the vast majority of people in modern liberal democracies do not engage in politics and thus are not participating in the sort of acts that Arendt believed made individuals fundamentally human. Far from representing a desirable political end-state, an understanding of

"action" would suggest that modern liberal democracies actually represent an end-state where individuals are denied their humanity. If nothing else then Arendtian political philosophy can be used to offer a compelling critique of the status quo in modern society.

However, a defender of that status quo might point out that the above claim is based on the assumption that the only form of politics is voting, whereas reality would suggest there are, in fact, others. They might point to political parties, to local governments, to trade unions, to protest movements and pressure groups as all offering political forums other than the solitary act of voting. Indeed, said defender might even point to universities as offering alternative forums, through their societies and through the discussions and debates that occur as part of the teaching and learning process. Thus, the critique offered in the previous paragraph is based on a, at best, caricatured presentation of politics in modern liberal democracies and, at worst, a demonstrably false one.

The first Arendtian response to this would need to acknowledge that all of the institutions mentioned above *could* constitute an example of and forum for action – however that does not mean that they *will* constitute such an example or forum. What will be the deciding factor is how the institution is constituted – does it actually allow for inter-subjective debate between equals, and thus embrace the unpredictability inherent in action? Does it allow for radical views to be expressed and bold new initiatives to be undertaken? If the answers to these questions are affirmative, then these institutions are examples of action and therefore genuinely political. If they do not allow for the potential for radical outcomes, though, then they are not examples of action. The example of political parties helps to make this distinction clearer; if a political party represents an open forum in which ideas can be openly discussed and remains entirely open on outcomes, then it is, in Arendt's eyes, political. However, this is not how many political parties appear to function in reality, especially the main ones who have a chance of attaining power in the national legislatures. Rather than providing a forum for inter-subjective debate over ideas, they provide networks that allow those who already agree with certain ideas to join them in promoting those ideas and the candidates the parties select for election. While there may be some debate over the priorities and content of, say, a manifesto for

election for a particular party, the terms of that debate are often very limited and do seem to deny the possibility of the radical – perhaps because of fears of what this will mean for the potential for electoral success. Arendt herself noted this when she mentioned the irony of political parties in the United States favouring electoral defeat through a lacklustre mainstream candidate rather than allowing for a potentially radical alternative candidate. Therefore, the claim that an Arendtian would make here is not to deny that there is the potential for other institutions in a nation or society to be examples of action, but rather than each of those institutions would need to be examined to see whether it does represent action. Just as a politician is not necessarily political in Arendt's eyes because they define themselves (or at least their job) using that term, so an institution that professes to be political is not necessarily so for Arendt unless it is constituted and operates in such a way that it matches the requirements for action.

The second claim that the Arendtian might make in response to the defender of the status quo is to point to the reality of the power relations within the society being defended, and ask who actually possesses the ultimate say in that society. The Arendtian could acknowledge that a trade union, a pressure group, or a university seminar might all meet the criteria for action, but then point out that all exist with the permission, tacit or otherwise, of the national government which – if run along the lines of many modern liberal democracies – does not itself represent an example of action. Therefore the Arendtian critique of such a modern liberal democracy is that any example of action exists only at the mercy of a body that is not necessarily itself based on the reality of, and the need for, pluralism in society. The example of the spontaneous councils that sprung up in the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian revolution is useful here– Arendt fully acknowledges these as examples of action. However, the warning that needs to be taken from that example is what happened when an institution in the form of the Soviet Union decided to end the council system. Thus, Arendtian political philosophy can acknowledge that a pressure group or a trade union might be excellent examples of "action", but they only exist as long the national government allows them to since, if that government decides to do so, they have the capacity to bring about the end of that pressure group or that trade union.

A further criticism that has been levelled against Arendt is about her treatment of gender, or rather her failure to focus on this issue. In an essay on this topic, Maria Markus notes "a disturbing tendency to persistently ignore women thinkers unless they openly declare allegiance to feminism"[75] and strongly implies at the very least that Arendt is one of those thinkers who falls foul of this tendency. In order to rebut this treatment of Arendt, Markus both points to the fact that Arendt nearly rejected a professorship at Princeton University as she felt it was offered to her because of her gender, whereas Arendt wished to be treated "not as an exception but as 'what' and 'who' she was – as a woman, a philosopher, a Jewess."[76] This, according to Markus, ties in with Arendt's desire to accept, at least on a basic level, what life "presents us with as part of our human condition of natality." This is not to say that any individual is perpetually bound by the circumstances that natality foists upon them, but rather an acknowledgement of the fact that "(o)ne grows from but never altogether beyond the identity that is bestowed by the historically circumstantial conditions of one's birth."[77] To attempt to negate gender altogether would, therefore, be an attempt to negate the identity that comes from the accident of birth.

How convincing is this rebuttal of a potential feminist critique of Arendt? A case can be made for stressing the importance of gender within political relations, and how the traditional divide between male and female as well as inequality between the genders would impact within Arendt's account of the ability to undertake action. How, if an individual does not have the economic resources, the societal status and the time to undertake action because of their gender – which Markus states Arendt would acknowledge to be an accident of birth – can this issue of gender inequality which is at the heart of the vast majority of feminist thought be ignored or at least not directly addressed? In a sense, then, the charge against Arendt's philosophy becomes similar to the one Okin makes of Rawls's failure to understand the implications of making those in the Original Position heads of households; namely, that if a political philosophy or theory is not taking the issue of gender seriously then it is not

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[75] Markus, Maria "The anti-feminism of Hannah Arendt" in Kaplan and Kessler, *Op Cit.* p.119.
[76] *Ibid*, p.122.
[77] *Ibid*, p.120.

taking into account the reality of political practice seriously as it is not addressing the power relations that actually exist between individuals. Honig points to some of these problems when she writes about Arendt's "notoriously uncompromising public-private distinction" which, according to Honig, have the end result of "prohibiting the politicization of issues of social justice and thus leads to "(i)ssues concerning race, gender, ethnicity, religion" being "barred from politics."[78] As with Okin's reading of Rawls, then, Honig is making the claim that the foundations of Arendtian political thought at best occlude the crucial issue of gender inequity within politics. As such, Arendt is seemingly removing from politics a crucial political question that would surely arise in a genuine debate between equal individuals undertaking action.

As is so often the case, addressing what the author under fire actually says is very useful here. In an essay entitled "On the Emancipation of Women" – itself a highly critical review of a feminist book by Alice Ruhle-Gerstel – Arendt does directly acknowledge the problem faced by the female gender even in the face of apparent "legal equality", namely that many females "must continue to do socially and biologically grounded tasks that are incompatible" with this legal equality and that in addition to any profession that any individual female might have is the expectation that "she must take care of her household and raise her children."[79] In these observations, Arendt is doing more than Markus ascribes to her; she is not only acknowledging that facts given to an individual through the accident of birth – or the circumstances of natality, to put the point in more Arendtian language – she is also conceding the inequities that arise from those facts. Why, then, is her review of Ruhle-Gerstel's book so critical? Why does she not spend more time on the issue of gender, even if she is not prepared to enter the intellectual category of feminism? As might be expected, the essay in question offers some of the answers here. In part, her rejection of Ruhle-Gerstel's book is because of some serious questions about the research the author uses to back it up, such as the "research sample which included only 155 subjects" being "not large enough to support the sweeping conclusions the author draws."[80]

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[78] Honig, *Op. Cit.* p.188.
[79] Arendt, "On the Emancipation of Women" in *Essays in Understanding*, p.67.
[80] *Ibid*, p.68.

However, and far more interestingly for the current account, is Arendt's statement that "(i)dentifying woman's dependence on a man with that of the employee proceeds from a definition of the proletarian much too oriented on the individual" and that "(t)he individual should not be the unit of analysis but, rather, the family."[81] Now, a feminist might respond to this by arguing that the individual needs to be the key unit of analysis precisely because the existing gender relations often lead to the female individual being at least partially subsumed by the family unit. However, from an Arendtian perspective where politics is fundamentally intersubjective, this criticism does not hold as it takes its base level as an individual, not individuals. While the family is arguably only slightly less restrictive a unit of analysis than the individual, it is at least closer to intersubjectivity that purely considering the individual alone.

However this answer does not seem to stand up to the challenge Honig makes; either Arendt needs to make an exploration of the family part of the public sphere and thus damage the public/private distinction she makes, or she needs to restrict the kind of debates that can happen when individuals come together in a public space by removing issues about and surrounding gender from the list of what is political. Perhaps the easiest option here would be to say that the rigid public/private divide Arendt puts in place is just plain wrong, or at the very least where she draws that divide is, at best, flawed. Yet this could be, as Honig convincingly argues, entirely in keeping with how Arendt sketches action. Comparing Arendt to "Nietzsche's self as a work of art" and "translation on Derrida's account", Honig notes that an implication of action is that, according to Arendtian philosophy, "politics is never a fait accompli."[82] What is said to constitute the limits of politics one day could change the next, just as one individual's way of drawing the distinction between the public and private realms could be redrawn by other individuals when facing a changing reality with shifting concerns and priorities. Therefore, action does not have to follow the lines and distinctions drawn by Arendt in her work and in the times in which she lived; indeed, the creativity that action enables on

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[81] *Ibid*, p.68.
[82] Honig, *Op. Cit.* p.115.

Arendt's account means there is every reason to assume that the nature of action will change rather than stay the same. As Honig puts it, "(a)ction is, after all, boundless, excessive, uncontrollable, unpredictable, and self-surprising. If action surprises its actors, why should it not also surprise Arendt, its author?" Honig then puts the further question that "(i)f action is boundless and excessive, why should it respect a public-private distinction that seeks, like a law of laws, to regulate and contain it without ever allowing itself to be engaged or contested by it?"[83] Thus Arendt may have been wrong to not include issues such as gender in her understanding of politics or, perhaps more charitably, the contemporary politics has become more focussed on such issues than in what was contemporary to Arendt. However, regardless of whether the reader sees Arendt as incorrect or merely short-sighted in where she drew the line between public and private, this does not fatally damage Arendt's idea of action. Indeed, the joy, the challenge and the danger of action is that all ideas and all political settlements should be open to challenge and change, since – as the second question from Honig quoted above alludes to – politics for Arendt is a public space that represents an outlet for human creativity and consequently is a public space that is perpetually in a state of flux and potentiality. There is no reason to suggest that this should not apply to Arendt's own parameters for action; indeed, the very opposite is true.

This section has examined what the implications of action are, and in doing so it has highlighted what some of the implications are of Arendt's account of politics and how an Arendtian might respond – and hopefully has shed some light on how convincing both the critiques and the response are. By now the relationship between Arendt's political philosophy and what was described in the first chapter as the reality of pluralism should be clear: for Arendt, the extreme form of the denial of pluralism is the hideous and inhuman nightmare of totalitarianism, and much of her work is an attempt to avoid that state of affairs, not least by diagnosing the problem and highlighting the warning signs of slippage towards totalitarianism. Furthermore, the Arendtian alternative to the extreme of totalitarianism relates to the reality of pluralism by being founded on the idea that politics

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[83] *Ibid*, p.119.

is only possible between a number of individuals rather than the individual alone. Indeed, part of the nightmare of totalitarianism is the extreme atomisation of society to the extent where the individual is isolated and alone even when surrounded by others owing to the impossibility of honestly communicating them, while action is the reverse of this as it denies the individual can undertake politics alone. As such, a comparison of Arendt's work with the reality of pluralism is not to make the claim that all realities reflect pluralism, as this is clearly not the case in totalitarian societies. Rather, Arendt implicitly makes the case that a more healthy version of politics should base itself on the reality of pluralism. Yet, while the exploration of Arendtian politics above demonstrates the connections between her philosophy and the reality of pluralism in theory, there is still work to be done in showing what it might look like in reality, not least because the state of perpetual change that is a crucial implication of action might look like a form of anarchy to some, especially if Honig's convincing claim that the ends of action could end up contradicting Arendt herself. If the reality of pluralism is based on the actuality of politics between individuals, then Arendt's philosophy needs to be able to withstand the test of being removed from theory and placed in the reality of politics. It is this test, and the potential Arendtian responses to it, that the final section of this chapter will explore.

Action in Reality

How, then, does Arendtian political philosophy relate to the actual practice of politics in reality? What might this conception of politics look like in reality?

Arendt herself, as alluded to above, did offer some examples of what she thought action could look like in practice. Perhaps the most famous is her apparent idolisation of the Athenian *polis* – in other words the public space that she praises so highly in *The Human Condition*. It is a controversial example, not least because of the long list of people who were excluded from that public space, but also because of what was required for the eligible citizens to participate in politics in Athens – namely having others, including slaves, to undertake the labour and work that freed up those citizens to undertake action. The problem of the example of the *polis* as an a bastion of action is that it represents action for the few, and thus makes it difficult to see this political settlement as truly allowing action – and therefore basic humanity – for all since some (in particular the slave class) are permanently excluded from the fundamentally human activity of action, and have no choice in the matter. It is possible to point to moments in her work where Arendt seems to understand the limitations of the *polis*, and Margaret Canovan makes a convincing argument that it was not the *polis* that Arendt rated so highly, but rather a different version of politics of the Ancient Greeks. Yet even given these qualifiers it is difficult to see the *polis* as a genuine alternative to the political status quo in the twenty-first century as it is so radically detached from the contemporary and is also so controversial in some of its fundamental foundations.

Fortunately the account of action is not just based on the example of the *polis*. The workers' councils set up in the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution are another example, according to Arendt, of action in reality. Arendt is keen to stress the spontaneity of these councils – to her, they represent the coming together of individuals to create together an alternative to what had gone before, and it is difficult to argue with this argument. The problem, however, arises when the ultimate fate of this revolution is considered. Even if the workers' councils in the aftermath of the Hungarian

revolution can be understood as an exemplar of action, what might be revealed by their swift demise after the Soviet Union decided that it was not prepared to let the revolution stand? Put crudely, the question might be this – how can action survive in the real world when sheer force arrives to suppress it? Indeed, it could be argued that the Arendtian account of strength and politics mentioned above needs to be amended to include an account of what happens when a monolithic, authoritarian entity such as the Soviet Union under Khrushchev decides to suppress the power of the amalgamated people. Even if the suppression of the Hungarian revolution is viewed, in Arendtian terms, as an example of political violence rather than of strength, the question of what those undertaking action might do in the face of political violence from an entity that is objectively stronger than them and therefore able to supress them remains. It should be noted that this question is not seeking to devalue the desirability of action, but rather to point out its potential limitations in the face of practical political reality.

Therefore, a need arises to find a more permanent form of political action in practice. Arendt is very much taken with the example of the US constitution, and how that document managed – in the face of the tumult of a revolution – to create a public space that has allowed for action to be undertaken. Thus the US constitution could be seen as a way of realising action in practice; it strikes the right balance between creating a public space that allows for action at the same time as not limiting the human creativity that is inherent in action too much. It is a good balance between the need to create a baseline of stability at the same time as allowing for the inter-subjective political debate that makes up action.

Yet this veneration of the US constitution is potentially undermined by the controversy it has and continues to cause. The perpetual debate, for example, about the second amendment in the Bill of Rights shows the passionate debate that this founding document has created, while quasi-judicial legalisation of abortion through a particular interpretation of the first amendment and the virulent opposition to this interpretation shows how the flexibility of the US constitution is not only a blessing, but also a source of deep, apparently irreconcilable conflict that has descended, at times, to the level

of what Arendt would class as political violence. However, it would be wrong to see Arendt as viewing the USA of her time as being a perfect example of what she considers to be action. Indeed, the essays that make up the collection *Crises of the Republic* vividly show how problems such as the aforementioned political violence and also the impact of almost industrial level deceit in politics have badly damaged the US Republic. It could be argued that these crises are not the fault of the constitution but are rather indicative of the problems a document written centuries before has when it comes to circumstances that its authors could not legitimately anticipate and therefore legislate for. Yet this concession does bring into play a criticism of the US constitution that suggests its efficacy as an enshrining of political action in the Arendtian sense had a sell by date which, even in Arendt's own time, had been exceeded.

However any attempt to define action using particular historical circumstances is arguably a failure to truly understand what action is. After all, if action creates a political reality based on the inter-subjective debate between individuals in a public place, then the outcomes of action will be contingent on the experiences of those undertaking it. Therefore, while particular examples from history may indicate examples of historical circumstances, they cannot be the definitive example of political action since action is, in Arendt's own understanding of it, innately creative and therefore unpredictable. As a result of this insight, it is possible to advance the claim that Arendt's work is not prescriptive in terms of the political settlement it wishes to advance, and indeed cannot be if it is to be true to the fundamental creativity of action.

This claim that Arendt is not prescriptive in her work may seem curious when it is considered in its entirety. It is true that a work such as *The Human Condition* does seem to defy prescribing a particular political settlement, and in doing so is entirely in keeping with its fundamental argument. Yet it is equally true that Arendt is at times highly prescriptive in her writing. After all, it is next to impossible to read *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and not see what Arendt very clearly wants to avoid in politics. The same is absolutely true of her essay "On Violence", which is very clear on what needs to be avoided within politics. Both pieces of writing (and they are by no means alone in her body of

work) very clearly show what should not be done; thus they are prescribing what should be avoided with politics.

Given this, the claim that she is a non-prescriptive political writer clearly needs to be adapted if it is to retain any sort of validity. The best way in which this can happen is through making a clear dividing line between positive prescription and negative prescription. Arendt is best understood as a thinker who is offering negative prescriptions; she is explaining to her readers and to her followers what needs to be avoided. This does not then mean that she is offering any sort of positive prescription; as demonstrated above her work could be used to critique the status quo, but that does not mean that it simultaneously offers an alternative to that status quo. In short, it is not positively prescriptive. This, as has been alluded to above, is entirely in keeping with her definition of action – being creative and unpredictable, it can be used as a tool to critically evaluate political settlements where action does not exist, but it cannot offer a rigid vision of what the alternatives to those political settlements might be since those alternatives can only really be created when individuals undertake action themselves.

So where does this leave Arendtian political philosophy? How can it offer a radical alternative when it is unable to positively prescribe how politics should look? The answer lies in defining what else a radical alternative might mean. Action is not about offering a concrete alternative to the status quo, but rather offering a way of viewing politics that is very different to that status quo. It offers a number of political fundamentals that brings into question much of what is typically understood to be politics in the modern age, and arguably offers a model of political interaction that is far more inclusive and proactive than much of what passes for politics in the modern age. In summary, it is an alternative way of viewing politics, not an alternative political settlement.

It is this inability to prescribe a particular political settlement, combined with the massively diverse public spaces that could constitute action in the Arendtian sense, which is both the genius and the fundamental challenge of Arendt's account of politics. It also based on what this thesis calls the reality of pluralism, both in the sense that action is inherently pluralistic in that it can only occur among

a plurality of individuals and through Arendt's exploration of the extreme of the denial of the reality

of pluralism that occurs in the inhumane and inhuman state of totalitarianism. Thus, in an age where

politics is often thought to be based on the finding of permanent political settlements – and

consequently the reality of pluralism is either denied or, at best, ignored – her idea of action defies

this instinctive tendency and instead offers an account of politics that embraces human creativity and

is underpinned fundamentally by human plurality. Its virtuosity actually lies in basing itself on that

plurality; in the challenge that it throws down both to itself and to those who directly interact with

this particular political philosophy in face of the reality of pluralism. And it will be this challenge that

this thesis will return to when the importance of *modus vivendi* is considered within the changing

political thought of John Gray, who, as will be shown later, bases his call for *modus vivendi* on attempt

to ground liberalism on an idea related to the reality of pluralism, namely what he calls the fact of

value pluralism. For now, this thesis will turn to another thinker, Alasdair MacIntrye, whose work is,

to a large extent, predicated on the reality of pluralism in politics but who, as discussed below, is far

more concerned with the impact of that pluralism on political and philosophical discourse.

Furthermore, MacIntrye – like Hannah Arendt – also turns to Athens for political inspiration and for a

method of dealing with the reality of pluralism, albeit it in very different ways to Arendt. Therefore,

the next chapter will start by exploring in detail what MacIntyre sees as pluralism, before examining

why that pluralism is a problem, especially when it takes on a form of what he calls emotivism.

4: After the Enlightenment

Introduction

The last two chapters considered in detail the work of Hannah Arendt: in particular, they showed how Arendt dealt with a distinct problem of modernity through recourse to the politics of Ancient Athens to provide a bold alternative view of the Human Condition that stands in contrast to much of the modern political experience. This chapter and the next will deal with another thinker who, like Arendt, reaches into the past – in particular political philosophies of and based around Aristotle – to deal with a problem identified in the present. However, as this chapter will show, the problem identified – the Enlightenment and its aftermath – by Alasdair MacIntyre is very different to the Arendtian concerns over totalitarianism, and the alternative vision he outlines is equally different to Arendt's alternative outlined in the previous chapter.

The first section of this chapter will focus on why MacIntyre sees the Enlightenment as such a problem through focussing on the analysis he provides in *After Virtue* of emotivism and why this has become such a problem for both philosophical and wider political discourse. It will drill down on some of the potential critiques of MacIntyre's analysis both in *After Virtue* and his subsequent works ranging from the relatively minor – such as whether MacIntyre's definition of the Enlightenment is historically convincing – through to more fundamental problems, such as whether emotivism is the cost of freedom. Finally it will note that, despite the potential issues in MacIntyre's treatment of the Enlightenment, his analysis of the problem does have merit for a thesis dealing the problem of the reality of pluralism in political philosophy and politics as a whole.

The next section of this chapter will examine further one of the key ways in which MacIntyre begins to arrive at his Thomist alternative – the discussion in *After Virtue* of the relative merits of the philosophies of Aristotle and Nietzsche. It will suggest that MacIntyre's approach to Nietzsche has its flaws, and these make his acceptance of Aristotle less convincing, and consequently make his overall Thomist alternative to the Enlightenment less credible than MacIntyre might suggest. This then raises

the idea that the Nietzsche's philosophy might hold more merit for the idea of the reality of pluralism, and that MacIntyre 's choice of Aristotle over Nietzsche may be a valid personal choice for MacIntyre, but the opposite choice could still make sense both within MacIntyre's own scheme and within the wider reality of pluralism.

The chapter will then move firmly beyond the *After Virtue* phase of MacIntyre's career and consider both his move to Thomism and his ideas around how traditions interact with – and potentially supplant – one another. It will suggest that the conflict between the genealogist tradition and Thomism does not necessarily move in the direction that MacIntyre claims (mirroring the conflict he describes between Aristotelian and Nietzschean thought) and that what MacIntyre's own theory of traditions in conflict might actually suggest the genealogist tradition is the one that triumphed. Then that theory of traditions in conflict will be put under the spotlight, both in relation to problems that MacIntyre himself identifies, such as the problem of translatability, and other, wider problems such as whether his account of that conflict can actually take into account practical political problems, such as how a flawed tradition that has control and power over the apparatus of power in a society can actually be challenged by perhaps more credible yet less powerful traditions.

Ultimately this chapter will conclude that while the direction MacIntyre takes and the position he ends up in with his commitment to Thomism is not particularly credible there is, at least from the viewpoint of a thesis defending the reality of pluralism, a great deal of merit in this ideas around conflict in traditions, even when the flaws of those ideas are taken into account. It will then acknowledge that there are further questions relating to MacIntyre and the reality of pluralism – in particular whether he would truly be committed to the reality of pluralism and what impact MacIntyre's earlier thoughts on belief have on a pluralistic reality. These are the questions that will form the bedrock of the second chapter dedicated to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre.

The Emotivist Society

Given the longevity of his career and the sheer volume of work he has produced across that career there would clearly be a number of interesting – and often controversial – ideas that come to the fore. However within that career few would dispute that perhaps his defining work is *After Virtue*, not least because of the striking central thesis to it that takes the form of a stinging critique of what MacIntyre sees as the post-Enlightenment tradition. MacIntyre goes against the grain of that tradition through focussing on what he sees as the flaws of the way of thinking, debating and philosophising of the post-Enlightenment era. He centres this critique on what he believes to be the problem of emotivism that has left those participating in debate in modernity not talking to one another but rather shouting beyond one another. *After Virtue* is often a rather bleak work, culminating in the famously damning conclusion that "the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they gave been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament."[84]

At this point it is definitely worth digging down further to understand why MacIntyre is making such bold claims and seeing modern liberal society in such a negative fashion. MacIntyre bases his account on a very particular view of the Enlightenment. He sees it as a breakdown of formerly rational discourse; the freedom and rise in secularism that came with the supposed dawn of rationality with the Enlightenment actually made so much of political and philosophical debate irrational – or at least incapable of reaching a clear outcome. The reason for this lies in one of the side effects of the rupture in intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment in the form of the rise of emotivism. MacIntyre characterises this phenomena as a change in the foundational basis for arguments and debate; rather than participants working to an understanding of how the debate might be resolved by recourse to a higher rule or set of rules, emotivism has as its ultimate justifications the emotions and beliefs held by those participants. There is nothing higher than that level. Consequently, when there is a fundamental

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[84] MacIntyre, Alasdair *After Virtue*, (London; Bloomsbury, 2013), p.305.

disagreement, there is no way of resolving it. The freedom of the Enlightenment is the freedom to engage in perpetual argument that has no possibility of closure.

An example of this can be seen in the debates that have come into being with the idea of rights. One particular debate that brings the potential problem identified by MacIntyre into sharp relief is the debate around abortion. What in the United States of America would be termed a stereotypical liberal would argue for a woman's right to choose when it comes to the question of abortion – it is a question of any woman having the freedom to choose what happens to their body. A stereotypical American conservative though would tend towards prioritising the right to life – so a woman's right to choose would be subsumed by the child's right to life. However there is no clear way of resolving this conflict. There is no meta-right that can be invoked, and even if one side were to claim their right as the most important one, there is little chance of the other side agreeing. The conservative might fall back on their Bible for the ultimate justification; that would be of no value for an atheist liberal though. On the other side of the coin the liberal's commitment to freedom would not be persuasive as it, in the case of abortion, requires the conservative to go against their sacred scripture. This then leads to the sort of bitter, irreconcilable conflict that can be seen on this very issue in the United States that has, on occasion, let to the extremes of murder – an act itself typically coming from extremists who believe in the right to life defending it – with a level of doublethink nearly impossible to understand: by taking life.

This contradiction within emotivist positions can be further illustrated by bringing into play another thorny topic – that of the death penalty. Here the American conservative stereotype might well be in favour of the death penalty, arguing that their Bible – particularly in its Old Testament phase – is very clear on the need for retribution, even if it is lethal. The right to life then ceases to be a universal right; it applies to the unborn child, but not the convicted killer. At this point the liberal stereotype, still in opposition to their conservative counterpart, would probably stand up against the Death Penalty – with the right to life perhaps becoming part of their arguments. Here then the emotivist society falls into further perpetual argument, with the added irrationality of the swapping

of the rights rhetoric between the two stereotypes because the issue has changed. This is the cost of the Enlightenment for MacIntyre; agreement and the rational end to debate fall in the face of modern emotivism.

At this juncture it is worth pointing out that these stereotypical positions may be representative of some of conservatives and liberals, but they would be a small minority of Americans. It is also worth noting that not all people or institutions are so overwhelmed by the emotions of their position that they all fail to see the internal contradictions mentioned in the paragraph above. The Catholic Church, for example, is a deeply conservative institution but applies their commitment to the right to life consistently – they oppose abortion and the death penalty as both fall foul of the commandment not to kill. The point, though, of the stereotypical positions briefly discussed above is to highlight how intractable the debate between different participants in an emotivist society can become and why MacIntyre sees it as such a major problem. Indeed, it is worth briefly contrasting Arendt with MacIntyre at this point. Arendt seems to be far more comfortable with individuals with very different views and beliefs coming together and learning from one another through being in the presence of others. As discussed in the previous chapter, there can be no guarantees that action will provide a positive outcome, but it is far healthier for the human condition for individuals to have the chance for political action. MacIntyre seems far less impressed by the idea that what Arendt calls action has the potentially to be good unless there is some form of higher authority that can be used to solve debate and avoid the trap of emotivism.

