

Geliş Tarihi | Received: 12.01.2019

E-ISSN: 2148-9327

Kabul Tarihi | Accepted: 29.05.2019

<http://dergipark.org.tr/kilikya>

Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

THE NATURE OF HUMAN ACTIVITY: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ARENDT'S VIEWS ON MARX

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Abstract: In this work I present some of Arendt's criticisms of Marx and assess whether these criticisms are fair. I claim that Arendt reads Marx erroneously, which results in her failure to grasp certain similarities between Marx and herself, at least on some points. It is important to mention that Arendt's interest in Marx is part of a wider project she pursues. She believes that Marx's theory might allow us to establish a link between Bolshevism and the history of Western thought. Marx's notion of history and progress enables Arendt to support her claim that Marx's theory involves totalitarian elements. By way of correcting Arendt's misreading of Marx, my purpose has been to get a better understanding of the theories of Marx and Arendt, as well as to see their incompatible views regarding the nature of human activity and of freedom. Arendt charges Marx of ignoring the most central human activity, that is 'action'; and of denying human beings a genuine political existence and freedom. Furthermore, according to Arendt, Marx conceives labor as human being's highest activity and ignores the significance of other two activities, namely work and action. In the last analysis, Marx and Arendt prioritizes distinct human activities as the most central (labor and action, respectively) to human beings; and as a result, they provide us two irreconcilable views of politics, history and freedom.

Keywords: Marx, Arendt, freedom, labor, action.

İNSAN ETKİNLİĞİNİN DOĞASI: ARENİT'İN MARX ÜZERİNE GÖRÜŞLERİNİN ELEŞTİREL BİR DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

Öz: Bu çalışmada Hannah Arendt'in Marx'a getirdiği bazı temel eleştiriler değerlendirilecektir. Bu eleştiriler büyük oranda Arendt'in yanlış ve hatta taraflı okumasının sonucu olmasına rağmen Marx ve Arendt arasındaki benzerlikleri ve ayrışmaları anlamak açısından önemli başlangıç noktalarıdır. Arendt'in Marx eleştirilerinin birçoğu onun 20 yy. totaliter rejimlerinin kökenini Batı

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Sevinç, T. (2019). The Nature of Human Activity: A Critical Assessment of Arendt's Views on Marx. *Kilikya Felsefe Dergisi*, (2), 116-128.

felsefesindeki bir takım düşünsel eğilimlerle temellendirme projesinin bir parçasıdır. Arendt Marx'ın materyalist tarih anlayışını, insanı maddi koşullar ve nesnel yasalar tarafından belirlenen 'kuklalara' indirgediği için reddeder. Bunun karşısına, insanı politik alanda eyleyen ve konuşan ve bu ölçüde de özgür olan varlıklar olarak kavramsallaştıran bir anlayışı koyar. Arendt'in eleştirileri bize insan etkinliğinin yani *vita activa*'nın çoğul yapısı (emek, iş ve eylem) ve insanın birincil etkinliği 'eylem' ile özgürlük arasındaki ilişkiye dair önemli saptamalarda bulunur. Buna karşın, Arendt'e göre Marx, 'iş' ve 'emek' (insanın inşa ettiği dünyanın kalıcılığı ile tüketim nesnelere) arasındaki ayrımı göz ardı etmekte, insanın asıl etkinliği olan 'eylem'i yok saymakta ve insanın birincil etkinliği konumuna tarih boyunca en aşağı olarak görülmüş 'emek'i yerleştirmektedir. Görülecektir ki iki düşünür arasındaki ayrışma nihayetinde insanın temel etkinliğinin ne olduğu noktasında düğümlenmektedir: İnsan asıl olarak politik ve eyleyen bir varlık mıdır? Yoksa üreten bir varlık mı? Sonuçta, bu çalışma boyunca vurgulanacak tüm benzerliklerine rağmen Marx ve Arendt iki farklı insan etkinliği üzerinden (emek ve eylem) bize iki farklı siyaset ve özgürlük anlayışı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arendt, Marx, özgürlük, emek, eylem.

