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## Hannah Arendt: from Property to Capital ... and Back?

**ABSTRACT:** Scant attention has been paid to the notion of property in Hannah Arendt's thought, and this paper aims to address this gap. For Arendt, property is the realm of privacy, located in the house. She argues that the modern age represented its loss with the expropriation of the peasant classes after the Reformation. As a result, wealth started to be accumulated and became productive through the labor of the new propertyless classes. This new way of dealing with property needed a new notion of property for the laborers. Locke's understanding gave the laborers the hope of being property-owners through their labor and simultaneously justified the unending accumulation of money; nevertheless, property in its true meaning was never recovered. Arendt believes that recovering property under conditions of equality is an essential consideration, and this egalitarian vision of property only can be achieved if law protects property as well as set limits on the accumulation of wealth.

*Keywords:* capital, Hannah Arendt, John Locke, private property, wealth

*Schlagworte:* Kapital, Privateigentum, Reichtum

### Introduction

Much of the research in recent years has focused on questions related with property in the thought of Hannah Arendt. Previous studies have focused on her notion of "the social"<sup>1</sup> her insights on capitalism and communism<sup>2</sup> or on the modern rise of expropriation.<sup>3</sup> However, her account of property still requires clarification and further discussion. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, to underline how the notion of property in Arendt's thought plays an important role in her account

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- 1 See, for instance, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*, 1998, 115–144. See also: Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 2003, 22–35; Richard J. Bernstein, Rethinking the Social and the Political, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 11/1 (1986), 111–130.
- 2 See, for instance, Ronald S. Beiner, Hannah Arendt on Capitalism and Socialism, *Government and Opposition* 25/3 (1990), 359–370; Steven Klein, 'Fit to Enter the World': Hannah Arendt on Politics, Economics, and the Welfare State, *American Political Science Review*, 108/4 (1986), 856–869.
- 3 See Onur Ulas Ince, Bringing the Economy Back In: Hannah Arendt, Karl Marx, and the Politics of Capitalism, *The Journal of Politics*, 78/2 (2016), 411–425.

of the modern age and our current world; on the other hand, we want to underscore the value of an egalitarian defense of private property.

This article focuses on the way Arendt understands property, wealth and capital, namely, in *The Human Condition* she demonstrates how property was threatened by expropriation and the accumulation of wealth during the sixteenth century. It also analyzes Locke's claim that labor was the origin of property and how this provided a setting for a bodily-centered notion of property that led to a theoretical confusion. However, in her account on property, Arendt showed that she was far more sympathetic towards a pre-modern notion of property, so in order to grasp her approach first requires identifying her distinctive use of the terms "property", "wealth" and "capital".

According to Arendt, "property" is essentially the ownership of the house: it is one's own place or one's own family, where the private activities of the owner and his/her family take place. These activities are not just limited to the biological necessities of life, but also family life, love and bringing up children. Arendt draws a very clear and distinctive line between this private place and the public realm: private property is the place we can hide, a "dark" place, in the sense that only family members can see each other in this realm; whereas everything that appears in public realm can be seen and heard by everybody. According to Arendt these two realms are deeply intertwined and one cannot endure without the other.

"Wealth" is of an entirely different nature; it provides the means by which we draw our livelihood. According to Arendt these means were the labor of slaves in antiquity, which for slave owners meant that their necessities of life were taken care of and allowed them to pursue a public life. Wealth and property were of great relevance to the public realm as the chief condition for admission, but it is essential to underline the fact that property and wealth were limited. Neither the house owners nor slave owners would have liked to improve their possessions because they were rooted in human necessities. In other words, more wealth did not mean more freedom.

According to Arendt, "capital" is supposed to be money that begets money, in other words, money not as a commodity, but 'reproductive' in nature. The rise of this conception of money presupposes a change in the way we understand wealth and property, because neither of them are a condition for admission to the public realm anymore. At the same time, wealth as money is wanted for its own sake and for its reproduction, thus becoming capital. The loss of property in the modern age could be succinctly rendered by echoing two lines by T. S. Eliot: "[...] Where is the *property* we have lost in *wealth*?/ Where is the *wealth* we have lost in *capital*?."<sup>4</sup>

4 "[...] Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?/Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" T. S. Eliot, Two Choruses from 'The Rock', in: *The Waste Land and other Poems*, 1999, 73

## 1. Hannah Arendt on Property

### 1.1 Property as a house or lasting object

According to Arendt, “property” (from *proprius*, one’s own) is always *private*, and so the term “private property” is redundant while the term “collective property” is a contradiction.<sup>5</sup> However, she uses the word “property” in two senses, which need to be broken down in order to understand her properly: first, property as a house or lasting object; second, property as a located place of privacy. We find both meanings together in the following text. Arendt claims that:

“... originally, property meant no more or less than to have one’s *location* in a particular part of the world and therefore to belong to the body politic, that is, to be the head of one of the families which together constituted the public realm. This piece of privately owned world was so completely identical with the family who owned it that the expulsion of a citizen could mean not merely the confiscation of his estate but the actual destruction of the *building* itself.”<sup>6</sup>

If we focus on the “building itself”, we find that is made by the *homo faber*. The origin of property is the *homo faber*, “the builder of the world”,<sup>7</sup> that is, the human being able to construct lasting buildings,<sup>8</sup> and it is precisely this quality of durability which Arendt considers to be fundamentally important. She claims, “the reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors.”<sup>9</sup>

These “permanent things” are built by the work of the *homo faber* through reification. That is, *homo faber* works with material removed from its natural location and fabricates use objects, described by its “durability.”<sup>10</sup> According to Arendt, this certain permanence of man-made things is distinguished from consumer goods and their inherent futility. These things are needed for the life of human beings, while consumer goods are the way life assures its own survival and the body constantly needs to consume and destroy these goods. This inherent destruction in the process of consumption of consumer goods is the reason why it is essential to protect man-made objects – including property – from the exigencies of consumption. In other words, more generally, protection from the so called “life process”, needed for human beings to be alive. Arendt writes, “... this earthly home becomes a world in the proper sense of the word only when the totality of fabri-

5 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1998, 256

6 Ibid. 61–62. Emphasis added. Benhabib considers the Arendtian notion of “property” as an affirmation of the home. Benhabib (note 1), 213.

7 Arendt, (note 5), 125

8 Ibid. 321

9 Ibid. 95–96

10 Ibid. 126. Art works possess even greater durability, because beauty and not use is their main feature. See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 1977, 208–209. See also Patchen Markell, *Arendt’s Work: On the Architecture of The Human Condition*, *College Literature*, 38 (2011), 33.

cated things is so organized that it can resist the consuming life process of the people dwelling in it, and thus outlast them.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus the main threat to property – like a building or lasting object – is the life process and the need and capacity to consume. The body, free to follow its own desires, swallows every man-made thing in its life process,<sup>12</sup> and this is why the loss of the property of the house cannot be separated from the decay of every use object and art work in the modern age. According to Arendt, the body and its capacity to destroy through consumption go far beyond its natural necessities and can destroy all man-made objects.

## 1.2 Property as the firmly located place of privacy

As stated earlier, a *place* of one’s own is the place where human beings can remain hidden from the common public world through “the four walls of one’s private property”,<sup>13</sup> and it is these boundaries which separate the privately owned places from the public. At the same time, these four walls are the link between those two realms: the boundaries preserve both public and private realms, essentially keeping private activities hidden from the public light:

“... the four walls of one’s private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity, from being seen and being heard.”<sup>14</sup>

This dark place lying behind the four walls of the house is the realm for privacy.<sup>15</sup> According to Arendt, bodily functions (1), and love, education, birth and death (2), are part of this realm in so far that they must be hidden from the public. However, these activities are not just those that could be embarrassing, but rather those in need of protection from the public light.

First, the bodily functions (1) of the life process take place in this realm, those concerned with *animal laborans*: they assure individual survival, the life and reproduction of the species and are basically related to labor and consumption. According to Arendt, “Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor.”<sup>16</sup> The aim of labor is therefore to produce the bodily needs of life and feed the body with consumer goods and the acts of laboring and consuming are so closely related that “they almost constitute one and the same movement”.<sup>17</sup> The main reason for this is the futile character of consumer

11 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 210. My emphasis.

12 Arendt (note 5), 134

13 Ibid. 71

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. 109ff.

16 Ibid. 7

17 Ibid. 100. Procreation also takes place in this realm.

goods which labor obtains from nature: they spoil if they are not consumed in as much as they belong to the everlasting process of life constituted by labor and consumption.

Second, as we said earlier, love, education, birth and death take place in this realm as well (2). Therefore, privacy is not just the realm of biology and the place where the needs of individual life and the species are fulfilled, but according to Arendt neither is it just the condition for admission to the public realm and to be engaged in political action. Waldron suggests privacy and property are just the *conditio sine qua non* of active political freedom in Arendt's account.<sup>18</sup> This opinion can be critically challenged with the argument that Arendt herself did not consider property solely within the realm of biology, which is clearly illustrated in the following quote from *The Human Condition*:

“It is therefore not really accurate to say that private property, prior to the modern age, was thought to be a self-evident condition for admission to the public realm; *it is much more than that*. Privacy was like the other, the dark and hidden side of the public realm, and while to be political meant to attain the highest possibility of human existence, to have no private place of one's own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human.”<sup>19</sup>