The question of what form MacIntyre's alternative to emotivism takes is a complex question which a reader of his work is not aided in answering by the fact that it changes and evolves from the initial position detailed in *After Virtue*. However before this chapter explores those ideas, it is worth addressing some immediate criticisms that could be made about MacIntyre's ideas as discussed above. The first is about his treatment of the concept of the Enlightenment. Some scholars argue that his understanding of what the Enlightenment actually is comes across as deeply problematic. For example Robert Wokler argues that the way in which MacIntyre characterises the Enlightenment is

"profoundly misleading."[85] He argues that MacIntyre's approach is flawed as it does not take into account any number of French authors who, on a broader understanding of what made up the Enlightenment, are crucial and just not sufficiently addressed by MacIntyre. For example he asks "(h)ow is it possible that Voltaire – the godfather of the Enlightenment Project on any plausible interpretation of its meaning – is altogether missing from MacIntyre's cast?"[86] Now, the vast question of what should be considered the definition of the Enlightenment is clearly beyond the confines of this thesis, and does not need to be answered here. Rather, the challenge to MacIntyre's thought is whether being able to answer that question is fundamental to his account of emotivism. The answer seems to be in the negative. Being able to demonstrate the decisive rupture in the history of thinking would strengthen his case, but his diagnosis of the problems of the emotivist society is not dependent on it. Indeed, MacIntyre could use the equally contested term of postmodernism to reach a similar conclusion that debate has descended into emotivism with the denial of there being a truth that can be agreed on. The diagnosis would be the same; the means of reaching the diagnosis would be what has changed. It could even be argued that the best means of getting to the conclusion MacIntyre reaches could be recourse to political reality, where the debate is less about the defence of political philosophies and policies through rigorous argument and much more about the strident defence of chosen political identities through a form of debate that often ranks subjective personal attacks more important than objective points.

A second, more potent attack on MacIntyre's understanding of emotivism can be based around whether the cost he sees in emotivism can be balanced by the freedoms that a post-Enlightenment offers. It is true that, in certain societies such as one based on fundamentalist religion, the debate would be far less likely to descend to the emotivist level of intractable conflict because there would be recourse in any debate or argument to a higher authority – in this example using the supposed teachings of the Bible. There would be no debate about abortion quite simply because it

[85] Wokler, Robert "Projecting the Enlightenment" in Horton, John and Mendus, Sue *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge; Polity Press, 1994), p.111
[86] *Ibid*, p.116.

would be written off absolutely as a sin, and those arguing for the right to choose could be dismissed as advocates of sin (or perhaps even evil) and those who chose to terminate their child would be sinners. Yet herein lies the problem; the force that guides the parameters of any disputes and points to how they could be resolved is actually not allowing the debate in the first place, and therefore in this particular scenario no-one would even be able to explain why abortion – or a woman's right to choose – might sometimes be crucial. Here the debate is not controlled, it is shut down. Even in a more liberal society, such as those that MacIntyre critiques, there is far more of a feel of argumentative anarchy it can be counter-balanced by the freedom people have to expressing controversial or dissenting opinion – which is the exactly the sort of conflict between traditions that, as will be discussed later, MacIntyre argues is essential for traditions to grow, develop, and even change so fundamentally as to cease to exist.

To further illustrate this second potential problem the difference from Arendt can be used; Arendt, as already discussed, is fully aware that the freedom of action is by no means an unalloyed good, and there is no reason to think that she would deny at least the potentiality of any debate under action becoming emotivist and intractable. However, the alternative – the totalitarian nightmare where action is suppressed and ultimately eliminated along with basic humanity– is worth the risk inherent in action. MacIntyre seems far less positive about what such freedom can offer, and there is the implication that he would seek to control action in a way that Arendt would probably consider as damaging to action. Of course, a quick rejoinder to this second criticism of MacIntyre's thought would be that he isn't arguing for the fundamentalist state in the first example nor for what Arendt would call totalitarianism. On face value, it is next to impossible to dispute this rejoinder; MacIntyre throughout his work is keen to engage with other thinkers and other schools of thought to his own, and as the examination of the alternatives below will show, he does not argue for anything approaching totalitarianism.

However this does not mean that the second challenge to MacIntyre's ideas of emotivism falls; rather, it needs to be reframed in a subtler way that better demonstrates what the potential

issues actually are here. MacIntyre critiques liberal society for its often interminable emotivist debates and appears to lament the lack of agreed parameters for those debates that could lead to a conclusion. The question arises of what those parameters might be as well as who and how they will be put into place, especially given the current reality of modern politics in Western democracies. MacIntyre seems to be suggesting the need for rules to control debate; these rules would inevitably lead to some restrictions of freedom – and this is the fundamental challenge faced by MacIntyre's alternative(s) to the status quo. He needs to be able to demonstrate that he can offer something that it is worthy of restricting pluralism and freedom for. The next section of this chapter will consider what the alternative from MacIntyre actually is and, taking its lead from MacIntyre himself, will compare that alternative with his treatment of Nietzsche and what he calls the genealogist tradition.

Aristotle Against Nietzsche

Before beginning the process of examining the two paths of Nietzsche and Aristotle and why MacIntyre chooses the latter, it is worth pausing for a moment to see where the commentary on MacIntyre has arrived. In terms of the reality of pluralism, MacIntyre would seem to fully accept that reality based on his work, especially *After Virtue*; however, unlike Arendt who would be a strong advocate of that reality even while acknowledging the potential for problems the freedom it offers might bring, MacIntyre is seemingly much less impressed with that pluralism. He focuses on emotivism, and offers a strong and often very convincing critique of it. The challenge to his work is what alternatives he can offer to what he would see as the emotivist status quo. The work undertaken by this section of the chapter is to consider how convincing his turn to Aristotle and then Aquinas actually is, especially in contrast to Nietzsche.

In a pivotal chapter in *After Virtue* MacIntyre directly compares Nietzsche with Aristotle, taking them both to be alternative paths to liberalism. He characterises Aristotle as believing in the "presupposition… that there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life. Truth in the moral sphere consists in the conformity of moral judgment to the order of this scheme."[87] Nietzsche's philosophy is described by MacIntyre as follows: "if there is nothing to morality but expressions of will, my morality can only be what my will creates. There can be no place for such fictions as natural rights, utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number."[88] MacIntyre is also very open about which path he prefers. He praises Aristotle for the sort of certainty his philosophy can bring to discourse and to wider human life.[89] He even writes that "no doctrine vindicated itself in so wide a variety of contexts as Aristotelianism: Greek, Islamic, Jewish and Christian; and that when modernity made its assaults on an older world its most perceptive exponents understood that it was Aristotelianism that had to be overthrown."[90] The importance and dominant

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[87] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p.166.
[88] *Ibid*, p.132.
[89] *Ibid*, p.137.
[90] *Ibid*, p.137.

nature of Aristotle's work for MacIntyre should be clear from this passage. The notion of a *telos* for humanity and individual humans, combined with the virtues that enable individuals to achieve that *telos*, creates a far clearer design for life than anything the emotivist society could ever offer. Aristotle here offers both objectives for life as well as tools and safeguards to assist in their attainment. The reason why the path of Nietzschean philosophy is not taken precisely because it can offer no further certainty. Indeed, if anything it arguably offers less certainty than the emotivist society and is a further step in the direction toward a moral vacuum. The critique of Nietzsche is further extended by MacIntyre in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, when he talks of how the genealogist tradition – in which he places Nietzsche[91] – with its mind-set of constant critique – is ultimately self-defeating as the fact that if it is to be coherent it must be equally critical of itself and its conclusions means that it effectively collapses in on itself.[92] Thomism is, for MacIntyre, far more coherent. In a sense MacIntyre suggests that Aristotle – and later in his works the Thomist tradition – are able to answer at least some of the questions indirectly set by the emotivist society, whereas all Nietzsche can offer is more questions.

Much like with the controversies around MacIntyre's understanding of the Enlightenment, this thesis is not the place to discuss how accurate MacIntyre's interpretations of Nietzsche and Aristotle actually are – interpretative questions do not necessarily interfere with the internal logic of the potential validity or otherwise of what MacIntyre is trying to argue. In other words, it does not matter whether MacIntyre has accurate representations of both Nietzsche and Aristotle; the key factor is why he chooses his interpretation of one over his interpretation of the other. A far more important question for what is being discussed is whether MacIntyre's interpretation of Aristotle can actually do the work required of it in terms of being a true alternative to the status quo with which he has such a problem and following on from that whether his understanding of Nietzsche warrants dismissing the thinker in favour of Aristotle.

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[91] See MacIntyre, Alasdair *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, (London; Duckworth, 1990), p.42.
[92] *Ibid*, p.45.

It is here that MacIntyre's line of argument struggles. There is a sense in which his account of Aristotle – and the relative certainty it can offer – clearly has an appeal, but what MacIntyre does not quite convince on is the idea that this is a definite credible alternative to post-Enlightenment philosophy and the emotivist society. It struggles to provide that alternative as it does not answer the question of why Aristotelian philosophy would end emotivist based arguments. To claim that human life is moving toward a *telos* immediately raises the question of who gets to decide on what the *telos* is. Even if the *telos* is taken to be *eudemonia* then the dual questions of what constitutes reason and what constitutes happiness immediately arise. A life well lived in modern liberal society means so many different things to so many different people. It is difficult to see how the stereotypical conservative and stereotypical liberal could agree on what their *telos* might be, and if one were to be imposed on them then it is next to impossible to envisage a scenario where both were happy with that imposition on them. Indeed, it is far easier to envisage a situation where neither was happy with it. This is not to say that there is no merit at all in an Aristotelian outlook on life; rather it is to point out that there is no reason why such an outlook could not be another voice arguing its case with a liberal society, rather than providing an indisputable (or even particularly credible) alternative to it. In short Aristotle's views may have individual merit but it is difficult to see how they could convince the warring participants in an emotivist culture.

In terms of the Nietzschean path not taken – and MacIntyre's wider rejection of the genealogist tradition in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* – there are also flaws in MacIntyre's own argument. As noted MacIntyre argues that the genealogist tradition is largely self-defeating; he cites, for example, Foucault's entry into the academic world he wished to critique as an example of the inability of the perpetual critique of the genealogist to find a meaningful position in the world.[93] MacIntyre appears to make the challenge to the genealogist of being as critical of themselves as they are of others; effectively their tradition collapses in on itself because the tools they use to often so

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[93] MacIntyre writes that while Nietzsche's "progress was from professor to genealogist, Foucault's (was) from being neither to being both simultaneously." See *Ibid*, p.49.

successfully critique other traditions have to be used on their tradition as well. Yet this idea of constant self-critique does not have to be taken in a negative context; in a sense it is an intellectually valid project to ensure to which standards that the genealogist would hold other traditions they also apply to themselves. There is merit in an individual attempting to understand what influences and what can create biases in beliefs and philosophies defended, partly because of its intellectual honesty, and partly because it allows for change and evolution in the thought of that individual. Indeed, this could be a solution to the problem of emotivism; if perpetual self-awareness and constructive criticism of an individual's beliefs were the norm, then surely it would be easier to shift the entrenched emotional beliefs that so hinder a more rational argument?

This then leads to an implication for and further challenge to MacIntyre's philosophy and it raises the question of whether there is actually anything that in an emotivist age could be credible to all. In this instance, Aristotelianism fails not because it has nothing to offer the emotivist age, but rather because it cannot convince on a wide enough basis to provide the parameters for debate and discussion required on MacIntyre's account to overcome the emotivist cul-de-sac in which philosophy and politics finds itself. The reality of pluralism in this case becomes not that there is no rationalist truth that can never be found; rather, the existence of such a truth is never going to have the power to command agreement with it, and therefore becomes of limited relevance in terms of dealing with the problems MacIntyre identifies. Yet this challenge – while fundamental – is addressed to some extent by MacIntyre in two ways – first of all, by the move to Aquinas via Aristotle and secondly by his account of traditions in conflict. These two facets of MacIntyre's philosophy do seem to suggest that he is aware of the challenge of their not being a universally compelling version of the truth at the same time as trying to address the issue of how ideas can and do evolve and change. The third section of this chapter will attempt to address both of these facts.

Traditions in Conflict

MacIntyre's career has not shown a thinker happy to adopt a position and defend it; instead he has emerged as an example of a political philosopher who has adapted his thoughts and beliefs as he has engaged with different ideas and different schools of thought. This can be seen quite clearly in the work he has produced since *After Virtue*; he has moved beyond Aristotle towards an openly Thomist position – writing that "Aquinas was in some respects a better Aristotelian than Aristotle" as he "had been able to extend and deepen both Aristotle's metaphysical and his moral enquiries"[94] – and developed an explanation of how traditions interact, and change and how knowledge and rationality develop. This section will consider both ideas in turn, before looking at how MacIntyre's Thomism links with his ideas about tradition and change, focussing on what this might indicate about MacIntyre's views on the reality of pluralism.

This first port of call is to consider why MacIntyre moves form a commitment to Aristotle to an endorsement of Thomism. One explanation of this is it is a purely understandable and natural move given Aquinas himself was a student of Aristotle and did much to expand the knowledge Aristotle's philosophy and ideas. Why would a student of Aristotle not want to pursue a thinker who did much to develop a system of thought they take much validity from? Yet this is a simplistic form of analysis; it would be natural for a thinker curious about the work of Aristotle to pursue research into Aquinas's thought, but there would be no guarantee that said thinker would automatically endorse his work, much in the same way that a Marxist would not automatically become a Marxist-Leninist after reading *What Is To Be Done?* The reasons for MacIntyre's approval of Aquinas are, as would be expected, far more detailed, intelligent and subtle than that. Thomism, for MacIntyre, represents a holistic approach to philosophy – it answers many of the questions presented by the reality of human life and is perhaps the best collection of answers currently available. McIntyre does not present the case that Thomist philosophy is the definitive answer to the conundrums of political – and wider – philosophy but instead represents the best alternative that we currently have. As such his praise of Thomism

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[94] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xi.

allows for the idea that a more convincing alternative may yet arise; it has yet, though, despite all of the innovations in human thought since Aquinas's death, to happen on MacIntyre's account.

How credible, then, is Thomism as an alternative to liberalism, to emotivism, to all the other philosophies that do not convince MacIntyre? Can Thomism convince beyond MacIntyre's own commitment to it? The first part of the answer is implicit in the preceding paragraph. MacIntyre is not arguing that Thomism has to be a definitive alternative to any other philosophy, political or otherwise. It is, on his account, just more convincing – there is nothing, though, to suggest that this situation will exist in perpetuity. Yet this does not really convince given the way in which Thomism has waned as a commonly held belief system, especially since the Enlightenment. Thomism may have convinced MacIntyre but it is not convincing many others. For example, recent debates in modern political philosophy – such as the liberal against communitarian debate[95] or the realist versus idealist arguments – owe little on either side to Thomism. If Thomism is so convincing on MacIntyre's account the question does arise of why it is not convincing on a wider scale. It is, at best, a muted voice in modern political philosophy and an even quieter voice in contemporary political debate in practice. Thomism as an alternative to the pluralistic debate that MacIntyre stands against struggles to convince as a defining theory given the sense in which it is but a voice that often seems drowned out by other and lounder (if not actually more convincing) voices.

So does the failure of Thomism to be the alternative to emotivism fatally undermine MacIntyre's project? The answer is negative for two reasons. First of all, as noted earlier in this chapter, there is much in MacIntyre's critique of emotivism that is convincing and represents as compelling challenge to pluralism. The fact that his antidote to the emotivist infection does not change the potency of his diagnosis. Secondly MacIntyre's analysis of the idea of traditions in conflict is another crucial contribution to the analysis of the reality of pluralism; his account of this phenomenon – in particular in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and more persuasively in *Three Rival Versions of*

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[95] Philip Pettit writes persuasively about MacIntyre's own take on this in Pettit, Philip "Liberal / Communitarian: MacIntyre's Mesmeric Dichotomy" in Horton and Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, pp.176-204.

Moral Enquiry – presents an account of the advancement of human thought and philosophy based on pluralistic discourse and debate. MacIntyre advances the idea that the way in which intellectual traditions grow and involve is through interacting with one another. It is through pluralism in philosophy that ideas can change and adapt through exposure to one another, helping to advance and develop their claims through seeing off rival versions of philosophy or maybe even falling by the wayside if those rival versions can comprehensively show that the existing philosophical tradition has lost its relevance for whatever the reason. There is the potential problem of translatability[96] – in that different traditions may not be able to converse with one another because of the sheer disparity in what they argue and how they argue it. Yet much like the rival nations with different languages who first come into contact with one another the initial interactions may be difficult because of the lack of a common language, but that does not mean that meaningful interaction will never be possible. An example of this sort of philosophical undertaking to bring disparate philosophies into meaningful engagement with one another can be found in Raymond Geuss's *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*, which attempts to bridge the gap between continental and analytical philosophy. Part of Geuss' undertaking in that work is to show that different core motivations and ways of communicating messages between the two types of philosophy does not mean that the two cannot interact and potentially learn from one another. This would be a good example of traditions in conflict allowing different philosophical processes to learn from one another through meaningful interaction with one another.

At this point Thomism can be brought back into the frame and be used to illustrate what MacIntyre is trying to say in relation to the conflict in philosophical traditions. A distinction can clearly be made between the philosophical tradition MacIntyre wants to be the most convincing in the form of Thomism and the process by which philosophical traditions grow and are judged through interaction and conflict with one another. MacIntyre does not have to be correct in his views on Thomism in order to be correct in his analysis of traditions in conflict – indeed, the former could be

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[96] For example see MacIntyre, Alasdair *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*? (London; Duckworth, 1988), p.348.

used as a clear example of the latter in action. Even on MacIntyre's account, Thomism was a highly important if not dominant tradition that has faded over time as others have challenged it, directly or otherwise. Thomism can be used to show what happens when a tradition ceases to be as compelling or as convincing as it once was, and while it would be harsh to place Thomism in obscurity it is probably safe to say in terms of modern philosophical debate interest in it has waned and it is now more of a niche tradition of interest primarily to devoted Thomists, such as MacIntyre. Ultimately this process of conflict in tradition does not mean that any one participant's preferred philosophy will emerge as the victorious tradition, nor does that process necessarily guarantee adherence to any particular prediction of where the conflict with take philosophy.

One potential response from the Thomist in MacIntyre might be to suggest that there is nothing in the idea of the conflict between traditions that necessarily guarantees the emergence of the best tradition. Other factors can come into play, such as the relative power of different traditions to control the debate and also the wider biases of those involved in the debate. An example of the former might be the dominance of Marxist based philosophies in many of the former states with governments founded on Marxism. In such states a form of Marxism would almost always emerge as the dominant tradition – not because it was the best or most convincing tradition but rather because of the backing power of the state. In terms of the second idea, fundamental belief systems could restrict the openness of some to other intellectual traditions. Thus a Christian might find it impossible to truly embrace liberalism since the latter tradition allows individuals to be free to contradict many of the central tenets of Christianity and indeed involve themselves in activities that could negatively impact on the souls of those liberal individuals. Here liberalism could be the more credible tradition but it would fail to convince the Christian. This idea links to others that will be discussed in the next two chapters – namely the importance of belief to individuals and the idea explored in detail by John Gray about the incommensurability of some values. It is also worth noting that the idea that of traditions in conflict does not guarantee the emergence of the best tradition has an implicit link with the idea discussed in Chapter Three within Arendtian philosophy that action will bring success to those

who participate within it. Rather, just as action for Arendt is the best and most human option for intersubjective interaction despite the potential risks, the idea of conflict in traditions becomes for MacIntyre the best way to allow for the advancement of human knowledge and offers the most likely route to the best tradition(s) that philosophy will have to offer even if there is no iron-clad guarantee of either – indeed, as the emotivist dominance in the aftermath of the Enlightenment demonstrates.

At this juncture the connections between the reality of pluralism and MacIntyre's conflict in traditions can be brought to the fore. Effectively, what he is arguing for is another form of pluralism; he sees the advancement of human intelligent as being generated through the often creative friction inherent in the pluralistic debate. There is a real sense in which pluralism is the natural result of traditions interacting with one another once the problem of translatability has been – at least to some extent – neutralised. If emotivism is the natural outcome of post-Enlightenment debate then the conflict in traditions and the ensuing change and potential growth in human knowledge is the reality of philosophies interacting with one another. While MacIntyre's relationship with pluralism is ambivalent at best and he arrives at it through a very different method to both Arendt and – as will be shown in later chapters – John Gray, it is worth stressing that despite that ambivalence his philosophy does seem to be underpinned by the reality of pluralism.

Conclusion

As this chapter has attempted to show, MacIntyre's opinions on pluralism are mixed to say the least. His work *After Virtue* could be interpreted as a critique of pluralism, or at least the sort of pluralism that manifests itself in the emotivism that he argues has become dominant in terms of political debate and discourse since the Enlightenment. His account acts as a counter-point on some levels to the Arendtian idea of action has a highly convincing account of the problems of post-Enlightenment political philosophy and debate, and how emotivism has created a situation where there is pluralism but no possibility of rationally revolving the arguments that ensue. However as discussed above his alternative does not necessarily convince – his commitment to Aristotelianism and then Thomism are argued convincingly by MacIntyre on some levels, but given his views on the conflict between traditions and how some philosophical schools and belief systems fall by the wayside when more convincing ideas arise it is difficult not to argue at least on some levels that Thomism is one of those that has faded from the prevalence it once enjoyed – it has arguably been swallowed by those traditions that now dominate the emotivist era. Furthermore, there is a real sense in which MacIntyre's rejection of Nietzsche and the genealogist tradition is based on its inability to bring certainty; yet this is to ignore that the reality of pluralism itself cannot guarantee certainty by its very nature (which is also shown through the inherent uncertainty of Arendtian action) and, given its slide into relative obscurity, nor can Thomism as it has been superseded by the more emotivist traditions of the modern age.

The importance of MacIntyre to this account of the reality of pluralism based on the account of some of his work in this chapter lies in the ambivalence his work seems to reveal towards the reality of pluralism. He sees the importance of the reality of pluralism in the form of the conflict between traditions as it extends human knowledge, traditions and belief systems through interactions with others yet he does not value the pluralistic debate in post-Enlightenment culture. It returns to the question of emotions in debate, and the emotive way in which people conduct those debates rather than the colder but more rational preferred debating style of MacIntyre. Yet, as the next chapter will

show, the earlier work of MacIntyre raises an interesting suggestion about the nature of belief –

namely that beliefs often fulfil deep emotional and almost existential needs in many as they offer a

sense of identity and perhaps even a sense of purpose that is essential in life. Then the next chapter

will look at the implications of this for both MacIntyre's ideas, especially on emotivism and the nature

debate before looking at the wider implications of this insight to the reality of pluralism and the sort

of pressures that are brought to bear on it.

5: Pluralism and Belief

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the idea of pluralism as a potential problem when it manifests itself in the form of emotivism. It also suggested that there is a hint of ambivalence in the way in which MacIntyre treats pluralism though – in its current, post Enlightenment manifestation it is problematic. However pluralism itself is actually, on MacIntyre's account, essential to the progression of both human thought and philosophy. The idea of conflict between traditions becomes a narrative of how traditions evolve and develop – even if it does mean that some traditions fall by the wayside or (as the example of Thomism might show) become marginalized. MacIntyre, then, has an ambivalent attitude to pluralism – he acknowledges that the reality is that life is based around pluralism, but he does not see it as an unmitigated good even as he argues that it is a crucial part of how human thinking develops.

This chapter will consider another aspect to MacIntyre's thought – particularly shown in his early work on the topics of Marxism and Christianity – through examining his ideas around the notion of belief. As the chapter will demonstrate, MacIntyre argues that for all of their differences the followers of Karl Marx and Jesus Christ share one thing – a sense that they have found the / their truth. They both believe fundamentally in a better tomorrow, even if the location of the better tomorrow – in this world or the next, dependent on viewpoint – differs between the creeds. The chapter will then use this notion in conjunction with the idea of emotivism and argue that emotivist disagreement is an inevitable part of people holding beliefs, as some of the conflicts mentioned in the last chapter show. It will suggest that the emotion in emotivism is down to the fact that cherished beliefs – beliefs that often form part of an individual's identity – is on some levels completely understandable as it represents a crucial part of the very nature of those expounding such views and beliefs.

From there this section of the thesis will use MacIntyre's ideas on belief as a springboard to look at wider issues of the challenge that the almost innate desire of many humans to hold beliefs has for

the reality of pluralism. It will suggest that the beliefs many hold both reaffirm the reality of pluralism at the same time as perhaps reinforcing MacIntyre's view that much of modern discourse is people passionately yet fruitlessly talking past one another because those beliefs that provoke such a strong response in them. It will examine the implications of belief in the sense of whether a more healthy sort of pluralism is possible when and where belief exists, or whether belief condemns pluralism to the sort of bitter, intractable and highly emotional conflict that can be seen, say, in the debate around women's reproductive rights in the USA. From there the chapter will reintroduce the idea of Arendt's understanding of action and pose the question of whether the impact of the passionate beliefs held by many renders the idea of open and honest interaction in a public space viable or not. Finally, it will round off by looking at the essential ambivalence of pluralism – In particular the notion that pluralism can lead to a meaningful and constructive debate on key issues but the very nature of belief means that any such debate can descend onto a conflict of beliefs that achieves little other than the active defence of already existing viewpoints. This then leads to the idea of openness being essential for a healthy of meaningful version of pluralism – beliefs can be held, but they must be open to change and amendment owing to what Arendt would see as the interaction with others in the public space and what MacIntyre would conceive as the conflict in traditions. This then leads to Chapter 6 on John Gray's differing versions of liberalism that arguably culminates in his idea of value pluralism in *Two Faces of Liberalism.*

Beliefs: MacIntyre on Marx and Christ

Some of MacIntyre's early work deals with an apparently massive divergence in his own views at the time – namely his belief in the Catholicism (which would later take him in the direction of Thomism) and his Marxist principles. MacIntyre writes that he "aspired to be both a Christian and a Marxist, or at least as much of each was compatible with allegiance to the other and with a doubting turn of mind."[97] The vast majority of MacIntyre's writing on these subjects shows his awareness of how the two are incompatible yet also suggests something that links them in that for all their disparate and conflicting ideas both represent systems of belief by which individuals can not only live their lives, but also understand their lives. A key inference that can be drawn from MacIntyre's work at this stage of his career is that individuals need or rely on some sort of belief system – indeed the need to believe is almost an inherent and crucial part of the human experience or condition. The nature of the beliefs almost do not matter and will vary from person to person – the key point here, though, is that individuals almost seem to need something to hold onto as they go through a life that often seems confusing and arbitrary without a belief structure or a narrative to bring sense to it.

