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Three issues of the journal are published annually. The second issue is a special issue that brings together articles by experts on a topic chosen by the Editorial Board. Articles are published in English, French, or German, with abstracts in Slovenian and English.

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Gorazd Kovačič*

Arendt's Break with the Liberal Imaginary of Society[1]

Introduction

The discourse on civil society and its relation to the state has framed the liberal tradition of political philosophy since Hobbes, and it spread especially between the mid 18th and mid 19th centuries.[2] Hundreds of authors participated in it, and the differences between their positions were always articulated through a restructured account of natural human sociability and the relationship between civil society and the state. The theoretical discussion of this disappeared after the political authorities in Western countries were constrained by liberal constitutions and partial democracy (class and gender exclusive), and it was later resumed only sporadically as an attempt to articulate a programme of extra-institutional opposition to authoritarian government. One of the cases of this was Gramsci's plans for an opposition strategy to maintain ideological confrontation within civil society, which he wrote while in fascist prisons. Another case is the Central and Eastern European anti-communist dissident movements from the late 1970s onwards, which articulated their oppositional practices using the concept of civil society.

The liberal tradition of political philosophy formed a particular imaginary of civil society to which some formal characteristics were ascribed. These enabled this philosophy to imagine civil society as a self-regulating sphere that could regulate its internal conflicts by itself and required only a minimal security state over it. This imaginary later entered the modern concept of society constitutive of the social sciences, and it was a signifier of a much broader field or set of

1 This article is a result of the research project J5-1749 "The break in tradition: Hannah Arendt and conceptual change" and the research program P6-0194 "Problems of autonomy and identities at the time of globalization", both financed by Slovenian Research Agency.

2 John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, London and New York, Verso, 1988, pp. 36, 63.

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issues than that of the relationship between autonomous civil society and the limited state within the liberal tradition. It has also been adopted by functionalist sociology, as well as by Marxist utopian political discourse (which is distinct from Marxist theory and social analysis), where it has been projected into ideas about the future classless society.

The first part of the article analyses the formal characteristics attributed to civil society and the human activities within it by the liberal tradition of political philosophy. Given the limited space, this article will not go into the details of its key texts (with the exception of Locke, since he was the pioneer of the idea of the self-regulation of civil society), but it will use some of the receptions thereto in recent decades. One of them was John Keane, who in the 1980s theorized the ideas and practices of the CEE dissident movements using the concept of civil society and especially its distinction from the state.[3] The other two belong to the materialist critique of the liberal concept of civil society. The critique of Locke's political philosophy, written by Ellen Meiksins Wood,[4] placed property interests at the centre of 17th century political philosophical debates about civil society and the state. Foucault's critique of the liberal concept of civil society presented it as the basis of a new, biopolitical governmentality in modernity.[5] All three receptions similarly discovered the form of civil society imagined by the liberal tradition of political philosophy.

In the second part, the article presents and analyses the break in the traditional imaginary of the formal characteristics of (civil) society made by Hannah Arendt, especially in her writings on anti-Semitism and the other components of the genesis of the Shoah.

2 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*.

3 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment*, London and New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 256–287.

5 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. We understand Foucault's work and this book to be materialist, even though he has written much on the history of ideas, discourse, and mentality. His materialist understanding is that he ascribes to the practices of power the fundamental role in the development of human formations. Meanwhile, discourses are rather functions of practices of power and they are their research indicators, but not their source or even cause.

The concept of civil society in liberal political philosophy

John Keane was the key author who theorized the ideas and practices of the CEE dissident movements in the 1980s. He renewed the already abandoned theoretical discussion of the relationship between civil society and the state, and he saw its historical importance in placing limits on the power of the state.[6] He applied this early modern liberal perspective to socialist political goals and argued for a democratization of real socialism so that civil society and the state would be separate; the former would limit state jurisdiction, both would engage in socialist goals, and thus the result would be a democratic socialist state and a socialist-oriented civil society.[7]

Beginning with an emphasis on the separation between civil society and the state, Keane interpreted and periodized the development of the concept of civil society through its various modifications presented by key authors from Hobbes to Tocqueville.[8] According to Keane, the decisive break in the development or the moment of the modernization of the concept occurred when the term ceased to denote a form of government (one dedicated to respect for fundamental rights) and civil society began to be perceived as a sphere and an entity separate from state authority. Within it, people were said to relate to others in cooperation and grassroots association rather than through the agency of government.[9] Such a notion of civil society was the benchmark for limiting the power of government. Crucial in the imaginary of civil society was the idea that it was capable of effectively and justly governing itself, so that government interference with it was unnecessary. It was derived from theses about human nature enabling people to coexist peacefully and cooperate justly within civil society. The development and reinforcement of this idea can be traced in major authors from Locke to Paine. Its normative political consequence was the intensification of the demand for a minimal state.

In Hobbes's model of the security state, people still threatened each other in the state of nature, and there was no tendency in human nature towards peace-

5 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*.