Here, Arendt argues that private property had an intrinsic value prior to the modern age because without property no one would be considered a human being, moreover, the realm of privacy, ruled by exclusiveness, made love and marriage possible. But, it was also the realm of depth and mystery. Arendt claims that the house was “the realm of birth and death which must be hidden from the public realm because it harbors the things hidden from human eyes and impenetrable to human knowledge.”<sup>20</sup> The realm of privacy is furthermore the realm of education: children need the darkness offered by private property in order to grow. In this regard it is essential to separate the public realm and the realm of education,<sup>21</sup> as this preserves children from publicity that would lead to a superficial life, as is the case with children of famous parents who so often turn out badly by the lack of privacy.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Expropriation, wealth accumulation and the power of labor

### 2.1 The conditions for the rise of capitalism

Arendt argues that private property was sacred until the beginning of the modern age, when it began to be lost through expropriation. She notes, “prior to the modern age,

18 Jeremy Waldron, Arendt's Constitutional Politics, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. D. R. Villa, 2000, 206. Parekh, on the contrary, emphasizes the value of the private in her thought. See Serena Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: A Phenomenology of Human Rights*, 2008, 96.

19 Arendt (note 5), 64. My emphasis. Moreover, we could allow for her defense of the independence of the private against the public in: Hannah Arendt, *Reflections on Little Rock, Dissent 6* (1959), 45–56.

20 Arendt (note 5), 62–63

21 Arendt (note 11), 195, *Reflections on Little Rock*, 45–56

22 Arendt (note 11), 195

which began with the expropriation of the poor and then proceeded to emancipate the new propertyless classes, all civilizations have rested upon the sacredness of private property.<sup>23</sup> And a few pages later she writes, “modern society [...] was started by expropriation – the expropriation of the peasant classes which in turn was the [...] consequence of the expropriation of Church and monastic property after the Reformation [...]”<sup>24</sup>

So, the loss of private property began almost by accident after the Reformation. This initial expropriation of the peasantry produced simultaneously propertylessness and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the expropriators. In the very moment of its accumulation, this wealth became “superfluous” wealth, i. e. wealth not used mainly as a means of livelihood. According to Arendt, these were the conditions for the rise of capitalism:

“Expropriation, the deprivation for certain groups of their place in the world and their naked exposure to the exigencies of life, created both the original accumulation of wealth and the possibility of transforming this wealth into capital through labor. These together constituted the conditions for the rise of a capitalist economy.”<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2 Ancient unproductive labor

Arendt makes an essential distinction: she illustrates the difference between the unproductive labor of slaves in antiquity, destined to be effortlessly consumed by the master class, and the modern productive labor of workers destined to produce an endless accumulation of wealth.

In the ancient way of thinking labor was despised and an activity performed by slaves; its only aim was to obtain the means of livelihood for the household. Thus the master of the household could employ his time for politics. Moderns, on the contrary, glorified productive labor but despised unproductive labor. Arendt writes:

“... both Smith and Marx were in agreement with modern public opinion when they despised unproductive labor as parasitical, actually a kind of perversion of labor, as though nothing were worthy of this name which did not enrich the world. Marx certainly shared Smith’s contempt for the “menial servants” [...] Yet it was precisely these menial servants, these household inmates, *oiketai* or *familiares*, laboring for sheer subsistence and needed for effortless consumption rather than for production, whom all ages prior to the modern had in mind when they identified the laboring condition with slavery. What they left behind them in return for their consumption was nothing more or less than their masters’ freedom.”<sup>26</sup>

23 Arendt (note 5), 61

24 Ibid. 66. See also Richard Schlatter, *Private Property: the History of an Idea*, 1951, 77–123.

25 Arendt (note 5), 254–255

26 Ibid. 86–87. See Karl Marx, *Wages, Price and Profit*, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 1951, 389.

### 2.3 (Re) productive labor in the modern age

The most important modern discovery about labor is that by Marx concerning the surplus of “labor power” – the discovery about the productivity of labor. This productivity is not related with the products of labor but rather with a surplus of strength: laborers can produce their own consumer goods, but their strength is not exhausted when they do. Albeit lengthy, the following quote is particularly relevant:

“The laboring activity itself, regardless of historical circumstances and independent of its location in the private or the public realm, possesses indeed a “productivity” of its own, no matter how futile and non-durable its products may be. This productivity does not lie in any of labor’s products but in the human “power,” whose strength is not exhausted when it has produced the means of its own subsistence and survival but is capable of producing a “surplus,” that is, more than is necessary for its own “reproduction.” It is because not labor itself but the surplus of human “labor power” (*Arbeitskraft*) explains labor’s productivity that Marx’s introduction of this term, as Engels rightly remarked, constituted the most original and revolutionary element of his whole system [...]”<sup>27</sup>

As a result, this surplus explains how ancient slavery and modern exploitation were useful: “through violent oppression in a slave society or exploitation in the capitalist society of Marx’s own time, it can be channeled in such a way that the labor of some suffices for the life of all.”<sup>28</sup>

Although, as stated earlier, this kind of labor is unproductive, what must be stressed is that the surplus explains “the possibility of transforming [...] wealth into capital through labor.”<sup>29</sup> “Labor” here means the surplus of human labor power used to further accumulate capital. It is this surplus that can transform the wealth of the expropriated farms into money, and then money can be re-invested and guarantee the appropriation of more money through more labor. Therefore, what it is at stake for the capitalist is not just production but an unending reproduction, and for Arendt this is the beginning of the unending process of capitalism.