It is worth fleshing out some of the reasons – both held by MacIntyre and more generally evident – as to why Marxism and Christianity exist in conflict with one another. As has already been touched on above, both do believe in a better world. One of the key differences between the two belief systems though is that a Marxist would see the possibility of building a better world here on earth (albeit it in an often distant future) while a Christian looks to the land beyond for their better tomorrow. The former believes in the idea of some sort of heaven on earth, the latter in a much more ethereal and intangible heaven in the next life. A further difference manifests itself in how the quasi-utopian visions in the mind-sets of both belief systems come about – for the Marxist, while the laws of history will inevitably lead to the communist world against a long enough timescale, the versions of some within the Marxist tradition (such as the followers of Lenin) would stress the need for proactivity in achieving

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[97] MacIntyre, Alasdair *Marxism and Christianity* (New York; Shocken Books, 1968), vii.

that better tomorrow. The Christian, however, including in the Catholic tradition, should believe the adherence to the law of God is enough to allow that individual to pass into the kingdom of heaven. There is room to be proactive in the Marxist tradition whereas in Christianity a certain passivity in the face of decrees from heaven is advantageous to say the least.

Yet the above only hints at the differences between a version of Christianity such as Catholicism and Marxism. As MacIntyre shows, the two are often in direct conflict with one another. Catholicism, Christianity and indeed religion in general often represents the forces of the traditional in society. They accept, for example, the often gross inequities in society as the rewards for living a good life according to the tenets of whatever religion come not here but in the next life. A Marxist, however, would virulently oppose the inequality in society – indeed, at the heart of Marxism is the idea that inequality will end with the dawn of the socialist and then communist societies – and sees the rewards for adhering to the values of it as an ideology as realizable on this very earth. Yet on Marx's own account the conflict is even more entrenched than that since Marx directly pits Marxism against Christianity and religion in general. Marx's oft-quoted notion that religion is the opiate of the masses is instructive here – for him and the vast majority of his followers religion is a key part of the problem with all pre-Communist societies. The promise of a better tomorrow after death is a key reason, on the Marxist account, why so many are prepared to accept a grim today. Thus Marxism comes to see Christianity as more than just an alternative view point – it directly sees it as part of the wider problem of pre-Communist societies.

The idea that Christianity and Marxism exist in conflict with one another is nothing new and neither MacIntyre nor this thesis would seek to argue otherwise. Yet part of what MacIntyre hints at is the nature of not just religion but also belief systems in general that act as opiates. Belief systems in general, it could be argued, end up being opiates. They represent – on some, and perhaps cynical levels – painkillers for a life and existence that makes precious little sense without some sort of overarching narrative. Thus both Christianity and Marxism – despite their apparent hostility to one another – share a common ground in that they help to explain not only why what is happening actually

is happening but also what an individual can do about it, even if it is the passivity of the Christian or the bellicose anarchic approach of the Marxist-Leninist. Beliefs of all shapes and sizes become necessary for human existence because they are opiates or explanations or even just general narratives of that human existence. Indeed, MacIntyre himself writes that "Marxism shares in good measure both the content and functions of Christianity as an interpretation of human existence, and because it is the historical successor to Christianity."[98] On this account, then Marxism is just a secular religion; an updated version of Christianity for a different age.

It is here that a quote from Nietzsche is very telling. Nietzsche wrote on Christianity:

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"[99]

Removing the perhaps typical hyperbole of a Nietzschean quote from the above it does offer some insights that chime in with MacIntyre's observations about the nature of belief. Nietzsche's murder of God, so to speak, comes at the hands of apparently self-aware humans. Their knowledge of the story of the deity has led to the demise of that story for at least some and telling for those individuals it has led to a need for comfort. One interpretation of this might be that there is a sense of mourning for God – his murder has created a sense of grief even in those who have slayed him. However, an alternative yet linked interpretation could be that the murder of God has removed a key source of comfort for even those who killed him. The lack of belief in God removes, for want of a better phrase, a security blanked for many. It is also telling that Nietzsche poses the question of what "sacred games"

[98] *Ibid*, p.6.
[99] Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Gay Science*, (New York; Dover Publishing, 2004), Section 125.

need to come into play in order to replace God. The use of the word "sacred" could be interpreted as a need to find some sort of deity to replace God even as the word "games" implies that any alternative will be just that – a game. Indeed, if the final sentence quoted above is taken to its logical extreme then it could arguably be interpreted as some sort of portent or omen of the various communist regimes of the past century – as noted in the chapter on totalitarianism, those who lead totalitarian regimes often seek to set themselves up as de facto gods in their own regimes. It is not a massive leap, for example, to see Stalin as a man who rejected the concept of God in his own regime only to then set up a cult of personality that replaced the Christian God for his own people.

Given MacIntyre's intellectual antipathy to Nietzsche as discussed in the last chapter, it would be far too much of a reach to claim that MacIntyre is on some level a Nietzschean. Nonetheless it is worth noting that both he and Nietzsche reach a very similar place through very different paths. This then becomes the point – they both point towards the concept of the need for belief as in some way integral to many human beings. The nature of that belief becomes almost moot – the need for the belief is the crucial factor. Indeed it does at times almost feel like MacIntyre's work trying (probably intentionally) to answer the questions Nietzsche poses – namely, what do those people who have rejected or left behind the ideas of society wide morality and rationality do with what is left? How can people function in a society besieged by emotivism in the wake of the Enlightenment? MacIntyre is at his best when he is examining the problem, and much of what he can offer the reality of pluralism is pointing to the sort of endless conflict that can be the result that pluralism, and directly faces the problem in a way that Arendt just does not. The problem with MacIntyre is the way in which he responds to it; while there is some theoretical merit in his analysis of how traditions interact and change, his preferred tradition of Aristotelianism and then Thomism is not convincingly shown by him to be the most convincing or compelling intellectual tradition on offer. As a result MacIntyre is a thinker like Nietzsche who sees the reality of pluralism yet – unlike Nietzsche – sees it as a problem. The previous chapter hinted at a key point underpinning emotivism that is worth fleshing out in detail as the idea of the need for belief is discussed – if belief systems are taken as offering some sort of meaning to an

otherwise arbitrary existence then it is clear that, at least on some levels, they are fulfilling an

emotional need. It is this observation that the next section of this chapter will consider.

Emotion and Belief

MacIntyre's definition of emotivism is infused by the notion of the emotions that humans feel. Indeed, the potency and poison of much emotivist debate is down to the fact that it is infused with emotion – even rational points become drowned in the emotional way in which they are expressed. Yet while MacIntyre seems to long for a form of debate that is much more rational than those conducted under an emotivist flag, it is easy to see why emotions become so powerful in debates where beliefs come into conflict with one another. For those beliefs are not just cold, rational explanations for the nature of existence – they fulfil emotional needs and provide succour to individuals. Without the emotional background and content of many beliefs, debate between conflicting belief systems would be far less aggressive and destructive.

MacIntyre sees the problem of emotivism, as suggested in the last chapter, as based on the removal of any rational standard the quality of arguments with in debate can be assessed against. MacIntyre demonstrates this through discussing how so many arguments are based not around cold, hard facts but rather are framed by talk about feelings. There is a sense that within MacIntyre's work that he would want the way debates between differing belief systems to be conducted with less emotion and more intellectual rigour and logic; he seems to want people to be able to argue their case based on facts rather than assertions – particularly those based around emotions and feelings in general. MacIntyre's preferred form of debate brings to mind more a meeting of senior academics in a university environment rather than the way in which, for example, modern politicians conduct their debates.

Yet here there are hints of tension between what MacIntyre seeks from the debates between belief systems and traditions and the work he has done on the importance for individuals of holding such beliefs and the emotional side to them. How possible is it for someone holding a view like Christianity to remove the emotion from it and instead argue from a purely rational perspective when a central tenet of their religion is the notion of faith combined with existence being a test that could result in an eternal life in heaven or hell? Furthermore, how realistic is it – even given Marx's attempts

to come up with what he saw as a scientific form of socialism – for a Marxist committed to remove injustice from the world through a positive transformative revolution that will improve life for all to not bring in emotion when it comes to those who would stand in the way of that positive transformative revolution? Neither seems particularly likely, meaning what MacIntyre sees as emotivism is actually inevitable if differing belief systems in which people passionately believe interact with one another. Emotion seems to be key to many belief systems and while MacIntyre might want a more rational approach to debate it is difficult to see how it can happen owing to that key emotional content of so many holistic beliefs.

The question of whether the removal of emotions is desirable is largely rendered moot by the impossibility of doing so. However a far more important aspect to it; if the emotional impact of a belief system is removed, it would appear – even on MacIntyre's own account in works such as *Marxism and Christianity* – the potency of a belief system is lost to a large extent. A Christian is not going to adhere to the often restrictive teachings of the Bible for a lifetime without the possibility of that eternal life in paradise while Marxism would cease to be such a compelling cause for many without the possibility of the better tomorrow that can, in theory, be built in this lifetime on this earth. Put crudely, what motivates people to fight and die for their beliefs is not the cold logic of their internal ideas but the passion the beliefs inspire through a raw emotional connection. That is not to say that there has never been anyone who has fought for a cause based on the intellectual side of it; the observation is that if you wish to inspire someone to fight for a cause recourse to the emotional rather than rational side of individuals appears to be far more potent.

If the early MacIntyre is to be taken as observing that beliefs form an important, if not essential, emotional need for many then the challenge of emotional responses to alternative viewpoints becomes almost overwhelming for the more emotionally sterile outlook on debate that MacIntyre seems to want later in his academic career. The problem for MacIntyre thus becomes that he accepts the need of many to have emotionally satisfying believes but wants a form of argumentation and debate that removes that emotional content. Thus the situation with MacIntyre's

discussion of emotivism that he is almost seeking to remove from the discussion of beliefs that very emotional core that makes many hold beliefs in the first place. On some levels it would make sense to pursue his general line of argumentation that those involved in a debate about beliefs or a conflict in traditions should seek to find a way of expressing those beliefs without recourse to purely emotional and subjective opinions. Yet this thesis is about the reality of pluralistic argument – and that needs to accept that the recourse to such styles of argumentation is arguably, even on the account of the early MacIntyre, completely understandable. A crude but potent example of this would be the Christian, pro-life conservative mentioned earlier who is picturing the loss of viable life that they see as inherent in the process of terminating pregnancy and then understanding how their rhetoric and general delivery of their belief system and its implications would almost always involve a massive emotional content as they talk of the loss of an infant life.

The implications of this would suggest that emotivism, at least on some levels, is not necessarily a post-Enlightenment phenomenon, but rather something in some ways intrinsic to all belief systems. MacIntyre argues for the Enlightenment representing some sort of collapse in logical and convincing argument, but the reality does seem to be that such a collapse is not unique to the modern era. The clash between traditions on a visceral, emotional and often violent level is the stuff of historical facts. The tortures of the Inquisition, the violence of the crusades and the pursuit of witches all do not allude to calm and rational discourse yet it is difficult to see any of these as the result of the Enlightenment especially since they are, barring some examples of the pursuit of witches, prior to that historical event. It is also worth noting that while Marx may at times get extremely emotive about the suffering of the proletariat even in his supposed works of scientific socialism the other belief system the early MacIntyre discusses is hardly above appeals to pure raw emotion. After all, what is one of the most powerful and arresting images of the belief system that is Christianity? A forlorn yet brave man dying in one of the worst ways imaginable on a cross. Such an iconography is difficult to see as anything other than, at least on some levels, being designed to provoke an emotional response that leads to sympathy for Christ and the beliefs that followed in the wake of his execution.

One of MacIntyre's key insights could therefore be the nature of debate in modernity as often irrational and based on recourse to purely emotional and subjective ideas rather than being more objective and rational. Yet it could also be argued that this is not a problem unique to the modern world and has actually been part of the human experience for centuries before the rise of what MacIntyre describes as the Enlightenment. Therefore MacIntyre can be seen as identifying the problem but not taking into account the full scope of it. His analysis of the emotivist slant to much debate after the Enlightenment may be intrinsically credible but his earlier work on the nature and importance of belief implies almost that such debate held against a purely emotive standard is part of the human experience as a whole, at least for many, not something that is unique to living after the Enlightenment. In a sense this would bring MacIntyre's ideas closer to those of Arendt – Arendt directly sees subjective debate as an essential part of the human condition while MacIntyre is scathing about it in the post-Enlightenment era yet his work would suggest, in conjunction with examples from history, that there is nothing new about such emotive debate.

Yet what does this mean for the wider question of the reality of pluralism at the heart of this thesis? It has to be a fundamental challenge when the notion of emotionally fulfilling yet also often controversial, contradictory and confrontational belief systems are brought into the mix. Pluralism as defined here has to allow for people to express their beliefs – there is nothing in Arendt's idea of action that would suggest that she believes otherwise, and even in his more scathing passages on emotivist debate MacIntyre does not seem to go as far as to deny those voices who converse in ways he feels to be counter-productive. Pluralism has to allow for emotionally charged beliefs to come into the public space or the general forum for debate – if it does not then it arguably ceases to become pluralistic. The fundamental challenge facing the reality of pluralism though is the nature of those voices that are often stridently and sometimes violently emotional. How can they be incorporated without them becoming fundamentally destructive of that public space or forum for debate?

The Challenge of the Emotional Foundation of Beliefs

The challenge that Emotional Beliefs lay down to the reality of pluralism should be obvious given the discussion of emotion and belief in the last section of this chapter, but nonetheless there is merit in making it explicit. Those with convictions that have an emotional stridency alongside their beliefs often find it difficult to accept ideas or principles with which they do not agree, and sometimes struggle in deeply concerning ways with those who cannot agree with their beliefs. Such a reality was brought into stark relief when writing this chapter as the news of the terror attacks of 13th November 2015 began to filter through. Passionate, emotional belief systems erupted into an explosion of violence that cost so many so much, and was met by the French President announcing a state of war against the entity claiming responsibility for the carnage. A conflict between traditions in this case has become a brutal physical confrontation with lethal consequences on a global scale.

While far from unique in history the attacks on Paris do show perhaps what could be termed as the collapse of pluralism. The nature of international society combined arguably with the actions of certain Western powers has allowed the Islamic State (IS) to rise and in doing so it has allowed for the creation of an entity that, in its core beliefs and intra- and inter-national actions, appears completely opposed to much of what constitutes the value and belief systems of modern liberal democracies. The internal politics is probably very close to an Islamic version of the totalitarianism that Arendt saw in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, while the international conflict caused by IS on a local but also increasingly global basis shows what can happen when the pluralism of the international community creates a situation where regimes that allow pluralism come into contact with a state inimical to the idea of pluralism.

Yet it is more than just the conflicting goals and ideals of the IS and a more modern liberal nation like France that has led to such a dramatic escalation in an already existing armed conflict is not simply the beliefs the different entities hold but also the emotional power that those beliefs hold

over their followers. IS is the most obvious example here – borne of failing states in the throes of civil war, it is relatively easy to understand the allure of a religion that offers hope and certainty in a part of the world lacking in both. The fact that the form of the dominant religion under the Islamic State is such a virulent and unforgiving version of Islam probably only helps to escalate the feeling of certainty and hope, even if the form of hope on offer can only be attained through the subordination of the individual in the face of the demands of the religion and the fledgling state. The barbarity of the state – as manifested in its executions and other draconian penalties for offences that would not be considered that serious or, in some cases even offences, at all in the Western world – combined with its willingness to destroy ancient landmarks because they do not match the state's interpretation of Islam is the sure sign of a regime utterly devoted to its version of the truth. Furthermore the fact that the IS is effectively at war with all entities that do not directly follow their interpretation of Islam – including other Muslims – is an extreme manifestation of something like Schmitt's friend / enemy distinction, but provides a potential sense of clarity, certainty and identity in a world that would otherwise offer very little. IS offers a form of emotional stability for those who can embrace the belief system, and it very clearly takes on the form of barbaric violence – almost a form of theocratic rage – when faced with those belief systems that do not exactly conform. As MacIntyre alluded to in relation to both Marxism and Christianity, the extreme form of Islam represented by the Islamic state could be fulfilling an existential emotional need for its followers.

The emotions behind the French response to the attack should be relatively easy for most to empathise with – a direct attack on a capital city aimed primarily at civilians is going to create negative emotions including grief, anger, fear and perhaps even rage. The desire to hit back against the entity that is unashamedly promoting its involvement feels perfectly natural in the light of all of those emotions. Yet that does not necessarily translate into the belief systems of those affected by the attacks. It would be possible to be a French liberal feeling the negative emotions in the aftermath of the attack driving a desire for national retribution against the responsible state. The belief in liberalism would not be being driven by the negative emotions created by the attack. However it is at this point

where how open the liberal might be to pluralism moving forward becomes potentially problematic as there could be a shift between having a belief system and that belief system becoming a label which comes to define identity in difficult times. The thought process could become more "I am a liberal, and liberalism is under attack, therefore I support confrontation to save the liberal identity" rather than "I am a liberal because I believe in the primacy of freedom." The impact of emotion in the belief system is almost to corrupt, or at the very least change, the motivations behind holding the belief and even the content of that belief.

What impact does the above have on MacIntyre's ideas of emotivism and the conflict between traditions? First of all it is worth emphasizing that while there is clear merit in MacIntyre's desire to have political debates and practical policies based on what is rational and objective rather than emotion, it remains very difficult to remove the emotion from many situations. The emotions can arise from the very nature of the debate, confrontational or conflict as well as from the emotional need that arguably leads people to their individual belief systems in the first place. Likewise the more cerebral conflict in traditions that might take place in an academic context such as between the Thomist and Genealogist approach seem far removed from the sort of radical conflict between such different cultures as can be seen in the example given at the beginning of this culture. Again the impact of emotion on belief systems and the conflict between them; the passions run far higher as they are not about cerebral and often semantic differences between academic positions but rather, as in the case discussed above, of a battle for the survival of the belief systems that have come to define or at least become essential to the identities of many of those involved. It is one thing for an academic tradition to fade into insecurity through stringent critique from other traditions; it is another entirely for the foundational beliefs of a state to come under existential threat from a rival state and its beliefs. It would, of course, be demonstrably false to say that all academic debate is conducted in a logical, unemotional way – debates often do inspire passionate emotions in the advocates of the different positions – just as it would be wrong to argue that all conflict between different cultures inevitably

takes the form of lethal conflict. Yet this does not change the challenge that emotivism is on some levels almost inevitable while human beings remain such emotional beings.

Moving on, the challenge of the sort of conflict that can be seen between a liberal democratic state like France and an entity like the IS towards the reality of pluralism is just as pronounced as it is to certain of MacIntyre's ideas. While the details of exactly what is happening within the IS will probably not be known until after the regime collapses it does show many of the signs of being a religiously based totalitarian regime, with the extreme version of Islam itself to a large extent taking the place of the personality cults at the heart of the Soviet and Nazi regimes examined by Arendt. While it is difficult to see the Syrian or Iraqi regimes that preceded the IS as inherently pluralistic it is far less difficult to see the collapse of pluralism in an theocratic state that so liberally uses archaic methods of execution for any dissenters and attempts to rigorously control all aspects of the lives of those who exist within its changing borders. The collapse of pluralism, though, in a country like France in the aftermath of something like the November 2015 attacks is not a complete collapse – but puts a pluralistic system under increased pressure. The increased need and desire for security pushes the boundaries of the beliefs and opinions that can be expressed and pursued. It is difficult to imagine how the voices of the supports of the Islamic State would be allowed to be heard in what Arendt would call the public space, especially by those grieving in the aftermath of the attacks. The state itself would need to manage the nature and content of the debate not just to ensure the security of those involved – it does not take a great imagination to foresee a scenario whereby a jihadist supporter arguing vehemently for their point of view might fall foul of a group of enraged individuals affected by the attacks or indeed vice versa – but also the security of the wider state from the perspective of preventing further linked attacks. The pressure on pluralism – and on freedom, democracy and other related political concepts often used as foundational concepts in modern western states – could become immense. The reality of pluralism could become damaged by real events. To be clear, this is not to say that the example of a state increasing its security at the cost of the freedom of speech that should be directly linked to pluralistic debate is the equivalent of a totalitarian settlement as see in

the Islamic State – whatever the rhetoric sometimes deployed by advocates of free speech when restrictions to free speech are brought in – but ideas like pluralism that Arendt, for example, sees as so essential to the human condition can, are and will be put under pressure in the face of opposition from non-pluralistic movements.

The challenge of the emotional foundation of many belief systems therefore points to an apparent tension in MacIntyre's evolving thought at the same time as showing circumstances when the reality of pluralism could come under substantial pressure. The latter is a key challenge to this thesis and it will be raised again in the concluding chapter which will look at in more detail through the consideration of a basic requirement of all those who truly wish to commit to pluralistic debate. Furthermore the nature of pluralism, and the challenge of toleration within pluralism, will be a key theme of the next chapter on John Gray's liberalism. However before the thesis turns to Gray's work the conclusion will look at what contribution MacIntyre's thought makes to the reality of pluralism.

Conclusion

What, then, to make of MacIntyre given the discussion of his work in relation to the reality of pluralism? As the last chapter noted, MacIntrye does seem to believe in the reality of pluralism in the sense that he understands it exists. He does not, however, see it as a positive. Indeed, through his critique of emotivist discourse that he sees as the norm in the post-Enlightenment world, it becomes clear that he is nowhere near even the muted positivity of an Arendt, who, while clearly understanding that there is an inherent risk given the uncertainty of pluralistic action, still claims it is central to what she sees as the human condition. As has been a lasting theme through both of the chapters on MacIntyre, there is much that is credible and often compelling in his identification of the problems of emotivism. This then ties in with the idea of the conflict between traditions that MacIntyre sees as the way in which human thought and philosophy has evolved over centuries of interacting between differing bodies of beliefs and thoughts.

The first potential problem with MacIntyre's ideas is the preferred alternative he has to both emotivism and the Nietzschean tradition he pits against that alternative – the thought of Aristotle progressed into a commitment to Thomism. As the previous chapter discussed it is not necessary to claim that Thomism is not the actual answer – or perhaps best existing answer – to many of the questions and riddles of philosophy. However, the idea of traditions that are unable to hold their own intellectually against newer ideas slowly fading into obscurity could be applied to Thomism. MacIntyre's preferred alternative to the emotivism of liberalism and the Enlightenment ultimately fails against in the conflict between different intellectual traditions that MacIntyre presents.

Furthermore, the critique of emotivism is perhaps slightly in tension with MacIntyre's earlier work on the nature of beliefs and the deeper emotional – or perhaps even existential – need for those beliefs in the first place. The emotion that often comes to the fore when beliefs come into conflict with one another is down to the nature of them as often crucial to the identities of individuals. Consequently it is theoretically preferable for individuals to bring more logical and mutually applicable standards for debate to interaction between belief systems, but the importance of those beliefs to

individuals makes the practical reality of modern political debate far more emotional than MacIntyre might prefer. The problem is that this is, on this interpretation of some of MacIntyre's earlier work, entirely natural. This also creates a wider problem for the thesis as to how the reality of pluralism can be sustained in the face of passionate beliefs that, as even recent history has shown, can lead to violent conflict.

So how to rate the overall contribution to the reality of pluralism of MacIntyre's canon of work? While there is no reason to assume that MacIntyre is specifically lamenting the end of a societies based on religion it does at times feel like MacIntyre is trying to answer the questions that the likes of a Nietzschean poses – namely, what do those people who have rejected or left behind the ideas of society wide morality and rationality do with what is left? How can people function in a society besieged by emotivism in the wake of the Enlightenment? MacIntyre is at his best when he is examining the problem, and much of what he can offer the reality of pluralism is pointing to the sort of endless conflict that can be the result of that pluralism, and directly faces the problem in a way that a thinkers like Arendt do not. The problem with MacIntyre is the way in which he responds to it; while there is some theoretical merit in his analysis of how traditions interact and change, his preferred tradition of Aristotelianism and then Thomism is not convincingly shown by him to be the most convincing or compelling intellectual tradition on offer. As a result MacIntyre is a thinker who sees a problem with the reality of pluralism very clearly; however, his solution – while sometimes passionately argued, sometimes argued with a high level of intellectual and philosophical rigour – ultimately becomes another voice largely lost in the white noise of modern pluralism.

6: Rationalism, Pluralism and the Second Face of Liberalism

Introduction

Alongside Arendt and MacIntyre, John Gray is a political thinker who has strongly critiqued philosophies that deny the essential plurality of humanity in favour of different forms of universalistic rationalism. Ostensibly beginning his career as a liberal, Gray has moved towards a position far more critical of liberalism and then finally to a position of what could almost be described as pessimistic misanthropy. It will be the task of the next two chapters to analyse why Gray has changed his philosophical positions so radically, then what this reveals about political philosophy and whether there can be, given the course of Gray's intellectual career, any sort of meaningful political philosophy. The first chapter will deal with Gray's relationship with liberalism, and the second with the more pessimistic turn of his most recent work.

The first section of this chapter will consider Gray's intellectual relationship with another liberal thinker – Hayek. It will show why Hayek initially appealed to Gray, before considering some of the flaws present within Hayekian thought, focusing in particular with the problems inherent in the idea of spontaneous order. It will then go on to show why Gray has increasingly detached himself from Hayek, and has almost done so using the same reasons that he used to initially align himself with Hayek. At the heart of his engagement with Hayekian political philosophy is a critique of rationalism; the appeal of Hayek being initially his critique of the rationalism of the planners, but ultimately for Gray Hayek remained caught in the rationalist trap.

The second part of the chapter will examine Gray's wider relationship with liberalism. It will start by noting his initial commitment to neoliberalism and the reasons for that commitment. It will then move on to show why he has moved towards a position that is far more sceptical of not just neoliberalism but also of other contemporary interpretations of liberalism. The section will then move on and examine Gray's attempt to bring liberalism back to its roots based on the notion of toleration

and thus what is for Gray what liberal political philosophy should aspire to – a *modus vivendi* that allows for peaceful coexistence in the face of what Gray calls the fact of value pluralism. Pluralism is at the heart of the reality of humanity's existence, and Gray's attempt to build a second face of liberalism is a reflection of that reality.

However, this supposed second face of liberalism is not without its flaws and its critics, and it will be the task of the third and final section of this chapter to address those issues. In particular, the extent to which the second face of liberalism is actually a form of liberalism at all will be examined, as will the success Gray has in detaching himself from the sort of universalist theories he is so keen to criticise. It will also consider two perhaps more fundamental, and inter-related, problems. Firstly, it will question just how inspirational *modus vivendi* can be in the face of its relative philosophical paucity, particularly in the face of other, more ambitious, philosophies. Secondly, the practical side to Gray's proposed political settlement is also damaged by this lack of substantive content since, crucially, Gray offers little in the way of an explanation of what is and what is not a suitable *modus vivendi*. It will compare Gray's form of liberalism with that of Shklar, and argue that the latter can bring important substance to Gray's second face of liberalism.

Yet this second face of liberalism represents perhaps Gray's last attempt to engage with liberalism and explore its implications as a political philosophy. This chapter will now turn to his earlier work on liberalism during what could be described as his neoliberal period – in particular, his changing intellectual relationship with one of the key thinkers of neoliberalism; F. A. Hayek.

An analysis of Hayekian thought is at the core of Gray's political thought and to some extent replicates his changing relationship with liberalism. The crucial text that demonstrates Gray's engagement with Hayek is *Hayek on Liberty* – in particular, the third edition, which contains both the main text sympathetic to Hayek and the far more critical postscript that questions the relevance of Hayek's form of liberalism in the post-Communist era. This section will argue that Gray's changing attitude to Hayekian political philosophy is actually underpinned by a consistently critical attitude to rationalism that he shares with Hayek, but is arguably more radical in his understanding and the implications of this critique of rationalism than Hayek.