6 John Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism: Toward a Socialist Theory of Democracy*, Cambridge, etc., Cambridge University Press, 1984.

7 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*. Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism*.

8 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, pp. 35–36.

ful and harmonious coexistence. Security was only guaranteed by an absolutist government, which created a condition for peace called civil society. Hobbes mentioned a private sphere within civil society where people could autonomously organize themselves into private associations, but he thought that this was only possible as long as the ruler guaranteed peace and the existence of civil society and as long as he or she did not prohibit certain associations.[10]

The idea of a natural tendency to cooperate and act in solidarity, which enabled the theoretical discourse on civil society as a self-regulating sphere, was developed by Locke in his *An Essay Concerning the True Origins, Extent and End of Civil Government*.[11] This idea was a prerequisite for Keane's modernization of the concept of civil society, although Locke articulated it not in his terminology but in his assumptions, which we will present a little later. Locke wrote about political and civil society as two sides of the same order. The notion of political community denoted the existence of authority, and the notion of civil society denoted the purpose of associating in order to keep property. The formal side or condition of living in civil society was subjection to the legal order provided by the authority, while the reason for interest in the establishment of civil society and civil government was the preservation of everyone's property. To this end, political authority was more efficient than individuals punishing violators in the state of nature.

In Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*,[12] civil society was not yet distinct from the state, but, similar to Locke, meant a kind of political order characterized by the rule of law and regular government. Within this order, increasingly efficient production and trade have been developing, and this economic progress has brought about the resulting "'civilizing' trends,"[13] but there was also an eventual regression, due to the hypertrophy of state administration and the decay of the sense of the public good and interdependence between

9 Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, pp. 36–39.

11 John Locke, "An Essay Concerning the True Origins, Extent and End of Civil Government", in *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003, pp. 100–209.

12 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 5th ed., Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, Inc., available at: https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/ferguson-an-essay-on-the-history-of-civil-society , accessed 20 June 2021.

13 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, p. 40.

groups, which showed itself as the selfishness and hunger for honour among the rich and as clientelism and criminality among the poor. "[T]he loss of public spirit neutralizes [...]citizens' suspicion of power and thus prepares the way for despotic government."[14] Thus, civil society needs the administrative state, but economic processes in civil society as well as administration by the government "threate[n] citizen's civil liberties and capacity for independent association, thus undermining a *sine qua non* of life in civil society."[15] Ferguson's solution to this paradox was a republicanist one: he appealed to the reinforcement of public virtue through participation in civic associations, jury courts, and a conscript army, within what we now call civil society in the narrow sense, but within the broadly understood civil society of his day.[16]

Thomas Paine, in *Rights of Man*,[17] written in the shadow of French Revolution, called for the radical curtailment of the power of government in favour of civil society. He valued government as a necessary evil, always prone to despotism, and called for its reduction to a minimum. On the other hand, he valued natural society as an unlimited good. Paine had to make arguments that civil society is almost self-sustaining, without the need to subject it to the control of government. He developed them, in accordance with the form of the liberal tradition of political philosophy, from a certain perception of human nature. "[W]ithin all individuals there is a natural propensity for society: existing before the formation of states, this natural sociability predisposes individuals to establish peaceful and happy relations of competition and solidarity, based only on reciprocal self-interest and a shared sense of mutual aid."[18] "[F]ree and equal individuals living together on earth actively desire peaceful and cooperative forms of social life which are self-reliant and independent of state institutions."[19] A "felicitous coincidence of instrumental market interests and the love of others [...] predisposes individuals to live together harmoniously by exercising their natural rights of freedom and happiness within a civil society which is unhin-

14 *Ibid*., p. 42.

15 *Ibid*., p. 43.

16 *Ibid*.

17 Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution*, 2nd ed., Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, Inc., available at: https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/paine-the-rights-of-man-part-i-1791-ed , accessed 20 June 2021.

18 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, pp. 44–45.

19 *Ibid*., p. 48.

dered by state institutions and recognizes only the rules of mutual respect, the satisfaction of interest and the safety and freedom of all individuals."[20] "Individuals tend to interact with others spontaneously, and this leads them to form interlocking and self-sufficient social networks emancipated from conflict."[21] In contrast to this idea, Paine claimed that the overbearing state was responsible for barbarism in the modern world, for the perpetuation of patriarchy, for nationalisms, as well as for the creation of class divisions, which he explained as the result of excessive tax burdens.[22] Paine therefore envisioned a self-regulating society in which government was not needed except to sanction individual offenses. The social assumption within which Paine envisioned modern society, overlooking the increasing inequalities within it, was a pre-industrial economy of competition between small businessmen who were both owners and workers. At the macro level, he envisioned a global, stateless civil society: an "international confederation of peacefully cooperating civil societies"[23] would limit the power of individual governments.

