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The Use of Humans: Aristotle, Marx, and the Specters of Indeterminate Utility

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Abstract

This dissertation reorients political theory to the concepts of use and utility for a more critical and emancipatory perspective on contemporary communal life. The reorientation entails a recovery of Aristotle's and Marx's overlapping approaches to use, whose contemporary reception indexes the surprising alignment of critical political theory with economics. That alignment has come by treating utility in terms of the solipsistic use of objects, which distracts from the social fact, and political problem, of human use that concerned Aristotle and Marx. By refocusing theoretical attention on the use of humans, this dissertation divides the politics of use and utility into two broad types. The first is the "politics of determinate utility" where human use and utility are delimited because instrumentalized for the sake of a determinate end. Wherever people are denied the right to determine that end, a split between them and the power to coordinate the use of humans occurs, a split that erodes the human singularity and collectivity that sustain democratic politics. With Aristotle and Marx, the dissertation conjures a second more empowering and emancipatory type, which is the spectral "politics of indeterminate utility." This account of use centers on an ongoing process whereby singular individuals question and value human use as they work out common purpose within an expanded view of life. Here use is open, egalitarian, agonistic, androgynous, and quotidian and finds expression in a Marxian conception of free time—the time of indeterminate human use. By placing human usefulness back at the heart of political thinking, the dissertation makes a salient contribution to ongoing debates about democratic community and political action, the relationship between politics and economics, and critical theory and the contemporary value of ancient texts.

Acknowledgments

Whenever I think about the years over which this dissertation was written, what first comes to mind is all the spaces I worked in. Deering Library at Northwestern University and Harper Library at the University of Chicago stand out. They were my study spaces of choice when the project first began to take form since I was simultaneously taking graduate seminars on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* with Richard Kraut and on Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* with Glenn Most. Although *Oedipus* didn't end up in the dissertation, it was by reading *Oedipus at Colonus* together with Aristotle on political friendship that got me thinking about what it means for humans to be useful and what its political stakes are. The other library that features prominently in my mind is the State Library of New South Wales in my native Sydney. Halfway through graduate school, I returned to Sydney with my wife to have our first child. Apart from the stints I did back in Chicago, it was in the beautiful and original reading room of the library's Mitchell wing that much of the reading and writing was done. The room is now called the Friends Room, which was apt given my project has always been guided by Aristotle's thinking about friendship. Less apt, I hoped, was the fact that the bookshelves around me were stocked with over 1100 copies of *Don Quixote*.

But libraries are not the only, or even the most important, spaces in which I work. It would have been nigh impossible to complete the project without the cafés I felt I almost lived in: Unicorn, Brothers K, and Peet's in Evanston; Sol and La Colombe in Chicago; 22 Grams and Badde Manors in Sydney. In the end, however, it was in an office that I finished the dissertation, and this was a great gift mostly of Julia Kindt's making. With a view out my window into the

Quadrangle of the University of Sydney and the city skyline behind it, I could not have asked for a more stimulating and yet becalming space in which to think and write.

Although Marx only became part of the project somewhat later, it is fitting that I now think back on this journey through its physical spaces because it was Marx who helped me think about human utility also in terms of the material substrate that humans lay down and bequeath to future generations. The spaces in which I worked are exemplary of this, and especially libraries. But, as is already apparent from the foregoing, these spaces are largely significant because of the living people that drew me to them. I am very grateful to have learned from and worked alongside wonderful researchers and educators around the world and privileged to be able to acknowledge them here.

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work is dedicated to you, which I humbly give as a token of my appreciation, even though it hardly compares with what you have given me.

Abbreviations

Works by Aristotle

<i>An. Post.</i>	Posterior Analytics
<i>An. Pr.</i>	Prior Analytics
<i>Ath. Pol.</i>	Constitution of the Athenians
<i>Cael.</i>	On the Heavens
<i>Cat.</i>	On the Categories
<i>De An.</i>	De Anima (On the Soul)
<i>EE</i>	Eudemian Ethics
<i>Gen. An.</i>	Generation of Animals
<i>HA</i>	History of Animals
<i>Met.</i>	Metaphysics
<i>NE</i>	Nicomachean Ethics
<i>Oec.</i>	Economics
<i>Part. An.</i>	Parts of Animals
<i>Phys.</i>	Physics
<i>Pol.</i>	Politics
<i>Rhet.</i>	Rhetoric

For Sarah

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	8
Introduction	11
Chapter 1 – Use’s Simplification and the Tradition of the Split	38
Chapter 2 – Plato’s <i>Republic</i> and the Contemporary Politics of Determinate Utility	85
Chapter 3 – Aristotelian Beginnings I: The Politics of Indeterminate Utility	136
Chapter 4 – Aristotelian Beginnings II: Politics and the Determinacy of the Good	202
Chapter 5 – Marx and the Use of the Spectral Symptom	253
Conclusion	289
Bibliography	295
Vita	318

Introduction

How useful are humans for politics? It is difficult to approach this question in anything but a critical, as in “negative,” mode today. In so far as it is understood as a question about instrumentalizing humans, the question seems capable of eliciting staunch opposition from almost any ideological position along the political theory spectrum. Several of the most influential critical theorists—including Max Weber, Geörgy Lukács, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas—earned their stature precisely by naming, theorizing, and opposing instrumental reason, a form of reason that this question seems to buy into. On their construal, people’s usefulness *per se* is determined by impersonal forces of modern rationalization (Weber and Habermas)¹, capitalism (Lukács)², and Enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno).³ Moreover, these critical approaches to utility demand, implicitly or explicitly, that we unite to ultimately get away from asking after people’s utility rather than pursue an answer to it. We can also recognize that aspiration in the work of Hannah Arendt and those she has influenced, including Giorgio Agamben and Wendy Brown, this time on instrumentalization in the service of “mere life” that comes with the rise of “the social.”⁴

In a rare alliance with these critical and political theorists, a politically liberal approach may equally object to the question on the grounds that humans should not be thought about in terms of utility. But a liberal approach, in contrast to critical theory, would likely emphasize the

¹ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”; Habermas, *Legitimation crisis*; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

² György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*.

³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*; J. M. Bernstein, “The Idea of Instrumental Reason.”

⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

humanity that makes us “equal in dignity and rights,” not to mention freedom as the protection of “life, liberty and security of person,” to which dignity and rights entitle us according to liberals since John Locke.⁵ Today this approach is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and has become notionally hegemonic given the way it has informed liberal political thought and institution building—if not popular thought or institutional practice—since. Thereafter, if humans are going to be considered in terms of usefulness at all, then usefulness must track moral behaviour, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted “American moralists” had already done by the early 19th century and to which Tocqueville attached the name “self-interest well understood.”⁶ For Tocqueville, talking about morality as useful marks a departure from a long tradition of treating it in terms of its beauty. Tocqueville also thinks, however, that morality’s utility, and therefore human utility, was always secretly studied—or not so secretly in the case of Machiavelli, Tocqueville fails to note—as this dissertation will further attest.⁷

For their part, utilitarians and economists may reproach the question of human utility as I have started to elaborate it here because it seems to be deploying “utility” in the wrong way. Traditionally, utilitarian utility meant the principal end of government, which James Mill glosses

⁵ These particular phrases come from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> Accessed February 19th, 2020.

⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 501. Although, as Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop note, “self-interest well understood” first appeared in Etienne de Condillac’s *Traité des animaux* (ibid.).

⁷ Tocqueville goes on to say that the main difference between the old and the new world’s approach to morality is really found in how *widespread* the idea of self-interest well understood is, rather than being a qualitative transformation of morality. Jess Whyte’s recent study of the imbrication of morality and the market suggests that morality has been rather transformed by its relationship to economic concepts such as utility. See Whyte, *The Morals of the Market*.

As to the veracity of Tocqueville’s claim that it has been considered before, in his *Politics* Aristotle claims that the purpose of speech (*logos*) is to delineate what is useful (*sumpheron*) or harmful (*blaberon*), “and so too what is just or unjust.” Jacques Rancière understands this to establish some of the most fundamental elements of politics and political philosophy. See especially Chapter 1 of Rancière, *Dis-agreement*.

as “the greatest happiness for the greatest number,”⁸ that set about measuring utility to inform public policy. This does not explicitly inquire after people’s usefulness, then, but rather the pleasure and pain they experience as a result of public policy. But, as Sara Ahmed notes, utilitarianism is now mostly understood as a branch of moral, not political, philosophy,⁹ which evinces one aspect of the contemporary decoupling of utility and politics in intellectual work that parallels developments within economic approaches to utility. For with the so-called marginalist revolution that inaugurated classical economic theory, economics has tracked in this direction, too. After the influential work of Carl Menger, Stanley Jevons, and Léon Walras (i.e., the marginalists), utility came to mean the result of pursuing one’s preferences in acts of buying and selling in a sphere of freedom called the market. But, in the early 20th century, some economists deemed utility too confining as a concept, beginning a trend towards the neoliberal preference to see “preferences” and their satisfaction as the determining marker of value. What remained foundational amidst these transformations in classical and neoclassical economic perspectives—and on whose foundation utilitarianism is now arguably built—is that utility subsists in the realm of the economy, not politics.¹⁰

Mainstream approaches to utility, then, despite their diversity, all rely on a split between the economy or civil society and politics. Utility is attributed to the former, which makes my leading question—how useful are humans *for politics?*—contentious for at least two particular

⁸ Mill, *An Essay on Government*, 55.