The first step in this process is to paint a picture of precisely why Hayekian political philosophy appeals to Gray. In the Preface to the First Edition to *Hayek on Liberty*, Gray explicitly states why he endorses the work of Hayek. He writes a "major theme of this study is that Hayek's work composes a system of ideas, fully as ambitious as the systems of Mill and Marx, but far less vulnerable to criticism than theirs because it is grounded on a philosophically defensible view of the scope and limits of human reason."[100] He goes on to note that Hayek's "realistic picture of the powers and limitations of the human mind" shows that "many important social doctrines – those of socialism and interventionist liberalism, for example – make impossible demands upon our knowledge."[101] Furthermore, Gray notes that Hayek takes some note of "some of the deepest insights of conservative philosophy"[102] in reaching his more restrained philosophical approach. Therefore, the initial appeal of Hayek lies in offering a form of liberalism that is founded on the limits of human reason, and is consequently a political philosophy based and constrained by those limits. Gray sees Hayek's project as one based on

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[100] Gray, John *Hayek on Liberty* (Third Edition), (London; Routledge, 1998), ix.
[101] *Ibid*, x.
[102] *Ibid*, ix.

"the investigation of the limits of human reason"[103] and these limitations have a number of important implications.

The first is that Hayek sees society progressing best if it evolves using spontaneous order, which Gray states "emerges of itself in social life (and) can cope with the radical ignorance we all share of the countless facts of knowledge on which society depends."[104] Part of this notion of spontaneous order also requires, to use the words of Hayek, a "maximum of opportunity for accidents to happen" since "(o)ur necessary ignorance of so much (means) that we have to deal largely with probabilities and chances."[105] In other words, society evolves through both fortunate and unfortunate incidents which, by implication, humanity can have – no matter what the ambitions of those in the thrall of reason – limited control over. There is also the need to maximise personal freedom, since the "freedom that will be used by only one man in a million may be more important to society and more beneficial to the majority than any freedom that we all use."[106] Thus there is a need to minimise coercion across society, and Stephen Lukes is correct when he states that "the key to Hayek's entire political philosophy [is] justice not as fairness but as the elimination of arbitrary coercion."[107]

Therefore, the above shows what Hayekian philosophy aspires to and what Gray, in the early part of his intellectual career at least, was endorsing. However, as alluded to in the above quotation from Gray that is critical of certain social doctrines such as socialism and more interventionist forms of liberalism, there are ideas to be resisted within Hayekian political thought. Those ideas are those which elevate or exaggerate the abilities of human reason, and attempt to interrupt the evolution of society through spontaneous order. The rationalists and the planners are the target of Hayek and therefore of Gray at this point in his intellectual career. Hayek writes that the "(t)hose who extol the powers of human reason… do not see that, for advance to take place, the social process from which

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[103] *Ibid,* p.5.
[104] *Ibid*, p.28.
[105] Hayek, F. A. *The Constitution of Liberty* (London; Routledge, 2006)*,* p.27.
[106] *Ibid*, p.29.
[107] Lukes, Stephen "Social Justice: The Hayekian Challenge", in Lukes, Stephen *Liberals and Cannibals: The Implications of Diversity* (London; Verso, 2003), p.127.

the growth of reason emerges must remain free from its control"[108] while Gray writes that "(i)n neglecting the dependency of reason itself on spontaneous order of the mind, the constructivist… accords reason a prescriptive role it is wholly unfitted to perform in mind or society."[109] For both thinkers, then, the rationalist is mistaken in both their thoughts and their actions; they mistake the extent to which reason is dependent on spontaneous order and that their faith in reason pushes their actions beyond the limitations of what their reason should actually allow for.

This is not to say that the intentions of the rationalist planners are necessarily malign, as both Gray and Hayek acknowledge. Gray writes that "(c)alculational chaos would ensue, and a barbarization of social life result, from the attempt to socialize production, even if men possessed only altruistic and conformist motives."[110] Hayek points to the "supreme tragedy" in Germany that "it was largely people of good will, men who were admired and held up as models in the democratic countries, who prepared for, if they did not actually create, the forces which now stand for everything they detest."[111] For both men the rationalists planners create, among other things, what Gray calls the "barbarization of social life" while trying to create something far more positive. The problem with the rationalist way of thinking is that their ambitions outstrip what their limited mental faculties can actually allow to be effectively created by the use of conscious reason. For both the early Gray and Hayek, then, the road to serfdom is paved with the best intentions of the rationalists. In short, rationalism becomes a dangerous delusion that does not reflect the reality of limited human reason.

Before this section turns to Gray's own about face in relation to Hayekian thought, it is worth noting that Hayek's philosophy is open to criticism on a number of different grounds. One of the most problematic Hayekian notions is that of spontaneous order. At times it reads like a form of conservatism; the idea that society will evolve most effectively if left to the tacit and implicit wisdom

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[108] Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, p.34.
[109] Gray, *Hayek on Liberty*, p.30.
[110] *Ibid*, p.40.
[111] Hayek, F. A. *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp.58-59.

of humanity brings to mind the Oakeshottian reverence for tradition as a guide.[112] Furthermore, there

is little in Hayek's account to convince that spontaneous order necessarily creates the sort of positive

outcomes that Hayek would wish for – as Roland Kley shows when he argues that the growth of

negative institutions, such as street gangs and the mafia, is a perfectly legitimate (if unedifying)

example of spontaneous order in action.[113] In short, spontaneous disorder is just as possible as

spontaneous order, and the accidental nature of social evolution within spontaneous order mentioned

above would suggest that accidental negative outcomes are just as possible as accidental positive

ones.

Furthermore, spontaneous order is central to the project Hayek undertakes in *The*

Constitution of Liberty. To a large extent, the attempt to create "Freedom in the Welfare State" that

makes up Part III of that book depends on a at the very least partial return to the political settlement

created by spontaneous order prior to the rise of rationalist planning.[114] Thus, spontaneous order is

central to Hayek's project, and if it does not do the work that Hayek needs it to, then his account is

damaged. Furthermore, part of the initial appeal of Hayek to Gray was the refusal to create a total

system of thought. However, as Chandran Kukathas has convincingly argued, Hayek's liberalism "is

grounded in a comprehensive social doctrine"[115] and is ultimately doomed to failure owing to the

impossibility of Hayek's attempt to combine his Kantian and Humean instincts.[116] This then leads to

what is a crucial problem with Hayek's political project, at least as it is presented in *The Constitution*

of Liberty; in a moment of unintended irony, he is trying to create a plan to reverse the plans of the

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[112] Oakeshott compares and contrasts the rationalist way of thinking with his preferred traditionalist way of thinking in Oakeshott, Michael *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, (Indianapolis; Liberty Fund, 1991), pp.8-9.
[113] Kley. Roland *Hayek's Social and Political Thought* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1994), p.117.
[114] A full return is not always possible, such as in the notion of returning the means of exchange to "the spontaneous forces of the market place" owing to the impact of government intervention in this area. See Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p.282.
[115] Kukathas, Chandran *Hayek and Modern Liberalism* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1989), viii.
[116] *Ibid*, p.17.

planners. As Oakeshott suggests, Hayek ultimately "belongs to the same sort of politics"[117] as that of

the rationalist planners he wishes to oppose.

The critiques of both Kley and Kukathas are similar in their content to those that Gray presents

in his postscript to the third edition of *Hayek on Liberty* – which is perhaps not surprising since both

Kley[118] and Kukathas[119] acknowledge the influence of Gray on their thinking. Gray extends the critique

of spontaneous order by stating that "(s)tatism and tyranny are, in general, ideal-typical instances of

Hayekian spontaneous order";[120] in other words, spontaneous order can create states based precisely

on the sort of coercion that Hayek wishes to reject. Then there is the problem that Gray identifies with

the Hayekian commitment to the free market, given the free market was "(c)onstructed by deliberate

statecraft" and "withered away spontaneously."[121] In other words, the free market Hayek advocates

is a product of the sort of reasoned political action that Hayek wishes to shy away from, and that its

demise was the result of spontaneous order he wishes to rely on. Thus Gray's critique of the

spontaneous order hints at the notion that Hayek himself is a rationalist planner; he is seeking a way

of justifying a return to a form of government based on his preferred political preferences. As such,

according to the later Gray, Hayek is as much a rationalist as those he wishes to oppose, since he uses

his own reason to justify his preferred version of state intervention in the wider society.

Therefore, Hayek appears to be – despite his determination to rebuke those with similar

philosophical outlook – a rationalist, or at the very least a planner, hoping to use state intervention to

further the political interests of those intuitions that he finds most plausible. When Gray writes that

Hayek will be remembered as "a critic of socialism, not a philosopher of liberalism"[122] it rings true, as

Hayek provides a convincing account of how socialism fails yet does not, given the failure of the idea

of spontaneous order, provide a convincing alternative to what socialism offers. This critique of Hayek

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[117] Oakeshott, *Op. Cit.* p.26.
[118] Kley states that Gray's "guidance was invaluable". See the Acknowledgements in Kley, *Op. Cit.*
[119] Kukathas acknowledges a "special debt" to John Gray in Kukathas, *Op. Cit.* ix.
[120] Gray, John "Hayek on liberty, rights and justice" in Gray, John *Liberalisms: Essays in Political Philosophy* (London; Routledge, 1989), p.99.
[121] Gray, *Hayek on Liberty*, p.151.
[122] *Ibid*, p.146.

ties in with another reason why Gray moves away from the Hayekian form of neoliberalism, namely that it does not convince when compared to its practical results in reality, as Gray's journey from being part of the liberal tradition to being on its outskirts shows. This journey, and the possible reasons behind it, will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

Towards the Second Face of Liberalism

As might be expected given the above description of Gray's relationship with Hayekian liberalism, the early Gray was a liberal. This section of the chapter will consider what kind of liberal he initially was, and then trace the reasons why his relationship with liberalism changed – and the importance of the fact of, or perhaps the reality of, value pluralism on this shifting relationship. It will then end by considering Gray's final constructive attempt to engage with liberalism in his bold attempt to rebuild liberalism in the face of value pluralism in what he calls the second face of liberalism. This section, then, is an examination of his transition from neoliberalism towards that second face of liberalism.

Early in his career, Gray was a liberal, even going so far as to baldly state in his 1986 short work *Liberalism* that "I write as a liberal."[123] Yet to state, or for some to state, that they are a liberal gives little clue as to what they actually believe, since liberalism is a broad, eclectic school of thought that contains different forms that often conflict with one another. Therefore it is necessary to try to identify what sort of liberal Gray actually was. Given the discussion in the first section about Gray's initial approval of Hayekian thought, it is probably not a surprise for the reader to learn that the early Gray is a Hayekian liberal or neoliberal. However, it is not simply the early approval of Hayek's interpretation of liberalism that shows this; it is demonstrated elsewhere in his early work as well. In the 1986 work on liberalism, for example, Gray approvingly quotes the historian A. J. P. Taylor's observation that "(u)ntil August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding citizen could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman… (as the state) left the adult citizen alone".[124] The early Gray, therefore, seems interested in a political settlement whereby the state's intervention into the lives of its citizens is minimised as much as possible.

This can also be seen in other works. In his book on Mill, for example, Gray praises Mill's philosophy where it embraces personal autonomy and the limited scope of the state, such as when

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[123] Gray, John *Liberalism* (Milton Keynes; Open University Press, 1986), vii.
[124] *Ibid*, p.26.

he writes "Mill goes on to argue (that) people are best left to help themselves without state or governmental assistance, which typically has a stultifying and paralysing effect on initiative and energy."[125] Note here how the positive terms ("initiative" and "energy") are associated with the absence of "governmental assistance" whereas the impact of the state is "stultifying" and "paralysing" – two terms it would be difficult to interpret any other way that negatively. Gray's preference for a minimal state, therefore, shines through in passages such as the one quoted above.

Indeed, the early, neoliberal Gray offers perhaps his clearest positive engagement with neoliberalism in another brief book produced for the Institute of Economic Affairs entitled *Limited Government: A Positive Agenda*. It is not just the title of the work – with its clear and categorical linking of the idea of limited government with positivity – that demonstrates Gray's neoliberal preferences. There are also the more radical neoliberal statements and policies, an example of the former being his attack on the welfare state for having "no rationale, no animating principle and no genuine justification"[126] and the latter being demonstrated by his advocacy of the adoption of the "radical proposal that the government monopoly on money issuance be ended."[127] Conversely, Gray's desire for limited government is also demonstrated in his staunch opposition to the states led by communist governments. He stood opposed to the Soviet Union, for example, because of its economic incompetence[128] and its often lethal impact on its own citizens.[129] While one does not have to be a neoliberal to oppose Soviet style totalitarianism, Gray's concerns here are exactly in keeping with his neoliberal beliefs. It would be easy to see the early Gray agreeing with the Hayekian claim that the "task of a policy of freedom must… be to minimize coercion or its harmful effects".[130]

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[125] Gray, John *Mill on liberty; a defence* (London; Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1983), p.61.
[126] Gray, John *Limited Government: A Positive Agenda* (London; Institute of Economic Affairs, 1989), p.49
[127] *Ibid*, p.38.
[128] Such as the critique of the Soviet communism that Gray argues is fundamentally Marxist. See Gray, John "Totalitarianism, reform and civil society" in Gray, John *Post-liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (London; Routledge, 1993), pp.170-171.
[129] For example, the tendency of Soviet security forces to seek to liquidate whole social categories. See *Ibid*, p.165.
[130] Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, p.12.

Yet, like his opinions on Hayekian political thought, Gray's relationship with neoliberalism changes, and he moves to a position where he stops short of rejecting neoliberalism outright, but also becomes far more critical of it. This increased disenchantment with neoliberalism can be starkly seen when he writes that "the global *laissez-faire*" which neoliberalism seeks "will be swallowed into the memory hole of history."[131] In the same work he also writes that "(g)lobal democratic capitalism is as unrealizable as worldwide communism"[132] and that the "argument of *False Dawn* is that no type of capitalism is universally desirable."[133] Gray also comes to acknowledge that, in many areas of the world, the problem is not a draconian or overtly coercive state, but rather the lack of a state that can offer basic security for its citizens – as seen in such areas as "much of Africa, Afghanistan, in the Balkans and a good deal of Russia" where the problem is that "(n)o power is strong enough to enforce peace" and that the state monopoly on violence has been lost.[134] Thus Gray acknowledges that in such states neoliberal concerns with the removal of state coercion do not match with the reality that the people of those nations are facing.

However, Gray also argues elsewhere that neoliberal solutions can be of use in solving practical political questions. An example of this comes in his analysis of the problem of the commons, where he writes that "the extension of private property to cover resources, such as shoals of fish, hitherto in the commons, is a potent corrective to the over-exploitation of the natural environment."[135] The questions arises of how, then, to align Gray's advocacy of neoliberal solutions in 1993 with his far more categorical rejection of neoliberalism in 1995? A simple answer might be that he just changed his mind. However, a more detailed look at the wording of those apparently categorical rejections of neoliberalism and neoliberal concerns reveals something interesting; it is not *laissez-faire* capitalism that is being rejected, but rather "global" *laissez-faire* capitalism. Likewise, it is

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[131] Gray, John *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London; Granta Books, 2002), p.235.
[132] *Ibid*, p.21.
[133] *Ibid*, p.235.
[134] Gray, John *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (London; Granta Books, 2004), p.84.
[135] Gray, John "An Agenda for Green Conservatism" in Gray, John *Beyond the New Right* (London; Routledge, 1993), p.130.

"global" democratic capitalism that is as unlikely to happen as global communism, and the fact that no type of capitalism is going to be universally desirable does not necessarily entail a rejection of all types of capitalism in all situations. What Gray is rejecting is not neoliberalism in its entirety, but rather the notion that it is or ever can be a universal solution to the problem of politics.

This rejection of neoliberalism as universally applicable ties in closely with Gray's commitment to and understanding of what he terms as Isaiah Berlin's "single idea of enormous subversive force" – that of value pluralism, which he defines as the fact "that ultimate human values are objective but irreducibly diverse, that they are conflicting and often impossible to combine, and that sometimes when they come into conflict with one another they are incommensurable; that is, they are not comparable by any rational measure".[136] Given this conflicting and incommensurable diversity in human values, it becomes clear why, for Gray, no one political philosophy – be it Marxism, conservatism, socialism or even neoliberalism – can ever be universally applicable since there is no reason to think that they will ever be universally acceptable. This subversive idea of value pluralism is sometimes called the *fact* of value pluralism; however, it might be more fruitfully termed to be the *reality* of value pluralism, since it is reflecting the reality that human nature "is something invented, and perpetually reinvented, through choice, and it is inherently plural and diverse, not common or universal."[137] Thus terming the insight that Gray ascribes to Berlin the reality, rather than the fact, of value pluralism allows for there still to be a single, objective truth in existence; however, what it brings into question is whether, given the inherent and apparently unavoidable diversity in the values held by the billions of individuals that make up humanity, that single objective truth – even if uncovered – could ever be universally accepted.

So, having introduced this idea that subverts so much, including Gray's own early commitment to neoliberalism, the question arises of what meaningful politics can exist in the face of the reality of value pluralism. At times, Gray seems to be adopting a more conservative approach, such as when he

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[136] Gray, John *Isaiah Berlin*, (London; HarperCollins, 1995), p.1.
[137] *Ibid*, p.23.

argues that "a liberal civil society is the form of society in which we have made our contribution to the human good; and, in defending it, we defend the best in our cultural inheritance, and the best that the species can hope for."[138] The conservative stance, then, arises from the idea that it is the defence of the liberal inheritance, not the advance of liberal values, which should be undertaken. Such a project is, almost by definition, conservative as he wishes to conserve that liberal inheritance.

However, this does not mean Gray adopts the politics and policies of conservative parties. For example, he writes that the British Conservative party is denied a return to "an older conservatism – 'One Nation' Toryism, say" owing to the "social effects of market forces whose often destructive radicalism conservative policies have only enhanced."[139] There is a sense in which, then, conservative parties have defeated themselves; they cannot return to tradition since the neoliberal policies they have pursued have destroyed those traditions. If there is to be a meaningful conservative project then it is one that seeks to protect liberal society from "the ossification of liberal thought from the hegemony of discredited liberal ideas in all mainstream parties (which) throws open a window of political opportunity for avowed enemies of liberal civilization."[140] This, then, becomes Gray's conservatism.

Again, though, this notion of protecting liberal society arises, which in turn raises the question of what, precisely, is it in liberal society that is worth preserving? What form of liberalism at least merits some political action in the face of the reality of value pluralism? Here, a clue can be found in Gray's thoughts on the work of Michael Oakeshott. While Gray sees flaws in Oakeshott's political thought – for example by pointing to Berlin's rejection of Oakeshott's notion "that dilemmas insoluble by reason can resolved by a return to tradition, so long as it has not been 'scribbled' on by rationalist philosophers"[141] – he clearly sees some merit in Oakeshott's work, even going so far as to argue that one of the twentieth century's greatest conservative thinkers is actually best understood as a

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[138] Gray, John "What is dead and what is living in liberalism" in Gray, *Post-liberalism*, p.11.
[139] Gray, John and Willetts, David *Is Conservatism Dead?* (London; Profile Books, 1997), p.4.
[140] *Ibid*, p.12.
[141] Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.7.

liberal.[142] The aforementioned clue arises when Gray writes that "the task of the state is to repair what Oakeshott calls civil association – that structure of law in which, having no purpose in common, practitioners of different traditions may coexist in peace."[143] The key point here is that there is a political response to the reality of value pluralism; those differing traditions, that have no common purpose, can peacefully co-exist. For it is this notion of peaceful co-existence that underpins Gray's attempt to simultaneously devise a political philosophy that is sensitive to value pluralism at the same time as redefining – or perhaps re-founding – liberalism. This is the second face of liberalism, to which this chapter now turns.

In order to understand the second face of liberalism, it is necessary to identify precisely what Gray means by the two different faces of liberalism. The first type of liberalism is described by Gray as a "prescription for a universal regime", whereas the second type of liberalism (and Gray's preferred type) is described as "a project of peaceful co-existence that can be pursued by many regimes.[144] Gray argues that the first type, or face, of liberalism – which he notes is advocated by the likes of Rawls, Nozick, Popper and Hayek – is a "dead letter"[145] since "if liberalism has a future it is in giving up the search for a rational consensus on the best way of life."[146] This immediately seems to be in keeping with the reality of value pluralism; that reality shows that a consensus on the best way of life is highly unlikely if not impossible, so political philosophy needs to accept and reflect that.

Yet the sweeping rejection of large swathes of contemporary accounts of liberalism does not flesh out what Gray's preferred form of liberalism actually looks like. It is necessary, then, to consider what the second face of liberalism actually is. Gray argues that his second face of liberalism is actually returning liberalism to its roots which he claims to be "a search for *modus vivendi*" and thus the task "we inherit is refashioning liberal toleration so that it can guide the pursuit of *modus vivendi* in a more

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[142] Gray, John "Oakeshott as liberal", in Gray, *Post-liberalism*, pp.40-46.
[143] Gray, "The Politics of Diversity", in *Ibid*, p.265.
[144] Gray, John *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge; Polity Press, 2000), p.2.
[145] *Ibid*, p.137.
[146] *Ibid*, p.1.

plural world."[147] Therefore the second face of liberalism is the pursuit of *modus vivendi* as a form of toleration that allows peaceful co-existence between radically different views on the good life.

It is instructive at this point to compare Gray's second face of liberalism with Mill's liberalism. On the surface level, there appears to be considerable crossover between the two forms of liberalism; after all, Mill's focus on the dangers of the tyranny of the majority[148] and his identification of the need for experiments in living[149] all hint at a crucial respect for the concept of toleration. However, Mill is seeking experiments in living to allow for progress towards the best way of living, whereas Gray is arguing for tolerance precisely because the reality of value pluralism suggests that agreement on the best way of living is an impossibility. Following Hobbes, Gray's understanding of tolerance is based not on "consensus" but rather "coexistence"[150] which Gray distinguishes from the alternative, typical "liberal idea of toleration" –such as Mill's – which sees toleration as "a means towards a universal rational consensus."[151] Thus Gray argues for a genuine form of tolerance, rather than for one that is both a stage and tool in the progression towards a universal consensus.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish the second face of liberalism – and the pluralism that is so crucial to understanding the need for it – from relativism. Steven Lukes, for example, argues that pluralism and relativism are distinct from one another as pluralism allows for effective judgement between different versions of the good whereas relativism does not – to the extent where the latter provides no way of criticising those societies which mistreat their members.[152] Lukes also states in his analysis of Berlin's work that "tragic choices are ineliminable."[153] Pluralism allows for moral choices and judgements to be made; furthermore, it recognises that while individuals will be free to make

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[147] *Ibid*, p.1.
[148] An example of this can be found when Mill discusses the "despotism of culture". See Mill, J. S. *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1991), p.78.
[149] For example, Mill discusses the importance of freedom for the flourishing of genius and the need for eccentricity in *Ibid*, p.72 and 74-75 respectively.
[150] Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.3.
[151] *Ibid*, p.2.
[152] Lukes, Stephen "The Singular and the Plural" in Lukes, *Op. Cit*. p.93.
[153] Lukes, Stephen "An Unfashionable Fox" in *Ibid*, p.114.

different choices of how to live their lives, not all of these choices will be of equal merit or equal worth. In short, people will make mistakes.

This understanding of pluralism is echoed in Gray's account of the second face of liberalism. Gray points to the ability within *modus vivendi* to make judgements about the worth of the choices people make about the best way to live their lives. He writes that "(w)e can judge the life of a crack addict to be poorer than that of both a carer in a leprosarium and a skilful *bon viveur*" while simultaneously being unable "to rank the carer's (life) against the hedonist's".[154] Thus lives, and the choices people make to create those lives, can be judged even if they cannot always be compared. Furthermore, Gray is under no illusions about the fact that "(w)e can be in error about the ways in which we want to live our lives" and that such knowledge "overthrows our beliefs about the lives we want to lead" and this gives "reason to alter our wants."[155] Within the second face of liberalism, then, people are free to live their lives as they choose, and the possibility exists for people to learn that their chosen path is not the best one for them and potentially change course. Furthermore, to iterate the point that unlike in Mill's philosophy, this is about toleration between differing ways to live life, not part of an experimental progression to best form of human life.

Gray is also aware of just how fundamentally difficult it might be to find a settlement between radically different opinions on how to live life. People will aspire to different freedoms within society, and there is no guarantee that these freedoms will fit neatly together. Indeed, given Gray's description of value pluralism, some of the different forms of the good life and consequent freedoms people seek will be incompatible to the extent where they are in direct conflict with each other. Gray uses the pertinent example of the conflict between the freedom to live without racial abuse and the right to free expression, including the freedom to express racist opinions.[156] Very clearly, the freedom to live without racial abuse requires the restriction of the freedom of expression, while allowing even abhorrent opinions to be freely expressed clearly damages the ability of people to live without racial

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[154] Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.43.
[155] *Ibid*, p.60.
[156] *Ibid*, p.78.

abuse. The two freedoms – which may very well form part of how different people want to live their lives – quite simply cannot exist at the same time. If the end sought is peaceful co-existence then it is easy to sketch different scenarios where one of these freedoms might be privileged over the other. For example, at times of racial unrest, it may be that the right to free expression is restricted to avoid exacerbating that unrest. At times of relative racial harmony, though, it might be decided that it is appropriate to let racists air their views (even if those opinions are not, in themselves, appropriate to most) as the possibility of offending an individual through racial abuse is worth the risk since it may help a wider debate about race relations in that society and possibly even to definitively refute and therefore perhaps change those racists views. Rather like Mill's famous distinction between making inflammatory statements against corn dealers in private being a very different thing to making those comments to a baying mob in front of a corn dealer's house, the political settlement that makes up *modus vivendi* would need to be based on circumstance and an assessment of, if freedoms do have to be restricted, what would be in the best interests of peaceful co-existence. Thus the terms of the political settlement that make up *modus vivendi* will be fluid, as they take into account the changing circumstances and the different stresses and strains on the goal of peaceful co-existence.

This essential fluidity is not without its problems, particularly given the difficulty of assessing what is and is not an appropriate political settlement within Gray's account of *modus vivendi*, as the next section will discuss. However, here it is worth noting that as well as factoring in the reality of value pluralism into his political philosophy, Gray is also, by implication, distancing himself from the approach taken by rationalist planners. He is not offering a blueprint, or a design, for a perfect society. He is not using reason to plan for and attempt to fabricate a better tomorrow. Rather, he is looking at reality, assessing the problems it creates within the political arena, and offering both an account of what is in the reality of value pluralism, and therefore what could be the best political assessment given that examination of reality. In this sense, Gray's account takes on the form of a realist liberalism.

Finally, no examination of the second face of liberalism would be complete without identifying an interesting point of departure between Gray and the man whose work on pluralism had such an

impact on that second face of liberalism – Isaiah Berlin.[157] Berlin remains as a liberal, whereas Gray –

even in *Two Faces of Liberalism* – has arguably moved away from or perhaps even beyond liberalism.

Gray writes that "(t)he argument from pluralism to liberalism fails… because the range of worthwhile

forms of life is… wider than any that can be contained within a liberal society."[158] Therefore, not only

does a society based on pluralism have to be liberal but, more radically, liberal society alone cannot

cope with the implications and therefore the second face of liberalism. This then leads to the question

of whether that second face of liberalism – given it could contain societies and settlements that are

not liberal – remains a form of liberalism at all. It is this problem and other equally if not more

fundamental problems with the attempt to create this second face of liberalism that the next section

of this chapter will examine in detail.

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[157] Gray points out this considerable debt in Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, viii.
[158] Gray, *Ibid*, p.154.