1. Introduction

In this paper, my purpose is to present some of Arendt's criticisms to Marx and to explore whether these criticisms are fair. I claim that Arendt reads Marx erroneously, which results in her failure to grasp the similarities between Marx and herself, at least on some crucial points.¹ Among Arendt's various criticisms of Marx, I will confine myself to her claim that Marx conceives labor as man's highest activity and ignores the significance of other two activities, namely work and action. Her critique maintains that (i) Marx does not distinguish labor and work as two distinct human activities, and reduces making to labor, (ii) Marx's attitude toward labor is contradictory, and (iii) Marx totally ignores the most humane activity of man, namely action and reduces it to making (fabrication). I would like to stress that Arendt blames Marx for *reducing* distinct human activities to one another. According to Arendt, Marx reduces action to work as the critique (iii) maintains, and he also reduces work to labor as the critique (i) maintains. As a result, while action ceases to be a human activity at all, work occurs only when Marx talks about 'making history'.

I will claim that while the critique (iii) is successful; critiques (i) and (ii) are the result of Arendt's misreading of Marx. At the very beginning, it is important to mention that Arendt's interest in Marx is part of a wider project. She believes that Marx's theory might allow us to establish a link between Bolshevism (a novel form of totalitarian government) and the history of Western thought. Marx's notion of history and progress enables Arendt to support her claim that Marx's theory involves totalitarian elements.² In this

¹ Similarly, Pitkin argues that Arendt's charges against Marx involve misreading. Moreover, according to Pitkin, Arendt "refuses to acknowledge" the similarities between her theory and Marx's theory, especially the similarity between her conception of social and Marx's conception of alienation (Pitkin, 1998, pp. 115-144).

² Canovan argues that it is through the idea of 'making' history in Marx that seems to prepare the ground for totalitarian regimes according to Arendt (Canovan, 1994, p. 75).

essay, I will not concern with this wider project except that it is related to our investigation of Marx's notion of 'making history'. I will start with the third critique, then I will consider (i) and (ii) respectively.

2. Arendt's Charges against Marx

2.1. Arendt: On making and action

In this section I will discuss Arendt's thesis that (iii) Marx reduces acting to making. We will concentrate on Marx's notion of history since Arendt claims that Marx reduces action to 'making of history' (Arendt, 1961a, p. 77). Arendt objects to Marx's conception of history and argues that Marx understands history as something that can be made like we make shoes or tables. Firstly, this is to deny that history is the result of men's actions, which are free and unpredictable. Secondly, mentality of fabrication in human affairs, to the degree to which it denies man a public space –in which they can act through their words and deeds, destroys the conditions for man's self-expression. Also, this understanding, according to Arendt, has serious consequences such as antidemocratic and totalitarian regimes.

Arendt argues that Marx borrows his understanding of history from Hegel except that Marx demystifies history and considers it as having a material basis. Unlike Hegel who thinks that history is the vocation of the Spirit and realization of its freedom, Marx thinks that history is the story of class struggles. In this respect, Arendt quotes Engels and calls Marx as the Darwin of history (Arendt, 1998, p. 116; Engels, 1978, p. 681). According to her, Marx understands history just like Darwin understood nature. Similar to Darwin, in Marx's account, history is understood as the evolution of society from primitive forms of production to developed forms of production. According to Arendt, the notion of progress in human affairs, no matter if it's the world spirit, invisible hand, nature or class interest, assumes that there is a force in the background that regulates the actions of individuals, which in themselves seem like "gestures of puppets" (Arendt, 1998, p. 185). To Arendt, this is to deny the fact that man is free and can act independently.