⁹ Ahmed, *What’s the Use?*, 9; although I disagree with Ahmed’s claim that this is how the *classical* utilitarian tradition (made up of Jeremy Bentham, J. S. Mill, and Henry Sidgwick) should be understood. For an exception to this trend, see Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*.

¹⁰ Although Friedrich Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society” is notionally about the use or utility of humans as well as the satisfaction of preferences, he still squarely locates this in the market as an apolitical or anti-political phenomenon.

reasons. First, politics has become widely understood today in contrast to what it is *not*, namely the economy, and goes by the name “government.”¹¹ In Miguel Vatter’s words, drawing on Michel Foucault’s lectures on governmentality, today we suffer from a “confusion of politics with government.” That means in so far as use and utility are taken to be economic concepts, they are set against the realm of politics as government. Moreover, Vatter notes that liberalism—and I would argue that utilitarianism and economics have played their part, too—“has taught that the less politics we have, the less governed we are, and thus the freer we become” because politics “seems to be reduced to the alternative of having more or less government.”¹² My question is contentious, then, because utility is a defining feature of the economy, and the economy is widely regarded as the realm of “freedom,” and so surely that is where utility should stay, because who wants to diminish freedom? Moreover, the question about human usefulness for politics now appears to be a question about how good people are at being politicians in the realm of government. While not an uncommon question—it is arguably the founding question of all political media and is recurrently, often begrudgingly, pressed upon populations in parliamentary or congressional elections—it seems to look at the world through the wrong end of the telescope. Surely, the objection may go, the more pressing question is how useful people are for the *economy*, which is the realm of freedom and therefore where we should focus our

¹¹ Such a construal is a mutation of the earlier distinction between civil society and the state, although unlike the government-economy distinction, it was possible to think about the state as presiding over civil society in a controlling way in order to make it subject to purportedly universal principles, as in Hegel. This has been resolutely inverted with the economy-government distinction since if there is any universality to be found it is claimed to be in economic relations that the state serves. But it is only in the forgetting of this transformation that Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos* can appear to be radical. Recalling it reveals the affinities between Brown and Hegel. Brown may use the language of democracy more than Hegel but their conceptualization of the relationship between economics and politics are remarkably aligned.

¹² Vatter, *Republic of the Living*, 1.

energies. The prevailing operations of governments, businesses, and schools today would affirm that this is the right question, even if the person in question is a politician, since the logic of government today—what Foucault calls “governmentality”—is so predominantly oriented to the good of the economy. Asking how useful people are for politics seems unusually narrow or just misinformed.

A second reason that makes my leading question contentious is the ostensibly purifying quality that both critics and supporters of economics wish to leverage by attributing utility to the economy. For democratic theory, a purer and even salvific politics can be distinguished from the deleterious and undesirable qualities of the economic market that instrumentalizes everything for marginal rather than universal—that is, democratic—purposes.¹³ Critical approaches to the relationship between economics and politics merely try to invert the existing dominance of the economy by locating freedom beyond the economy. Against economic liberals, the economy is recoded as the realm of base needs, to which use and utility then are confined, while freedom is articulated against them, whether as leisure, politics, or simply non-work. For economists, by contrast, dissociating usefulness from politics allows true human utility to emerge universally as the market’s price mechanism is liberated from the distorting effects of government that looks as deleterious and undesirable from this perspective as the market does from democratic theory’s perspective.¹⁴ If there is one thing that democratic theorists and economists can agree on, then, it is that use and utility should remain in whatever sphere politics is not. The debate

¹³ See note 11, above.

¹⁴ Friedrich Hayek has arguably articulated this approach most famously and forcefully across his body of work.

between them then becomes one about the reach and predominance of use and utility, not over its quality or the necessity of its existence as such.

Despite these headwinds, in this dissertation I seek to reclaim human usefulness as an important mode of thinking about politics by developing an alternative and more affirmative approach to use and utility from the perspective of democratic theory. I contend that in giving up utility *per se* to decry its undemocratic qualities, democratic theorists give up too much because they help to perpetuate a fundamental conceit that is disempowering from the perspective of democratic politics. The conceit is that use and utility largely mean what economists—and others who work in the wake of economics—have told us they mean. This conceit is disempowering for democratic politics, I argue, because it denigrates features of human life that are central to democratic politics—most especially singularity and collectivity—while obscuring from view alternative articulations of use and utility that could catalyze democracy's renewal.

While these claims and the content of these concepts will be clarified over the course of the dissertation, we can already see the way that collectivity—understood as a form of human togetherness that makes and remakes life in common—is significantly narrowed in the economic conceptualization of utility. Consider, for example, Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus' discussion of utility in their classic textbook, *Economics*. They ask,

“What do we mean by “utility”? In a word, utility denotes satisfaction. More precisely, it refers to how consumers rank different goods and services. If basket A has higher utility than Basket B for Smith, this ranking indicates that Smith prefers A over B.”¹⁵

Samuelson and Nordhaus make utility out to be something that is established between humans and objects. Utility, as satisfaction, is something that people are assumed to pursue, and they do so by using and consuming objects. But a choice over what will provide the greatest satisfaction is required because it is assumed that there will always be more objects than any individual is able to consume at any one time. That choice is disclosed in what someone ultimately buys, which is their revealed preference. The result is that the relationship between the buyer and any other *human* involved in the transaction is abstracted out. This holds even if the object in question is a human service because in order for utility calculation to be meaningful it must treat the person who renders the service *as if* they were an object. If the service provided were not as determinate as an object then it would not be possible for the buyer to judge the utility the service will provide compared with other goods or services. The main difference between commodities as goods or as services, as Michael Heinrich has pointed out, lies in the fact that a service’s production takes place at the same time as its consumption.¹⁶

Any exchange of objects also involves the use of humans, but considered through economic utility humans effectively take on the form of objects, too. The buyer uses the seller in so far as she is a purveyor of things that the buyer wants. The seller uses the buyer in so far as he

¹⁵ Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 84

¹⁶ Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital*, 44.

is an acquirer of the things she sells. By accepting the meaning of utility as economics stipulates it, then even if we think about utility as the use of humans, we think about the use of humans in terms of commodity exchange in this way. In other words, simply recognizing that *there is* a use of humans in the exchange of objects does nothing to meaningfully transform utility because it does not change anything fundamental about the activity that orients utility around objects in the first place. Utility, as conceived by economics, also implies that this is the only way humans could use each other. Economists do not explicitly lay claim to the necessity of human use in object exchange, but they do not need to. As Philip Mirowski has shown, isolating value to utility in the consumption of objects was instrumental to the conceit that economics is a value-free discipline.¹⁷ In doing so, the ostensive scientific neutrality of economics endows economic exchange with a naturalness akin to the physical sciences that further removes any question that humans could use each other differently.

Rather than denaturalize and historicize the economic account of use and utility, political and critical theorists have instead compounded their apparent naturalness. That is because many have aligned their conceptualizations of use and utility with economics while drawing on a different theoretical archive. As I will show in detail in chapter 1, Arendtians and Marxists alike have articulated use and utility in economic terms while drawing on Aristotle's conceptualization of the *oikos* (household) as the realm of use and exchange that is purportedly separated from the *polis* and its politics. But significant questions arise when the great distance between Aristotle's ancient Greek context and modern capitalism is so minimized and the essentialness of use and utility is so augmented. Regarding Aristotle, did he really articulate a proto-capitalist

¹⁷ Mirowski, *More Heat than Light*.

conception of use and utility? In so far as this reading of Aristotle is attributed to Arendt and Marx, what remains of Arendt's and Marx's work when they are used to naturalize and fortify economic principles rather than critique them? Can a democratic and emancipatory politics exist together with economic use and utility? Or, put differently, how could contemporary theory's critical ambition be undermined when the distance between it and the object of its critique has so greatly shrunk? What other ways could Aristotle, and indeed Marx and Arendt, be read that better serve democratic politics?

In this dissertation, I address these questions through a reorientation to the concepts of use and utility. I join other theorists who have recently taken up the concept of use in order to expand the kinds of, for instance, agency, action, and accountability that use can inform. Giorgio Agamben has spent the better part of his career developing a project oriented to, ultimately, "a free use of the self"¹⁸ that is revealed in the final volume of his famed *Homo Sacer* series to be an Aristotelian "use of bodies."¹⁹ More recently, Sara Ahmed has probed the broad semantic range and queer practices of use with her *What's the Use?*, while Bonnie Honig has argued that democracy depends in deep and underexplored ways on the common use of and care for public things.²⁰ Even with the variety of archives and vocabularies that these approaches advance, they are united in the way that use is marshalled to displace the preponderant meanings and

¹⁸ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 28–29.

¹⁹ Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*.