### 2.4 The rise of the social and the public protection of wealth accumulation

According to Arendt, the initial accumulation of wealth coincided historically with the so-called “rise of the social”: wealth became a public concern and governments began to protect those who owned it. According to her, these owners pretended to defend *property* but in fact what they wanted was to protect their own *wealth*, which is something different from property, namely the property of the house. Through this distinction between property and wealth, Arendt solves the contradiction of expropriators becoming

27 Arendt (note 5), 88. See Karl Marx (note 26), 386–388.

28 Arendt (note 5), 88

29 Ibid. 255

defenders of ownership in a very clever way by claiming they were not defenders of property but of wealth.<sup>30</sup>

What was referred to earlier as a change in the way wealth was understood, is also reflected in the name she gives it: this new wealth is called “social wealth.”<sup>31</sup> However, its meaning was a far cry from the notion of wealth that was distributed; rather she means that accumulating wealth became public concern. While governments started to protect this wealth, at the same time public space became a realm for accumulating wealth,<sup>32</sup> so the initial accumulation of wealth was just the beginning of a virtually unending process.<sup>33</sup>

Arendt’s distinction between “social wealth” accumulation and “property” is, in a sense, similar to that of Proudhon between “private property” and “possession.” For him, “property” is related with large-scale ownership as a kind of “theft”, and “possession” is of a completely different nature and it is related with the personal right to use the fruit of one’s own labor.<sup>34</sup> This second notion is interesting in respect of the “use,” because as far as the property of the house is related with *someone’s* privacy is then related with *someone’s* use of that property in an Arendtian sense. However, she is not engaged with Proudhon in respect of the origin of that “possession.” The source of property for Proudhon is labor (following Locke and Rousseau),<sup>35</sup> but according to Arendt is work as we said earlier. It is precisely Arendt’s critique of the Lockean notion of property what leads us to the core of her insights on property.

### 3. John Locke on property: a theoretical underpinning of early capitalism

#### 3.1 Labor as the source of property

Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), offered a new notion of property for a new age. This was a major shift from the notion of property related with the house and the family to a notion related with the labor of the individual. Richard Schlatter outlines this revolutionary change: “before 1690 no one understood that a man had a natural right to property created by his labour; after 1690 the idea came to be an axiom of social science.”<sup>36</sup>

30 Ibid. 68. Schlatter has pointed out this contradiction (note 24), 81.

31 Arendt (note 5), 67

32 Ibid. 68.

33 Arendt is in debt with Rosa Luxemburg: see *The Accumulation of Capital*, 1951, 329ff. See also Karl Marx, *Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation* (note 26), 415–418. Today we find this capitalist threat against property and privacy through the execution of mortgages or through the “commodification” of personal data on the internet.

34 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Selected Writing*, 1970, 127-128

35 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, *Basic Political Writings*, 2011, 76

36 She is in debt with Schlatter (note 24) 156. See Arendt (note 5), 110.

According to Arendt, Locke's defense of property did not lead to a recovery of expropriated property. On the contrary, his thought provided the theoretical foundations for glorifying labor, and this glorification, as we will see, is deeply intertwined with the loss of any property different from that of money or one's own income. According to Arendt, this theoretical glorification of labor began with Locke's error about the origin of all property:

"The sudden, spectacular rise of labor from the lowest, most despised position to the highest rank, as the most esteemed of all human activities, began when Locke discovered that labor is the source of all property."<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, for Arendt, Locke is the very origin of the rise of the importance of biology and the body. According to her, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham and, especially, Karl Marx would take Locke in consideration to develop their own thoughts.<sup>38</sup>

Arendt, however, pointed out that Locke's thought was not completely revolutionary; in fact she goes as far as to say that his concepts were essentially those of the pre-modern tradition.<sup>39</sup> He stated that property was related with those durable things that can be kept and become a property,<sup>40</sup> he wrote about property as a place enclosed from the common,<sup>41</sup> and he also seems to be linked with the tradition in its concern with the institution of private property as the root of society.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2 Locke's contradiction

The points Locke shares with the tradition, however, seem to finish here. According to Arendt, Locke's main concern was appropriation, a concern far removed from the tradition. She writes, "What he had to find was a world-appropriating activity whose privacy at the same time must be beyond doubt and dispute."<sup>43</sup> And that privacy beyond doubt was that of the body and the "world-appropriating activity" was labor. So, Arendt writes: "These means, body and hands and mouth, are the natural appropriators because they do not 'belong to mankind in common' but are given to each man for his private use."<sup>44</sup> For her, this appropriation through labor is not related with the "privacy of property" but rather the "privacy of appropriation."<sup>45</sup>

37 Arendt (note 5), 101.

38 Ibidem.

39 Ibid. 115.

40 Ibid. 104, 136. See also John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, sec. 26, 47, *Two Treatises of Government*, 1965.