A close examination of Locke's second *Treatise of Government* makes it clear that he ascribed the possibility of the emergence of a self-regulating society already to the state of nature. He viewed this as a state of individuals' full freedom, sovereignty, and equality in their right to self-preservation. Natural law did not give individuals the authority to use arbitrary force or to appropriate another's property, but only the right to use personal and direct force against an aggressor and to claim damages.[24] Thus, exaggerations in penalties and compensation could occur, and a chain of revenge acts was set in motion. But such complications of the state of nature resulting in war were not a regularity. Locke understood the state of nature fundamentally as "a state of peace, good-will, mutual assistance and preservation."[25] According to him, the state of nature was neither a state of general war, as in Hobbes, nor a state of individual isolation and autarchy, but a state of a functioning and fully developed economy. Labour, the division of labour, the hiring of a labour force, and thus class relations, in-

20 Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, p. 45.
21 *Ibid*., p. 46.
22 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, p. 45.
23 *Ibid*., p. 49.
24 Locke, "An Essay Concerning the True Origins, Extent and End of Civil Government", pp. 102–103.
25 *Ibid*., p. 108.

cluding the appropriation and distribution of property, in short, developed economic structures already existed in the state of nature, before the establishment of civil society and the legal state.[26] After property relations became a target due to increasing social tensions, as a result of the concentration of property and the lack of waste grounds on which non-owners could attempt their own projects of land appropriation through labour, owners established civil society to protect their property.[27] There are only a few fragments in Locke's second treatise that discuss these pre-civil society interests and the reasons for the establishment of civil society, while the major part of the essay argues at length about the rule of law as the essence of civil society after it was established.

Locke's installation of developed economic relations in the state of nature had two consequences. First, the state of nature was already a kind of society,[28] as it included the division of labour, trade, property, and class conflict. What was newly created by the establishment of civil society over these economic structures was merely centralized authority, with its exclusive right to use violent means, and the rule of law. And second, property and class relations were something pre-political for Locke, such that legal government should not interfere with them except to the extent necessary for the taxation required to maintain the apparatuses of a minimal security and rule of law state. Locke's key starting point, which was followed in the ensuing centuries by the notion of society as a self-regulating structure, was not his concept of civil society but his description of the state of nature, in which there was already a rich economic and social life and in which economic and property relations were not yet developed.

A materialist critique of the liberal concept of civil society

The Marxist tradition challenged precisely the assumption made by liberal political philosophy about the capacity of civil society to regulate itself justly. There was the core thesis that civil society was populated by *homo economicus* (although liberal thinkers also included non-profit, e.g. intellectual and religious, activities within it) engaged in competition and class conflict. A more

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[26] *Ibid*., pp. 112–114, 118–119, 135–136. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property*, p. 272.

[27] Locke, "An Essay Concerning the True Origins, Extent and End of Civil Government", pp. 119, 121.

[28] Explicit, for example, in *ibid*., p. 156.

fundamental assumption of this thesis was that civil society was a historical social formation. Whereas the entire liberal tradition, from Locke to Paine, derived its assumption about civil society's capacity for just and harmonious self-regulation from its ideas about human nature (these varied, but all denied the historical formation of human "nature" or values and tendencies towards action). Marx, on the contrary, based his theory (*inter alia*) on Hegel's realistic and historical description of civil society.

For Hegel, civil society was a historically formed realm. Within it there were the market economy and the other activities of private actors asserting their various and conflicting interests; the whole field was regulated by civil law. Within Hegelian civil society there were also various corporate associations and the public administration of social welfare. It was unable to resolve its inherent conflicts, fragmentation and injustices; only the supreme public authority was able to "synthesize its particular interests into a universal political community."[29] The state was to intervene in civil society to redress its injustices and inequalities and to enforce common interests defined only by the state as an agent of the mind.

Marx concretized Hegel's abstract description of the imperfections and contradictions in historically formed civil society with his analysis of capitalist class relations, recognized from the perspective of the proletariat and workers' movement. What liberal political philosophy conceived of as civil society was for Marx an element of bourgeois class society in which class exploitation takes place. In his view, bourgeois society – in its own imaginary – was split between the state sphere of abstract legal equality and the private sphere of civil society. Marx interpreted this split as ideologically functional, since it artificially dissected human life into a real man involved in production in the historically developed mode of production and thus installed in class-structured society, on the one hand, and an abstract citizen with abstract rights, which did not intervene in the structural injustices of capitalist society, on the other. The distinction made by political theory between civil society and the state was analytically fallacious for Marx because both "spheres" were overdetermined by capitalist class domination.[30] This should be analysed starting from the analysis of production and

[29] Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, p. 47.

[30] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction* (html version), Marxist Internet Archive, 2009, available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/

class relations,[31] rather than from the relationship between the spheres of civil society and the state.