Drawing on the Greek experience, Arendt poses a distinction between work and action. Relying on the ancient distinction between craftsman and citizen, Arendt argues that making means fabrication, which is performed under the guidance of a model, and which always involves violence in transforming the pure material into an object as in the case of transforming a marble into a statue. Fabrication always has a beginning and a definite end. The process is determined by the categories of means and ends, which includes the sacrifice of means to the end (Arendt, 1998, pp.139-143). On the other hand, action is the activity of citizen who through his words and deeds appears in the public space and meets other citizens. Unlike fabrication, action is to initiate a beginning in the world through one's words and deeds. In this respect, according to Arendt, our freedom

consists in our ability to start something new. In Arendt's theory, action is the only activity within which man's genuine freedom is manifest.³

In her conception of political freedom, Arendt argues that action is possible only among people and its pre-condition is to be seen and heard by others. Since action is performed among people, its path is subject to change with respect to the intentions, responses and interests of the people. For this reason, the consequences of an action are *unpredictable*, even though an agent always has a particular end in mind, the real end almost never matches the intended one. With respect to this plurality of ends, action is *boundless*, it continues so far as someone acts as a response. Though both making and action have the character of a process, there is a crucial difference. Like making, action has a beginning. But unlike making, action does not have a definite end (Arendt, 1961a, pp. 59-60).

In what follows, Arendt claims that making cannot be the activity of politics, and this point constitutes her major objection to Marx. Arendt stresses that the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action. She considers that the ultimate form of action is founding a state and writing a constitution to maintain and protect the public realm within which citizens could act – through their words and deeds.

2.2. Marx: Making history

The first occurrence of the term 'make history' is in *German Ideology*, in a section dedicated to the discussion of history (1978b, p. 153). Marx says "man must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'". There Marx deals with urgency of the requirements of man's material life e.g. eating, drinking and sleeping, in order to 'make' anything at all. He leaves the notion of making history unexplained and continues to elaborate what constitutes history and historical action. Marx argues that while the content of history is material production, the development in history is the result of development in forces of production. In addition, Marx maintains that "[t]he multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society, hence that the 'history of humanity' must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange" (Marx, 1978b, p. 157). Marx argues that history has to be understood in terms of production relations and there is a correspondence between the stage of society and the stage of industry and exchange.

Unlike in its first occurrence, where Marx illustrates the content of history; in its second occurrence, Marx gives clues about what 'making history' means. Marx argues that man cannot 'make history' as he pleases. He says "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx, 1978c, p. 595). From the quote we see that we do not make history as we please. To the degree to which we act in conditions transmitted from the past, Marx

³ Arendt's conception of freedom is political, hence the very opposite of 'inner freedom'. Arendt suggests that freedom should be understood as Machiavelli's *virtù*: it is "the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*" (Arendt, 1961b, p. 153).

seems to suggest that our action is affected by these conditions. Here, Marx does not say anything about the degree of the effect and it is not clear whether he means *determination* as some interpreters suggest. This discussion is part of an ongoing debate about whether Marx leaves room for men's freedom in changing the course of events or whether he thinks men as an instrument in the hands of history.

History, as Marx understood it, proceeds towards antagonisms which are inherent in society. Existing social relations come into contradiction with existing forms of production and the latter forces the former to a change (Marx, 1978b, p. 159). Some interpreters argue that Marx conceives history as a science, which has its own rules; and a revolution can be successful only when men understand these rules and act accordingly. According to this interpretation, man's role is limited to the execution of his assignment that is prescribed by the course of history. Arendt also holds this reading of Marx.

On the other hand, Allan Wood argues that Marx's theory of historical materialism as an explanatory theory that examines *tendencies* in history, rather than as an account of historical development based on *causality*. Wood thinks that "Marx's theory rests on the idea that there is a general historical tendency for productive powers to be used efficiently and to expand" (Wood, 2004, p. 109). And to say that men have a tendency to improve forces of production says nothing about how man will act in particular circumstances. (Wood, 2004, pp. 116-117).⁴

I think that even if we accept the teleological account of Wood, Arendt's objection against Marx's understanding of history still holds. Here, we should distinguish two aspects of the issue in order to assess Arendt's criticism fully. Arendt argues that the modern concern for history is grounded on neither our desire to take lessons from past nor our desire to understand and give meaning to it. According to Arendt, our interest in history and finding regularities or tendencies in it has another objective: to *predict* future events.⁵ Marx, after having discovered rules or tendencies in history, predicts that the next stage of society would be socialism and *prescribes* a course of action to men accordingly e.g. abolishment of private property. He characterizes the future society and its form of government as proletarian dictatorship which is based on common property. In the eyes of Arendt, to make predictions about future is to deny the freedom of human beings. It is to reduce infinite possibilities that are opened by human beings' actions into one, which always involves violence.