41 Arendt (note 5), 115. Locke (note 40), sec. 32.

42 At least, with the Romans. See Arendt (note 5), 101. See also Locke (note 40), sec. 95.

43 Arendt (note 5), 111.

44 Ibidem. See also Locke (note 40), sec. 25.

45 Arendt (note 5), 111. See also Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950 bis 1973*, eds. U. Ludz e I. Nordmann, 2002, notebook XIV, text 31.

Arendt agrees the body has a private character but it has nothing to do with property: neither body nor its labor is property strictly speaking. Moreover, she states that the main contradiction in Locke is rooted in the idea that labor can be the source of property. On the one hand, he states, in consonance with the tradition, that property is something that “can be kept,”<sup>46</sup> but on the other hand, he states consumer goods “if they are not consumed by use, will decay and perish of themselves.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, what kind of property could arise from the activity of labor? Arendt states that Locke never paid too much attention to his own distinction between “the labour of our body and the work of our hands,”<sup>48</sup> and because of this lack of distinction he did not understand that the origin of property was work and not labor. This echoes what was said earlier, the work of *homo faber* is the producer of things.

In his chapter “Of Property”, Locke basically refers to consumer goods as the things that can become private property through labor, that is, bread, wine, clothes and also the land itself, and the means by which one can appropriate this property of the land is also labor. He claims, “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, “He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common.”<sup>50</sup>

As stated earlier, the perishable nature of consumer goods showed the limits of appropriation – an abundant property of consumer goods was impossible precisely due to its perishable character. Furthermore, for Locke it was against morality to accumulate consumer goods without using them, “it was a foolish thing, as well as dishonest, to hoard up more than he could make use.”<sup>51</sup>

### 3.3 Money and the ideals of animal laborans

This leads to the very core of Locke’s contradiction: how could a perishable thing be owned? The answer to this is money: in exchange for consumer goods or by the force of labor, the laborer can obtain money. Arendt claims that money was “a kind of *deus ex machina* without which the laboring body, in its obedience to the life process, could never have become the origin of anything so permanent and lasting as property.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, Locke gave the new propertyless classes hope: they were able to have a property through their labor. Moreover, this shift from the property of consumer goods to the property of money introduced the idea of accumulation. Consumer goods are spoiled

46 Arendt (note 5), 104. Locke (note 40), sec. 46–47

47 Arendt (note 5), 96. Locke (note 40), sec. 46

48 Arendt (note 5), 103. Locke (note 40), sec. 27

49 Locke (note 40), sec. 32

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid. sec. 46

52 Arendt (note 5), 102. This expression, “lasting as property,” only can be true through the investment and re-investment of money. Otherwise, money can be either lasting through accumulation (but then not used) or consumed by “use” and perishable. Ibid. 68–69.

if not used and cannot be accumulated, in contrast Locke argues money will not spoil if not used<sup>53</sup> and can be accumulated, “gold and silver [...] may be hoarded up without injury to any one [...]”<sup>54</sup> According to Daniel Bell it is precisely money which makes accumulation virtually unending, as opposed to the accumulation of the consumer goods nature gives us. Bell claims that the state of nature is a state of penury and civil society is a state of plenty for Locke. Thus, “bourgeois” acquisitiveness and the expansion of “wants” were justified.<sup>55</sup>

This principle of the bourgeoisie is consistent with the ideal of *animal laborans* which considers everything from the point of view of biology, i. e. that there is an analogy between the productive power of labor and that of money. Arendt seems to see Locke as a philosopher who wanted to “force open those stable, worldly boundaries that ‘enclose’ each one’ person’s privately owned share of the world [...] he wished to see the process of growing wealth as a natural process.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Locke was engaged with the notion of process and wanted to overcome the boundaries of the old notion of property and make the acquisition of property an endless and *natural process*.<sup>57</sup> This would lead to the main bourgeoisie principle, which is, “the crudest superstition of the modern age – that “money begets money” [...]”<sup>58</sup> In this sense Locke would be close to the purpose of Benjamin Franklin claim, that: “Money is of a prolific generating Nature. Money can beget Money, and its Offspring can beget more, and so on.”<sup>59</sup>