Keane acknowledged that Marx was right to warn of a blind spot in the early modern tradition of political philosophy, namely its "silence [...] about the forms of social power and exploitation,"[32] but for him the biggest theoretical problem with Marx and the Marxist tradition was the abandonment of the separation between civil society and the state. This disabled them of the possibility to ask theoretical questions about the role, limitations, and legitimacy of state authority, which was given by the liberal tradition, motivated by an awareness of the "dangers generated by concentrations of political power."[33]

Instead of developing such a discussion, the Marxist theoretical tradition was concerned with "a myth of collective harmony" and "a tendency towards the organic unity of society."[34] It manifested itself in two currents. One espoused the idea of the state's necessary withering away and a self-managing classless society, while the other argued that the community should rule over and abandon the existing class-based civil society, which was characterized by disorder, domination, and corruption. Practical manifestations of these two theoretical currents were self-management and state forms of socialism. Keane held that from the perspective of the liberal separation of civil society and the state there was no crucial difference between these two currents and programmes, as both sought unification and homeostasis in society, and they only chose different ways to get there.[35]

However, this socialist vision of post-class social homeostasis is actually a continuity of the liberal imaginary. The difference was that socialist thought projected a possibility of social homeostasis in the future classless society after the revolution, whereas early modern liberal political philosophy presupposed it

marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/index.htm , accessed 20 June 2021.

31 Karl Marx, *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (html version), Marxist Internet Archive, 2009, available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/appx1.htm, accessed 20 June 2021.

32 Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, p. 60.

33 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, p. 64.

34 Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, p. 52.

35 *Ibid*., pp. 52–56.

already in the present society and even derived it from the state of nature and human nature. It could do so on condition that it disregarded the problems of class, race, gender, and other forms of domination.

A case of a more contemporary materialist interpretation of early modern liberal political philosophy was the critique of Locke and his theory of property and privatization as the core of claims on civil society and civil government written by Meiksins Wood in her book *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment*.[36] Her social history of Western political philosophy, published in two volumes,[37] interpreted the development of political philosophical ideas and concepts from Ancient Greece to the Enlightenment as the result of struggles between groups with different class interests and sometimes also ideological, especially religious beliefs. She presented the polemics between different ideas about ruling and its limitations in a particular time and space, in correlation with the antagonisms between the exploiting classes with their different strategies for exploiting surplus value.

The political context of the development of English political philosophy in the 17th century was the civil wars between royalists and parliamentarians, and its social context was the rise of agrarian capitalism, which used fencing and the seizure of common land and drove peasants off it. State power was centralized, so the nobility turned to a new source of power, namely capitalized agricultural land. It defended its property interests through Parliament. The dual rule of royal authority and noble property emerged, and was formalized in a mixed constitution.[38] Cohabitation between king and nobility came into conflict from time to time, but gave way to firm cooperation when, from the 1620s onwards, the masses entered the political arena with their social demands (against fencing and for the old customary rights to use common land) and political claims (the extension of suffrage in favour of non-owners, or at least small property owners). The political mobilization of non-owners increased when Cromwell mobilized them in the Parliamentary Army. This sparked a theoretical debate about who constituted the "body politic", the ruling class in Parliament or the politi-

36 Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 256–287.

37 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages*, London and New York, Verso, 2011. Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property*.

38 Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 212–220.

cally awakened people outside Parliament.[39] The parliamentarians' answer was clear: "Citizenship could belong only to those who had the 'wherewithal to live of themselves'."[40] Meanwhile, Leveller radicals, such as Thomas and William Rainsborough and Richard Overton, produced a thesis on self-propriety over one's own body, and they carried from it their demand for universal and equal suffrage, for freedom of religious belief, for the primacy of access to means of survival over the inviolability of private property, and they maintained that the primary purpose of government should be the preservation of the person in addition to the preservation of property, which was the origin of the theory of the welfare state.[41]

Half a century later, Locke, in his argument against absolute monarchy, referred to the Levellers' premises, but with the intention of arriving at anti-democratic conclusions that entailed no threat to property or to the political monopoly of property owners in Parliament. He blocked the demand for the right to vote, which stemmed from the Levellers' thesis of consent, with his own thesis of "tacit consent,"[42] and he legitimized the existing ownership with his theory of privatization. This, according to Meiksins Wood, is the key to understanding the background of interests in Locke's political philosophy.

A consequence of the thesis of self-propriety was the right to own one's own products under natural law. The same law also limited the amount of seizure to how much one could consume. However, the subsequent spread of money changed this, as it allowed one to take more than one could directly consume. In addition, the money economy encouraged trade, improvements, and productivity growth, which led to an increase in the common stocks of mankind compared to the use of unimproved natural resources in the traditional economy. This, according to Locke, was the reason why those who were able to improve productivity and capitalize on natural resources were able to appropriate large portions of land as they also improved the welfare of others who could be employed on their farms, thus achieving a better life than through the traditional mode of production. From the ability to accumulate surplus value was derived

39 *Ibid*., p. 229.
40 *Ibid*., p. 231.
41 *Ibid*., pp. 234–238.
42 *Ibid*., p. 264.

the right to privatize common resources and also other people's property, such as that of the natives, and it justified the inequality of property relations.