²⁰ Ahmed, *What's the Use?*; Honig, *Public Things*. There are many other discussions of use. For instance, the 2013 special issue of *New Literary History*, edited by Rita Felski, or more recently Hitz, *Lost in Thought*. Few of these works overtly engage the relationship between politics and use, although Terry Eagleton's article in the special issue of *New Literary History* is specifically about the use of humans, which I will argue is therefore at least amenable to political analysis. See Eagleton, "Bodies, Artworks, and Use Values". See also Dimitris Vardoulakis' forthcoming effort in *The Ruse of Techne: Heidegger's Metaphysics of Materialism* to trace another tradition of philosophy that replaces instrumentality in light of its abandonment in Heidegger's metaphysics.

manifestations of utility with a view to alternative forms of life. And so, use has begun to circulate in forms largely unfamiliar to, or overlooked by, critical theorists, utilitarians, or economists, who have consistently reduced its meaning to serve discreet theoretical and practical projects.

Valuable as some of these recent efforts are, these theorists stop short of a step that I deem to be crucial for a fundamental reorientation to use and utility: to shift our perspective away from the use of objects to the use of humans. At its heart, my reorientation takes place through a close reading of Aristotle whose conceptualization of use and utility haunts contemporary approaches to these concepts and yet has, I argue, been greatly misunderstood in so far as it has been selectively read in terms of the use of objects. For Aristotle's approach to the use of objects is embedded within his conceptualization of the use of humans. And in so far as his approach to use has been misunderstood, a central element of his political theory has been occluded, too. For as I argue in chapter 3, the use of humans is the concept through which Aristotle claims we get the "best theoretical grasp" (*Politics*, I.2.1252a25) on the polis and politics as it is put to work in his famous etiology (causal account) of the polis. But there too, Aristotle's approach to use has been misunderstood because the use of objects is so ingrained in contemporary political, philosophical, and economic discourse. By refocusing attention on the use of humans, I develop a much more complex and historically sensitive conceptualization of use and utility that allows us to rethink their limitations and possibilities for democratic politics in the present.

The Indeterminate and Determinate Use of Humans

Resituating Aristotle's account of use and utility within the use of humans results in two especially significant shifts in perspective, relative to modern and contemporary conceptualizations, when we approach these concepts. The first is a shift from the intrapersonal to the interpersonal. As recent approaches to use and utility have focused on the use of objects, human beings have been primarily conceptualized in intrapersonal terms, with utility designating the feeling of satisfaction or pleasure that results from the use and consumption of objects. With Aristotle, by contrast, his starting point is the use of humans, not the use of objects, and that means the primary consideration of human beings is an interpersonal one. These differences appear to stem from what each considers to be of primary significance about human life. For economics, it is the fact that human beings use things. For Aristotle, it is the fact that human beings use each other. The two facts are clearly co-implicated, but which one is taken to be prior changes the way that the other is conceptualized. So, as I already pointed out in the previous section, when the starting point for considering use is the use of objects, human use does not differ drastically from object use because humans become mere appendages to a process that unfolds between an individual human and various objects. When the starting point is the use of humans, by contrast, then a much broader set of considerations about human beings and their relationships with each other come into play and whose connection to the use of objects is something to be established. So it is that Aristotle can make the concept of use central to his

theorization of the polis at the same time as he downplays the importance of exchange and the use of objects in the constitution of a political community.²¹

Pertinent to the wider set of considerations that Aristotle folds into his conceptualization of use and utility, and the second significant shift in perspective that takes place, is the way that Aristotle understands individual human beings. Current approaches to use and utility understand a human being as an individual utility-maximizer. Aristotle conceives of individuals as *singularities* that resist subsumption under the general or universal because they are unlimited (*Rhetoric* I.2. 1356b33). What does that mean? For starters, it means that humans are not reducible to scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*). So, Aristotle writes in his *Metaphysics*, “it is impossible to have [scientific] knowledge until we come to indivisibles...we cannot understand without making a stop” (II.994b21-24). Science, as Aristotle conceives it, cannot proceed without an indivisible thing with a determinate quality that makes all instances of it “one and the same thing” (*Metaphysics*, III.4.999a28; cf. II.994b21-22). By saying human beings are unlimited, then, Aristotle is saying that humans are *not* simply indivisibles. As indivisibles, humans would be unique in the sense of “separate and different”²² but all countable as individuals. Aristotle is making a more radical claim. A human being is “odd,” which means it “does not just stand out: it does not *fit in*.”²³ It is, in Sam Weber’s terms, a “singularity.”²⁴

²¹ I argue at length in chapters 3 and 4 for the centrality of use in Aristotle’s theorization of the polis, which all stems from the use of the word *chrēsis* in *Politics* I.2. But Aristotle clearly does not think that a political community only exists “because of exchange and [peoples’] usefulness to each other” (Pol. III.9.1280a34-35).

²² Weber, *Singularity*, 1.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. Other places where Aristotle says that there is no scientific knowledge of particulars include: *An. Post.* 81a38-b9, 88b33-89a11, 89a35-89b2; *Met.* 999b1-9; *NE* 1180b13-23; *De An.* 417b17-23.

As singularities, however, humans are not the objects of crafts, such as medicine, rhetoric, or politics, either. Craft—and therefore what Aristotle calls practical and productive sciences with it—works with what is true for the most part but with a different goal than the strictly theoretical sciences, which try to explain the causes that have brought given objects into being. A craft is rather concerned to make something good. Aristotle’s political science is a practical science and therefore more like a craft and aims to make people good, its instrument being good law. But in applying itself, political science, along with rhetoric and other craft-like activities, cannot get a “theoretical grasp on (*theōrēsei*)” what is good or persuasive to the “singular (*to kath’ ekaston*),” such as “to Socrates or to Hippias;” it can only consider “people of such-and-such a sort (*to toioisdi*)” (*Rhetoric*, I.2.1356b32-34, Reeve translation, amended). In short, science and craft deal with *types* of people; not singular individuals.

Aristotle’s conception of individuals as singularities means that the use of humans is not only a fact of and starting-point for thinking about human life. The use of singular humans is also a *problem* of human life that calls for a political response. That is, if humans are singularities because there is no determinate quality that makes them all “one and the same thing” (*Metaphysics*, III.4.999a28), then that means each singularity represents something indeterminate. And this indeterminacy means that human beings will always exceed the determinate uses to which they are put as part of the fact of human use. Put differently, any use of humans underdetermines singularities, and the indeterminate remainder means humans have the capacity to reflexively consider, contest, renew, and repurpose their uses. This excess or remainder of human use means it is a problem that demands attention and response that Aristotle thinks politics must continually address. Indeed, it has not been widely noted or

appreciated but Aristotle conceives of politics itself as the use of humans, as when he states “politics (*politikē*) takes humans from nature and uses (*chrētai*) them” (*Pol.* I.10.1258a22-23). In sum, human use is a problematic fact of human life that generates more human use in a political process that dynamically and continually unfolds.

Aristotle’s conceptualization of and response to human use’s generativity is the principal source that I examine in this dissertation in order to reorient contemporary political theory to use and utility. But to that end I am also served by Plato’s *Republic*, whose first “city in speech” is, I argue, closer to contemporary interpretations of use and utility that are nonetheless attributed to Aristotle. In my reading of Aristotle, by contrast, use and utility in Plato’s first city—and therefore contemporary theory—are the foil against which Aristotle’s conceptualization can be grasped. I also draw on Marx, who has been misread along with Aristotle in so far as his conceptualization of the use of humans has remained unidentified. Marx especially serves my ultimately critical reading of Aristotle in so far as he reads Aristotle from a modern standpoint and mobilizes his insights for an emancipatory vision of politics. The dissertation thus centres on how, and how not, to read Aristotle, but it does so not simply to reconstruct Aristotle, nor to understand with a view to justifying Aristotle’s approach, but rather to make available the problem of human use for further examination and consideration. Aristotle and interpretations of Aristotle provide me with some key parameters, concepts, and questions that guide the reorientation to use and utility in human and thus political terms. On that conceptual foundation, I seek to build an approach to the use of humans that is politically empowering and emancipatory.

Through my engagement with these thinkers, I divide the politics of utility into two broad types that are two modalities of the relationship between singularity and use or utility. I call the first the “politics of determinate utility” that especially helps us get a purchase on the destructive character of utility for democracy. A classic manifestation of instrumentality that is nonetheless underexplored in its political manifestations, here human use and utility are delimited and constrained for the sake of a determinate end. Whoever earns or claims the right to set that end instantiates a split between some people and the power to coordinate the use of humans. In doing so, power is aimed at closing down indeterminacy as it calls some activities useless and others useful and whose moral and congratulatory overtones interpolate both the useful and the useless in the process by which it maintains itself.

Against this I posit the “politics of indeterminate utility.” It departs from the refusal to cede the concept of use or utility to the politics of determinate utility, whether in its contemporarily dominant form or historical variants of it. This refusal requires a problematization of determinacy itself. For the politics of determinate utility is predicated on the assumption that determinacy structures and guides human use for the good of human beings, or at least for the good of some of them. The politics of indeterminate utility accepts, by contrast, that indeterminacy and indeterminate use may have important roles to play in human life and politics. Here the expansive, indeterminate quality of human use is not seen as a problem to be solved and thereby eradicated, but a problem that is embraced for its generative and emancipatory possibilities. While the politics of determinate utility is characterized by a hierarchy that underpins its own determinacy, the politics of indeterminate utility is especially democratic. As I will show, it is open, egalitarian, agonistic, quotidian, and collectivist, as singular

individuals come together to work out common purpose. I argue that it is here that an alternative and more affirmative approach to use and utility for democratic theory can ultimately be found.