When we think of the means-end character of the activity of fabrication, we soon realize that the immanent contradictions present in society points out the 'end' of human activity and we 'make history' according to achieve this end. For Arendt thinks that an

⁴ In another important passage, Marx argues for a reciprocal influence affirming that material conditions affect man and that men affect material conditions. (Marx, 1978b, pp. 164-165).

⁵ Similar to Arendt, Karl Popper (1961, 1971) criticizes Marx and theories of historicism arguing that Marx's commits historical prophecy.

activity that is pursued according to a definite end cannot be the realm of freedom, but of *necessity*. I think that Arendt would not object to Wood's thesis that we cannot say anything about the particular actions of individuals, and they are still free in this sense. But their freedom resembles the freedom of a shoe maker whose end is to make shoes no matter whether the shoes are black or white; comfortable or high heeled. According to Arendt, when people try to make history as Marx suggested, they use violence in order to fit people into their design or fictitious ideology; as a result, they destroy human plurality, and potential to start anew. And, to force the course events in such a way might result in dangerous consequences and according to Arendt, Bolshevism is an example of this.⁶

On the contrary, Arendt thinks that "nothing in fact indicates more clearly the political nature of history —it is being a story of action and deeds rather than of trends or of forces of ideas" (Arendt, 1998, p. 185). Arendt considers history as a *story* that can only be told backwards rather than a process that has a path and its own laws of development. Just like the end of an action is unpredictable in advance, the end of history, when history understood as a sequence of actions, is unpredictable too. We are capable of affecting the course of events and history either by starting something entirely new or responding to what is already initiated to the world. According to Arendt, this constitutes our freedom. Arendt acknowledges that history owes its existence to men, yet she objects that men do 'make history'. Unlike Marx, who understands history as a development of men's productive forces, Arendt thinks that history is the memory of great words and deeds.⁷ In the Arendtian framework, when viewed from the perspective of the agent, action has a revealing power. While 'what' we are is constituted by our properties, character, habits or talents; 'who' we are is revealed through our action, our words and deeds; and unknowable even to the actor himself (Arendt, 1998, pp. 179-180). Thus, action is self-expression in Arendt.

So far, I have investigated Marx's notion of history and assessed Arendt's criticism of Marx. I have argued that no matter how we interpret Marx's notion of history—deterministic or teleological, Arendt is right in saying that her conception of action is absent in Marx's theory. Thus, Marx's notion of history excludes the possibility

⁶ In *On Revolution* Arendt underlines the emergence of a new form of government in distinct countries of Europe after 1800s. For instance, in 1905, in Russia, the workers in the factories organized themselves into councils whose structure was representative self-government. Their coming into being was spontaneous and they had never been understood by professional revolutionists (historical materialists). Arendt explains that these councils were soon abolished by the party because their program did not recognize democracy as the true form of revolutionary government. Because the ideologists of the party admit nothing except the party program, democracy, the most genuine expression of man's freedom was destroyed immediately. For Arendt, they were stuck to the ideology; they never acted, but tried to make (fabricate) history in the light of the pre-given party program (Arendt, 2006, pp. 247-258).

⁷ In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel gives an enlightening account of kinds of history, one of which is original history which Herodotus and Thucydides are examples. Historians are mere historiographers since they bind together the fleeting elements of story and give it immortality. (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 1-5) It is plain that Arendt incorporates this ancient understanding of history into her theory and revitalizes it as an alternative to *history as science*.

of freedom as initiating something *entirely new* to the world. Moreover, I have argued that Arendt's emphasis on action and its place in general human activity has twofold significance: both freedom and human existence is possible only through action. In the next section, while I examine Marx's notion of labor, I will argue that Marx's notion of non-alienated labor has also an expressionist aspect.