While the Levellers wanted to protect small property from large expropriators and separate wealth from political power, Locke theoretically secured property by grounding it in natural rights and conditioning it with capitalist competence, which was a new phenomenon at the time. He offered to non-owners living under a legal government symbolic representation in Parliament in lieu of their political participation.[43] He called such a social order civil society. The role of government, in his view, is to protect accumulated property, while a just and effective distribution of resources should be ensured through mechanisms of free exchange. Locke legitimized the wild agrarian capitalism of primary accumulation in England at the time as a society. He attributed to it the capacity for self-regulation, equitable market distribution, and thus spontaneous social harmony without state intervention. In this way, he not only depoliticized the class issue after it had already been politicized by the Levellers, but he also moved it beyond the horizon of moral philosophy. He eliminated the question of the sufficient accessibility of resources for all in the new order with the belief in progress, led by capitalist improvers. One solution to a possible shortage under capitalism was said to be more capitalism.

Another case of a materialist critique of the liberal idea of (civil) society was Foucault's analysis of civil society as an element of perfected modern governmentality in his 1978–1979 lecture cycle published under the title *The Birth of Biopolitics*. His starting point was the fact of ruling. The author was interested in the historical break between the sovereign and biopolitical modes of governing, which was accompanied by a break in the way liberal political philosophy thought about the limitations and efficacy of governing.

During the period of sovereign governing, legal-political theory was developing in polemics between supporters and opponents of absolutism. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the counter-absolutist opposition used a legal argument strategy in favour of limiting monarchical authority by discussing supposed pre-state natural laws and natural rights, and later by concluding a treaty establishing sovereign authority that would limit the king's arbitrary power. In the late 17th

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 266–278.

century and in the 18th century, the opposition developed a different strategy, according to Foucault. Sovereign authority was to limit itself regarding the economic dynamics among the ruled, as it could see labour and capital leaving after it had ruled too excessively, such as through excessive taxation or unreasonable regulations. Within this new theoretical strategy, the measure of governance was determined by political economy or economic growth. Foucault called this "new type of rationality in the art of government"[44] liberalism. The crucial trait of the new theoretical strategy was the separation between the realm that was supposed to be governed and another for which it would be more beneficial if "governing" left it autonomous. The second realm was called civil society or society, and it was perceived as separate from the state.

Foucault noticed that while in Locke's terminology civil society was still constituted by its state or legal ties and was identical to political society, in Ferguson's work a century later this was transformed into the view that civil society was a transhistorical given-ness and the result of human nature. This distinction, however, as we have already pointed out, was only a terminological one. The qualities that Ferguson ascribes to the state of affairs called "civil society" Locke had already attributed to the "state of nature," which would later be upgraded to "civil society." In Ferguson's civil society, within which, as within Locke's, there are "economic men [...] operating,"[45] social bonds are formed spontaneously, always and everywhere, and we are always already in society, so that it did not have to be founded at a particular moment.[46] According to Ferguson, "civil society assures the spontaneous synthesis of individuals" arising from "a summation of individual satisfactions within the social bond itself."[47] (Civil) society was reproduced as a spontaneous mechanics of interests. It acted as "spontaneous synthesis and spontaneous subordination," as "spontaneous bonding and spontaneous equilibrium."[48] Interference by the state in the spontaneously self-regulating economic development arising from society itself was not necessary and would also be counterproductive, since it would hinder the process of value production.

44 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 20.
45 *Ibid*., p. 298.
46 *Ibid*., pp. 298–299.
47 *Ibid*., p. 300.
48 *Ibid*., p. 305.

Keane designated the change in the concept of civil society in the 18th century as its modernization, and he interpreted the significance of this change as contributing to the arguments for limiting state authority. Foucault, meanwhile, was interested in a different aspect of this change of perspective, namely the new social power relations and governmentality arising from (civil) society itself, its hierarchies, its spontaneous division into subordinates and rulers, stemming from the social division of labour. He most of all assessed the significance of this change from the perspective of its function in creating a new liberal, biopolitical governmentality. As a theorist of power, Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* was primarily interested in restructuring governance as a practice, rather than in the development of the philosophical discourse on its limitation.

The modern mode of governing, Foucault argues, co-opted the liberal strategy of political-economic restrictions over executive authority and thus began to perform governing in a new way. The realm of civil society was populated by *homo economicus*, who asserted his own interests. Among them, a mechanics of the market prevailed in which the government was not to interfere.[49] Liberalism took this up as a "new type of rationality in the art of government,"[50] or the new "governmental regime,"[51] or the new "method of government,"[52] or its new "technology."[53] It adopted the liberal political philosophy's demand for the separation of the "social field" into an area of governmental interference and an area of independence from it for the governed.[54] Governing within this new regime was carried out as forming the condition under which the governed could follow their interests.