Methodology – Reading for the Spectral Symptom

The basis of my effort to reorient contemporary theory to use and utility is an interpretive device that I rely on throughout the dissertation. As I read certain modern theorizations of use and utility in addition to Plato, Marx, and especially Aristotle, I read for the *symptom* of human use. In doing so, I am inspired by the recent work of Emanuela Bianchi, for whom the symptom names an outcome of the tension but also connection between the “systematic” and “phenomenological” vectors of Aristotle’s work. For, on the one hand, Aristotle famously employs a teleological method that folds all phenomena into a functionalist account with an overarching and determining final cause. On the other hand, however, Aristotle also evinces “painstaking attention” to all phenomena and an “attunement to the very texture of becoming in its singular and irreducible contexts.”²⁵ Reading for “the problematic of sexual difference and sexual reproduction within Aristotle’s texts,” Bianchi is particularly focused on the “feminine symptom,” which names physical matter that plays a necessary role in Aristotle’s teleological explanation but does so in an *inexplicable* way.²⁶ It is inexplicable because the feminine, for Aristotle, is seen as “a fault, a misstep, a deviation in the teleological transmission from father to

²⁵ Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

son” and is therefore deemed as “aleatory” in the sense of unpredictable or, in the terminology I have adopted here, indeterminate.²⁷

While Bianchi particularly focuses on Aristotle’s natural science with occasional forays into his political science, here I reverse that equation. But in so far as I read for the symptom in *Aristotle’s* political science, some readers may expect symptomatic reading to become uninteresting and somewhat misguided. Reading for the symptom may be deemed uninteresting when applied to Aristotle’s political science because, unlike in the theoretical sciences that aim to account for what is necessary, symptoms should be expected. Aristotle’s political science is famed for its distinctive methodology that accommodates difference by recognizing the indeterminacy that is part of practical life, which Aristotle’s most strictly scientific methodology cannot abide (NE. VI.5.1140a33-35; although cf. *APr.* I.13.32b4-21). So, Martha Nussbaum writes of “the *indefiniteness* or *indeterminacy* of the practical” in Aristotle and, while admitting the difficulty of knowing what this really means, believes “it appears to have something to do with the variety of the practical contexts and the situation-relativity of appropriate choice.”²⁸ Echoing that, Jill Frank notes that Aristotle “discusses at length the varying actions that would miss the [virtuous] mean, [but] he never says exactly what acting with good judgment amounts to. This omission,” she continues, “is necessary so as to respect the particularities of circumstance.”²⁹

But there is a difference between respecting the indeterminacy that comes with the particularities of circumstance and respecting the indeterminacy that comes from people as singularities. Aristotle respects the particularities of circumstance because he realizes that he

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 303.

²⁹ Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, 162n65.

cannot determine what is good for people in particular situations. But as I show in chapter 4, it is clear that he thinks the good *is* something determinate and can only be approached *by determining what is indeterminate*. In so far as singularity represents something indeterminate, then, Aristotle thinks it needs to be eradicated through determinate action. These are the assumptions that inform Aristotle's approach to the use of humans that ultimately comes down on the side of the politics of determinate utility that compromises singularity, indeterminacy, and the forms of collectivity that are sustained by both.

So, if Aristotle respects the indeterminacy of particular circumstances by not prescribing correct action, he does not think that correct action on the model of a craft like politics or rhetoric can ever address singularity because that is simply not within its capacity, nor is it conducive to the human good. But if Aristotle is correct to see human animals as singularities, on the one hand, *and* to recognize the limits of science and craft to accommodate singularity, on the other hand, then we should be able to identify places where singularities appear as problems. In other words, Aristotle will treat humans in so far as they can be treated in scientific or practical terms, but given that humans are in reality singularities, at some point these same human animals should manifest some recalcitrance. It is this recalcitrance that the symptom names. Given that Aristotle thinks politics is the use of humans (*Pol.* I.10.1258a22-23), if I can identify the symptom in Aristotle's political science, then I will have precisely located the singular human being as an ongoing problem of human use and politics. From the perspective of Aristotle's scientific inquiry, Bianchi has shown us how the symptom is inexplicable. From the perspective of politics and the use of humans, I wish to show that the symptom is *ineradicable*.

When we look at Aristotle's analysis of humans, however, singularities and the problem of human use are somewhat fugitive. They are, in the metaphor I deploy from chapter 3 onwards, ghost-like, or spectral. That is as true in the etiology of the polis at the beginning of *Politics*, where Aristotle undertakes a rare analysis of human life using the methods of natural science, as it is of his political science as a whole. Something, then, has happened to singularity. Reading for the symptom becomes the way to look for singularity and how it configures and in turn is configured in Aristotle's work. For singular human beings cannot be entirely omitted from an account of politics since they are the natural material of politics in a way that Aristotle thinks is analogous to land or sea as the natural material of a household manager (*Pol.* I.10.1258a22-24). But in Aristotle's account the relationship between politics and singularity itself is nonetheless difficult to see because, true to his understanding of scientific inquiry, political science does not get a theoretical grasp on what is singular. Much like the recent and magnificent effort to photograph the singularity that we call a black hole, it will require multiple viewpoints.³⁰ That means reading for the phenomenological and the systematic, as I have said, but doing so through Aristotle's different scientific accounts of human life with their distinct methodologies.

What is the result? For Bianchi as well as Brooke Holmes, reading for the symptom can become a window "onto hidden worlds" that are hidden insofar as they fall outside of the main causal account.³¹ At other times, the symptom forms part of the "phenomena that help to generate and sustain worldviews."³² While Bianchi and Holmes are primarily interested in the

³⁰ Ota Lutz, "How Scientists Captured the First Image of a Black Hole - Teachable Moments | NASA/JPL Edu."

³¹ Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom*, 14, quoting Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*

latter, here I am interested in the symptom because it reveals both human use's hidden and generative dimensions. That is, reading for the symptom reveals the ways singularity, and human use with it, is a political problem in so far as it represents indeterminacy. This problem then attunes us to the ways that it generates political responses that also subsequently occlude indeterminacy in human use. In the case of Aristotle, his naturalizing and normative account of politics as human use somewhat downplays indeterminacy's pervasiveness even while it generates the normative account in the first place. For like the feminine symptom, use's symptom is necessary for Aristotle's account, not of sexual reproduction per se but for *polis* reproduction, which *Politics* I.2 shows *begins with* sexual reproduction. Use's symptom is not a feminine symptom, however, but an androgynous one because its archetype is the male-female couple in the first household. That is, hewing to the word's etymology, it is androgynous because a combination of man (*anēr*) and woman (*gunē*). But it is also an androgynous use of humans in the sense of *indeterminately* gendered because I go on to show the contestability of the binary gender terms that are in play here, even within Aristotle's own political theory. For Aristotle's discussion of *philia* (friendship) testifies to the pervasiveness of human use's symptom more than Aristotle is willing to admit.

Despite Aristotle's overarching assumption about the determinacy of the good, the pervasiveness of use's symptom, and therefore the indeterminate use of humans, is what presses me to go beyond simply reading for, and so identifying, the symptom of use. I go beyond reading for the symptom by theorizing the use of the symptom itself. This is what I have called the politics of indeterminate utility. For the pervasiveness of use's symptom leads me to consider a possibility that Aristotle nowhere seriously entertains. What if indeterminacy itself is good for

humans? Or, in other words, what if indeterminacy is a good that human beings aim for in their activity? While Bianchi is primarily interested in the “production and sustenance of Aristotelian teleology” (p. 2), I am principally interested in considering how human use’s symptom could be generative for an alternative teleology and politics that can account for singularity. What if, that is, we took singularity and the indeterminate use of humans and turned them into the prized possession of political life rather than something to be eradicated? While it is critical of Aristotle’s teleology, then, my approach does not completely reject teleology, either, but rather continues to work between teleology and phenomenology to better account for the politics of human use and especially its democratic dimensions. In this sense my account of the politics of indeterminate utility shares some features with other approaches to democracy, ancient and modern. Some democratic theorists approach democracy itself as the interplay between—and so a *symptom* of—the formal constitution of political power in rule and law and the “aconstitutional”³³ mobilizations of political power aimed at the “disorganization”³⁴ of its formal components.³⁵ This is a productive approach, and most powerful when it attunes us to the possibilities of political disorganization, even its quotidian dimensions that lie outside citizenship itself, as I attempt here.