Modus Vivendi and its discontents

As noted in the previous section, Gray proposes a form – or second face – of liberalism that is sensitive to the reality of value pluralism in the form of *modus vivendi*. While *the modus vivendi* does appear, on the surface level at least, to address the reality of value pluralism, there are a number of different problems that arise in relation to Gray's own understanding of *modus vivendi*. These problems can be broken down into four key areas; firstly, the relationship of *modus vivendi* with liberalism; secondly, the extent to which Gray escapes the charge of universalism that he liberally applies to others; and then the third and fourth problems are linked based on the relative lack of philosophical and practical content to his presentation of *modus vivendi*, which raises questions around the extent to which his second face of liberalism can inspire practical action and, further to that, whether it provides enough of a practical guide to assess political settlements. This section of the chapter will take each of these problems in turn, and assess just how important they are to this second face of liberalism.

The first problem is what could be described as the definitional problem; namely, is the second face of liberalism actually a form of liberalism at all? On first reading, Gray's understanding of *modus vivendi* appears to be a very open and tolerant one. After all, a Rawlsian liberal could co-exist peacefully next to a Hayekian liberal as well as one inspired by Nozick despite their very different takes on the content and the aims of liberalism. However, a more detailed examination of what Gray proposes suggests that all three different types of liberal would have to make substantial sacrifices – in particular, the surrender of any claim to universalism made by their forms of liberalism – which might prove to be too much of a sacrifice. There is no reason to expect those holding alternative liberal beliefs to Gray to be willing to make that sacrifice.

Indeed, other liberal thinkers have been scathing in their rejection of Gray's second face. Paul Kelly, for example, has not only rejected Gray's alternative liberal conception, but goes so far as to call it anti-liberalism. Kelly argues that "(g)enuine moral disagreement can only occur in a shared set of moral understandings"[159] yet what Gray actually offers is "a conception of values as fixed entities that

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[159] Kelly, Paul "The Social Theory of Anti-Liberalism" in Horton and Newey, *Op. Cit.* p.34.

are not subject to interpretation and revision in moral arguments" meaning that "(i)n this way values are not like beliefs that are revisable in argument."[160] Kelly even goes so far as to say that the social theory "that underpins (Gray's) view… is no more credible than any other anti-liberal argument currently on the agenda and as such liberals can safely ignore it."[161] The crucial point here is not so much the overall efficacy of Kelly's argument, but rather the language that he uses. Gray not only ceases to a liberal in Kelly's account, but he is actually against liberalism. Furthermore, Gray's arguments can not only be disputed, according to Kelly, but they fail so badly that they can be ignored by other liberals. At the very least, Gray's second face of liberalism is going to have to work extremely hard to persuade liberals of other stripes to accept his fundamental revision of liberalism.

A further aspect to this definitional problem arises in Gray's treatment of Hobbes. Gray adopts the position that Hobbes is fundamentally a liberal. He writes that those reading his work have "most to learn" from Hobbes rather than from other, more archetypal liberals such as Rawls, Hayek and Mill.[162] Gray even goes so far as to say that "Hobbes is one of the authors of liberalism".[163] This view would be hotly contested by another liberal thinker, Judith N. Shklar. When assessing Hobbes, Shklar writes that "Hobbes is not the father of liberalism" as his theory "gives public authorities the right to impose beliefs and even a vocabulary upon the citizenry" and thus is "not even remotely liberal."[164] For one thinker, then, Hobbes is a founder of liberalism; for the other, he is not a friend of liberalism at all. It is beyond the scope of the current project to assess which is the most convincing account of Hobbesian philosophy; rather, the importance of these radically different readings of Hobbes comes from the fact that the sort of thinker that Gray sees as fundamental to liberalism can be so categorically dismissed by a fellow liberal thinker.

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[160] *Ibid*, pp.34-35.
[161] *Ibid*, p.41.
[162] Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.132.
[163] *Ibid*, p.26.
[164] Shklar, Judith N. "The Liberalism of Fear" in Shklar, Judith N. *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.6.

So how important is this definitional problem to Gray's pursuit of *modus vivendi*? Can the second face of liberalism actually be called a form of liberalism at all? Liberalism is a broad and eclectic form of political philosophy, so it is more than possible to argue that there is a place of the second face of liberalism within that school of thought even if some of its members would not agree. What is truly important to note here is that this definitional problem occurs only because of Gray's apparent determination to make it a form of liberalism rather than an alternative to liberalism. The definitional problem does not sink Gray's project since that project does not have to be a form of liberalism to still hold relevance in the pursuit of a political philosophy removed from universalism and rationalism.

This leads to the second problem – to what extent does *modus vivendi* actually avoid the problem of universalism? He appears to be attempting to produce a political settlement that can be applied at all time while simultaneously denying that such a settlement exists. On a macro level, Gray argues that reality does not reflect the idea of convergence on a single universal value; as he argues "(i)t is a strange notion that humanity is destined for a single way of living, when history is so rich in conflict."[165] This then raises the question of why he believes that humanity is destined to agree that the relatively slight ambition of creating *modus vivendi* will be applicable or agreed upon by all humanity. Thus the second face of liberalism takes on the appearance of adopting the very same universalism that Gray wishes to reject. On this reading Gray's idea falls foul of the very critique he levels at the other forms of liberalism he seeks to criticise, as Brian Barry argues when he writes "(f)or, in the face of these disagreements, what we need is a fair way of adjudicating between the conflicting demands that they give rise to. This is what liberalism offers. But saying that is to make a universalistic claim."[166]

A further problem arises when the reason for Gray's rejection of convergence on a single value is considered – as the quote above shows, the example of history demonstrates that this convergence is highly unlikely to happen. So why is convergence on *modus vivendi* any more likely to happen than

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[165] Gray, John *Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern* (London; Faber and Faber, 2003), p.114.
[166] As quoted in Lukes, "Liberalism for the Liberals, Cannibalism for the Cannibals" in Lukes, *Op. Cit.* p.38.

the end point of those philosophies that Gray wishes to reject? If the test of history is applied, then convergence on *modus vivendi* seems to be very unlikely. The example of Israel and Palestine, for example, shows two nations coexisting but certainly not in peace with each other, and it is difficult to see the long-term aims of either side as being any other than the eradication of their rival rather than peaceful co-existence. Of course, it is impossible to accurately predict the future, and it is possible that further decades of conflict between Israel and Palestine may lead to a desire for some sort of *modus vivendi*. However, to paraphrase Gray, it is slightly odd to think that such an outcome is likely between those two peoples when the history of the area is so rich in conflict.

Given the idea of convergence in the notion of *modus vivendi* is not backed by the test of history that Gray himself uses, perhaps the strongest claim that can be made for the second face of liberalism is that it is more likely to work in practice than the more definitive and detailed outcomes of other political philosophies. To quote John Horton, the realisation that there "are always circumstances that can undermine a *modus vivendi*" is "*c'est la vie*" since "(n)o political accommodation is immune to the vicissitudes of human circumstance (even Rawls's), and none can expect to last indefinitely."[167] Reality indicates that *modus vivendi* is not universally applicable, but just more likely to be achieved than other, more ambitious political projects. In this sense, then the modesty of *modus vivendi* saves it from failing the test set by the reality of pluralism in Gray's work; reality shows it cannot be universally applicable, and therefore a realist approach to it will be to deny that universality, and instead point to the increased likelihood of it being an appropriate political settlement than those advocated by other political philosophies.

Yet it is this very modesty that creates the linked third and fourth problems with the second face of liberalism. Gray himself acknowledges this modesty and even sees it as a positive, writing that "*modus vivendi* is a mark of humility and realism, not of ignobility."[168] *Modus vivendi* appears to be the opposite of prescriptive political philosophy seeking neither to build a utopia nor to reach an

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[167] Horton, John "John Gray and the Political Theory of *Modus Vivendi*" in Horton and Newey, *Op. Cit*. p.50.
[168] Gray, "What is alive and what is dead in liberalism?", p.315.

absolute answer to the question of politics. Yet the implications of this modesty create problems within Gray's account. Those problems manifest themselves in two ways. The lack of inspirational philosophical content creates the issue of how the second face of liberalism will inspire others. Furthermore, the limited content of *modus vivendi* means Gray offers little that can be used to assess existing political settlements as to whether they are acceptable forms of *modus vivendi*.

To illustrate what could be called the inspiration deficit, a comparison of the second face of liberalism with Marxism is useful. On the one hand, *modus vivendi* is predicated on the idea that reality demonstrates that disagreement is perpetual, and thus the very best that humanity can hope for is to acknowledge this fact and find a way to live with it. Marxism, on the other hand, offers a comprehensive analysis of the woes of today while simultaneously explaining how a particular reading of history can offer a glimpse of a better tomorrow. Furthermore, Marxism often offers its more optimistic philosophy couched in passionate and inspirational language. The point here is not to assess which of these philosophies is more correct in its analysis and prognostications, but rather to ask which of the two philosophies is more likely to inspire political action. It is easy to see how those of a more idealistic temperament might prefer the ambitions of Marxist thought rather than the modesty of *modus vivendi*. As John Horton starkly puts it, "*(m)odus vivendi* is not an inspiring idea".[169] As such, it is a philosophy that might very well struggle to inspire people to actual political action, especially with the more inspirational alternatives to it.

Gray's exposition of his interpretation of *modus vivendi* is not just lacking in inspirational content, it is also lacking in practical content. If, as Horton suggests, the "notion of *modus vivendi* is consistent with many different moralities, but it is not infinitely expansive"[170] then the question arises as to where to draw the line between what is acceptable within *modus vivendi* and what is not. Unfortunately, there is little guidance from Gray as to where to draw that line. Now, it is true that it is, almost by definition, difficult to offer too much detail as to exactly what a *modus vivendi* will look

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[169] Horton, *Op. Cit.* p.50.
[170] *Ibid*, p.20.

like, as it is dependent both on era and circumstance. Thus, a *modus vivendi* in a small community bound by strong belief in one religion in the sixteenth century will be very different to a *modus vivendi* in a twenty-first century multi-cultural, multi-faith society. Yet if the second face of liberalism is to work in practice then it must be able to provide a base line as to what is acceptable as a political settlement and what is not. A baseline of acceptability is crucial.

It could be argued that the baseline for Gray's understanding of *modus vivendi* could be drawn using what Gray bases his second face of liberalism on; toleration. Yet some of the examples that Gray uses undermine this idea. In particular, he uses Singapore as an example of a state where freedoms are restricted but *modus vivendi* remains. He notes that "there is full freedom of religious practice and belief, but proselytism is forbidden."[171] By definition, this description of freedom and its restriction in Singapore shows that only religions that do not have an evangelical side to them that requires a certain level of proselytism are tolerated. Gray argues that the restriction of the freedom to proselytize is balanced by the freedom from religious conflict. Yet this would imply that freedom from religious conflict is more important as a value than toleration. There is no clear baseline of what is and is not acceptable in terms of *modus vivendi* in this example other than the faint notion that the removal of conflict is crucial.

Furthermore, other writes have shown that Singapore has draconian sentences for many crimes and the apparent desire of the regime to foster conformity.[172] It is a *modus vivendi* that substantially restricts freedom – and consequently it seems highly unlikely that most conventional liberals would agree that it constitutes an acceptable political settlement. If a regime such as Singapore is an acceptable form of *modus vivendi*, then what regime would not be? An argument could be constructed that apartheid in South Africa brought some form of peaceful co-existence to that nation, even if the terms of that co-existence were ultimately self-defeating. Yet prior to the rising

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[171] Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.122.
[172] For a discussion of both issues, William Gibson's seminal "Disneyland with the Death Penalty" is an enlightening and concerning read, not least because of the brief coda that details the draconian response of the Singaporean regime to the publication of Gibson's critical article. See Gibson, William "Disneyland with the Death Penalty" in Gibson, William *Distrust That Particular Flavour* (London; Penguin Books, 2012), pp.69-89.

ethnic violence of the 1980s, there was a form of co-existence between the different ethnicities in South Africa. It was, of course, co-existence based on rigid segregation and gross inequity economically and before the law. Yet it was co-existence. Now, it would be a big and absolutely unsubstantiated leap to claim that Gray would defend apartheid era South Africa as an acceptable *modus vivendi*, and that is certainly not the claim being made here. The problem lies in the failure of Gray's account of *modus vivendi* to offer a practical way of critically being able to state that apartheid, as a political settlement, was clearly unacceptable.

It is here that a comparison between Gray's second face of liberalism and the liberalism of fear of Judith N. Shklar becomes useful, since the latter can offer the former's *modus vivendi* some important philosophical content. There are immediate points of synergy between the two thinkers. They are both seeking to found a form of liberalism based on toleration, with Shklar arguing that "(we) would do far less harm if we learned to accept each other as sentient beings", thus making her project based on, as she acknowledges, mutual "physical well-being and toleration."[173] Thus for both thinkers part of what they wish to achieve through their political philosophy is a way of allowing differing forms of the good to co-exist peacefully.

Furthermore, neither of them is naïve enough to dismiss the need for some sort of state, however minimal. Shklar argues that "the actualities of countries in which law and order have broken down are not encouraging" before posing the rhetorical question "(d)oes anyone want to live in Beirut?"[174] Likewise, Gray stresses that the idea of *modus vivendi* is "far from being the idea that anything goes"[175] and also categorically states that "(i)n countries where modern government has crumbled away, anarchy rather than tyranny has become the chief threat to human rights" and that "(i)n countries the worst crimes against humanity are no longer the work of states."[176] Thus, both

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[173] Shklar, *Op. Cit.* p.14.
[174] *Ibid,* p.3.
[175] Gray¸ *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.30.
[176] *Ibid*, p.131.

thinkers do not adopt a crude form of anarchism but instead are analysing different ways to form a truly tolerant state.

Yet it is in one of the differences between the two thinkers that a crucial part of what Shklar can offer the second face of liberalism is revealed. It has already been noted that both thinkers have different interpretations of Hobbes, and this ties in with Shklar's rejection of absolute pluralism. Shklar writes that the liberalism of fear "does not rest on a theory of moral pluralism" since while it does not "offer a *summmum bonum*"[177] it does "begin with a *summmum malum"* – in this case the "evil is cruelty and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself."[178] Gray, however, following his reading of Hobbes, would dispute this idea of their being a universal *summmum malum*. He argues that violent death, for example, is clearly "an evil that stands in the way of any kind of worthwhile life" but that "it cannot be the only such evil, or the one that is bound to override all others"[179] thus denying that there is a *summmum malum*.

Why does this difference matter? It is because by offering this *summmum malum* Shklar creates a way of assessing whether or not a particular regime is tolerant and therefore successful. By using cruelty – and its related effects, such as fear – as the baseline for what is a minimally acceptable state, Shklar's readers are offered a way of accepting or rejecting political settlements as appropriate or not. For example, it would be hard, given the use of corporal punishment and draconian use of the death sentence, to argue that Singapore represents an acceptable political settlement because its government seems to open to using methods which could be described as cruel. Likewise, apartheid era South Africa – with its wide-spread use of torture and other means of creating fear in the population – is also clearly unacceptable, given its use of cruelty as a political weapon. Thus Shklar is able critique particular regimes using cruelty as the baseline as to what is and is not acceptable, whereas Gray's non-specific *modus vivendi* is left without this important tool.

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[177] Shklar, *Op. Cit.* p.10.
[178] *Ibid*, p.11.
[179] Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p.113.

As well as offering a crucial litmus test of political acceptability, the liberalism of fear can enhance Gray's second face of liberalism in another way. The lack of inspirational content of the pursuit of *modus vivendi* was noted above, with the linked question of how this can provoke political action. The *summum malum* in Shklar's account also offers a way of inspiring actual political interventions as it is about preventing harm and preventing cruelty. As Shklar herself passionately put it, "(w)e say 'never again,' but right now somewhere someone is being tortured, and acute fear has once again become the most common form of social control."[180] Indeed, Shklar is at pains to remind liberals and others that "(t)oo great a part of past and present political experience is neglected when we ignore the annual reports of Amnesty International and of contemporary warfare".[181] There is, then, an urgency to Shklar's work that is perhaps lacking in Gray's justification of the pursuit of *modus vivendi*. Furthermore, as Bernard Williams has pointed out, the liberalism of fear has a wider audience than just that of liberal academics and political philosophers – Williams writes that the "liberalism of fear can be taken as having a different and much wider set of listeners; roughly, everybody."[182] The justificatory basis for the liberalism of fear, therefore, shows offers the immediacy and inspiration missing from the second face of liberalism.

Therefore, this section of the chapter has shown how Gray's second face of liberalism faces four main problems. In two of them – the definitional and the universalist problems – are not fatal to Gray's attempt to return liberalism to what he supposes are its routes. A far greater threat lies in the dual problems of the inspiration deficit and the lack of a usable acceptability test. It is here that the second face of liberalism falls short, and that the need for more substantive content to the pursuit of *modus vivendi* is required. Shklar's work here greatly aids the second face of liberalism – although, as the conclusion will suggest, there needs to be a more positive justification for the pursuit of *modus*

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[180] Shklar, *Op. Cit.* p.9.
[181] *Ibid*, p.17.
[182] Williams, Bernard "The Liberalism of Fear" in Williams, Bernard *In the Beginning was the Deed* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2005), p.59.

vivendi than Shklar's project of prevention can ever hope to be, no matter how great the evil it desires

to prevent.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Gray's changing relationship with liberalism and, in particular, has looked at his potentially radical – and controversial – attempt to return liberalism to what he believes to be its foundation; toleration. Underpinning these changes, though, is an on-going critique of rationalism and of universality that the fact of value pluralism under-mines. This can be seen in his changing relationship with Hayek; the initial appeal of Hayekian thought lay, for Gray, in his critique of rationalism. However, it was Hayek's failure to ultimately escape from the rationalism that both men seek to reject that ultimately turns Gray away from Hayek's work.

This rejection of rationalism also affects Gray's wider relationship with liberal political philosophy. The second section of this chapter demonstrated why Gray went from neoliberal to a far more critical stance on liberalism as a whole and the importance, in this transition, of the fact of value pluralism. Neoliberalism, for example, fails not because it is not of any use in any situation, but cannot function as an all-purpose solution to every political question. Reality suggests that convergence on a single point of view is not going to happen; Gray therefore attempts to reconfigure liberalism in the face of this reality. This is his second face of liberalism; a liberalism that calls for a means of peaceful co-existence between radically different philosophies. In short, he redefines liberalism as pursuit of *modus vivendi*.

However, as the third section of this chapter demonstrates, there are a number of problems with Gray's use of *modus vivendi.* It has been argued that it is not liberalism at all, and it also seems likely that Gray comes very close to falling into the trap of universalism that he identifies in others. More fundamentally, though, the modesty of *modus vivendi* creates two problems – firstly, that it is not an inspirational model and secondly that Gray's elaboration of *modus vivendi* is far too vague. He does not provide a test or a standard against which political settlements can be assessed. As it stands, Gray's understanding of *modus vivendi* comes across as little more than Oakeshott's description of a conservative politics where "in the main, we get along with one another, sometimes by giving way,

sometimes by standing fast, sometimes in a compromise."[183] It is here that the work of Shklar can aid Gray's project; her desire to stop cruelty and the fact that cruelty can be used as the litmus test in her philosophy as to what is an acceptable political settlement fill some of the crucial blanks left open by Gray.

This then leads to the need for a more substantive and positive content to justify *modus vivendi* as an acceptable form of a non-rationalist political settlement. This can be found in the Arendtian concept of action, which shares important similarities with Gray's understanding of *modus vivendi*. However, before the potential idea of some form of synthesis between Gray's second face of liberalism and Arendtian action can be considered, it is necessary to acknowledge that the advocacy of *modus vivendi* is not representative of the most recent turn in Gray's political thought. It will be the work of the next chapter to show how Gray's most recent turn to misanthropic anti-humanism is actually indicative of an ingrained philosophical pessimism that is present throughout his work, and that this pessimism is based on his rejection of rationalism and does not necessarily have to follow the overtly negative trajectory that it does in the case of Gray's political thought.

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[183] Oakeshott, "On being conservative", in Oakeshott, *Op. Cit.* p.425.

7: Pessimistic Political Thinking

Introduction

Throughout his intellectual career, John Gray has adopted a number of different political and philosophical positions. Indeed, his career could be characterised as one of continual change and evolution within his thought. Starting out as a Hayekian inspired neoliberal, he later explored ideas such as "communitarian liberalism"[184] and "green conservatism"[185] before apparently turning against anthropocentric political philosophy as a whole. Such on-going change could be characterised in a number of different ways. Firstly, Gray could be considered to be something of an intellectual gadfly; seizing on ideas as he comes across them, only to turn his back on them as his philosophical analyses expose the limitations of those ideas. An alternative to this view is that there must be some sort of intellectual undercurrent throughout the different – and often disparate – political and philosophical positions that Gray adopts. This chapter will argue for the latter, and will suggest Gray's changing and evolving thought is best understood as a form of philosophical pessimism.

In order to make the case that Gray is a pessimist, this chapter will be divided into three sections and a conclusion. The first section will explore and develop the notion of philosophical pessimism using the excellent and penetrating work on the subject by Joshua Foa Dienstag. Pessimism in this context will be defined in a particular way, and the different types of pessimism identified by Dienstag will be considered in order to show the full extent of the philosophical school that this chapter will argue Gray resides in. In order to fully demonstrate the understanding of the pessimistic school of thought, it will contrast it with a similar yet fundamentally distinct alternative political philosophy – that of the anti-utopian thought found in a thinker such as Max Weber. Furthermore, it will discuss the more common understanding of 'pessimism' that is not necessarily being used in this chapter by critically examining Gamble's assertion that Hayek was also, in some respects, a pessimistic

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[184] See Gray, John *After Social Democracy: Politics, Capitalism and the Common Life* (London; Demos, 1996).
[185] See Gray, John "An Agenda for Green Conservatism" in Gray, John *Beyond the New Right* (London; Routledge, 1993), pp.124-177.

thinker.[186] Finally, this section will also look at Glen Newey's essay on the idea of Gray as a pessimist, and will demonstrate how Newey's analysis of Gray's body of work fits in with Dienstag's definition of pessimism.

The second section will begin the process of examining Gray's thought by considering two of the most pessimistic philosophical strands in his intellectual career: his on-going desire to expose what he perceives to be the myth of progress and his steadfast critique of the Enlightenment. The latter will be shown to be focussed on two core issues – the damage that Enlightenment philosophy has wrought when put into practice, as well as the failure of Enlightenment thinking to escape the Christian tradition it purportedly wishes to replace. The latter point ties in with another pessimistic aspect of Gray's thought that can be seen throughout his career; namely, his concerns about the limits of human reason. Yet at the same time it will look to refute the idea that Gray is conservative in his political philosophy, as well as explaining why these insights into Gray's thought show pessimistic thinking rather than simply an anti-utopian bias.

In order to explore the implications of Gray's pessimism, the third section will look at perhaps the most radical and nakedly pessimistic phase in Gray's career – it will examine his rejection of anthropocentric philosophy in works such as *Straw Dogs*. The section will sketch out precisely why Gray reaches such an apparently anti-human position, examining in particular his use of the ecological theory of James Lovelock. It will demonstrate why this use of Green theory is at best problematic, and at worst completely undermine the nihilistic conclusions reached by John Gray at this point in his career. However, this part of the chapter will also advance the argument that the use of Lovelock is not necessary, and that Gray's rejection of anthropocentric theory – a deeply pessimistic idea – can be found using other, more compelling methods. Yet this section will also take issue with the notion, apparently advanced by Gray through his focus on humanity's relationship with the inevitability of death, that resignation is the only logical conclusion to be drawn from such pessimistic thought by

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[186] Gamble, Andrew *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty* (Cambridge; Polity Press, 1996), p.181.

considering an alternative conclusion – that of a pessimistically informed political *praxis,* as Dienstag's

reading of the life and thought of Albert Camus shows.

Finally, the conclusion will offer an overview of Gray's evolving thought and demonstrate how

there have always been pessimistic strands within that thought. It will also identify a further question

about the possibility of political philosophy suggested by Gray's ambivalent relationship with

liberalism. However, before the case can be made that Gray is a pessimistic thinker, it is first necessary

to explain how that oft-used word will be defined in this chapter through use the insights and analysis

of Dienstag. This analysis will form the content of the first section to this chapter.

Defining Philosophical Pessimism

Pessimism is a frequently used term and often has negative connotations concomitant to it. Pessimism tends to be associated with assumptions about the likelihood of failure when actions are undertaken. However, this is not the only sense in which the word can be used and does not accurately represent the understanding of pessimism as a concept that will be used in this chapter to describe the thinking of John Gray and others. As such, when it is used to describe any thinker or school of thought, it is imperative that the word is clearly defined so the intended meaning can be understood and alternative definitions, even if widely used, can be put into perspective. This chapter will place Gray within the school of pessimistic philosophy described and examined in detail by Joshua Foa Dienstag.

Dienstag sees pessimism as a relatively recent philosophical phenomenon – one linked to the "modern notion of linear time"[187]. It is this notion of linear time that highlights a simple fact of human life; namely, that each and every human is moving toward an inevitable fate – death. This can be illustrated in the work of one of the thinkers that Dienstag identifies as a pessimist – Emil Cioran. A bleak thinker for whom existence is simultaneously painful and pointless, Cioran makes his thoughts on human mortality plain in a number of passages such as when he writes "[n]othing exposes our failure better than the spectacle of a pharmacy: all the remedies desirable for each of our ills, but none for our essential ill, for the disease of which no human invention can cure us"[188]. Death is that essential ill; for Cioran, our attempts to cure other lesser diseases are rendered largely pointless given humanity is not able to meaningfully deal with that fundamental and inevitable fate.

Yet Dienstag's reading of pessimism is not solely about excessive morbidity, even if such a charge could be levelled successfully at a writer like Cioran. There are other key factors that Dienstag uses to identify thinkers as pessimistic. He defines his vision of pessimism against optimistic theories – which include "[l]iberalism, socialism and pragmatism"[189] – but not as a binary opposition to

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[187] Dienstag, Joshua Foa *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2006), p.16.
[188] Cioran, Emil *The New Gods* (New York; Quadrangle, 1974), p.79.
[189] Dienstag, *Pessimism*, p.18.

optimistic theory. Rather, he argues, pessimistic theories and philosophies represent the "negation, and not the opposite, of theories of progress"[190]. This is not, Dienstag is at pains to point out, a pessimistic denial of the concept of progress or that progress exists "in certain areas" such as technology and the "powers of science", but rather a desire to question "whether these improvements are inseparably related to a greater set of costs that often go unperceived"[191]. Furthermore, pessimists argue against the notion of progress in history; they have no "particular faith in a necessary historical directionality"[192], to use Dienstag's phrase; history is not teleological in its nature and is perhaps better defined, in the words of Cioran, as "nothing but a procession of false Absolutes"[193].

Pessimists also have concerns about the possibilities of human reason and the extent to which that reason is a positive factor for humanity. Dienstag writes about the optimistic deception inherent in the idea that "our capacity to reason is something that gives us power over the world and thus a means of alleviating our suffering" whereas, for "this to be true, the world would in some way have to be aligned with or amenable to the force of reason when, to the pessimists, it simply is not"[194]. This position is disputable; the fact that the world around us is not *completely* amenable to human reason does not mean that it is not *partially* amenable to that reason. Perhaps what pessimistic thinking is trying to do here is to offer a point of resistance to those optimistic theories that see the world as completely amenable to – and thus simply a resource to exploited by those possessing – human reason. Tying in with the notion of the limits of the potentiality of human reason is a certain circumspection when it comes to universal claims about existence; Dienstag writes, for example, that pessimists have a "scepticism that there are permanent and unchanging moral values that can guide or be imposed upon political decision-making, in the international sphere or any other"[195]. Thus,

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[190] *Ibid*, p.18.
[191] *Ibid*, p.25.
[192] Dienstag, Joshua Foa "Pessimistic Realism and Realistic Pessimism" in Bell, Duncan (ed) *Political Thought and International Relations* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2009), p.170.
[193] Cioran, Emil *A Short History of Decay* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1975), p.1.
[194] Dienstag, *Pessimism*, p.34.
[195] Dienstag, "Pessimistic Realism and Realistic Pessimism", p.167.

pessimism as defined by Dienstag represents an understanding of the fact of mortality combined with a far from positive interpretation of the power of human reason and concomitant universal concepts – all of which provides for the negation of the dominant optimistic strands of philosophy.