Foucault highlights an example of the new principles of governance in the central part of the book in his analysis of the early theory (of the German Ordoliberals) and practice of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism did not mean the distancing of governance from the private sphere, but its active interference in it, so that it created market and competition mechanisms as the principle of regulation regarding various spheres of life. The object of interference was "society as such,

49 *Ibid*., pp. 270–295.
50 *Ibid*., p. 20.
51 *Ibid*., p. 22.
52 *Ibid*., p. 13.
53 *Ibid*., p. 41.
54 *Ibid*.

in its fabric and depth"[55]; society was "the target and objective of governmental practice." More precisely, "the object of governmental action is [...] the social environment."[56] Governing was accomplished by shaping the social environment and the rules of the game in which men-as-businessmen were acting. There was "an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals."[57]

According to Foucault, the liberal political philosophy of the 18th century, which argued for a limitation of state authority, imagined *homo economicus* as someone who was and had to be an "intangible element with regard to the exercise of power."[58] Economic subjects alone entered into contracts to coordinate their mutual interests, while the entire economic world was unknowable to the sovereign, so that he or she had to let everyone act in his or her individual interest. The new, biopolitical governmentality took this into account, it adapted to the specificities of the economic field and economic subjects, and made civil society its object of ruling.[59] This new liberal governmentality "manages civil society, the nation, society, the social." Civil society is a part of the modern "technology of liberal governmentality."[60] Thus, society is "both [the] condition and final end"[61] of governance. In this new regime, *homo economicus* is no longer dependent on the old, sovereign type of governance, but he now "appears precisely as someone manageable" and "becomes the correlate of governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables."[62]

The form of civil society in the imaginary of liberal political philosophy

What was the form of civil society (whether named "civil society", or "state of nature" as in Locke, or "nation" as in Smith[63]), what was the description of its presuppositions and characteristics within the imaginary of early modern lib-

55 *Ibid*., p. 145.
56 *Ibid*., p. 146.
57 *Ibid*., p. 260.
58 *Ibid*., p. 270.
59 *Ibid*., pp. 286, 291–295.
60 *Ibid*., p. 296.
61 *Ibid*., p. 319.
62 *Ibid*., pp. 270–271.
63 *Ibid*., p. 298.

eral political philosophy? It consisted of features registered by both liberal affirmative reception, and Marxist critique, which we have described using the interpretations posited by Keane, Meiksins Wood, and Foucault.

The first formal feature of the imagined civil society in early modern liberal political philosophy was that it was presented as a sphere or an area. Human activities within this sphere were supposed to be different from those in the sphere determined by state authority. Only as a sphere could civil society be distinct, separate, and partially autonomous from government. Subsequently, it could also be conceived as an entity.

Second, since the fundamental demand of the liberal tradition of political philosophy after Hobbes was the demand for the limitation of state power, the tradition developed and sharpened its thesis about how people in the sphere of civil society lived and acted in a way that did not need much state regulation of their everyday lives. This was needed only to protect life and property from individuals who violated valid rules of living together in civil society. People were supposed to cooperate spontaneously, out of their nature, peacefully and fairly, to do business, to associate from below, and to practice solidarity, all without state paternalism. Conflicts of interest and tensions over differences between people were to be resolved through negotiation and coordination in civil society. The sum of these deals was the market, and their cultural condition was "civility". Civil society regulated itself almost without the state because of spontaneous market mechanisms and cultivated speech. Therefore, civil society was imagined as a market community.

Third, the human capacity for peaceful cooperation was assumed as a basic given-ness, secured by transhistorical "human nature". Consequently, since the forms of communication derived from this were seen as social, the basic state of affairs, called "civil society" by tradition, was always pre-given. This is why it was so difficult to think of a possibility of conditions and forms of (human) being outside of it.

Fourth, although early modern liberal political philosophy derived the supposed human propensity for peaceful cooperation from "human nature", it actually proceeded from certain social-historical presuppositions. This was a pioneering economic formation in which there were many approximately equally powerful

independent and thus free owners who were not yet constrained in their ambitions by the concentration of property, increasing inequalities, or scarcity of resources. Such circumstances were conceivable only at the price of overlooking structures of domination that stemmed from the preceding feudal social formation, later upgraded under early capitalism, or from colonial violence.

Fifth, the materialist critique of the liberal theory of civil society has perceived the members of the theoretically imagined civil society as *homo economicus* and has focused on analyses of real economic relations in concrete social formations. But these analyses, which have sought to undermine the liberal imaginary of harmonious self-management in (civil) society, should not be conflated with the normative notion of society in the Marxian utopic discussion of the future classless society, which denotes a situation in which humanity, and all the people, have self-realized their positive potentials.[64] Society was imagined there as a situation of "collective harmony" and "organic unity,"[65] similar to the imaginary of the liberal tradition. Both traditions shared the concept of (civil) society, with all the positive qualities and conditions attributed to it, in "human nature" as a normative ideal. The difference between them lay in the arguments and political claims for which they used this normative concept. The liberal tradition called for the limitation of state authority, while the Marxist utopian discourse called for the abandonment of class exploitation and alienation.