My efforts to outline a democratic approach to the politics of human use is therefore not merely an historicist’s endeavor. While I devote myself to close and contextually sensitive reading, I am interested in the way the politics of indeterminate use haunts, as an ever-present

³³ Wolin, “Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy,” 37.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Meiksins-Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave*; Meiksins-Wood, “Democracy: An Idea of Ambiguous Ancestry”; Ober, *The Athenian Revolution*; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*; Castoriadis, *Ce Qui Fait La Grece, Tome 1: D’Homère à Héraclite*, 181.

possibility, contemporary political regimes, which manifest their own forms of the politics of determinate utility. Human use's symptom, then, does not only garner historical or philosophical interest, but contemporary political interest too. It is as much a spectral symptom for us as it was for Aristotle and the Greek *polis*. By conjuring this spectral symptom, then, I attempt to intervene in contemporary theory and politics as much as critically reading Aristotle's account of human use. To that end, however, I am sensitive to history. As Marx, while commenting on Aristotle, will especially help us see, the conditions in which indeterminate use manifest itself are not equal. The conditions of social and political life can enable or disable, and so empower or disempower, indeterminate use to varying degrees. This means we must be attuned to the specific and historical conditions of any given time or place.

This dissertation amounts to a reorientation to use through an Aristotelian accounting of human community. It is to this end that my conjuring of the spectral symptom that is the politics of indeterminate human utility works. With the motif of the specter, my project could also be summed up as re-enchantment of use in the face of the disenchantment of the world at the hands of more determinate modes of human use. And insofar as use is revalued as a political concept, it is therefore a re-enchantment of contemporary political life. I hope to show that use, then, need not be synonymous with modernity's "disenchantment of the world."³⁶ It may yet re-enchant the world in ways that affirm democratic life and human flourishing with it.

New risks come with this capacious approach to utility and politics, however. Now my leading question may simply be too broad: if the politics of human use is understood as

³⁶ This is Max Weber's famous phrase, appropriated from Friedrich Schiller, for modernity's instrumental rationalization of the world. See especially Weber, "Science as a Vocation."

indeterminate utility, then isn't there an almost infinite number of uses to which people could be put, and therefore an equally infinite number of ways people could be deemed useful? Surely one could not provide *any* determinate answer to that question! Perhaps. But if one accepts the expansiveness of human utility, then one should also accept that it has not been a problem or obstacle to the forces of contemporary society that, it has been amply shown, reduce people to very determinate and detrimental forms of instrumentalized life. These have resulted from various developments and choices in politics and society, i.e., determinate human uses. If these developments and choices could lead down one path (a negatively instrumentalized one), then why can't they also lead down other paths that we would want to affirm? Moreover, if this delimiting approach has resulted in the forms of utility we want to critique, then why accept utility's delimitation as a matter of fact rather than a reflection of the paths that various instrumentalizing strains have taken, paths that we may refuse to continue on? It is the goal of this dissertation to both look back at the path we have trodden to arrive at the prevailing approaches to use and utility and to plot at least one alternative path we might yet take. I proceed to make these arguments along the following course.

Chapter Outline

Beyond this introductory chapter, the dissertation comprises five chapters and a conclusion. In chapter 1, I trace the reception of Aristotle's conceptualization of use in 20th century critical and political theory, especially through Marx and Hannah Arendt, where some alignment between these fields and economics has emerged. There we see the way that use in Aristotle has become

representative of a discreet realm that serves basic needs and is counterposed to a realm of freedom. Although this basic dualism appears in many authors, Arendt stands out for the way use informed a fully-fledged, and especially influential, political theory that has significantly shaped the recent work of Giorgio Agamben and Wendy Brown.³⁷ But a careful reading of *The Human Condition* reveals the influence of Plato's *Republic* in Arendt's reading of Aristotle in these dualistic terms. Plato's influence—which now stretches to Agamben and Brown via Arendt—leads me to carefully read, in chapter 2, Plato's account of use and utility in *Republic's* first “city in speech.” There I seek to discern the kind of politics entailed in the simplified conceptualization of use and utility that Plato partly inspired and is now affirmed, to varying extents, in the work of critical and democratic theorists. I argue that Plato's account presupposes—rather than explains—an authority model of politics that inflects and simplifies use through a deductive account of need, human nature, and time that divides some from the power to coordinate the use of humans. The presupposed split between use and freedom manifests the politics of determinate utility that erodes the singularity and collectivity that Arendt, Agamben, and Brown want to reprise. I argue that this is especially concerning for the way that Plato illuminates our contemporary social and political context. Neither Plato nor Arendt, Agamben, or Brown produced the politics of determinate utility in the present but their conceptualization of use in dualistic terms mostly affirm, rather than refuse, the ways that singularity and collectivity are currently diminished.

³⁷ Of the Arendtians, Bonnie Honig is an exception. Perhaps this is because in her treatment of use she doesn't focus on Arendt's reading of Plato and Aristotle. Honig rather compellingly suggests that reading Arendt through another ancient tradition, the Jewish Sabbath, along with Rilke, etc. is a better bet. Like me, in doing so Honig wishes to reclaim use, but I do so by advancing an alternative reading of Aristotle to Arendt's. Sara Ahmed also wishes to reclaim use but like Honig, wishes to leave Aristotle out of the picture. When Ahmed says that the problem of Agamben's theory of use is his archive, she effectively posits her account as an alternative to Aristotle's.

Owing to Plato's influence, contemporary theoretical engagements with Aristotle have failed to identify how Aristotle understands ostensibly economic categories such as exchange in political terms. Moreover, they miss the way Aristotle theorizes politics itself in terms of use and utility. The novelty of Aristotle's thought in this regard shines through when we read Aristotle against Plato.³⁸ Like so much of his contribution to thought, Aristotle's contribution to theorizing the politics of use can be read as a response to Plato.³⁹ In chapters 3 and 4, I put Aristotle into conversation with Plato and thereby read the politics of utility through need, human nature, and time. In doing so, I identify another, more esoteric to be sure, politics of use in Aristotle that establishes the central features of the politics of indeterminate utility.

My reading of Aristotle focuses on his etiology of the polis in *Politics* I.2. There Aristotle sets out what he thinks is the "best theoretical grasp" of the polis. Against the grain of long-held interpretations of Aristotle by political theorists and Aristotle scholars alike, I show how the etiology makes *chrēsis* as *use* a central feature of politics. In chapter 3, I focus on what Aristotle calls the "first *oikos*." Here we encounter the politics of indeterminate utility as "everyday use," which names the process by which singular individuals come together to work out common purpose. This significantly challenges the simplistic relation between politics and use established by Plato and attributed to Aristotle by contemporary theory. By conceiving of everyday use, and the *polis*' development, as a search for alternative human uses, I argue that Aristotle reveals the

³⁸ I thank James Ley for helping me appreciate this aspect of Aristotle's thought.

³⁹ Scott Meikle notes that Aristotle is combatting Plato's account of human community in *Republic* Book II, but he does not see it as pitting one account of human use against another account of human use but rather combatting "mundane and utilitarian banality" with his "view about the *telos* of human association (or the state), as having to do with the higher provision of 'the good life' which realizes the potentialities inherent in the essence of man" Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, 25. Like so many others who divide Aristotle's politics from use or utility, Meikle cites (p. 25 n. 26) Aristotle's claim at *Politics* I.2.1252b29, the *polis* "comes to be for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well."

open, contingent, dynamic, and androgynous process by which human uses are established. This avoids the fallacy of Plato's account, as it has been received in contemporary theory, that presupposes political community and so fails to explain its coming to be. It is also empowering from the perspective of democratic politics because it is where we see use facilitating an ongoing transfer between singularity and collectivity.

In chapter 4, however, I examine the way everyday use in the first household is transformed into "not-ephemeral use" as the first household grows into a village and a polis. This is where Aristotle's own politics of determinate utility comes into play. But in contrast to Plato's first city, the politics of determinate utility in Aristotle is not presupposed but rather predicated on the historical supposition that patriarchs will determine the indeterminate for the sake of some good. Aristotle legitimizes this and makes it the model for political rule in his account of the regime (*politeia*) because he thinks it creates the conditions for *the* good, which is already determined, to become apparent to human animals. With his conception of not-ephemeral use, "living well," and the use of humans as political rule, Aristotle discounts the value of everyday and indeterminate use as singularity is turned into a symptom of politics. But Aristotle also testifies to the preponderance of indeterminate use, especially in his discussion of *philia* (friendship). While Aristotle judges indeterminate use in the developed polis to be an error, I suggest that Aristotle himself is in need of a reorientation to the good people pursue and that should inform our thinking about politics.

In chapter 5, I seek alternative pathways out of Aristotle who never pushes the democratic reading of utility even while his account can provide us with the starting points for doing so. As I have already said, the politics of indeterminate use haunts politics and theory

today, but its particular manifestations and indeed threats from the politics of determinate utility need to be historically grounded. In my efforts to make the politics of human use speak to our contemporary condition, there is still a need to translate the insights gained from the reading of Aristotle into our own context. To that end I am particularly well served by the work of Karl Marx.