Yet while defining pessimism, Dienstag is not seeking to apply a false homogeneity to the disparate group of thinkers he associates with the pessimistic school of thought. Indeed, the opposite is true, and Dienstag seeks to point to the plurality of pessimistic thought at the same time as acknowledging "close associates" to pessimists, such as "Sartre, Arendt, Benjamin, Wittgenstein and Weil"[196]. Dienstag demonstrates the variety of thought and thinkers involved in pessimism by highlighting four different types of pessimism – cultural, metaphysical, existential and the Dionysian pessimism that he associates with Friedrich Nietzsche. While a detailed examination of each kind of pessimism is impossible here owing to space considerations and is arguably superfluous as Dienstag has already examined all four in detail in his book, a brief overview is perhaps useful to demonstrate the breadth and depth of pessimistic thought and also to highlight the varying implications of differing strands of that way of thinking.

The first type of pessimism examined by Dienstag is the cultural pessimism he associates with Rousseau and Leopardi. Dienstag argues that both thinkers are concerned about the developments affecting humanity not only since the Enlightenment, but "from the moment of our emergence into sentence"[197] – in other words, from the moment humanity became able to communicate. One of the major problems for humanity is their awareness of the concept of linear time – Dienstag writes that "[a]nimals and humans alike are fated to time – our misfortune is to be aware of this fact"[198]. The dawn and the acceleration of human reason after the Enlightenment does not represent some sort of salvation for humanity, but rather the exact opposite as "[o]ur dissatisfaction multiplies as at each higher plateau of reason we see further and further into an ultimate emptiness"[199]. Modern

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[196] Dienstag, *Pessimism*, p.6.
[197] *Ibid*, p.50.
[198] *Ibid*, p.53.
[199] *Ibid,* p.57.

materialism is not the answer; in fact, the "growth of our possessions only multiplies the growth of our needs so that, ever richer, we still lose ground"[200].

So what hope for humanity in the worldview of the cultural pessimists? The answer lies in understanding that "happiness may not be within humanity's grasp" but that "a certain kind of freedom could be" but only if "we were willing to set the futile search for happiness aside"[201]. Tying in with this realisation about the impossibility of happiness is the strength of the pessimist – while the pessimist cannot be "free from time-consciousness" they can at least "be free from the illusions it encourages" and thus be "free from a modern project in which [they were] enrolled without consent"[202]. Thus, while cultural pessimism may be far from comforting to those who seek happiness, it does still offer some positives through its insights; those who understand the implications of linear time can free themselves from ultimately false ideologies or, to put it another way, the delusions of the universal theories of optimistic philosophy.

Metaphysical pessimism – seen, according to Dienstag, in the thought of Schopenhauer and Freud – is perhaps best summarised by the notion that, from "a cosmic perspective, conscious life is a minor and temporary deviation from the normal state of things" or, to put it perhaps more starkly, life itself is "a detour from death to death"[203]. Dienstag suggests that Freud believed that "all life aims at death – death is the biological *telos* of life, rather than the meaning of it"[204]. Given this emphasis on life as an aberration, what are the implications of metaphysical pessimism? A return to the natural state – that of death – would be one option, perhaps realised through suicide, but it is not necessarily the conclusion of either Schopenhauer or Freud. Rather, pessimism again becomes a way of illuminating the reality of the human condition. It represents, according to Dienstag, an "art of living… a kind of fortification of the self against temporality"[205]. By comprehending that life is an aberration

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[200] *Ibid*, p.61.
[201] *Ibid*, p.63.
[202] *Ibid*, p.81.
[203] *Ibid*, p.92.
[204] *Ibid*, p.105.
[205] *Ibid*, p.116.

between the normality of the nothingness of death, the pessimist is freed from the twin myths of "individual" and "historical progress"[206]. Albeit starting from a different viewpoint of life, metaphysical pessimism – like its cultural counter-part – offers a type of freedom not available to those in the thrall of optimistic theory.

Existential pessimism is different again from both its metaphysical and cultural manifestations. While Dienstag argues that the existential pessimists – the likes of Camus, Unamuno and the aforementioned Cioran – have similar concerns about issues such as "the burden of temporality" and "the futility of striving", they "reconstitute the issues… by focusing on the life-conditions of the individual"[207]. This means that, for the likes of Unamuno and Cioran, "their main concern is that the *telos* of progress has become an idol, and is used to justify violence and a loss of freedom in the present"[208]. Camus arguably has similar thoughts about the secular faiths represented in more optimistic philosophy since, as Dienstag demonstrates, Camus saw the hopes of both Christianity and Marxism in very similar lights, as both "ultimately 'betray' human life because they do not accept it in the timebound, absurd state that is… its single unalterable condition"[209]. The implications of existential pessimism vary from pessimist to pessimist. Indeed, Cioran shows a certain ambivalence towards the implications of his pessimistic thought – at times, he suggests that any human "is predestined to suicide"[210] and that life itself is a "state of non-suicide"[211] yet at other times argues that the "true hero fights and dies in the name of his destiny, and not in the name of a belief"[212]. However, overall Dienstag argues that the implication of existential pessimism is that "for our lives to have merit, they must have it in the here and now, and not by reference to an unactualized future"[213]. Thus one of Cioran's views advocates death and the other fighting for an individual destiny or cause.

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[206] *Ibid*, p.110.
[207] *Ibid*, p.119.
[208] *Ibid*, p.122.
[209] *Ibid*, p.129.
[210] Cioran, *The New Gods*, p.49.
[211] Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, p.19.
[212] *Ibid*, p.83.
[213] Dienstag, *Pessimism*, p.135.

Accordingly, existential pessimism is not simply about the pessimist shedding the illusions offered by optimistic theory, but also potentially about empowering them to choose how to live in the reality revealed by pessimistic philosophy.

The final form of pessimism explored by Dienstag is what he terms as Nietzsche's Dionysian pessimism. This is a form of pessimism based on Nietzsche's interpretation of tragedy, which is centred on his view that "the world" is "constantly in flux" and thus is simultaneously in the process of "becoming" and "destroying"[214]. Again, pessimism becomes "an art of living", this time for "the era following the death of God"[215] and it stands against "stifling optimistic theory" which "insists that there is only one path, and one means with which to walk that path"[216]. Thus, Nietzschean pessimism stands against philosophies that claim to be universally applicable. Furthermore, it is here that pessimism's profound political implications are shown since, within the Dionysian pessimism of the iconoclastic Nietzsche, the true nature of life is shown to be "this theme of self-shaping and self-transformation against a fundamentally chaotic background" and this leads Nietzsche to his vision of an "energetic individuality that can be supportive of political action"[217]. Like the other forms of pessimistic thinking, Dionysian pessimism does not offer much solace for those who enjoy the comfort found in the worldview of much optimistic theory, but equally it does not have to lead to the negation of the self and political action in the face of an uncontrollable world where humanity has no real or meaningful influence over the matters including death and time which have such profound effects on the human race. Rather, Dionysian pessimism allows for radical self-reinvention and proactive political engagement precisely because the world is in a state of constant flux; it is constantly changing, and thus individuals can change themselves.

Thus, pessimistic philosophy is, according to Dienstag, a broad and eclectic school of thought that represents a fundamental challenge to the optimistic strands of philosophy that arguably

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[214] *Ibid*, p.169.
[215] *Ibid,* p.188.
[216] *Ibid*, p.185.
[217] *Ibid*, p.196.

dominate so much recent political theory. This eclecticism can be clearly demonstrated by the implications pessimistic thinkers take from their insights into the human condition. Dienstag, for example, points to the stark contrast between a thinker such as Schopenhauer who suggested that "the only reasonable response" to pessimism "is a kind of resignation" with a philosopher such as Nietzsche who, as shown above, rejected resignation in favour of "a more life-affirming ethic of individualism and spontaneity"[218]. Indeed, the broad understanding of the implications of pessimism is a crucial factor when examining the pessimism of John Gray since, as the third section of this chapter will show, Gray seems to adopt a resigned stance in his later work; however, it can also be argued that such a stance is not the only possible outcome of the case he presents.

The outline of Dienstag's analysis detailed above should also make clear that philosophical pessimism is not entirely or fundamentally predicated on the assumption that any act undertaken is destined to go wrong, nor is it based on the assumption that life itself is always destined to get worse. However, it is worth contrasting Dienstag's understanding of pessimism with the use of that term by another theorist – for example, Andrew Gamble on the thought of Hayek. While there is no reason to believe that Gamble wishes to advance the idea that Friedrich von Hayek is a pessimist in the Dienstag mould (a claim that would be very hard to defend even if it was being advanced) when he writes that Hayek "is often regarded as a pessimist, a Cassandra repeatedly appearing before the public with dark warnings of apocalypse"[219], his use of the term "pessimist" is interesting as it perhaps represents the most common usage of that word. Gamble also argues that it is "the apocalyptic tone" of much of Hayek's work that "has often been a barrier to a wider acceptance of his ideas"[220]; in short, Gamble argues that it is Hayek's pessimism that has limited the impact of his thought. Particularly given the allusion to Cassandra, Gamble is treating the concept of pessimism as a form of disillusion and despair owing to the likely negative outcomes that the future holds. Chandran Kukathas also alludes to this pessimism in Hayek, noting that Hayek saw humanity as repeatedly making the same mistake, through

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[218] *Ibid*, p.19.
[219] Gamble, *Ibid*, p.181.
[220] *Ibid*, p.56.

thinking that it "can acquire the capacity to control social processes"[221] through its capacity to reason.

Thus, Hayek is not rejecting the notion of universal theory *per se*, but is rather pessimistic about

humanity ever truly coming to understand his universal theory about human reason. Dienstag, while

clearly understanding the derivation of the term from the Latin word for "worst"[222], is quite clear that

pessimism is not necessarily "an insistence on some eventual doom"[223], but rather that pessimism

does not "tells us to expect less" but rather "to expect nothing"[224]. Once freed from the limiting

thinking of optimistic theory, there is real potential for individual humans to decide their own destiny

within the constraints of their understanding of linear time. This does not mean that pessimistic

thinkers will never consider failure in the future likely – indeed, Gray himself is arguably a thinker who

believes precisely this – but rather that Dienstag's reading of pessimism does not leave this as the only

possible outcome available to the pessimistic thinker.

To further demonstrate what philosophical pessimism actually is, it is worth considering

another school of thought that is clearly linked with pessimism but is also tangibly distinct – that of

anti-utopianism. A key example of an anti-utopian thinker is Max Weber. In an article[225] looking at

different readings of Weber's anti-utopianism, Joshua Derman argues that there are "cold",

"temperate" and "hot" interpretations. The cold interpretation offers a quasi-Stoic understanding of

Weber – that in the era in which he wrote "it was pointless to wait for a redeemer" and therefore

"Weber's stance towards modern life was characterized by the stereotypically masculine qualities

evoked by these admonitions: renunciation, endurance, fortitude and ascetic self-discipline"[226].

Derman cites Siegfried Kracauer as believing that Weber represented a form of "unequalled heroism",

and that by his "self-chosen wretchedness" he came "closer to salvation" than those who sought

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[221] Kukathas, Chandran *Hayek and Modern* Liberalism (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1989), p.11.
[222] Dienstag, *Pessimism*, p.8-9.
[223] *Ibid*, p.18.
[224] *Ibid*, p.5.
[225] Derman, Joshua "Skepticism and Faith: Max Weber's Anti-Utopianism in the Eyes of his Contemporaries" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Volume 71, Number 3, July 2010), pp.481-503.
[226] *Ibid*, p.486.

comfort in utopian beliefs[227]. Here, the "cold" anti-utopianism perhaps brings to mind the conclusions

of the cultural and metaphysical pessimists mentioned above; of thinkers freeing themselves from the

illusions of optimistic theory and thus, no matter how stark some of their conclusions may have been,

they come closer to understanding reality.

The "temperate" reading of Weber's anti-utopianism focuses on Weber's lack of faith, or at

least, according to Erich Vogelin, a preference for faith "that does not let itself be expressed as an

'ideal' or future plan"[228]. This lack of faith in utopian philosophy can be seen when Weber himself

charges such apparently atheistic philosophy with actually demanding faith from its followers. For

example, in his essay on socialism, Weber argues that "the *Communist Manifesto* is a prophetic

document"[229] – with its concept of a progression towards a future utopia, it takes on the form of a

secular divination of the sort more normally associated with the Bible. This use of the language of faith

continues as Weber looks at the splits within the Marxist camp over "Marxist dogma" when Weber

argues that the "terrible mutual hatred of these two factions stems from this dogmatic charge of

heresy"[230]. He also notes the problem with dealing with a figure like Trotsky at the negotiations for

the Brest-Litovsk treaty is that "[o]ne cannot make peace with people who are fighting for their

faith"[231]. Weber is clear in his contempt for these secular faiths; however, this then leads to the

question of what Weber has to offer in the "temperate" understanding of his anti-utopianism. Karl

Lowith argues that Weber offered only a "diagnosis" of the problems of rationalism, but no "therapy"

to deal with them[232]. However what this lack of faith does offer is "the subjectivity of pure self-

responsibility to the individual to himself"[233]. Therefore, Weber's thought offers neither the exuberant

self-definition of Nietzsche nor the gloomy resignation of a Schopenhauer or a Cioran. Rather, it frees

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[227] *Ibid*, p.487.
[228] As cited in *Ibid*, p.491.
[229] Weber, Max "Socialism" in Weber, Max *Political Writings*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.288.
[230] "Socialism", p.301.
[231] "Socialism", p.300.
[232] As cited in Derman, "Weber's Anti-Utopianism", p.492.
[233] As cited in *Ibid*, p.494.

individuals from the subjugation of the self in favour of a future utopia, and thus makes that person responsible for themselves in the here and now.

The final reading of Weber's anti-utopianism is classed by Derman as the "hot" one. This focuses on the apparent gulf between Weber's "academic sobriety" and his "excessive personality"[234]. It reveals the discrepancy that Karl Jaspers identified between the Weber who could be "the consummate relativist" yet at the same time "he was the man with the strongest faith of our times"[235]. Weber, then, focussed on "deeply personal truths that were absolute and yet not universalizable like the truths of traditional philosophy"[236]. This perhaps ties in with the unresolved tensions in Weber's work discussed by Lassman and Spiers; they note that Weber "wants to defend the institutions of the liberal constitutional state, but his own intellectual principles prevented him from justifying them in terms of a fully elaborated political philosophy".[237] In other words, Weber's personal values lead him to liberalism because, as Lassman and Spiers argue, "[l]iberty is valued because it makes possible the fullest development of the human personality"[238], but his anti-utopianism means he cannot make his liberalism into a universal goal for all. He is thus a man of personal faith who simultaneously eschews universal faith.

The question then arises of how to distinguish the anti-utopianism of Weber – be it the "cold", "temperate" or "hot" understandings – from pessimism. It has to be noted that there is considerable overlap within these schools of thought. Both discard the notion of universal truth, of devotion to a utopian future that is actually based on nothing but comforting but ultimately unreal illusion. In short, both reject utopian thinking. However, the key difference between the two lies in the use they make of their anti-utopian insights. Weber, as Derman suggests, "never considered himself to be a philosopher and bristled at the suggestion that metaphysical or developmental tendencies guide the

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[234] *Ibid*, p.497.
[235] As quoted in *Ibid*, p.498.
[236] *Ibid*, p.499.
[237] Lassman, Peter and Spiers, Ronald "Introduction", in Weber *Political Writings*, xxv.
[238] "Introduction", xxiv.

course of history"[239]. Weber does not seek to pursue his anti-utopian intuitions to their natural, philosophical conclusions, but rather look at where they lead practically. Hence the focus in his famous work "The Profession and Vocation of Politics" on the practical reality of the life and world of the politician. Weber is keen to point out the implications of the power that the politician holds, arguing that said politician "is becoming involved… with the diabolical powers that lurk in all violence"[240]. This realistic yet negative view of politics is reinforced when Weber states that "[a]nyone seeking to save his own soul and the souls of others does not take the path of politics in order to reach his goal, for politics has quite different talks, namely those which can only be achieved with violence"[241]. Furthermore, given his anti-utopian insights and the fact that reality and the people contained within it will often confound even the most well intentioned of plans, Weber argues that "[o]nly someone who is certain that he will not be broken when the world, seen from his point of view, is too stupid to too base for what he wants to offer it, and who is certain that he will be able to say "Nevertheless" in spite of everything – only someone like this has a 'vocation' for politics"[242]. If Weber is pessimistic then it is perhaps more in the definition of the word used by Gamble and Kukathas in relation to Hayek; Weber is a thinker who sees the negativity and disappointment in the world rather than, as the philosophical pessimists do, exploring the fundamental problems of reality such as humanity's consciousness of linear time. Weber appears less interested in such ephemeral concerns, and this is evidenced by the fact that his conclusions are very much focussed on practical engagement with reality rather than radical Dionysian self-creation or despairing resignation to an uncontrollable reality of pessimistic thinkers. Therefore, while a pessimistic thinker will almost certainly join an anti-utopian thinker in their rejection of universal philosophies that offer an illusion of a better tomorrow, there is no reason that the thought of an anti-utopian thinker need be pessimistic in their reasoning or

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[239] Derman, *Op. Cit.*, p.481.
[240] Weber, Max "The Profession and Vocation of Politics" in Weber, *Op. Cit.* p.365.
[241] *Ibid*, p.366.
[242] *Ibid*, p.369.

conclusion. In short, therefore, while there may be some overlap between the two schools of thought, they are distinct from one another.

Having defined the way the word "pessimism" will be used here, it will be the task of the rest of this chapter to demonstrate that John Gray is best understood as a pessimistic rather than an alternative type of thinker, such as an anti-utopian theorist. However, before that work is undertaken, it is worth acknowledging that Gray has already been identified as a pessimist by another commentator on his intellectual career. In an essay entitled "Gray's Blues: Pessimism as a Political Project", Glen Newey argues that pessimism underpins Gray's work. While there is no evidence in his essay that Newey is using Dienstag's definition of pessimism, it is both telling and extremely interesting that one of the "two core beliefs [that] persist" in Gray's political thought and draws Newey to the conclusion that Gray is a pessimist is the fact that Gray is "unrelentingly sceptical throughout his work about the Enlightenment project of justifying action… by universal norms whose authority derives from human reason"[243]. Therefore, Newey identifies within Gray one of the central beliefs Dienstag associates with pessimistic thinkers – that of holding deep reservations about the potentiality of human reason. Furthermore, as the next section will show, it is these reservations about the possibilities of human reason are a clear point of consistency in his thought. Therefore, it is time to begin the work of demonstrating precisely how Gray's broad and diverse output as a political thinker indicates his fundamentally pessimistic outlook by exploring two of the targets he focuses on most in his work – the idea of historical progression and the Enlightenment.

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[243] Newey, Glen 'Gray's Blues: Pessimism as a Political Project' in Horton, John and Newey, Glen *The Political Theory of John Gray* (London; Routledge, 2007), p.152. The other core belief is an on-going scepticism towards central planning in both liberal and non-liberal forms.

Gray, Progress and the Enlightenment

Gray's thought shares common ground with the philosophical pessimists in two of the strands that can be found throughout much of his body of work. The first strand is his criticisms of the idea of historical progression; the other is his rejection of the Enlightenment. The two strands are linked but are best considered separately to identify the similarities of Gray's ideas and those of the pessimists. Like the pessimistic thinkers discussed above, Gray is highly sceptical of the notion inherent in optimistic philosophy that history is some sort of journey; a progression towards a better future that often requires substantial sacrifice today. Part of the problem with this idea of inevitable historical progress is the assumptions that underpin that concept – in particular, the idea that there is a universal philosophy applicable to all in a world that, in reality, is increasingly diverse. This conflict between pluralism and optimistic universality leads to unpleasant and unintended consequences. According to Gray, "[t]otalitarianism follows wherever the goal of a world without conflict or power is consistently pursued"[244]. In other words, when a group of people with diverse and pluralistic views are expected to come together to pursue a universal vision, some sort of authoritarian or even totalitarian control of their thought is required to suppress the natural diversity of their thinking. In theory, the concept of progression towards a better future is comforting; Gray, however, would join pessimist philosophers in arguing that reality does not show a definite, indisputable progression and would argue that the theories of progress in practice often achieve the opposite of what they intended.

This idea ties in with a further criticism Gray has about the notion of progress. It is not fundamentally founded in reality; rather, the concept of progress has become an illusion. Gray seeks to demonstrate that progress itself has become another form of faith; another myth designed to add an ersatz meaning to life. Gray demonstrates the starkness of his views when he writes that "[b]elief in progress is the Prozac of the thinking classes"[245]. The wording here is very interesting; it is perhaps deliberately mimicking Marx's remark about religion being the opiate of the masses. However Gray

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[244] Gray, John *Al Qaeda and What It Means to be Modern* (London; Faber and Faber, 2003), p.9.
[245] Gray, John *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (London; Granta Books, 2004), p.3.

uses a different drug in his metaphor; he does not mention a drug designed to control pain, but rather one designed to alleviate depression. The notion of progress inherent in much optimistic theory is revealed to be a medicine designed to deal with a reality that is, for many, deeply discouraging. However, that medicine can only help to alleviate the symptoms; it cannot cure the fundamental problems in human existence.

Yet while Gray is highly critical of the idea that humanity is progressing to some sort of optimistic *telos*, he does not fall into the trap of offering a blanket rejection of the idea that progress is, at least in some respects, possible. He acknowledges, for example, in the growth of scientific knowledge, some signs of progress, and he is quick to reject those who deny those scientific advances[246]. He notes that science has helped, through fuelling "technological innovation", to create the "enormous increase in human numbers over the past few hundred years"[247]. However, he does not believe that science represents a cure for all aspects of human existence. He is keenly aware of the limits of technological innovation, writing that the idea "[h]umanity can use the powers given by new technology to bring about a world better than any that has ever existed" is blatantly false by bluntly stating "[t]his is faith, not science"[248]. Again, the wording here is interesting; science and faith are often considered to be mutually exclusive, with science shining a light on the limitations of (in particular religious) faith. Yet Gray sees the myths that have grown about the potential of science as another article of faith, bringing to mind the Weberian association of socialism with faith discussed above. However, it is not just that the notion of scientific progression as a new form of faith that leads to Gray's concerns with progress; he also points to the fact that progress in science and technology has led to dramatic increases in the lethal abilities of humanity. He asserts that the "gas chambers and gulags are modern"[249], building on this point when he argues that "[p]ogroms are as old as

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[246] For example, he writes that postmodern philosophies of science "are too silly to be worth refuting at length" since the growth of scientific knowledge is a "brute fact". Gray, J. *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London; Penguin Books, 2008), p.292.
[247] Gray, *Heresies*, p.8.It is worth noting that Gray himself would be deeply sceptical of whether this growth in human numbers is actually a good thing, particularly given his Lovelock inspired ecological outlook.
[248] *Ibid*, p.26.
[249] Gray, *Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern*, p.2

Christendom" but "without railways, the telegraph and poison gas there could have been no Holocaust"[250]. Starkly put, progress can lead to unprecedented destruction. Here, a critic might argue that assessing the impact of progress is actually a question of balance – that the negative impact of technological and scientific progress needs to be assessed with the positive outcome of that progress. In other words, the development of the railways and the telegraph do not have solely negative implication. However, Gray, while never weighing up the positives and negatives explicitly, has clearly decided that the latter dominate.

A linked and equally crucial component of Gray's pessimism are his views on the Enlightenment. Gray provides his definition of the Enlightenment when writing about the views of one of the Enlightenment's leading thinkers; for Voltaire, he argues, the Enlightenment offered "[f]reedom from superstition, the growth of wealth and knowledge, [and] progress towards a universal civilization"[251]. Yet while other thinkers may have found much that is positive in the Enlightenment project – something that is clear through the positive connotations of the word 'Enlightenment' – Gray is regularly scathing about Enlightenment thought. He states baldly that "the Enlightenment project has proved to be self-defeating"[252] and "Enlightenment values have very often been illiberal, racist or totalitarian"[253]. An example of the dangers of Enlightenment thinking can be found in the history of the Russian Revolution: Gray argues that "Russia's misfortune was not in failing to absorb the Enlightenment but in being exposed to the Enlightenment in one of its most virulent forms"[254] highlighting, for example, the dramatic rise in executions after the dawn of the Soviet Union[255]. Furthermore, this critique of the Russian Revolution and the Marxist-Leninist regime that followed it ties in neatly with the rejection of the idea of progress as explored above. Marxism, even in its Leninist guise, is a theory that adds real content to the concept of historical progression. It purports to offer

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[250] Gray, John *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London; Granta Books, 2002)*,* p.14.
[251] Gray, John *Voltaire* (London; Phoenix, 1998), p.2.
[252] Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake* p.216.
[253] *Ibid*, xvi.
[254] Gray, *Black Mass*, p.62
[255] There were around 14,000 executions between 1866 and 1917 compared to 200,000 between 1917 and 1923. *Ibid*, p.67.

an explanation of the inevitability of progress towards a better tomorrow. Yet, as Gray's example of the massive rise in executions demonstrates, this theory of progress – that theory of the Enlightenment – does not lead to that better tomorrow; in the case of the Russian Revolution, the opposite is true. In short, Enlightenment philosophies may offer a brighter future in theory; however, Gray argues, this is not realised in practice.

Yet the problems with the Enlightenment are not simply about the impact of the practical politics it has helped to inspire. It also fails on an intellectual level; according to Gray, it fails to escape from the religion that inspired it. In fact, Gray argues "[i]t inherited a good deal from the religion it was meant to supplant"[256]. For example, there is the inherent contradiction with militant atheism for, as Gray notes, there is nothing "more religious than the attempt to convert the world to unbelief"[257]; it is about spreading a faith – albeit a secular one. Furthermore, there are the problems inherent within the thought of those thinkers who argued so passionately during and after the Enlightenment against religion. Gray offers the example of Nietzsche, stating that the philosopher who so famously proclaimed the death of God was "an inveterately religious thinker, whose incessant attacks on Christian beliefs and values attest to the fact that he could never shake them off"[258]. This observation would not necessarily be rejected by Nietzsche – after stating that "God is dead" Nietzsche goes on to write that given "the human race as constituted, there will perhaps be caves for millenniums yet, in which people will show [God's] shadow" meaning that "we have to still to overcome [that] shadow"[259]. However, the implications of Gray's critique of Nietzsche are potentially very revealing about Gray's own relationship with the Enlightenment. Since if Nietzsche can be charged by Gray as being, at least on some levels, a Christian thinker then is Gray himself, despite holding the Enlightenment in similar regard to Nietzsche's views on religion, an Enlightenment thinker? Gray demonstrates an understanding of this irony when he writes that "Enlightenment thinking has become an integral part

[256] Gray, *Voltaire*, p.1.
[257] Gray, *The Immortalization Commission*, p.225.
[258] Gray, John *Straw Dogs*, p.45.
[259] Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Gay Science* (New York; Dover, 2006), p.81.

of our identities. We cannot deny the Enlightenment without rejecting ourselves"[260]. However, even given this irony, Gray is adamant the Enlightenment is not the dramatic step forward its advocates might regard it as, but rather the continuation of faith; with the secular myth of progress replacing any of the divine myths that dominated prior to the supposed Enlightenment. Gray's attitude to the Enlightenment is best summarised when he writes that by believing "that one way of life is best for all of mankind and viewing history as the struggle to achieve it, Marxism and neo-liberalism are post-Christian cults"[261].