Arendt's break with the traditional imaginary of (civil) society

Arendt's conception of society, unlike the liberal and Marxist utopian traditions, was critical and negative. The author did not elaborate it explicitly anywhere in her work, so it can only be reconstructed through a detailed reading of her entire oeuvre, especially the texts in which she discovers all the "origins of totalitarianism" or the processes in modernity that together made the Shoah possible. I made such a reconstruction in my book *Proti družbi: Koncept družbenosti pri Hanni Arendt in meje sociologije*[66] (Against Society: Hannah Arendt's Concept of Sociality and the Limits of Sociology), where I applied the method of first

64 Mark Neocleous, "From Civil Society to the Social", *British Journal of Sociology*, 46 (3/1995), pp. 395–408.

65 Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, p. 52.

66 Gorazd Kovačič, *Proti družbi: Koncept družbenosti pri Hanni Arendt in meje sociologije*, Ljubljana, Založba Sophia, 2012.

registering all noun and adjective derivations from the lexical root of "society" with all connotations in certain contexts, then classifying them and checking for possible consistency among variants of usage.

Arendt's concept of society consisted of three different content complexes. 1.) Status inequalities and in this context especially the phenomenon of social climbing. 2.) Conformist behaviour, the performance of social roles, and assuming socially ascribed identities. 3.) The capitalist economic system, guided by the imperative of economic growth.[67] In order to understand how these three complexes form a conceptual whole, certain formal peculiarities in Arendt's concepts, especially those in her concept of society, should be taken into account.

First, Arendt understood society not as some kind of totality, but as something particular, to be evaluated relationally. She never denoted society as a kind of sociological integrated whole, which is then dissected into some sub-areas, but she used the concept in relations and oppositions to various other notions, such as politics, the public sphere, authenticity, the traditional way of life, worldliness, etc.

Second, the boundaries between society and its oppositions were not to be understood productively in spatial terms, but from an existential perspective.[68] It was about different ways of being determined by different senses (ger. *Sinn*).[69] Despite the author's explicit statements about society as a space, area, sphere,

67 *Ibid*., pp. 143–170.

68 *Cf.* Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982. Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994. Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994. Vlasta Jalušič, "Hannah Arendt: Politika kot možnost", in Arendt, Hannah, *Vita activa*, Ljubljana, Krtina, 1996, pp. VII–LIII. Vlasta Jalušič, "Vaditi politično mišljenje v posttotalitarnih časih", in Arendt, Hannah, *Med preteklostjo in prihodnostjo: šest vaj v političnem mišljenju*, Ljubljana, Krtina, 2006, pp. 233–274. Jerome Kohn, "Introduction by Jerome Kohn", in Arendt, Hannah, *Responsibility and Judgement*, New York, Schocken Books, 2003, pp. vii–xxix. Dana Villa, *Public Freedom*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2008. Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking", *Social Research*, 44 (1/1977), pp. 160–182. Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

69 Kovačič, *Proti družbi*, pp. 111–114.

or even entity in the 5th and 6th chapters of *The Human Condition*[70], which have influenced the reception of her concept of society,[71] many other passages in her work justify a different interpretation: Arendt understood the distinction between the social and the non-social not through spatial metaphorics, but in a modal way.[72] The three modes of active life in The Human Condition, as well as her notion of sociality, were not determined by some separate locations, but by their different existential purposes and different modes of how we do things.[73] "Society" for Arendt was neither an entity nor a sphere, but a mode of being. Therefore, despite some sentences in which she uses the noun "society", it should not be understood as an entity or living being that guides people, but as a form of their activities.

Third, Arendt's basic historical ontological position was that what has happened in the course of history was merely possible – and not necessary – before its realization, and was not caused by social forces. It happened due to the human choices to act in a certain way or to refrain from acting against tendencies. Since Arendt always reckoned on a capacity for action, this means that what has happened, including social behaviour, was never predetermined and inevitable, but chosen. Just as "society" is not a totality, it is not taken for granted. Certainly, one of the major effects of sociality, especially in the economic sphere, is the diffusion of responsibility. Nevertheless, the alleged social determination that people will behave in what Arendt would call a "social" manner under certain circumstances is only a fiction of opportunists and conformists who have not taken responsibility for other people and/or for the world and have not acted against trends and social expectations. Society is not a creature, but only a constellation created and reproduced by our behaviour and by giving up the possibility of action against it.[74]

70 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 28–49.

71 *Cf.* Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*.

72 Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 179–181, 282. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, pp. 139–140. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 117. The places where Arendt understood the difference between society and politics spatially and ontologically were, according to Benhabib, the result of theoretical and interpretive slippages. (*ibid*., pp. xxxix–xl, 23, 123, 142–159).

73 Kovačič, *Proti družbi*, pp. 22, 56.

74 *Ibid*., pp. 161–170.

Fourth, Arendt consistently assessed society's mode of being as impoverished and the result of giving up or disabling the human capacities to assert equality, plurality, worldliness, and action. Its negative normative charge contrasted with the positive projections invested in it by the liberal tradition and Marxist utopian discourse. Arendt described the social mode of existence as reduced to a generic being, as subject to domination by natural and economic processes of immense collective reproduction in which individual life made no sense, or as compulsive conformity to the expectations of others.[75]

Fifth, when Arendt conducted her historical analyses of problems regarding status inequality, conformism, and the capitalist system to which her concept of society referred, her discussions of these phenomena were not descriptive but critical. It was a matter of from which and whose existential viewpoints Arendt thought about particular phenomena. Only by taking such critical perspectives into account can we understand her view on how people do something when they do it in a social way.