My reading of Marx is greatly served by William Clare Roberts' book, *Marx's Inferno*. Roberts shows how indeterminate human utility was a central theme of nineteenth-century socialist critiques of market society. The opening part of Marx's *Capital*, on Roberts' reading, is an extended response to this. Despite the differences between them, Marx was equally concerned by the destructive mode of indeterminacy of human utility in capitalism. But while Roberts reads Marx as calling for a perfectionist virtue-politics that emphasizes, along with classical philosophy, determinacy in the good human life, I argue that Marx critiques this as a limited way of conceiving human satisfaction. The point, for Marx, is to realize indeterminate use—which capitalism has universalized as a form of suffering, not satisfaction—in the free development of the individual. This is what he understands as free time, whose unique understanding helps us appreciate the degree to which Marx inverts Aristotle's account of the *zoon politikon*.

Despite the overall inversion that Marx performs on Aristotle, in the end I treat Marx in Aristotelian fashion by working under the expectation that free time must be realized as a form of life. In other words, free time and its indeterminate use must be made determinate in at least one sense. The goal is to make indeterminacy determinate, not by eradicating it in Aristotelian fashion, but by liberating it. With that end in mind, in the final and concluding chapter, I begin to consider what a political project bent on realizing free time could look like.

Chapter 1

Use's Simplification and the Tradition of the Split

In the introduction, I began by considering the present difficulty in answering how useful humans are for politics because of the theoretical terrain cultivated by numerous discourses, especially over the last two centuries, that continue to form the basis of political enquiry today. That is, use and utility are consistently divorced from both politics and *human* use as they are attached to human-object relations in a discreet realm of need called the economy. As I aim to show further in this chapter, that is true not only of traditional fields such as economics, but of critical and political theory, too. Authors such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Hannah Arendt are central to the simplification of use that has brought it closer to economics, which has made a significant mark on contemporary theory if through nothing other than the influence on figures such as Giorgio Agamben and Wendy Brown. Together, these theorists share a tendency not to challenge the simplistic accounts of use and utility bequeathed to us by economics—which would require a challenge on theoretical grounds—but rather challenge them in terms of their dominance over contemporary life. Often enough, this comes by way of reconceptualizing *freedom*, rather than use, as something beyond the economy and use. Use and utility, still in their economic forms, are put in their proper place, which means in the realm of “mere life,” as Arendt calls it. At the same time, though, use and utility are secured in the simplistic mode that economics and other fields have produced them. The result is the simultaneous simplification, accommodation, containment, and abandonment of use and utility in the search for alternative

vocabularies and, ultimately, forms of life that could instantiate freedom and so transcend but not eradicate the realm of use.

If nothing else, the effort to contain use and utility, rather than transform it, is consistent with the simplistic conceptualization of use and utility that they reproduce, since these terms belong to one half of a dualistic society where politics occupies one side of a constitutive divide, and need, or mere life, or economics occupies the other. Within this framework, it makes sense to direct attention to the relative reach of each realm and, where one is encroaching too much upon the other, to push back. On this account, use and utility have no politics in and of themselves but are rather accompanied and attended by a politics that, governed by its own logic, can either support or thwart the economy. The task for democrats who think the dominance of the economy is deleterious is, then, to reverse the “economization” of life by mobilizing a political force—such as “the demos”—that can put the economy in its place to serve democratic ends. Understood in these terms, the political task may have the virtue of being conceptually straightforward, but as Samuel Chambers has argued, the conceptualizations of the economy and politics on which it rests neglect the ways that the so-called “economy” today already involves politics. Chambers helpfully establishes some parameters for conceptualizing the politics of ostensibly economic features of contemporary life that guide my effort in this chapter and the next to discern the politics of use and utility today. For Chambers, politics occurs in the historical process of forming and reforming society, which means wherever there is “contingency, contest, and struggle.”¹ The political struggle that plays out with respect to the economy, for Chambers, is over subjectivity and subjectivation; that is, “articulations of subject

¹ Chambers, “Undoing Neoliberalism,” 715.

positions in relation to power”² in political-economic discourses. The “capitalist social order” is unique precisely because, Chambers submits, “economics becomes a major terrain of struggle, such that what people do in economics is political.”³ On Chambers’ account, a *critique* of economics requires three related moves. First, to understand that capitalism, or neoliberalism, or both, names a certain subjectivity that has been discursively produced. Second, to understand what that particular subjectivity involves. Third, to counter it, which means not “merely...*postulating* alternative forms of subjectivity,” but rather producing “alternative theories and practices that themselves *produce and sustain new forms of subjectivity*.”⁴

Chambers singles out Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos* as representative of approaches that falter because they merely postulate rather than produce alternative subjectivities. Why? Because Brown and others “misapprehend the enemy and mythologize the hero”⁵ when they do not understand economics (the enemy) as the political production of subjectivity and treat political life (the hero) as a given ontological reality. When the relationship between economics and politics is configured in this way, “the two do not share the same terrain,” meaning there is “no field of battle on which the two could meet.”⁶ Reading Brown in terms of this mismatch of discourse and ontology, Chambers’ critique ultimately depends on Brown’s reliance on Aristotle’s *zoon politikon*—the human political animal—where Chambers thinks the hoped-for battle ends before it begins.

² Ibid. 724

³ Ibid. 715.

⁴ Ibid. 723, my emphasis.

⁵ Ibid. 707

⁶ Ibid. 720

But Chambers misses something important about Brown's account of the *zoon politikon* that undermines his critique and calls for a different kind of analysis. It is true that Brown invokes Aristotle's *zoon politikon* and on that basis claims that we have simply always been political. But Brown's account of Aristotle, Chambers fails to note, is itself part of a larger discursive tradition and in that way comes close to the kind of political work that Chambers calls for to counter the processes of economic subjectivation.⁷ Brown's participation in that tradition comes from one major feature of her reading; namely, the split between oikos and polis that she reads into Aristotle that then informs the argument that *homo politicus* is being economized in the face of *homo oeconomicus*' ascendancy and her normative injunction to halt and reverse that tendency.⁸ This split is important for understanding the discursive force that Brown's argument takes on despite her effort to ground the argument in ontology. But this is not just important for understanding the force of Brown's argument. This split and its tradition is also important for other contemporary work, as Chambers himself points out. For Chambers begins his article by noting the prevalence of the split between *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*, which is the

⁷ Instead of noting this larger tradition, Chambers rather isolates and particularizes Brown's reading of Aristotle by pointing out alternative interpretations of Aristotle's *Politics*, whose diversity may preclude the kind of ideological force that economics, say, has achieved as a concept like marginal utility takes hold of the entire discipline. Granted, there are many interpretations of Aristotle's argument for the *zoon politikon*, but Chambers overlooks a feature of Brown's interpretation that forms part of a much larger tradition of political and critical theory.

⁸ I think this goes some way to mitigating Chambers' critique, since the split between oikos and polis, on Brown's interpretation, is *part of* the life of the *zoon politikon*. To invoke the *zoon politikon* as existing today, then, seems to be Brown's way of saying that there is another way we can think about the relationship between *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*, and that is because Aristotle related them differently. Of course, this requires the identification with *homo oeconomicus* with what Brown takes to be Aristotle's "mere life," and *homo politicus* with Aristotle's good life (as the political, not contemplative, life), which admittedly requires justification. But to Chambers' claim that this is not a discursive subject, Brown may also point to the fact that the *zoon politikon* is the animal with *logos*, which brings Brown's Aristotelian approach closer to Foucault's and Chambers' discursive approach. The only remaining problem is that Brown thinks this figure existed "in the beginning," which locates the *zoon politikon* ontologically, not historically and discursively. But in what follows, I argue that despite Brown's argument, her treatment of Aristotle is very much part of a long and historical discursive tradition. What remains is to work out whether that is a tradition that produces a politics and subjectivity that we want to affirm, to which my answer is "no."

split that Brown equates (with admittedly little explanation) with the older split between *oikos* and *polis*.⁹ If I am correct in identifying Brown's split between the economic and the political as part of a long theoretical tradition, and Chambers also takes "Wendy Brown's recent work as representative of a broader effort" in the *contemporary* world that similarly invokes this division, then it is hard to maintain that this split does not have discursive force that on Chambers' reckoning forms the playing field of economics' politics. It is by virtue of this tradition that Brown's argument is persuasive because it makes her argument look completely natural. What remains to work out is whether that tradition produces a politics and subjectivity that we— whoever that "we" is—want to affirm.