2.3. Arendt: Work and labor

According to Arendt, Marx misconceives the plural nature of human activity, and considers human beings chiefly as *animal laborans*. Hence, for Arendt, Marx not only reduces man's overall activity to the activity of labor, but also his theory is an elevation and 'dignification of labor' (Arendt, 2002, p. 283), which has been considered as the lowest activity of man throughout history (Arendt, 1998, p. 84).

Arendt points out a distinction between work and labor which, she thinks, is mostly ignored and unexamined in the tradition (Arendt, 1998, p. 79). Her thesis is based on the fact that in most (Western) languages there exist etymologically two distinct terms that corresponds to labor and work. She argues that though we have two distinct words for these distinct activities, we have never investigated the meaning of this difference. To her, by stating "working hands and a laboring body," only Locke provides a distinction similar to that we found in ancient Greek (Arendt, 1998, p. 80).

Arendt distinguishes work and labor with respect to the nature of the end product. According to her, whereas the products of labor are produced for the sake of continuity of biological life and immediately consumed e.g. bread, corn and wheat; the products of work constitute our objective world and could stay longer in the world. The products of work constitute the *permanence* of human world as opposed to the *temporality* of human life.⁸

Thus, according to Arendt, labor is a life producing activity; be it one's own life or the life of others or 'the life of all' as Marx argues (Arendt, 1998, p. 88). The activity of labor, so long as it is a natural activity belongs to the cyclical and ever recurring character of nature. We need to eat, drink and sleep, and we must do them every day in order to continue our biologic life. Labor, when viewed from the point of its product, produces for immediate consumption. The products of labor must be added to the life process and consumed immediately; otherwise they would perish and become useless (Arendt, 1998, p. 94).

In the following, I argue that Marx uses the term 'labor' in a qualified sense, which as well includes the meaning of work in the Arendtian sense. And I establish that Marx

⁸ It is important to note that, Arendt stresses a tendency in modern capitalist society where the ground for the basic distinction between work and labor gets blurred (Arendt, 1998, p. 94). In a capitalist society with its mass production techniques, it becomes easier and faster to produce tables and cars and to throw them away just because they are out of fashion. Durability as a criterion for distinguishing products of work and products of labor becomes unreliable because of the fact that capitalist society undermines this distinction.

does not consciously prefer labor to work; rather he incorporates both in his notion of labor.⁹ I will present Marx's discussion on alienated labor in order to show that although Marx does not use 'work' as a distinct category as Arendt uses it, he uses 'labor' in two distinct senses: the alienated/estranged labor as opposed to non-alienated labor, and labor as a human activity as opposed to labor as an animal activity (Marx, 1978a, pp. 74-79). I will argue that Marx's notions of non-alienated labor and labor as a human activity, when reformulated, captures the meaning of 'work' in Arendt's theory. In what follows, I will argue that Arendt gravely misreads Marx at this point. I claim that there is no reduction of work to the category of labor in Marx as Arendt claims.

In *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx mentions four distinct types of estrangement: alienation from the product, from the productive activity, from the species being and from the fellow men. Now, I will examine the first three of forms of alienation with a view to distinguish and clarify the two senses of the term 'labor' in Marx. Firstly, the worker is alienated from the products of his labor since what he produces does no more belong to him. Secondly, the worker is alienated from the productive activity itself. The productive activity, instead of being a realization of man's essence, becomes a torment to him. Labor does not belong to his essence but is external to him in the alienated state. By laboring, "he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind" (Marx, 1978a, p. 74). However, as it is manifest mostly in his early writings, according to Marx, man essentially realizes his powers and capacities, and develops new powers and capacities through his labor. Through the activity of labor man objectifies his inner capacities in the product and realizes himself. To quote from Marx: "[t]he product of labor which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor's realization is his objectification" (Marx, 1978a, p. 71).