This naturalization of everything was to have major consequences. It would lead to the loss of all man-made and lasting objects and to the rise of the ideals of *animal laborans* against those shared by the property-owner and the *homo faber*. Arendt writes, “the ideals of *homo faber*, the fabricator of the world, which are permanence, stability, and durability, have been sacrificed to abundance, the ideal of the *animal laborans*.”<sup>60</sup> This shift implies not just the loss of durability of property but also the loss of its *place* or location. The reason for this is that neither the source of property – the labor of our body – nor actual property – money – is firmly rooted in a place. Locke’s confusion between property and labor was:

“the most revolutionary modern contribution to the concept of property, according to which property was not a fixed and firmly located part of the world acquired by its owner in one way

53 Locke (note 40), sec. 47–49

54 Ibid. sec. 50

55 Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, 1979, 254. This emphasis on accumulation of money for its sake contrasts with his notion of labor as the origin of property that could be a refrain over exploitation as Bell has claimed.

56 Arendt (note 5), 111

57 Macpherson claims that, for Locke, the main purpose of money is to serve as capital. Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Hobbes to Locke*. 1962, 206–207

58 Arendt (note 5), 106

59 Benjamin Franklin, Advice to a Young Tradesman, 1748. <<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-03-02-0130>>, [Accessed 27 Oct. 2016].

60 Arendt (note 5), 126

or another but, on the contrary, had its source in man himself, in his possession of a body and in his indisputable ownership of the strength of this body.”<sup>61</sup>

This quote refers to the loss of roots through the Lockean notion of property and also referred to in her *Denktagebuch*: “property used to link a man with a home and made it independent from other men. Labor gives man ‘the right of freedom of residence’ and at the same time subjects him to society.”<sup>62</sup> This new notion of property brings with it a new right of freedom of residence but destroys the dependence on the family replacing it with dependence on society.

Locke was nothing more or less than the first contributor to this modern misunderstanding in the notion of property and of the rise of the *animal laborans* and what Arendt calls the “unnatural growth of the natural.”<sup>63</sup> For her, the bodily functions – essentially labor and consumption – emerged from the private realm and became central in the social realm, thus referring to the new society a “society of laborers” and a “consumer’s society”. By “society of laborers”<sup>64</sup> she means that, “whatever we do, we are supposed to do for the sake of ‘making a living,’<sup>65</sup> that is, “to make money,”<sup>66</sup> and so no job is done for its own sake, but essentially for money. This society of laborers is also a consumer’s society, a society where the human necessity of consumption destroys all boundaries and claims that everything, whatever that thing is, can be consumed. Therefore, the things of the world become consumer goods and this means that it is well-nigh impossible to have a lasting ownership of them.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. An egalitarian view on property: between freedom and equality

According to the republican tradition from Aristotle to Kant the ownership of property has been the condition for responsible participation in government.<sup>68</sup> In short, property was the condition to experience political freedom and this is why some authors have considered property as intrinsically non-egalitarian in terms of political rights: not every human being had a property and thus not everybody experienced political freedom. As a consequence many egalitarian thinkers have despised property, starting with

61 Ibid. 70. My emphasis. Against the property of the body, see Arendt. *Denktagebuch*, notebook XIII, text 33.

62 Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, notebook XIV, text 31.

63 Arendt (note 5), 47. In short, “taking care of the body” becomes the main concern of society. Arendt claims “The body always wants to be taken care of and to hell with it!” Hannah Arendt, On Hannah Arendt, in: *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. M. A. Hill, 1979, 305.

64 Arendt considers that this is the (unfortunate) success of the Lockean notion of property, because under the conditions of capitalism our only reliable property is our skill and our labor power. Arendt (note 5), 70

65 Ibid. 128. See also, Philip Walsh, Hannah Arendt on the social, in: *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts*, ed. P. Hayden, 2014, 129.

66 Arendt (note 5), 128, note 75.

67 Ibid. 136ff.

68 Albert Weale, The Limits of Democracy, in: *The Good Polity. Normative Analysis of the State*, ed. A. Hamlin / Ph. Pettit, 1999, 36

Rousseau who following the Lockean notion of property considered it the cause of the “destruction of inequality” and the root of all kind of evils, i. e. egocentrism, theft and slavery.<sup>69</sup>

More recently in the same vein, M. Hardt and A. Negri have considered the republican tradition and its “Republic of property” against a “democracy of the multitude.”<sup>70</sup> This critique of the republican tradition as non-democratic and non-egalitarian can be challenge in two ways. First, through Arendt herself who defended a limited and egalitarian notion of property. For her it is necessary to make property available to every human being, something that is consistent with her limited notion of property. Second, we explore briefly other previous defenders of this egalitarian spread of property in the republican tradition and beyond: from James Harrington to Philip Pettit.