In this chapter and the next I take up this question, but it is not easy to answer. Recognizing a tradition that splits politics from other domains is not difficult. It is readily apparent in Hannah Arendt, who sees it as a feature of Greek antiquity and dwells on its place in Aristotle's philosophy. In this chapter I further argue that the split is also apparent in Adorno, Benjamin, and Agamben, who are also influenced by Aristotle to an extent. Indeed, as I indicated in the introduction, the very *milieux* of modernity can be characterized in terms of the split that is claimed between state and civil society or government and economy. But it is the apparent pervasiveness of a split between politics and other domains that comprises the first difficulty in identifying what kind of politics it entails. That is, the split is thoroughly naturalized—or in Chambers' terms, ontologized—, meaning the readiest answer to the question is provided by the

⁹ He writes, "[m]any theorists and political actors today conceive of the battle of neoliberalism as a death match between the figure of *homo oeconomicus*, who transforms everything into economics, and *homo politicus*, the figure of democracy as popular sovereignty and the creature who just might save us from the encroaching forces of neoliberalism." Chambers, "Undoing Neoliberalism," 706.

split itself: the politics of the split is the one that is *named* in it. So, it is the politics of Action (Arendt), the Demos (Brown), or the free use of the self in common (Agamben) that is pertinent to the split. But this answer requires us to accept that the splits between use and politics, or oikos and polis, or mere life and the good life on which they rely are given in advance as part of the natural order, or ontology, of life.¹⁰ Given how naturalized these splits have become, many would readily accept this. But here I refuse to accept the givenness of the splits between politics and other domains. I rather wish to see these very articulations as results of prior processes that are routinely overlooked but that need to be accounted for or else, I submit, we do not adequately understand what these splits entail. In this chapter and the next, then, I seek to disclose what else is presupposed in the splitting of these realms and thereby understand what kind of subjectivity and politics they produce. In the end, I argue that there is another, deeper split that subtends this tradition. It is a *split between people and the power to coordinate the satisfaction of needs, which is the power to use humans*. This is the key feature of what I call the politics of determinate utility that should concern democratic theorists because it erodes singularity and collectivity through its very constitution. Moreover, this other split and its politics are not only pertinent to theoretical debate. I argue that the politics of determinate utility is already manifest in our material condition, which then implicates theory in contemporary social practice in concerning ways. I submit that when theorists produce their own splits they erode singularity and collectivity as they affirm the politics of determinate utility in the present. The

¹⁰ Although the conceptualization of use is remarkably consistent, the splits that it informs do not always take on the same names. I generally call it the split between use and freedom, or use and politics, but it also comes in the form of the split between economy and politics, need and politics, and mere life and the good life. For some thinkers, the concepts belonging to each of these splits overlap, as when politics is understood to be part of a good life, but for others they will be in tension, as when Aristotle says that politics is not a leisured activity.

result is that the alignment, though not complete overlap, of critical and political theory's conceptions of use with that of economics brings with it an alignment of its politics, which is contrary to critical and political theory's declared intentions.

But in so far as I am correct that this other split (between people and the power to coordinate need's satisfaction), describes our contemporary lived condition, there is another reason—in addition to the naturalization—for the difficulty identifying it, even in theory. In our contemporary market society almost everything we claim to need is accessed through the mechanisms of the market. The market that coordinates the satisfaction of our needs is neither easily identifiable as a power nor something entirely removed from us. That is, it does not appear to be a power because it does not have one localizable agent but is the product of a dispersed network of people, activities, and ideas—to name just a few of its components. And it does not appear to be removed from us because the market can only function through the activities of those who depend on it. Even if we do identify that the satisfaction of needs forms part of a power, then, it looks like there may be no split between the needs of people in the market and the power to satisfy them because as subjects of that market, we are embedded in the process and therefore the power that satisfies our needs. More than that, even if there is some split between our needs and the power to satisfy them, if the very reproduction of the contemporary social formation, in its current capitalist form, and our lives as we know them depends on it, why would we want to fundamentally challenge this condition?

Given these difficulties, my argument in these first two chapters will require several intersecting manoeuvres. In this chapter, I undertake a critical reconstruction of use and utility in the work of Giorgio Agamben and Wendy Brown. Because of the intimate connection between

the theorization of use and utility and the tradition that splits politics from other domains, reconstructing the former is a way of reconstructing the latter. I single out Agamben and Brown because of their significant influence on contemporary thinking about the relationship between use and politics. But to understand use and utility in Agamben and Brown, I also examine the authors who most influenced them, most especially Adorno, Benjamin, and Arendt. In doing so, I show how Agamben and Brown are part of a broader simplification of use and utility in the Aristotelian-Marxian vein of theorizing these concepts that has skewed them towards economics. This will allow me, in later chapters, to show how far Agamben and Brown, together with those who influenced them, have departed from Marx and Aristotle in their approach to use and utility in so far as they exclude the question of human use. My more immediate goal in this chapter, however, is to identify how even use as it pertains to objects in Aristotle and Marx is significantly simplified by Benjamin, Adorno, Arendt, Agamben, and Brown and, in the next chapter, to disclose the politics and subjectivity that is produced as a result. In this chapter I argue that Brown's and Agamben's conceptualizations of use and utility are indebted to Plato's *Republic* because it plays a hitherto unidentified role in Hannah Arendt's conception of politics and use. Through Arendt, Plato's account of need and freedom and use and utility has become pervasive in contemporary theory, and a close examination of this account will reveal, in the next chapter, the deeper conditions of the split between politics and other domains that informs the conceptualization of use and utility. The more complete picture, provided by Plato, of what produces a split between use and politics then allows me to consider how these deeper conditions manifest themselves, or do not, in our contemporary condition and sustain the

conceptualization of use and politics today. In other words, we will be in a position to articulate the politics of use and utility today.

Salvific Objects in Adorno and Benjamin

Starting points are always difficult because, as we will see throughout this dissertation, one always risks presupposing what needs to be explained, meaning one's omissions become more important than one's commissions. But here I begin tracing the split between need and politics, and the simplistic conceptualization of use, in Agamben and Brown by looking at Adorno's and Benjamin's shared work on use because it represents a juncture. Junctures are of course defined by what takes place before them and then after them.¹¹ As we will see, Adorno and Benjamin play an important role in the development of Agamben's thinking about use, which makes them part of the contemporary politics of use and utility that I wish to account for here. But Adorno and Benjamin are also significant because of what goes before them. Adorno and Benjamin work with ostensibly Aristotelian and Marxian conceptions of use but rework them in a way that is crucial for understanding the way use in Aristotle and Marx have been received since. Adorno and Benjamin stand at the beginning, then, of the story of use's simplification among those who identify with the Aristotelian and Marxian conceptions of use. More than that, Adorno and Benjamin mark the beginning of a recurrent political strategy with simplified use at its base. Since Adorno and Benjamin think the commodity is emblematic of, and mostly

¹¹ In bringing Adorno and Agamben together, I am particularly indebted to Vatter (*The Republic of the Living*, chapter 3), which was, to my knowledge, the first to recognize the influence of Adorno on Agamben. In the following I also draw on Zuidervaart, "Theodor W. Adorno."

responsible for, the erasure of singularity, use is treated as a problem to be overcome. Adorno and Benjamin do so by trying to transcend use, a manoeuvre that is also apparent in the most prominent and influential treatments of use thereafter. Adorno and Benjamin are important, then, because their theorization of use is really its simplification that results in a subsequent reticence of critical theorists to ask after alternative use, and especially of *human* use, even in the context of political treatments of use.¹²

While I defer a more complete examination of use and utility in Aristotle and Marx to later chapters, where the use of humans will be the focus, to appreciate the conceptualization of use today we need to look at the way Aristotle and Marx approached the use of objects. The terms “use-value” and “exchange-value” are crucial here. They were inspired by Aristotle but first articulated by Marx in his theorization of the commodity, and then taken up by Benjamin, Adorno, and Agamben. In Aristotle’s *Politics*, use-value and exchange-value fall within a more general treatment of the use of objects, since Aristotle describes “two uses (*chrēsis*)” of “each piece of property (*ktēmatos*)” (*Pol.* I.9.1257a6). One form of use is use as *consumption*; the other is use as exchange. Giving the example of a shoe, Aristotle says that the former use, and the one that “properly belongs to the thing,” is the wearing of it, while the latter use, the exchange of the shoe, “is not the use that properly belongs to it” (*Pol.* I.9.1257a8, 12-13).

In the opening paragraph of the 1859 *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy)*, Marx references this very passage of Aristotle in order to stipulate the definition of the commodity. Marx famously defines the commodity as having a

¹² In pointing to the influence of Adorno, I am conscious that another genealogy of use could be written that traces it out of Heidegger, because Dimitris Vardoulakis’ forthcoming book, *The Ruse of Techne*, attributes the contemporary abandonment of utility to Heidegger’s metaphysics.

“twofold aspect,” which he calls “*use-value* and *exchange-value*.”¹³ But with this terminology, Marx introduces a subtle but noteworthy shift that somewhat masks Aristotle’s continuing influence through an *expansive* conception of use. In Marx’s definition, “use” is only *explicitly* attached to one aspect of the commodity, while the other appears to be defined *against* use. Despite that, Marx is clearly operating with the Aristotelian analytic, which sees both consumption and exchange as uses of objects that both authors also think are “intrinsic” uses. So much is clear when we consider the fact that *Zur Kritik* becomes the basis of part one of *Capital*, volume one. In that later and foundational text, Marx similarly begins his account with the twofold aspect of the commodity. When it comes to introducing the notion of exchange-value, which in *Zur Kritik*’s terms *appeared* to be defined against use and therefore departing from Aristotle, Marx sets up his entire investigation by considering whether the exchange value of an object is *intrinsic* to the commodity. For his part, Aristotle writes, “[e]ach piece of property has two uses,” he also says that both “are uses of it intrinsically (*kath’ auto*), but not uses of it intrinsically in the same way” (*Pol.* I.9.1267a7-8). The continued influence of Aristotle on Marx is patent given the same term appears in Aristotle’s discussion of the two uses of property. Marx takes up the analytic to address the fact that exchange-value appears to be “something accidental and purely relative” given that the proportion according to which things exchange “changes constantly with time and place.”¹⁴ But Marx, like Aristotle, wants to understand the essence of exchange, in terms of which he can understand how exchange is an intrinsic use of

¹³ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 27; Marx, *Capital*, 1976, 138.