Perhaps implicit within this critique of Enlightenment thinking is an insight into the nature of human reason. For Gray, human reason is exceptionally limited in its abilities, scope and potential which is, as the first section to this chapter shows, very much a pessimistic thought. This strand in his thinking has been present throughout his career. Indeed, part of the initial appeal of Hayekian thought to the early Gray was its "philosophically defensible view of the scope and the limits of human reason"[262]. Gray is drawn to Hayek – a thinker whose political philosophy and critique of socialism is predicated to a massive extent on what humanity cannot possibly know – precisely because the latter shares the former's reservations about the narrow nature of human reason. This strand in Gray's thought becomes more pronounced as his career develops to the extent where he seems to not only have concerns about the inadequacy of humanity's reason but the flaws of human intellect overall. Most strikingly, in his recent book he writes "the Earth has a greater capacity for intelligent action than the human animal" before going on to state that it "makes more sense to ascribe intelligence to the unknowing planet than it does to witless humankind"[263]. Gray subordinates human intelligence to such an extent that it is beneath a planet that shows – even given the assertions about the Earth's instincts within the Gaia hypothesis[264] – little if any meaningful signs of conscious intellect. Thus Gray's

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[260] Gray, *Voltaire*, p.48.
[261] Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*, p.104.
[262] Gray, John *Hayek on Liberty* (Third Edition) (London; Routledge, 1988), ix.
[263] Gray, *The Immortalization Commission*, p.218.
[264] This hypothesis and Gray's relationship with it will be explored in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

concerns about the limits of human reason appear to have grown across his intellectual career to the extent where he is now openly dismissive of human intelligence altogether.

Gray's critique of progress and Enlightenment thinking show clear points of similarity with Dienstag's definition of pessimism as outlined in the first section. Yet they also show points of similarity with other schools of political philosophy. Conservatism, for example, has clear concerns with the idea of progress, the nature of the Enlightenment and the limited nature of human reason as evidenced in a thinker such as Edmund Burke. Given this, a key question arises – why not consider Gray to be a conservative rather than a pessimistic thinker? The answer lies in Gray's critique of the Enlightenment. A conservative thinker might wish to return to a time before the Enlightenment; to conserve or bring back a period before secular humanism became such a dominant strand in philosophy. Gray, however, critiques the Enlightenment at least in part because of its failure to truly escape the confines of Christian thinking. Consequently, Gray does not wish for a return to pre-Enlightenment times – indeed, the very fact that he uses the thinking associated with those times as a tool with which to point out the shortcomings of the Enlightenment makes it clear that as well as seeing the problems in Enlightenment thinking he also sees the problems in the thinking that preceded the Enlightenment. Furthermore, a conservative – or, indeed, a thinker such as Hayek – might have concerns about the limits of human reason, but they might also see human wisdom implicit in the institutions, morals and traditions that have evolved in society. The scathing comment from Gray about human intellect quoted above suggests he does not share that faith in the implicit wisdom of humanity that the conservative sees and seeks to preserve in society.

Yet, while Gray's thinking shows clear points of departure from conservative thinking, his concerns about the idea of progress and about the Enlightenment do share an affinity with anti-utopian thinking. So, a similar question to the one explored directly above arises – why not consider Gray to be an anti-utopian rather than a pessimist? It is worth noting that quasi-utopian philosophies such as Marxism are met with contempt by Gray – a judgment he shares with Max Weber. Yet Gray's concerns with utopian thought have a more radical implication than the desire to offer the sort of

realistic attitude to human life and society revealed by anti-utopian thought; Gray writes that the "most rigorous investigations reveal a world riddled with chaos in which human will is powerless. All things may be possible, but not for us"[265]. Hence, while an anti-utopian philosopher might wish to restrict human action according to their reading of reality, Gray suggests what is revealed by engagement with reality is the inability of humanity to meaningfully act. The implications of his pessimism seem to suggest resignation in the face of a reality humanity cannot possibly hope to control. This is indeed the central thesis of his book *Straw Dogs*; an analysis of which makes up the third section of this chapter.

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[265] Gray, *The Immortalization Commission,* p.221.

Gray against Anthropocentric Philosophy

It is in more recent work that John Gray appears to have become most openly pessimistic, even to the extent where he seems to believe that the best way forward for the planet would be if the human race disappeared from its face. Given this almost anti-human approach where action of that race is considered the problem rather than part of any solution, it might be tempting to describe this phase of John Gray's career as nihilistic. Yet, as will be demonstrated below, he still holds some beliefs, even if those beliefs are controversial. However, any work arguing that Gray is a pessimist needs to pay close attention to this stage of his intellectual career, and consequently this section will attempt to piece together the reasons for Gray's rejection of anthropocentric philosophy across the aphorisms presented in *Straw Dogs* and other, related works as well as considering whether the only option left open by Gray's argument is, as he advocates, resignation in the face of a malign fate that humanity created, deserves and cannot avoid.

Gray makes his position towards philosophy clear in *Straw Dogs* in a number of different places. One example is in his curt dismissal of postmodernism. He attacks postmodernists for "implicitly rejecting any limit on human ambitions" through "denying the natural world exists independently of our beliefs about it" before concluding that "[p]ostmodernism is just the latest fad in anthropocentrism"[266]. Gray's interpretation of postmodernism is arguably flawed, but to demonstrate this here is impossible for space reasons and is not the crucial point to make at this juncture. Rather, the reason for his ultimate dismissal of postmodernism is the most interesting part to his brief engagement with that philosophical school in *Straw Dogs*. He ultimately dismisses it because it is anthropocentric – because it centres on humanity. This is a radical reason for rejecting an entire philosophical school of thought not least because, prior to this point in his intellectual career, Gray himself was arguably an anthropocentric thinker himself.

The reasons behind this rejection of anthropocentric philosophy appear to be two-fold. Firstly, such philosophies – particularly when they take on universalist ambitions – have failed. In this sense,

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[266] Gray, John *Straw Dogs: Thoughts On Humans and Other Animals* (London; Granta Books, 2002), p.55.

Gray could be seen as being close to the existentialist pessimists referenced in the first section of this chapter. For example, he rejects, just as the existential pessimists did, communism, but he also points out that "[w]ith the Left moribund, the right has become the home of utopian imagination. Global communism has been followed by global capitalism… Both are hideous and chimerical"[267]. It is not the failure of *one* theory that drives Gray to the pessimistic conclusions of *Straw Dogs*, but the apparent failure of *all* theory combined with the tendency of those theories, regardless of where they sit on the political spectrum, to become utopian. Furthermore, Gray seems to reject idealistic philosophies because they represent the false belief "that only humans exist" in the sense that "the world acquires a significance from the fact that humans have appeared in it"[268]. Finally, in terms of his critique of the nature of anthropocentric philosophy, he believes that "we must give up on the idea that human history has a meaning" since neither "in the pagan world nor in any other culture has human history been thought to have an overarching significance" and that the "idea that history must make sense is just a Christian prejudice"[269]. Gray stands against those philosophies that try to graft a false sense of progress on history and that place humanity at their centre.

At this point, it might well be asked what the problem is with philosophies that do centre on humanity. After all, such philosophies are more often than not intended (regardless of outcome) to improve the human lot and to make life better for those who inhabit the planet Earth. This leads to Gray's second reason for rejecting anthropocentric philosophy; he rejects humanity. Put simply, he sees the human race as a destructive force on the face of this planet. Gray approvingly quotes the ecologist James Lovelock when he writes that the Earth, in the form of Gaia, "is suffering from *Disseminated Primatemaia*, a plague of people"[270]. Humanity thus becomes a plague and anthropocentric philosophy is not the cure, but quite the opposite – an exacerbation of the problem. Fortunately for Gray, there is a cure to this plague of people, as either "the Earth's self-regulating

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[267] *Ibid*, xiv.
[268] *Ibid*, p.53.
[269] *Ibid*, p.47.
[270] *Ibid*, p.6.

mechanisms will make the planet less habitable for humans or the side effects of their own activities will cut short the current growth in their numbers"[271]. Humanity is an inherently destructive force on the face of the planet, according to this reading of Lovelock, but the very nature that is under threat will bring about humanity's own destruction. Anthropocentric philosophy thus becomes part of the problem but remains ultimately powerless to change the fate of humanity.

Immediately, though, this second reason for rejecting anthropocentric philosophy runs into trouble. Firstly, Gray's use of Lovelock is controversial; it is arguably a highly selective use of Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis that Gray uses to back up his anti-human argument. This indicates the first fundamental difference between Lovelock and Gray; the former is motivated by his clear love of nature[272], whereas the latter appears to care little for nature other than through its capacity to deal with the problem of humanity. Furthermore, Lovelock is (initially at least) perhaps less convinced by humanity's destructive capabilities than Gray. Lovelock does sketch a doomsday scenario of how a human (with the best of intentions) could destroy Gaia[273], but it is an extreme and purely speculative scenario. Furthermore, Lovelock argues that even nuclear war would only have a limited impact on Gaia[274]. Of course, the destructive capability of humanity may have increased from when Lovelock initially sketched the Gaia hypothesis in 1988 to when Gray was writing in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but it is telling that Lovelock offers ways in which humanity could live in harmony with Gaia while Gray assumes that this is not only impossible, but makes the wrath of Gaia absolutely inevitable. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Lovelock by his own admission is sketching a hypothesis[275] yet, somehow, within Gray's work it becomes a fact or a belief that predicates, to a large extent, his rejection of humanity. It is worth noting both that there is a certain irony in Gray – the

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[271] *Ibid*, p.8.
[272] Examples of this love of nature include Lovelock's description of the beauty of this planet and its oceans with its neighbours in the solar system, and his memories of his father instilling in him a love of nature and of the ecosystem around him. See Lovelock, J. E. *Gaia: A New Look At Life On Earth* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1988), p.84 and p.140.
[273] *Ibid*, pp.42-45.
[274] *Ibid,* p.40.
[275] Lovelock defines his hypothesis on xii of *Ibid*.

iconoclastic critic of so many secular beliefs – taking on one himself as well as emphasising the fact that this is the point where Gray cannot be described as a nihilist. He clearly believes in the Gaia hypothesis; it is just that he uses that belief to advance a negative case against anyone who is anthropocentric in their philosophy. Gaia could almost be seen as a substitute for God – a divine entity with ultimate (and somewhat arbitrary) power over humanity. Thus Gray finds his own secular deity in the form of Gaia.

Furthermore, Gray's use of Lovelock and his attempt to back his pessimistic conclusions using Green theory are controversial. In a highly critical and insightful essay on the subject of that use of Green theory, John Barry argues that Gray is limited in his understanding of Green theory and could "learn much from a more comprehensive reading of Green thought" – Barry states that Gray "misunderstands basic Green concepts and ideas" meaning "his particular Malthusian, population-obsessed, scientific and religious-spiritual version of Green thinking is at the least radically incomplete, and at worst a caricature"[276]. For Barry, as serious as environmental problems may be, there is still hope that humanity can deal with the environmental damage it has wrought and he outright rejects Gray's assumption that "all human advances have led to ecological devastation" as "there have been historically documented examples of human societies that have developed in harmony with their natural environment"[277]. Barry persuasively argues that Gray's "critical powers seem to have deserted him when it comes to… the inevitability of global and local ecological damage"[278]. For his part, Gray responds to Barry by arguing that he has read widely when it comes to Green theory, it is just that he rejects the sort of progressive Green theory advocated by Barry[279]. Furthermore, he does see some solutions to advancing environmental problems – and thus contradicting categorical statements he makes elsewhere such as there is "[n]othing humans can do

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[276] Barry, John "Straw Dogs, Blind Horses and Post-Humanism: The Greening of John Gray" in Horton and Newey, *The Political Theory of John Gray*, p.132.
[277] *Ibid,* p.140.
[278] *Ibid*, p.141.
[279] Gray, John "Reply to Critics" in Horton and Newey, *Op. Cit.* p.230*.*

to prevent the Earth [from] returning to equilibrium"[280] – it is just that he is prepared to accept solutions that progressive Green theorists are not comfortable with[281]. But the very fact that he accepts that there are potential solutions to environmental problems weakens Gray's fatalistic approach to the future of humanity. Furthermore, looking at his use of Green theory overall, it is difficult to argue that he makes a convincing case for the rejection of anthropocentric philosophy using Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis as a foundation.

This then leads to the question of precisely why Gray feels the need to back up his presentation of humanity as a plague with a selective reading of a problematic and controversial ecological theory. Gray is not alone among pessimists in presenting humanity as a plague. Emil Cioran – twice cited by Gray in *Straw Dogs*[282] – makes similar claims. Cioran writes that humanity, described in this instance as "the flesh", is "like a gangrene upon the surface of the globe"[283]. He states that "[w]e are in the presence of a veritable epidemic of life, a proliferation of faces"[284] to the extent where "every childbirth is suspect"[285]. Like Gray, Cioran is concerned about humanity's impact on nature, noting that the "disappearance of animals is a phenomenon of unprecedented gravity" and that increasingly "there is no room left for anyone or anything" but humanity, the "executioner"[286] of nature. Crucially, Cioran also foresees a time when individual humans – forced increasingly by population growth to live on top of one another – will "invent unwonted forms of hatred, they will rend each other as they never did before, and a universal civil war will explode"[287]. Thus Cioran's writing shows that the dark, bitter and anti-human pessimism that he and Gray seem to share does not require the ecological foundation that Gray appears to want to give it. Indeed, Gray – who has often highlighted the growing human cost of theories of progress – could give his anti-human turn a

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[280] Gray, *Heresies*, p.8.
[281] *Ibid*, p.231.
[282] Gray, *Straw Dogs*, p.117 and p.129.
[283] Cioran, *The New Gods*, p.10.
[284] *Ibid*, p.12.
[285] *Ibid*, p.10.
[286] *Ibid*, p.91.
[287] *Ibid*, p.119.

firmer grounding by pointing to the suffering humans inflict on other humans, and merely extrapolate from that toward the likelihood of some sort of future global conflagration caused by human action, particularly given the supposed increased proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Put simply, Gray's pessimism does not need the ecological foundation he tries to give it, and is certainly not strengthened by that foundation's inclusion in his theory.

However, putting to one side the concerns about Gray's use of Lovelock in his pessimistic thesis, it is still worth considering another aspect of his pessimism – the implications he takes from the worldview he sketches. It was noted in the first section to this chapter that Dienstag offers two contrasting approaches to the implications of pessimism – the energetic, individualistic Dionysian pessimism of Nietzsche and the resignation of a thinker such as Schopenhauer. Gray's writing would put him resolutely in the latter camp. In keeping with the overtly negative prognosis for the human race, Gray seems to suggest that resignation in the face of humanity's coming destruction is the only sensible course of action. Indeed, at times Gray seems to lament the fear with which humans regard death. He argues, in the pessimistic spirit detailed in the first section, that the reason why "other animals do not fear death as we do" is "because they are not burdened with time"[288]. Likewise, he argues that "what distinguishes humans from other animals is that humans have learnt to cling more abjectly to life"[289]. The extent to which the latter point is true can be contested – for example, what about the suicidal or the terminally ill who choose assisted suicide? However, Gray has stated elsewhere that he views humanity as the "death-defined animal"[290] and clearly sees the fear of death as a false fear that humanity would be best off overcoming. This even reaches the point where Gray has defended suicide as a viable option for humanity and almost as a form of self-ownership when he writes that, prior to the moral hegemony of Christianity, "[o]ur lives [were] our own, and when we were tired of them we were at liberty to end them"[291]. It is here that Gray shares the observation of

[288] Gray, *Straw Dogs*, p.130.
[289] *Ibid*, p.131.
[290] Gray, John, *The Immortalization Commission*, p.235.
[291] *Ibid.* p.232.

the metaphysical pessimists such as Freud and Schopenhauer – that death, far from being something that should be feared, is actually the norm rather than the exception in existence. At the end of his work exploring humanity's futile and often ridiculous attempts to cheat death[292], Gray writes that "[e]verlasting peace is a perpetual calm, the peace of the grave"[293]. Humanity resigning itself to its fate at the same time as losing its fear of death seems to be the best that Gray feels reality can offer it, meaning it is difficult to argue with Postel when he writes that "Gray has [in *Straw Dogs*] outlined a program for complete political passivity. There is no point whatsoever in our attempting to make the world a less cruel or more liveable place. Such matters are beyond our control – and to think otherwise is humanistic hubris"[294]. Newey offers a similar insight when he states that Gray's resignation shows up "*all* political engagement, including his own work, as pointless"[295]. Thus Gray's answer to the pessimistic worldview expounded in *Straw Dogs* and elsewhere is clear: humanity needs to resign itself to its fate; therefore political action is rendered pointless.

Yet, even if the problematic Lovelockian foundations of Gray's argument are taken at face value, is resignation the only possible answer to Gray's pessimistic outlook? Or is there the potential for politics within the thesis he advances? At this point, the implications that could be taken from Gray's Gaia dependent argument become a question of trajectory. Gray's thought takes a particular trajectory after he has embraced the Gaia hypothesis; that of resignation, as discussed above – and perhaps even a form of pessimism that, given its focus on the inevitability of the grim future facing humanity, takes on clear traits of the traditional use of the word pessimism than the more nuanced version Dienstag uses. However, there are alternative trajectories. Given the revenge of Gaia is unavoidable yet still only due at an undisclosed date in the future, a more hedonistic, Dionysian response could be taken by some. Likewise, a further alternative trajectory does present itself since,

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[292] An example of this is the attempts to resurrect Lenin that ended with the opposite to what was intended; instead "of opening the way to a deathless humanity science could only create a lifeless dummy" that became the substitute for Lenin's embalmed corpse. *Ibid*, p.168.
[293] *Ibid*, p.236.
[294] As cited in Barry, *Op. Cit.* p.142.
[295] Newey, *Op. Cit.* p.156.

as noted above, Gray does allow for some innovative, if controversial, technological changes that might allow humanity to redress its relationship with Gaia. If this is combined with the fear of death typical to humans which, despite Gray's lamentations on humanity's failure to overcome this, refuses to go away then it is possible to advance the case for a radical alternative politics that abandons utopian philosophy in favour of a practical politics that seeks to address the fundamental problems facing humanity in the here and now. Far from negating politics, Gray's argument could lead to an alternative trajectory where the conclusion reached is that there is a pressing need for political theory based on the insights that pessimistic theories such as his offer.

This has profound implications for the understanding of pessimism since even the arguments of those pessimistic theorists who end up resigning themselves to a reality and existence that they cannot control do not have to embrace passivity and political inaction. It is worth, at this point, contrasting the apparent apathy of Gray's pessimism with the portrait Dienstag paints of Albert Camus. Both thinkers share some common ground; for example, they stand against those "ideas that began as being beneficial" but that end up "being used to defend murder and oppression"[296]. Yet as Dienstag suggests, Camus' thinking shows how pessimism "can orient us toward the political arena"[297]. Dienstag demonstrates how Camus advocated a politics that involved "not directing one's efforts to a far-future, but rather enacting the present in a way that does not replicate it"[298]. Thus, even starting from similar insights to Gray, Camus's pessimism offers a radical conception of political activism; a form of politics not in the thrall of theories predicated on the achievement of a future utopia but rather an engagement with politics in the here and now.

However, even if the inferences that can be taken from Gray's work are not identical with his intentions, it should still be clear that *Straw Dogs* is a profoundly pessimistic work. It clearly shares with pessimistic thought many features, such as the distrust of human reason, the insights into our time-bound existence and the importance of the inevitability of death in the human relationship with

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[296] Dienstag, *Pessimism*, p.135.
[297] *Ibid*, p.145.
[298] *Ibid*, p.150.

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reality. Yet it has to be conceded that the fact that Gray's more recent work displays pessimistic strands does not automatically mean that he has always been a pessimist. Therefore, it falls to the conclusion of this chapter address this question and also to suggest another – namely, whether there is any other way in which political activism can be advocated using Gray's thought other than through endorsing the flawed ecological view of *Straw Dogs.*

Conclusion: Politics after Pessimism?

This chapter has argued that Gray's thought – particularly given its changing nature – is best understood as pessimistic. In particular, his body of work displays clear similarities with the sort of pessimistic thinking identified by Dienstag. The attacks on the concept of progress, his comments on the self-defeating nature of the Enlightenment and his rejection of anthropocentric philosophy all chime with the concerns of the pessimist thinkers examined by Dienstag. The fact that some other pessimists might not reach the same conclusions as Gray in the face of their pessimistic insights does not change the fact that Gray's thought – particularly in his most recent work – shows a clearly pessimistic thinker at work.

Yet the question still stands as to whether Gray has always been a pessimist in some way or whether it is an outlook that he has discovered during his career. A definitive answer to this question is most probably impossible; to divine the implicit thoughts and motivations that lie behind a book such as *Hayek on Liberty* is something that perhaps only the author of that book can do. It is enough to note that, as discussed above, part of the appeal of Hayek to Gray is the former's concerns about the limits of human reason – an idea shared by most pessimists. Thus, there were some pessimistic seeds in Gray's thought from early on, and these became more pronounced as his career has progressed. Even if Gray was not consciously a pessimist at the start of his intellectual career, at least one of the pessimistic insights that have come to dominate his thinking was present from early on in his thinking.

Thus pessimism offers some form of consistency to a thinker who has substantially and repeatedly revised his opinions across his career. His initial sympathies for Hayekian neoliberalism; his rejections of it and his simultaneous yet often fleeting explorations of alternative ideologies; and then finally his overall rejection of anthropocentric philosophy are rendered coherent if viewed through the prism of Dienstag's understanding of pessimism. The rejection of optimistic neoliberalism followed by an inability to fully embrace any alternatives leads Gray to the resigned pessimism similar to that of Schopenhauer. All of this could stem and thus grow from that one insight – that if human reason is

too limited to allow for a universal project such as socialism, then other theories predicated on human reason are equally flawed. Thus, a pessimistic stance becomes inevitable and logical.

Yet this chapter has argued that the resignation Gray advocates in his later work is not the only implication that could be taken from his pessimism. A radical new politics committed to technological innovation could, within the parameters of Gray's argument, lead an equally pessimistic thinker to conclude that activism, rather than resignation, is the appropriate political response. However, such a position would have to accept the parameters of Gray's use of the Gaia hypothesis which, as suggested above, is extremely controversial. Therefore, another question arises – is there anything more convincing within Gray's evolving thought that indicates the need for politics even given his pessimistic outlook?

In order to answer this question, the next chapter will look at Gray's often rather fraught relationship with liberalism. Gray started as a neoliberal, but turned his back on that strand of liberalism. Later works, particularly the collection of essays entitled *Postliberalism* show an increasing dissatisfaction with the liberal tradition as a whole. Yet Gray still attempted to offer an alternative vision of that political philosophy in his book *Two Faces of Liberalism* – and it is in that text that he advocates a political philosophy focussed on a *modus vivendi*; a concept he has returned to even in his more pessimistic books. Consequently, the next chapter will consider Gray's changing liberalism and the extent to which the *modus vivendi* offers a meaningful political philosophy in light of pessimistic understandings of the limited nature of human reason and the apparent impossibility of universalistic optimistic philosophy.

8: Conclusion: Pluralist Political Philosophers and the Reality of Pluralism

Introduction

This concluding chapter will attempt to bring together the very different political philosophers considered in the main body of the thesis and identify any linking strands of thought that exist between the thinkers. Its purpose is to suggest that despite the disparate ideas and differing concerns of Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray there are clear shared implications of their work in relation to the idea of the reality of pluralism and that through drawing out some of these strands an argument can be made about what underpins the reality of pluralism and its relevance to political philosophy.

In order to achieve this, the chapter will take each of the thinkers in turn and review their thoughts in relation to pluralism in order to firstly demonstrate why each thinker – however limited their enthusiasm to the concept might be – are committed to the reality of pluralism with a view to secondly seeking to demonstrate that this commitment to the concept is a linking strand despite the very different ways and with very different outlooks on it. It will start by reviewing Arendt's understanding of pluralism as the alternative to the extremities of totalitarianism, before reviewing how she offers her version of pluralism in defining the concept of action in distinction to labour and work. It will round off the summary of Arendt by pointing to her claims that action / pluralism is essential to make humanity human, and that this is central to her commitment to the reality of pluralism in both meaningful political philosophy and political interaction.

From there the chapter will turn back to MacIntyre, considering first his issues with what he terms as emotivism since the Enlightenment and how this form of pluralism is deeply problematic in his worldview. After briefly reviewing some of the basic limitations of MacIntyre's preferred alternative to the emotivism the chapter will consider the concept of the conflict between traditions in MacIntyre, both in terms of demonstrating the further limitations of Thomism, and, more importantly, how this

relates to the reality of pluralism as a key part of the advancement of political philosophy. From there, a review of John Gray will take place – starting with a demonstration of how his changing attitude to liberalism is actually a movement towards the closest explicit endorsement of the reality of pluralism through his analysis of what he terms "value pluralism" in *Two Faces of Liberalism*. It will then turn to review the later, nihilistic Gray of *Straw Dogs* and suggest that there is nothing within it that would deny the reality of pluralism even in this more misanthropic turn in his political and philosophical thought.

This will then lead to the final section of the chapter which will look in detail at the mutual underpinnings of the reality of pluralism between the three philosophers with a view to identifying a tentative definition of the concept which can then be applied to contemporary political philosophy. This definition will focus on the idea that the reality of pluralism is a commitment to political philosophy as inherently discursive and forever evolving. In short, this chapter is attempting to argue that if one were able to put Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray in a room together to discuss political philosophy then the chances are they would not agree but would look to interact openly with one another, learning, debating and allowing their respective philosophies to evolve as they did so – and that this is precisely the key point that underpins the links in their political philosophies and the reality of pluralism.

Arendt – Pluralism as Human

Hannah Arendt's distinct take on political philosophy represents a clear commitment to pluralism – albeit using terminology largely unique to her political thought. Action, which represents on her terms a form of pluralism, is essential to both a meaningful form of political philosophy and humans realising their distinct status from the rest of the animal kingdom. However to truly understand why action is so important it is worth considering, as Chapter 2 of this thesis attempted to do, the extreme alternative that manifests itself in totalitarianism. For Arendt, totalitarianism represents an extreme of the human experience – in essence, it is an extreme that denies humanity, which effectively dehumanises all of the individuals who live under a totalitarian regime. Arendt argues that there are a number of ways in which this dehumanisation occurs. For example, there is the removal of the basic rights of citizenship manifested in the terrible irony that a Jew in Nazi Germany would be better off entertaining the legal system as a criminal than they would be remaining law-abiding as the former would allow them the rights and protection of the legal system whereas the latter approach would see them lose their status as citizens – something that is a clear step on the road to the concentration camps. Its extreme perhaps lies in the Khmer Rouge slogan mentioned in the second chapter where the expendability of the citizens of Democratic Kampuchea is made starkly clear.