By appealing to the ancient notion of wealth and property Arendt shows the importance of limits. Slaves were the sign of wealth in the ancient world and the condition that guaranteed access to public realm. The slaves’ power of labor was used by their masters for their personal consumption, so they were able to act in public. Thus, wealth always had an instrumental character, related with the necessities of life and consumption. In this instrumental nature of wealth Arendt’s notion is particularly near to the Aristotelian understanding of wealth. According to Aristotle, wealth in this sense offers the necessary means of subsistence and is therefore in accordance with nature. This is the “wealth in the true sense”<sup>71</sup> and what is particularly important is that he underlines this wealth “is not limitless.”<sup>72</sup>

This limited nature is shared by property and wealth: the former is limited by the boundaries of other properties and the latter by the necessities of life in a narrow sense (that is, it does not include an unlimited “taking care of the body”). This notion of limits makes it possible for Arendt to advocate an egalitarian defense of property for every human being,<sup>73</sup> “There shouldn’t be any debate about the question that everybody should have decent housing.”<sup>74</sup> That is, there is no need for public discussion because it is self-evident. In another interview she states, “To make a decent amount of property available to every human being [...] then you will have some possibilities for freedom even rather inhuman conditions of modern production.”<sup>75</sup>

However, housing for all is not enough; a more egalitarian access to the means of livelihood is also essential. Arendt did not point out the origin of wealth but she wrote about the sacredness of agricultural societies, where the house and the means of subsistence were located in the same place: “only where wealth as the source of income coincided with the piece of land on which a family was located, that is, in an essentially

69 Rousseau (note 35), 77–78.

70 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, 2009, 21.

71 Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1992, 1256b

72 Ibid.

73 Arendt does not follow the modern prejudice in favor of equality or freedom. Both are equally important for her. See Jesús Ballesteros, *Postmodernidad: decadencia o resistencia*, 2000, 172.

74 Hannah Arendt, On Hannah Arendt, 318

75 Ibid. 320. See also Hannah Arendt, *Thoughts on Politics and Revolution, Crises of the Republic*, 1972, 214.

agricultural society, could these two types of property [the property of the house and wealth] coincide to such an extent that all property assumed the character of sacredness.<sup>76</sup> This coexistence between wealth and property seems to be essential, because property can only make freedom possible if it is followed by someone's access to a means of subsistence or wealth.<sup>77</sup>

In a brief sketch we can find similar approaches to property in the republican tradition. A "balance of property" is essential for James Harrington who considered that freedom and independence consisted in property and emphasized the political significance of property as it is linked with power and freedom.<sup>78</sup> We find an analogous opinion in J. Trenchard y Th. Gordon. They highlight the relevance of the spread of the property of the land in order to avoid anybody to be so rich that can reduce others to dependence.<sup>79</sup> By the same token, John Adams in a remarkable letter writes: "the Balance of Power on the side of equal Liberty and public Virtue, is to make the Acquisition of Land easy to every Member of Society: to make a Division of the Land into Small Quantities, So that the Multitude may be possessed of the Balance of landed Estates."<sup>80</sup> And Tocqueville takes for granted democracy puts property within reach to all men and this is precisely one of its great merits.<sup>81</sup>

The Arendtian requirement of an equal distribution of property – and a certain amount of wealth – is linked with other thinkers outside the republican tradition. According to Margaret Canovan Arendt sometimes sounds "strikingly Distributist"<sup>82</sup>, in other words, her opinions about an alternative to capitalism are very similar to those of G. K. Chesterton. He defends "a policy of small distributed property [...] against the two extremes of Capitalism and Communism"<sup>83</sup> and pays special attention to the life on the land of the peasants.<sup>84</sup> This attempt to offer alternatives against capitalism and communism is offered by Albert Camus as well, who believes that it is necessary to challenge the constraints of both by defending freedom and equality as complementary. But this is only possible if we set limits to our freedom and the freedom of others and if we are responsible for each other.<sup>85</sup>

76 Arendt (note 5), 66

77 Hannah Arendt, Public Rights and Private Interests, in: *Small Comforts for Hard Times. Humanists on Public Policy*, ed. M. Mooney / F. Stuber, 1977, 106–107.

78 James Harrington, *The Oceana and Other Works*, 1747, 204. See also J. G. A. Pocok, *The Maquiavellian Moment*, 1975, 408.

79 John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters: or Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, 1723, 71–74, 85–90. Quoted by Pocok (note 78), 468, 473.

80 John Adams, John Adams To James Sullivan (May. 26. 1776), *Revolutionary Writings 1775–1783*, 2011, 73

81 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 2010, 391

82 Margaret Canovan, Arendt and Chesterton, *The Chesterton Review* 7/2 (1981), 144

83 Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity*, 2001, 29

84 Ibid. 112–118. Even Proudhon has been considered in this vein. S. Edwards wrote Proudhon was a defender of "small-peasant owners" of property (specially through his *Theory of Property*, published posthumously). See Steward Edwards, Introduction, in: Proudhon (note 34), 33.