What were her critical perspectives and the contexts thereof in which she critically addressed historical events and processes within the three complexes of her use of the word "social"?

1.) In discussing status inequalities, there were several normative perspectives in her work whose historical subjects were Jews and members of other minorities. One was the perspective of political equality, which is disabled by social practices. The second one referred to the loss of one's self, one's original self-image and authenticity of existence,[76] which was the price social climbers had to pay for their compulsive conformity to the required social norms. The third perspective concerned the coercive nature of social phe-

75 *Ibid*., pp. 111–114.

76 Villa (*Public Freedom*, pp. 323–324) points out that unlike Heidegger, for whom authentic existence was solitary (the figure of the philosopher in his or her cathartic phase) or collectively unitary, for Arendt authenticity refers to the capacity for shared and pluralistic co-creation of the world, the public sphere, and action. This means that an authentic person is unproblematically integrated into relationships with others who recognize him or her (as well as themselves) as equal in dignity. For members of minorities, an authentic life does not mean clinging to their traditional folklore, but accepting and expressing their own identity without internalizing pressures to assimilate.

nomena and the suffering position of those subjected to the rule of class distinction. The final perspective within this inequality complex was, for Arendt, the possibility of ignoring and actively refusing social rules.

2.) Arendt discussed the issue of conformism primarily from three perspectives. Again, the Jews in modern times were the main historical point of reference. The first perspective was integrated into various historical episodes in her account of how social conformism hindered politicization and the struggle for the recognition of political equality. The second emphasized the loss of authenticity under pressure to assimilate. And the third was her stand in favour of a diversity of modes of human living as a fundamental value; this diversity was impoverished in the social conformist way of being.

3.) Arendt also assessed economic socialization in the process of capitalist reproduction from the point of view of the diversity of human activities and modes of living. In *The Human Condition*, her main criticism of social being in the cyclical process of the economic reproduction of society was that it meant only something like a species life. Moreover, in several parts of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she warned of superfluity and of the possible destruction of whole groups of people and of nature if they stood in the way of the process of economic growth.[77]

Arendt's critical concept of society broke with the traditional liberal concept of society, which supposed human nature to be collaborative. This political-philosophical argumentation justified its demand for a field autonomous from state intervention, and its theoretical by-product was the idea of a spontaneously emergent positive society. Its modern derivative is functionalism in sociology. The Marxist opposition tradition has attacked this imaginary through critical analyses of class power relations in real societies, but it has also partially accepted this idea within its conception of a future classless society, which was a slip below the level of materialist theory and analysis.

Arendt's concept of society serves primarily as a negative qualifier of problematic modes of being. Its form is the complete opposite of the form in the liberal tradition. Society, for Arendt, is not a sphere but a way of life. According to

77 Kovačič, *Proti družbi*, pp. 143–170.

her, it is not harmonious and enabling of self-realization, but oppressive and self-suppressive, and it impoverishes the modes of existence that have specific human value, such as a creative or politically active life. Sociality is not something given, but is made possible by the renunciation of resistance to it. Besides all this, Arendt rejected a scientifically objective view of the field of the social, since she always wrote about social phenomena from a particular perspective that exposed a set of practices as oppressive. These were mostly epistemological perspectives of oppressed minorities, especially Jews in modernity. Arendt was above all a thinker of the social position of minorities.

This placed her work close to other critical epistemologies, such as Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, environmentalist, etc. However, there was a major blind spot in her theoretical system. Her critical judgements regarding the economic dimension of society, mentioned earlier, were only existentialist and not class-based. The reason for this is that nowhere did Arendt develop her own economic theory or accept any other that would enable her to understand in detail the capitalist economic processes and their effects such as the generation of property and income inequalities. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she addressed mainly the symbolic inequalities of status and rights, but not economic ones. In *On Revolution*,[78] she failed to properly interpret the political significance of high economic inequality, and she developed no sympathy for those who sought to bring the fact of their extreme lack of welfare into the public space as a political issue. She interjected the position that the prerequisite for constituting political equality was relative welfare equality, but did not examine when this was met and why it was often not met. It is precisely the asymmetry of political power that undermines the possibility of political equality and equal public engagement. Past cases of participatory republics, often admired in her texts, were nothing more than oligarchic republics in which participation was limited to members of owner classes.

Marxism deconstructed the early modern liberal imaginary of civil society by making analyses of concrete socioeconomic relations in the bourgeois period that differed markedly from idealistic descriptions of harmony in an abstracted civil society. Arendt's existentialist radicalism would be more convincing if she

[78] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York, Penguin Books, 2006, pp. 49–105.

included the situation of non-owner groups, such as the poor, women, natives, and migrant workers, in her critical historical analyses.

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