Another of the ways in which a totalitarian regime dehumanises its population is the refusal to accept or even allow the acknowledgement of reality. Hence the failed Five Year Plans of the Stalinist era were not just hit in the ersatz history of the regime but were actually exceeded. Or the regime where a democratic constitution was implemented even as show trials were underway to send perceived enemies of the regime to the gulag or to an even worse fate. It can also be seen in the DPRK, where a dead man still rules, where aid is claimed to be reparations, where the people are told that they have nothing to envy even as they starve and where the regime is so afraid of outside influences affecting the perception of its people that they use the death penalty for interacting with the outside

world. As well as linking with Arendt's idea that totalitarian regimes collapse in on themselves if they face reality, the dehumanisation of the people trapped by totalitarianism comes from the fact that the reality they can see, hear and feel all around them is something they have to deny on the orders of the regime.

The most relevant way in which totalitarian regimes dehumanise their people in relation to the reality of pluralism is the denial of pluralism, or at least pluralistic discourse. Because the regimes cannot allow for any sort of debate that might challenge their false reality or create dissent against the abuse of human rights, any sort of open conversation or political discussion has to be suppressed. Indeed, one of the core methods used to remove free speech under totalitarianism is through creating an environment where sharing other than the spurious creeds of the regime in power is inherently dangerous as reporting those who do dissent to the authorities is pro-actively praised. Everyone's peers therefore become potential enemies who cannot be trusted. This then means that the public space – so crucial for Arendt – is stifled into non-existence and people cannot go through the basic expression with one another that Arendt sees as the inherently human experience for any individual. Therefore, on the Arendtian account, the reality of existence under totalitarianism means an individual can be surrounded by his or her peers yet still be in total isolation, radically disconnected intellectually and emotionally from those around them. As such, they begin to resemble animals unable to effectively communicate with what another except with the key distinction that animals cannot undertake that effective communication while those living under totalitarian states. Hence the dehumanisation that comes with the removal of the possibility of pluralism.

As Chapter Three discussed, what could be viewed as the opposite to the nightmare of totalitarianism in Arendtian philosophy is action. Standing in distinction to labour (essential for human existence activities such as farming) and work (producing more permanent products that allow the human race to move beyond a mere subsistence existence), action is the interaction between individuals in a public space that allows those individuals to learn about themselves and others through open debate and discourse. It is for Arendt the fundamentally human activity; it is something

that animals cannot do and, as noted above, something those living under totalitarian regimes are not allowed to do. Furthermore, action is about possibility and potential. There is no guarantee that the outcomes of action are going to be positive – by its very nature, the implications of the outcomes cannot be anticipated even as action is undertaken. Nonetheless, even as it can be conceded that there is the risk of a negative outcome from action, the possibility of a positive outcome is still possible. Thus action is not a commitment to stability, but that instability does allow for individuals to create their own futures – positive as well as negative.

What, then, can be taken as the explicit implications for the reality of pluralism from the account of Arendt presented across the course of this thesis? First of all, pluralism can be seen as reality not because it is always a guaranteed status quo, as its denial under totalitarianism clearly shows. Rather, it becomes a reality because it is natural; humans should be able to come together and interact with one another since, as Arendt clearly argues, this is essential to what separates humanity from animals. The reality of pluralism can be seen in the notion that action can only happen in a pluralistic setting – indeed, an individual cannot undertake action as it is completely dependent in interaction with others. Put at its starkest, Arendt suggests the reality is that an individual needs pluralism in order to be human. Thus Arendt's is an example of political philosophy that sees the reality of pluralism as a crucial part of the human condition is based on engagement with others; essentially the reality of pluralism as politics of engagement.

MacIntyre – Pluralism as Problem

If Arendt's take on pluralism can be seen as largely positive, the MacIntyre's approach to pluralism could be perceived to be ambivalent at best, and at times clearly hostile. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Four, MacIntyre's arguably most famous work, *After Virtue*, takes a form of pluralism in the guise of emotivism and sees it as having a devastating impact on debate and discourse since it emerged in the Enlightenment. The problems MacIntyre has seen in emotivism are based primarily around it rendering people incapable of having a meaningful debate with one another as there is no pre-agreed parameter against which to assess which argument is most credible. This is discussed further in Chapter Four but as the differing thinkers and their attitudes to the reality of pluralism are brought together in this conclusion it is worth noting one key thing about MacIntyre's thoughts in *After Virtue*: he sees that pluralism as the reality of the post-Enlightenment age, but he perceives it to be a problem.

The Aristotelian and Thomist alternatives to emotivism defended by MacIntyre ultimately are not entirely convincing. As noted earlier in the thesis, argumentative strategies around the limitations of the genealogist approach do not take the possibility of self-awareness from the genealogist as to influences on his or her own way of thinking. Furthermore, MacIntyre's initial embrace of Aristotelian philosophy and then the Thomism that he supplanted it with do not entirely convince as alternatives to emotivism. They might, as philosophies, offer more certainty that either the emotivist or Nietzschean alternatives can but that does not alone mean they can overcome either. There is a real sense in which Aristotelian or Thomist philosophy does not overcome emotivism but rather become other voices in the emotivist debate. Indeed, the same could be said of the Alasdair MacIntyre who wrote *After Virtue* – he ends up critiquing the very debate into which he himself falls.

Despite his concerns around emotivist pluralism it is possible to flesh out a more positive take on pluralism in MacIntyre's work, even if it does not necessarily help MacIntyre's commitment to Thomism. As Chapter Four also noted, MacIntyre's work, both within *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and beyond, suggests that MacIntyre can see a more positive – or at least useful –

approach to pluralism. MacIntyre considers the way different philosophical traditions interact with one another and how one might come to supplant another. It is only through interaction between traditions that they can learn from one another and the more effective ones can emerge, often at the cost of one another. Pluralism is to be the background to these interactions; indeed, it is difficult to see how traditions could exchange ideas and move forward without a pluralistic backdrop to those interactions. This does not help MacIntyre's championing of Thomism since an argument can easily be constructed about how Thomism's fall from prevalence within philosophy is down to its defeat at the hands of alternative traditions. However it does create another sense of the reality of pluralism – that the progression of thought is dependent on a pluralist academic and philosophical reality.

Chapter Five introduced another challenge from MacIntyre towards pluralism in his earlier work on Marxism and Christianity. As Chapter Five discusses in more detail, MacIntrye introduces the idea that between two very different belief systems that are often in conflict there is one linking factor – they offer certainty and comfort in relation to the trials and tribulations of the world. Both Marxism and Christianity provide belief systems that make sense of the world; hence people passionately believing in those creeds. It would be easier to bring other creeds into this idea that some belief systems offer that comfort and inspire fervent followers, but this is not the main reason as to why this idea from MacIntyre is so important. The idea of these belief systems that can become all-encompassing cannot lead to the denial of the existence of the reality of pluralism; there is little doubt that the Marxist and the Christian would enter into debate in a pluralist environment. The challenge to the reality of pluralism is how to contain such fervour within the confines of, for example, the Arendtian public space or the philosophical debates that evolve though in MacIntyre's analysis.

Ultimately, therefore, MacIntyre's approach to pluralism is essentially twofold – on the one hand it is at best circumspect as he considers emotivism, while the alternative sees it more as a natural part of the process involved in the evolution of philosophy and conflict in tradition. Despite this ambivalence in his thoughts on pluralism there is one thing that cannot be denied – he sees in the emotivism of modernity and within the evolution of different philosophical traditions an inherently

pluralistic reality. If his treatment of pluralism can be directly compared with that of Arendt's pluralism as a politics of engagement it could be said that MacIntyre is more focussed on the implications of pluralism, but neither would deny the existence of the reality of pluralism.

Gray – Pluralism and Pessimism

As shown in Chapter Six, John Gray moved from a position that could be accurately described as neoliberal in his earlier published work through a number of alternatives before arriving at an extremely pluralistic approach in his book *Two Faces of Liberalism.* His move through the liberal tradition arguably ends with the clearest political philosophy that might tie in with the reality of pluralism; his idea on intractable conflict in the face of value pluralism ties in closely with the reality of pluralism considered throughout this thesis. His assertion that the fact of value pluralism is the logical liberal position and that the toleration of alternative views is essential to any successful liberalism links closely with the idea of the reality of pluralism reflects the fact that political philosophy is more about disagreements between political philosophies that converging on the truth.

Yet, as Chapter Seven discussed, the fact of value pluralism may be the final resting place of Gray's engagement with liberalism but it does not represent the end of his journey in philosophy. In *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* he moves to a position that is, at times, morbid, misanthropic and defeatist. At times he writes as if he has given up entirely on his own race, and through a controversial and debatable ecological theory he has decided the best thing for our planet is to lose that race altogether. As discussed in the chapter, it is not immediately easy to see how this move to misanthropy can be linked to his liberalism – especially the liberalism directly linked to *Modus Vivendi* and a general, broad toleration. Why would the reality of pluralism matter to a philosopher like Gray when he turns his face against anthropocentric philosophy?

As Chapter Seven showed, there is a solution to this problem by showing that even within the confines of Gray's misanthropy in *Straw Dogs* through the need for a *Modus Vivendi* to deal with the lethal environmental catastrophe facing the human race. However a more relevant train of thought from that chapter is to consider the relationship between Gray and pessimism before focusing in more detail on the latter. As discussed, Gray in this phase of his career could be best classified as a pessimist in the manner of the likes of Emil Cioran; a pessimist in the most literal sense in that he does not see

life getting any better. However on Dienstag's account there are other forms of pessimism. The main point to take for this concluding chapter is that one of the strands linking what proves to be a very eclectic collection of thinkers is the belief that the idea of progress is misplaced; it is not the claim that progress is impossible but rather than progress is not inevitable and regression is as possible as progression. This idea can be linked with the concept of convergence on a single truth as being unlikely within the reality of pluralism; progress to that version of the truth agreeable to all cannot be guaranteed. The reality of pluralism thus shares traits with Dienstag's definition of pessimism. It is also worth noting that this central strand of pessimism could also be applied to both Arendt and MacIntyre, since the former's definition of action as being an outlet for human creativity cannot guarantee a better tomorrow and the latter's distrust of emotivism shows he does not believe in the idea that progress is inevitable as the pattern of discourse since the Enlightenment has regressed.

Yet there is more that the philosophy of John Gray can offer the reality of pluralism than simply a similar idea in the fact of value pluralism and providing a tangential link between the three thinkers of this thesis via pessimism. To return full circle to the *Two Faces of Liberalism* it is worth considering the *Modus Vivendi* that Gray argues is necessary for effective politics given the facts of value pluralism and how it can further, and more clearly, link Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray himself with the reality of pluralism. Arendt's public space, for example, could benefit from a more formal application of *Modus Vivendi* in order to attempt to guarantee that space moving forward much in the manner of the US constitution as she describes it in *On Revolution*. From MacIntyre's perspective the *Modus Vivendi* could, albeit in a far more substantive form than the one Gray discusses in *Two Faces of Liberalism*, provide a basis for more constructive debate and discourse than the relative anarchy of emotivism. It could also assist with the conflict between intellectual traditions as it provides an extremely basic framework within which very disparate traditions can interact with one another and possibly extend the extent of human knowledge. While Chapter Six suggested that a potential weakness of *Modus Vivendi* is how potentially broad and nebulous it is as a concept, yet here that weakness could be

characterised as a strength as it provides a point of synergy between otherwise often very different political thinkers.

Yet a very broad concept providing a point of convergence for different political thinkers is not enough to explain how it directly relates to the reality of pluralism. In order to show its importance in helping to bring Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray together and to help to flesh out the idea of the reality of pluralism and its relevance to political philosophy the final section of this thesis will consider the idea of a political philosophy that draws on the philosophies of all three thinkers – the philosophy of an intersubjective engagement and the basic foundational requirement that their mutual recognition of the reality of pluralism creates a need for. The final section of this thesis will consider this is more detail.

The Basic Foundational Requirement of the Reality of Pluralism

What, then can be taken from these three philosophers and their differing treatment of the reality of pluralism? The answer seems to be that pluralism requires those taking part in any debate to critically engage with other people. More than that, though, it requires those individuals to be able to take part in those debates – something that does not necessarily exist, as Arendt's study of totalitarianism demonstrates. It is not enough for the individuals who wish to take part in politics or philosophy to have a voice; they need to be able to use that voice through interactions with others. The reality of pluralism is ameliorated if there is, in Arendtian terms, a genuine public place in which individuals can come together and engage with and learn from others. An immediate challenge that arises, though, is whether there could be any sort of public place that would maximise the freedom to allow voices to be heard which could be acceptable to Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray.

It is possible to draw out links or areas of agreement between the Arendtian public space and Gray's *Modus Vivendi.* The thinkers arguably arrive at the common ground through entirely opposite starting place. For Arendt, the possibility of action in the public place is, if not guaranteed to be positive, preferable to the alternatives of a less than human existence under a life devoted to work, labour or even under totalitarianism. She comes to arrive at action in her public space through seeing this as the best possible forum for realising human potential. Gray, however, arrives at his version of *Modus Vivendi* through the conclusion that the reality for humanity is the fact of value pluralism; *Modus Vivendi* provides a skeletal approach to human interaction that takes into account the views and beliefs of people are often in conflict to the point of incommensurability. His journey is less about realising human potential than reflecting human reality.

What then of MacIntyre? Can his philosophy be brought into line with the idea of Arendt's public space for action or Gray's *Modus Vivendi?* It would be difficult to argue that the MacIntyre who wrote *After Virtue* could agree with either. A follower of MacIntyre could object to the idea of a public space on the ground that there would be no guarantee that emotivism within it can be avoided. The

potential of humanity might be realised through action in the public space but no Arendtian could disagree with the charge that other outcomes are possible, including emotivism. Furthermore the possibility of emotivism could paralyse the interactions between individuals that Arendt holds so highly through individuals talking past each other even when together in the public space. The same charge could be levelled at Gray's *Modus Vivendi*; there is nothing within in the *Modus Vivendi* that could prevent emotivism and the incommensurable conflicts in values that leads Gray to *Modus Vivendi* potentially sounding a lot like the very emotivism he wants to avoid. On this reading of MacIntyre it could be argued that part of his project is to reject the more nebulous and amorphous political settlements which Arendt and Gray move towards.

Yet is the argument against emotivism as presented in *After Virtue* truly a decisive blow against the ideas of a public place for action and Gray's version of *Modus Vivendi*, especially when other key ideas discussed in this thesis are brought into play? The answer here has to be in the negative. While MacIntyre might point to both Arendt's and Gray's ideas and see large flaws based on the propensity of both to allow for emotivism, his idea of conflict in rival traditions being vital for the growth of philosophy and politics also requires some sort of mechanism whereby those members of the rival traditions can constructively engage with one another and further develop their traditions or even form new ones. This could be achieved in either the Arendtian public space or in Gray's *Modus Vivendi* – or, indeed, in some other similar mechanism. Indeed, this sort of arena for debate and discussion is arguably crucial given the need for those who hold very different belief systems such as Christianity and Marxism to be able to constructively engage with one another rather than exist in perpetual conflict. Finally, it is also worth noting that in a closed system where certain voices are silenced is essential for something like the Thomist voice to be heard; in a purely Marxist space it would arguably be one of the voices rejected from any collective conversation because of its Christian roots. If MacIntyre does believe that Thomism should emerge as the most convincing tradition then he needs to embrace some sort of system or mechanism that will allow that tradition to engage with its rivals.

This, then, becomes the key unifying factor or thought between the very different philosophies of Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray – a mechanism that allows for the reality of pluralistic engagement between individuals. They all arrive at this point through differing means and yet it does seem to be a common thought – explicit or otherwise – that underpins their different philosophies. Crucially this does not mean that they have to endorse each other's own versions of that mechanism of the reality of pluralism – Gray does not have to talk in terms of a public space for action just as Arendt does not have to posthumously endorse Gray's *Two Faces of Liberalism*; MacIntyre does not have to wholeheartedly support either. The common strand is not a particular type of political mechanism that embraces pluralism – it is the understanding that such a mechanism is crucial given the reality of pluralism. The nature of this mechanism is open to interpretation and change; indeed, it would be counter-intuitive if such a tool of pluralism could only exist within very constrained or limited parameters. Nonetheless, a common commitment to finding a way to make the reality of pluralism work unites the three political philosophers.

Yet simply stating that that Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray would be able to commit to a system that allows for pluralism is a slim claim; it is only marginally more useful that stating that all three show a commitment to political philosophy. In order for this to become a more meaningful claim some light needs to be shed on what the mechanism or political settlement that allows for the reality of pluralism might actually look like. While such a mechanism or settlement might, as already noted, evolve and develop – not least because of the outcomes of ongoing pluralistic debate about it – there needs to be something that creates a benchmark or basic parameter against which any mechanism or settlement purporting to allow for the reality of pluralism can be assessed. One such benchmark or parameter that might be useful here is establishing what the foundational requirement might be for those who wish to engage in a meaningful debate with others in the system supporting pluralism. Such a basic foundational requirement would need to be broad and inclusive to allow for as broad participation in philosophical and political debate as possible.

What might such a basic foundational requirement – one that might be acceptable to Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray – actually look like? Since the mechanism or settlement that allows for the reality of pluralism to be exercised relies on interaction between individuals, one core idea might be to make the basic foundational requirement to be something placed on those individuals. Again, this would need to be as unrestrictive as possible to allow for broad intersubjective engagement and debate. Therefore a key, relevant foundational requirement for the mechanism or settlement based on the reality of pluralism could be the requirement to take seriously the views of other people. Such a requirement is, inevitably, extremely broad and as such does run the risk of becoming a meaningless platitude unless it is fleshed out more. Therefore exploring further what is involved in the requirement is essential for the basic foundational requirement to enhance in anyway whatever method is used to allow for the reality of pluralism.

Taking seriously the views of other people as a foundational requirement opens up the potential for further expectations that can be placed on those individuals engaging in truly pluralistic debate. This first is to treat it actually as a foundation for the discussion being entered into. This would need to be the first step – one that should supersede other potential objectives of any of the individuals entering the debate or political arena. It would not necessarily restrict further objectives; rather, those objectives would be subordinated to the basic foundational requirement. Therefore a Marxist who holds their own version of the truth might enter the debate with the explicit objective of converting others to that version of the truth. The basic foundational requirement of engagement with the reality of pluralism would not preclude this. What the Marxist would have to do, however, is accept the plurality of views within that debate and take them seriously, be they liberal, conservative and so on. The Marxist would then have the comfort of knowing the others in the debate would be taking their opinions seriously.

Yet is this actually possible? Would a Marxist and, say, a conservative really be able to take each other's views seriously? It would be said at this juncture that the whole point of the basic foundational requirement would be to exclude those who cannot take the views of others seriously – so if the

Marxist or the conservative are not able to take the views of their counterpart seriously then they have no meaningful place in a system based on the reality of pluralism. Yet this would become a very heavy restriction of who might be able to participate in the differing debates. After all, how could a true Marxist take seriously the conservative, with their fundamental belief in the merits of tradition and the past leading to their endorsement of gross inequity and the denial of the better future offered by their Marxist beliefs? Likewise, after the horrors of the regimes associated with Marxism in the last century – some of which were alluded to the second chapter – how could the conservative take seriously the Marxist with their idea of a revolution that could lead to such horrors? The basic foundational requirement – initially meant to be as inclusive as possible – could end up being very restrictive or perhaps creating a reality where the Marxist can talk happily to another Marxist while a conservative could debate with problem with a fellow conservative without ever being able to meaningfully debate with the viewpoint dramatically different to their own.

The basic foundational requirement then needs to take into account the difficultly of taking the views and beliefs of others seriously, especially in cases such as the Marxist and the conservative where the views of the other individual seem so inherently wrong. A shift in the basic foundational requirement, then, could be to take what needs to be treated seriously one step back. Rather, therefore, than expecting the individuals entering the philosophical debate or political process seriously the basic foundational requirement could become to take the fact that the other person holds those views seriously. No endorsement of those views would need to be forthcoming. Rather, there would need to be a sense of mutual respect between the participants. The basic foundational requirement, then, becomes to respect an individual in a debate regardless of the views they hold, and to treat them with respect as those views are discussed even if an individual is and remains committed to ideas and beliefs that remain different or even fundamentally opposed to one's own ideas and beliefs. This, then, is the reality of pluralism: an acceptance that as long as individuals are allowed the freedom to think freely there will be differing views, ideas and beliefs; the challenge is to respect the right to hold those differing views and in doing so respect the individual hold them. The

alternative is to start to silence dissenting opinions and, as Arendt showed, the extreme end of this suppression of dissenting is dehumanisation under totalitarianism.

Having done some work on trying to understand what the basic foundational requirement of mechanism of the reality of pluralism might be it is worth pausing briefly to consider whether the requirement, as defined above, would actually be acceptable within the political philosophies of Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray. For Arendt, the idea of respecting the rights of others to hold dissenting views fits nicely with her concept of action. The idea of coming into a public space to intersubjectively act with others can only be enhanced by respect for individuals; indeed, it is almost mandatory that such respect exists. Furthermore the complete lack of respect for an individual who might hold differing views is one of the hallmarks of a totalitarian regime on Arendt's account. For Gray's *Two Faces of Liberalism* the idea of mutual respect for individuals despite differing beliefs is fundamental to the project he discusses; the fact of value pluralism, like the reality of pluralism, exists only when dissent and differing opinions are allowed. Mutual respect is an important if not essential part of any kind of healthy pluralism. Finally, for MacIntyre the conflict between traditions could have created issues with the first definition as that conflict is predicated on the idea traditions do not necessarily respect one another and that this can actually be positive as it leads to advances in traditions that are credible and the demise, if not extinction, of those that do not. However the reformulation of the basic foundational requirement is far more in keeping with the conflict in traditions as a certain level of mutual respect between the individuals in conflict leads to far more productive outcomes of their debates and arguments. Therefore the basic foundational requirement of the reality of pluralism is, on at least some levels, compatible with the ideas of Arendt, MacIntyre and Gray.

Yet what more can the reality of pluralism and the ideas this thesis has discussed offer beyond this broad foundational point? How might it be practically applicable? Here the broad nature of the concept potentially impacts on its practical implications. That broad nature, designed to allow for as many voices as possible to enter debate, also means that all attempts to codify it can run the risk of restricting the number of voices that can be heard. Underpinning this is the tension inherent with the

basic foundational requirement relating to freedom under the reality of pluralism – at some point a judgement has to be made as to what is and is not acceptable against that basic foundational principle. The reality of pluralism is predicated on there being numerous different views, beliefs, values and so on – yet if it is to become any sort of practical reality then at some point some of those views or beliefs or values will need to be restricted as they damage intersubjective engagement. They cannot meet the basic foundational requirement. This tension can be seen elsewhere – for example in Arendt's work *On Revolution*, where the US constitution has to strike a balance between creating that public space that allows for intersubjective action and avoiding the anarchy and collapse into proto-totalitarianism that France experienced after its revolution. In a purely theoretical sense the reality of pluralism should allow all voices to be heard; the practical aspect to this, though, is that such idealism is not possible – those voices that deny pluralism may have to be denied themselves as they would damage that pluralism.

Yet there is a further way in which the basic foundational requirement can offer a broader debate that can be as inclusive as possible, even of those voices that would see pluralism as a problem that needs to be solved through its denial or removal from practical reality. Here the trick would be to stress what actually needs to be surrendered in order to become part of a debate based on this particular politics of engagement – fundamentally, there is no need for anyone to concede at the beginning of a conversation that their point is wrong and that their potential opponent is correct. They do not have to even go as far as to believe that they could be wrong and their opponent could be correct. They would even be able to argue that pluralism is not the way forward and that they might be pushing through their rhetoric and argumentation to end the debate. However all they would have to concede at the outset is that engaging with the other people involved in the conversation is something they would be willing to undertake. The basic foundational requirement therefore becomes a willingness to enter the debate even if in fundamental disagreements with the debate's existence – just so long as those holding such views do not practically try to destroy that debate.

However this then leads to the question of what happens if that individual who is opposed to pluralism but willing to argue for their viewpoint with a pluralistic debate wins? What if they are able to persuade others to end pluralistic discourse? Here it does have to be conceded that such a turn of events could occur; much like there can be no guarantee in Arendtian action that outcomes will be positive, so no concrete guarantee can be offered that engaging in pluralism will ensure that pluralism is a permanent feature of the political and philosophical landscape. There may be an argument, fleshed out through pluralistic debate, which ultimately comes to convince all. This takes the thesis full circle to the notion discussed in the first chapter that the reality of pluralism does not deny that there might be a truth convincing to all; rather, it looks at the long, fractious history of political and philosophical debate and states that such convergence on a particular view seems highly unlikely. Put simply, the person who enters the debate with a conviction that they will persuade others to shut it down flies in the face of historical reality. What closes down pluralistic debate is not the debate itself, according to analyses of history such as Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism, but the use of force. While there is nothing within the idea of the reality of pluralism that can guarantee its longevity in the face of force and violence, this is also true of other concepts, such as freedom and liberty, which have considerable traction within political and philosophical debate despite their vulnerability to such pressures.

One final question to raise on the reality of pluralism is to ask just how radical and original an idea it actually is. A response might be to say that pointing to disagreement across the course of political and philosophical history is neither radical nor particularly original. It is offering instead a commentary around a perception of reality that three different thinkers have arrived at through different means and with differing levels of enthusiasm. An immediate rejoinder to this would be to point out that a political philosophy does not need to be radical nor original in order to be valid. Its merits can lay elsewhere, through offering relevant insights that may have a validity distinct from claims of originality and radicalism. Yet while this is true to a large extent of the reality of pluralism, there is a sense in which even the most cursory review of both contemporary philosophy and politics shows there is, if

not originality, then at least there is something radical in pointing to the reality of pluralism where entrenched positions have become commonplace and in some areas almost dominant. An example of this might be elements of modern academia where open-minded discourse has been replaced by defence of certain philosophical schools of thought and political identities. It becomes a case of liberal against conservative, liberal vs communitarian, realist vs idealist and so on – with many voices silenced as they do not directly contribute to academic debates that often struggle to get beyond a purely semantic level. This idea becomes even more striking – and potentially radical – when it is compared to politics in the real world. Contemporary politics shows a world where anti-abortion militants commit murder because of their belief in the right to life and fundamentalists from different chapters of the same religion are willing to drag whole nations into civil war – these represent cases where any rationality in dialogue has not only ceased to exist but the whole concept of a dialogue with anyone other than the most fervent fellow believer has ceased. To make the basic foundational claim of the reality of pluralism becomes radical in such contexts – the concept of engaging with others with very different, if not completely opposed views, from the perspective of the other person as an individual with beliefs rather than attempting to respect their views would arguably represent a major departure in many of the political debates, arguments and conflict that exist in contemporary political practice across the globe.

Ultimately the reality of pluralism and the basic foundational requirement are a clear possibility for wider political philosophy – yet it is a possibility that is not about ending philosophical debate or only being able to accept the possibility of one truth. It is about the possibility of ongoing philosophical and political discussion and debate. It is about the political and philosophical instincts of individuals growing, developing and evolving through open-minded intersubjective engagement with others. MacIntyre perhaps sums up this sentiment best himself with the final paragraph in his "Reply to Critics" at the end of *After MacIntyre* when he writes "(t)his reply to my critics is one contribution to what I hope will be a series of continuing conversations. Too all those who have helped me to understand my own point of view better and to correct or supplement it where it badly needed to be

corrected or supplemented I am most grateful. In the case of those who are most antagonistic - some

of who are also among those who have helped me the most - I can only hope that, by defining their

own positions over against mine, they have clarified their own theses and arguments in ways useful

to them. Whether I have learned as much as I should from all my critics is a matter not so much of this

essay, as of their impact upon my future writing."[299]

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[299] MacIntyre, A "A Partial Reply to My Critics" in Horton and Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, p.304

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