Having established the centrality of the activity of labor, Marx continues that when man is alienated from the object and the activity of production, his existence loses its human character. Marx argues that when man is alienated, he no longer feels freely active except in his animal functions (Marx, 1978a, p. 74). He argues that eating, drinking and procreating are also genuinely human functions but when they are abstracted from the sphere of human activity, these activities lose their human character. Here, we see that Marx makes a distinction between human activity and animal activity. Activities are human activities when they involve more than mere satisfaction of physical needs.

We can see a similar distinction in another passage, where I think Marx uses 'labor' in the sense of 'work' in Arendt. Marx discusses what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees. It is, as Marx puts it, "that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement" (Marx, 1978d, pp. 344-345). As I mentioned, according to Arendt, one of the characteristics of

⁹ Pitkin supports my reading with her etymological analysis of German words *werken* and *arbeiten*, arguing that Marx usages cannot be interpreted as a conscious choice between these two activities as Arendt believed (Pitkin, 1998, pp. 133-134).

fabrication is that the object is fabricated with respect to the image in the mind of its producer. The activity described by Marx obviously corresponds to the activity of fabrication in Arendt.

The third form of alienation is man's alienation to his species being. In the life of species, Marx formulates the productive activity of men as free and world creating activity. According to Marx, man does not produce blindly; his productive activity is always a conscious one. Marx says "[t]he whole character of a species –its species character– is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free and conscious life activity is man's species character" (Marx, 1978a, p. 76). Whereas an animal is identical with his life activity, man's life activity is always an object for him. In this respect, it is a willful and conscious life activity.

In Marx, life activity is not equated to the activity of maintenance of physical life. As the above passage suggests, the life activity of men is always a life-engendering activity, a means of satisfying physical needs. However, man's activity of production does not remain at the level of maintenance of physical life. It is also a *world creating* activity. Consequently, the estranged labor is wrong for Marx since it reduces the activity of the worker to the preservation of his physical existence.

As I have shown so far, Marx does not consider life only as physical life. It might be said that he always gives priority to the satisfaction of basic needs, but it is not because he thinks that it is the only activity of human beings, but because a human being can do nothing if he is not provided with his basic needs. Marx is aware of the urgent, slavish and animal character of the physical needs. That is why he thinks that without satisfying them man can do nothing. In addition, we have seen so far that the term alienation signifies the situation where man is reduced to a non-human condition in which he has been given no chance to realize his capacities fully. Marx criticizes capitalist society because it reduces man to something like an animal or a machine. And it is ironic that Arendt blames Marx for the same attitude.

To summarize, I have shown that Marx distinguishes the term labor as alienated and non-alienated labor, by which, there is no reduction of the activity of work (world creating activity) to the activity of labor (life generating activity). Marx captures both meanings in his writings. In the following, I will consider (ii) the second criticism of Arendt that is Marx's attitude towards labor is contradictory.

2.4. Arendt: The inconsistency in Marx's conception of labor

According to Arendt, Marx views labor as an "eternal necessity imposed by nature" on the one hand, and argues for the necessity of emancipation from labor; and on the other hand, he regards the laboring activity as the most human and central activity of man. For Arendt, this constitutes an apparent contradiction which "rarely occurs in second-rate writers" (Arendt, 1998, p. 104-105). To quote Arendt:

Marx's attitude toward labor, and that is the very center of his thought, has never ceased to be equivocal. While it was an 'eternal necessity imposed by nature' and the most human and productive of man's activities, the revolution, according to Marx, has not the task of emancipating the laboring classes but of emancipating man from labor; only when labor is abolished can the 'realm of freedom' supplant the 'realm of necessity'. (Arendt, 1998, p. 104)

The fact remains that in all stages of his work he defines man as animal laborans and then leads him into a society in which this greatest and most human power is no longer necessary. (Arendt, 1998, p. 105)

In the light of the analysis I have provided in the previous section, I argue that Arendt finds Marx's attitude toward labor contradictory partly because she does not distinguish the two different senses of 'labor' in Marx (alienated and non-alienated); and partly because she does not distinguish two different senses of freedom in Marx (positive and negative).