85 Patrick Hayden, *Camus and the Challenge of Political Thought: Between Despair and Hope*, 2016, 92–100

In the last decades another egalitarian notion of property has arisen with John Rawls; one that it has been linked with Chesterton<sup>86</sup>. John Rawls considers personal property – as something different from the property of the means of production – has to be guaranteed as a basic liberty and thus its wide dispersal is a “necessary condition” to maintain “equal liberties.”<sup>87</sup> In this respect, the two “systems” that fit his notion of justice as fairness respect this basic liberty; these systems are “liberal (democratic) socialism” and a “property-owning democracy.”<sup>88</sup> The latter disperses personal property and also that of the means of production and puts all citizens in a position to manage their own affairs by the respect of property, but this is not achieved by redistribution of income, it is achieved by ensuring widespread ownership of productive assets (basically, education and trained skills).<sup>89</sup>

Although coming from very different backgrounds, Chesterton, Arendt and Rawls would agree on the necessity of the recovery of responsible freedom and a reasonable equality for all in a democracy of property-owners. Arendt considers property and freedom have being always related until the Twentieth Century, but she does not develop which notion of freedom was intertwined with property.<sup>90</sup> Thus another question arises: what kind of republican freedom fits this Republic of property-owners?

According to Philip Pettit the republican notion of freedom can be defined as freedom as “non-domination” in contrast to the libertarian notion of freedom as “non interference.”<sup>91</sup> He states that this republican freedom is an egalitarian good. That is, egalitarian in the sense that “one such that its maximum realization tends to occur at a point where it is more or less equally distributed [...]”<sup>92</sup> However, this notion does not consider equality a good in itself and thus it does not seek equality for its own sake. Rather, the good is freedom as equal non-domination, according to Pettit, and this is a claim in favor of the distribution of property and wealth. In fact, beyond Rawls, Pettit considers this notion of freedom allows and demands redistribution and restriction to spread non-dominion.<sup>93</sup> Arendt would agree with the importance of the spreading of non-domination, that is, with the importance of not being dominated nor by rulers, neither by human necessities as poverty. Although for her non-domination would be the *condition* of freedom but not freedom itself, which for her it is related with *acting* politically.

86 Jeremy Waldron, *The Right to Private Property*, 1990, 423

87 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice. Revised edition*, 1999, xvi, 245

88 Rawls (note 87), xiv–xv

89 Rawls (note 87), xiv–xv, 63, 213. See also Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: a restatement*, 2011, 119.

90 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 1982, 180. In the same token see D. Benjamin Barros, Property and Freedom, *Journal of Law and Liberty*, 4 (2009), 63.

91 Philip Pettit, Freedom in the Market, *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 5/2 (2006), 147

92 Philip Pettit, *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*, 1997, 274

93 Pettit (note 91), 141. See also Barros (note 90), 69.

## Conclusion

According to Arendt the modern age represented the loss of private property. Its threat began with expropriation in the sixteenth century and it became permanent with the so-called “rise of the social,” when the bourgeoisie received the protection of governments and no longer engaged with the protection of property-owners. Wealth began to be accumulated and pursued for its own sake at expense of small and limited properties and through the labor of the propertyless classes.

It has been shown how Locke’s thought on property became the theoretical underpinning of the loss of property despite his own aim. According to Arendt, Locke gave the laborers the hope of being property-owners through labor and simultaneously justified the unending accumulation of money. This represented the theoretical loss of property as a firmly located house, and property became the body and its labor. So property became movable setting the theoretical conditions for unrootedness and global capitalism.

We can also put the Arendtian notion of property to the test if we consider that the forms of “property” widely recognized are precisely certain forms of “intellectual property” (originated in labor) and privacy as an essential good of human beings is becoming less and less guaranteed. Recently, Frank Pasquale has pointed out that in our world “law, so aggressively protective of secrecy in the world of commerce, is increasingly silent when it comes to the privacy of persons” in front of “powerful businesses, financial institutions and government agencies”<sup>94</sup>.

In the end, the recovery of property – and privacy – for all has become an urgent necessity, overcoming the false dilemma between freedom and equality. Certainly, Arendt never offered an alternative to capitalism because she always made the distinction between her desire to grasp the world and her desire to change it. Her practical alternative to capitalism is in essence proper housing for everybody. Nowadays this is still an urgent necessity, as it is to avoid further propertylessness, social injustice and unrootedness. Arendt’s egalitarian vision of property can only be achieved if law both protects and promotes small properties, the stability of the family and sets strong limits on the accumulation of wealth.

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94 Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society. The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. 2015, 3

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