Thus, it can be argued that when Marx talks about labor as alienated labor, he conceives it as "a blind necessity" and a kind of torment to men; and hence he argues for the necessity of getting rid of it. In this respect, when labor is alienated labor or forced labor, according to Marx, freedom requires emancipation from labor. And when he talks about labor as non-alienated labor or human labor, he thinks that labor is the highest activity of human beings, through which they can realize their powers, develop new capacities and be free.

In the communist society, Marx anticipates, human beings would not have to produce out of necessity since, thanks to technological development, there would be abundance of goods. In such a society, man would work whenever he pleases and not for the sake of maintaining his life but for the sake of realizing himself and fulfilling his capacities as well as developing new capacities. In this respect, in a communist society freedom does not require emancipation from labor. On the contrary, we are free to the degree to which we engage laboring activity not as a forced activity but as a free and conscious life activity.¹⁰ Also, freedom when understood as the realization of human beings' capacities and externalization or objectification of their inner powers has an *expressionist* aspect which is similar to Arendt's view of action. Marx holds that through labor, a person does not only satisfy her needs but also expresses herself through her laboring activity. Viewed in the light of the two senses of the term 'labor', we will overcome the seemingly contradiction in Marx's writings.

Arendt also finds it contradictory that Marx understands labor both in the realm of necessity and in the realm of freedom. Let me turn now to an elucidation of Marx's notion of freedom in order to refute Arendt's thesis. To do so, I will quote the relevant passage at length:

¹⁰ Relying on Marx's insights, Sayer objects to this conception of work as necessarily painful and argues that even in its alienated form, work (job) is a genuine need of human beings and it gives man a sense of fulfillment and self-worth. (Sayers, 1998, pp. 36-59)

The realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible mode of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy, and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with the realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its prerequisite. (Marx, 1978f, p. 441)

At the beginning of the passage Marx argues that the prerequisite of freedom is the independence from necessity and routine considerations since freedom lies beyond the sphere of material production. To achieve freedom and get rid of necessity, we have to unite as producers, and rationally control our production activity. It is only in this way that nature ceases being a blind force that controls our lives (Brenkert, 1983, pp. 99-101). That is why freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, it is a social freedom. It is not something than man can accomplish alone. However, even when we control production in this way, it does not change the fact that it is a realm of necessity. According to Marx, freedom begins where necessity ceases and even a civilized man, who is assisted by the powers of technology, has to struggle with nature as a savage man, but with a difference: he would achieve this in ways that are worthy of his nature. And 'the development of human energy' is an end in itself and is conceived as "the true realm of freedom" which can only be sustained when it is based on necessity as its driving force.

In this passage, we see two distinct formulations of freedom, freedom as freedom from necessity and from determinations of daily considerations (freedom from or negative freedom); and freedom as the development of human energy or to generate new human capacities (freedom to become, or positive freedom). Though overcoming obstacles might be painful, it might be also pleasant and gives labor a sense of self-worth and self-respect.¹¹ Viewed in this manner, Marx's attitude toward labor ceases to be inconsistent. When distinct senses of labor and freedom is taken into consideration, the seemingly contradiction disappears.

¹¹ Wood argues that labour is not only an act of self-expression (since man externalizes his inner capacities into an external object), but also an act of self-affirmation. Through the act of labor, men affirm both to himself and to his fellows their dignity and self-worth. (Wood, 2004, p. 35).

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I have assessed the validity of Arendt's criticisms of Marx. I have shown that critiques (i) Marx does not distinguish work and labor and reduces work to labor, and (ii) Marx's attitude towards labor is contradictory are not fair and the result of Arendt's erroneous reading of Marx. However, I have showed that Marx does not have a notion of 'action' in the sense formulated by Arendt. In this respect, regarding (iii), I have stressed that even in its most charitable reading such as suggested by Wood, Marx's notion of history and man's role in it does not leave room for 'action' and 'freedom' as understood by Arendt. As we have seen, there is no room for politics in Marx as understood by Arendt. Marx and Arendt prioritize distinct human activities as the most important (labor and action, respectively) to human beings; and as a result, they provide us two irreconcilable views of politics, history and freedom.

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