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 1976, 126.

objects.¹⁵ In the end, with Marx there is a subtle shift in terminology where use appears to be consumption alone and defined against exchange, but on close analysis it is apparent that Marx is still working with a broad conception of use, even when we are only considering the use of objects.

With Benjamin's and Adorno's redeployment of Marx's Aristotelian analytic, use value becomes both more important and more narrowly defined so that the connection to a broad analytic of use is completely lost. So much is apparent in a letter from Adorno to Benjamin in 1935, where Adorno provides a critical response to Walter Benjamin's analysis of commodity fetishism, especially in 'Paris, Capital of the 19th Century.' Now commodity fetishism is a feature of Marx's analysis of capitalism that is intimately tied to his understanding of use-value and exchange-value. As we have seen, a commodity is an object with both use-value and exchange-value, but it is not the commodity in itself, for Marx, that is especially remarkable about the capitalist social formation he long worked to critically understand. As we have seen, Aristotle had already identified the dual nature of an object's value long before anything approaching capitalism existed. A distinguishing feature of capitalism, for Marx, is the commodity's proliferation. As Marx famously declares in the first sentence of *Capital*, "[t]he wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'."¹⁶ It is this proliferation of commodities, under capitalist conditions, that also

¹⁵ On essence and its importance for understanding "intrinsically (*kath' auto*)" see Reeve's commentary in Aristotle, *Politics*, 240n84.

¹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 125, quoting the first sentence of his 1859 *Zur Kritik* (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 27).

gives rise to what Marx calls commodity fetishism, which is the topic Benjamin and Adorno discuss and where the simplification of use and utility takes place.

In what amounts to a significant innovation on Marx's conceptualization of commodity fetishism, Benjamin and Adorno express the view that commodity fetishism, through the proliferation of exchange value, is the vector of the commodity's as well as human redemption. How? Because it excludes use-value.¹⁷ What use-value? For both Adorno and Benjamin, the commodity's own use-value, understood as its value in consumption. Being "freed from the drudgery of being useful,"¹⁸ in Benjamin's words, refers to the overcoming of use value that made an object a commodity. Before we see what this overcoming entails, we can already see how use is simultaneously elevated and simplified as it refers only to the consumption of an object that stands opposed to an object's exchange and the freedom that ensues when use is overcome. In Benjamin's and Adorno's thinking about capitalism and its transcendence, it is use—through its negation—and not production, exchange, or commodity fetishism that takes on a leading role.

But use's simplification does not end there. Benjamin and Adorno understand the suspension of the commodity's use value through the collection and exhibition, not use as consumption, of objects, and this is where commodity fetishism bears the possibility of liberating capitalist objects and subjects alike.¹⁹ For Benjamin, what stands beyond use is "exhibition-value," which is gained, for instance, through the mechanical reproduction of art, which

¹⁷ Their agreement on this is directly communicated in their written correspondence. See Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, 107, 113.

¹⁸ Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," 155; paraphrased by Adorno at Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, 107.

¹⁹ Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," 1978, 155.

simultaneously entails the loss of art's traditional "aura."²⁰ For Adorno, the figure of dis-use is Odradek, a "star-shaped spool of thread with two wooden crossbar sticks coming out of it, which allow it to "stand upright as if on two legs,""²¹ taken from Franz Kafka's story "The Cares of a Family Man." But with their opposition between use-value and exhibition-value, Benjamin and Adorno even simplify what Aristotle and Marx understand as use in consumption. From even a cursory examination of Marx's theorization of the commodity, it is clear that Marx would not see the exhibition and display of commodities as an annulment of use-value, i.e. consumption. The commodity's use-value is responsive to human needs, and Marx announces the expansive, historical, and changing quality of needs on the very first page of *Capital*:

The commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, make no difference. Nor does it matter here how the thing satisfies man's need, whether directly as a means of subsistence, i.e. an object of consumption, or indirectly as a means of production.²²

We can see the way that Marx's expansive approach to need also entailed a broader and more historically situated understanding of use. He follows up the above claims about need with:

²⁰ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 222–23; cited in Vatter, *Republic of the Living*, 112.

²¹ Vatter, *Republic of the Living*, 110, quoting Kafka, *Erzählungen*, 129.

²² Marx, *Capital*, 125; Cf. Schaap, "The Politics of Need"; Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*.

Every useful thing is a whole composed of many properties; it can therefore be useful in various ways. The discovery of these ways and hence of the manifold uses of things is the work of history. So also is the invention of socially recognized standards of measurement for the quantities of these useful objects. The diversity of the measures for commodities arises in part from the diverse nature of the objects to be measured, and in part from convention.²³

Marx's expansive understanding of use-value is all but obscured by Adorno's and Benjamin's approaches that rely on a drastically simplified conception of use, the exclusion of which defines the exhibited object. That is, Benjamin's and Adorno's conception of use excludes whatever motivation, reason, benefit, or any other factor that can be attributed to the exhibition of an object that marks the moment when the commodity has been overcome. But not only does no *commodity* appear to escape the logic of use according to *Capital*, in his 1857 'Introduction' Marx says that no *object* escapes the logic of use, including art, the paradigmatic exhibited object.²⁴ Marx comes to this view in the midst of his critical engagement with the categories of classical political economy: production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. Marx skewers the political economists for their confused claims about these categories, all of which he understands as "moments" of production, and proceeds to argue why production —

²³ Marx, *Capital*, 1976, 125.

²⁴ The 1857 'Introduction' is often cited as the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. While it has become more widely known because published along with the notebooks that form the *Grundrisse*, the Introduction was both written and published prior to those notebooks, though none were published during Marx's lifetime. For discussion of the introduction's history, see Carver's commentary in Marx, *Texts on Method*.

that is, “individuals producing in society”²⁵—“predominates...over the other moments.”²⁶

Pertinent to the discussion of Adorno and Benjamin’s post-commodity is the way that Marx configures the exchange and consumption of an object squarely in terms of production. Marx understands them in terms of production because it is only when a potential consumer *perceives a produced object* that a felt need may also be produced, which leads to the object’s exchange and consumption.²⁷ Moreover, Marx specifically cites art to illustrate his claim: “The object of art – like every other product – creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty.

Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.”²⁸

What matters when characterizing the consumption of an object, then, is not the way that it is consumed but the way that it is produced. If the conditions of *production* are capitalist, then the exhibition of a commodity has still manifested and valorized its capitalist conditions. In sum, Adorno and Benjamin place too much emphasis on the consumptive aspect of a commodity, which obscures the predominance of the conditions of *production*.²⁹ Of course, the production of an object does not always succeed in creating a subject who consumes it, as we will see. It can fail to have a use-value for anybody, in which case it will not be exchanged and so will fail to be a commodity. But the exhibition of an object still counts as a use-value for Marx, in so far as the commodity is produced under capitalist conditions, in which case its exhibition does not

²⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 92. Or, the object may fail to produce the felt need, in which case the object will not be exchanged and consumed and so is not even a commodity, since it has neither exchange nor use value.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁹ In some places, Adorno and Benjamin suggest that the exhibition of an object is not a consumption of it, but we have to disagree insofar as the object *decomposes*, which is Marx’s understanding of consumption (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 91). Every material decomposes, of course, even if not at equal rates under all conditions of use or consumption. Those in charge of storing and preserving artworks know this better than anyone.

challenge or overcome the objects' status as a commodity or capitalism. So, Marx's expansive conception of use must be excluded from consideration when it comes to Adorno and Benjamin's exhibited objects or else lose their status as post-commodity.³⁰ As a result, use and utility become more narrowly defined by Benjamin and Adorno as they seek to disclose a realm of freedom beyond use. This is the second simplification of use and utility in the hands of Benjamin and Adorno.

But there is another conception of use in Benjamin and Adorno that is especially important for understanding the difference between their emancipatory visions and then how their treatments of use influence, and become more influential through, the work of Agamben. It refers to an original use value that distinguishes an object's singular identity and becomes obscured in the process of exchange. Such an approach relies on Aristotle's examination of use-value in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle contrasted use-value and exchange-value in terms of commensurability and incommensurability. An object with a use-value is purpose-built and has a function that is incommensurable with any other object *qua* use-value. But exchange, and the social division of labour that demands it, precisely requires commensurability between heterogeneous objects. And so, use value becomes subordinated to, obscured by, and compromised by exchange value for the sake of social necessity.

This conception of use-value is mobilized in Benjamin's 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in a way that Adorno singles out for criticism in a letter to Benjamin in 1935. Benjamin

³⁰ Coleman, *The Spirit of French Capitalism* argues that there was a specifically Catholic commodity culture that "privileged the marvellous over the mundane, consumption over production, and the pleasures of enjoyment over the rigors of delayed gratification" (from the book description). I believe this could challenge or significantly qualify Benjamin's, Adorno's, and Agamben's conceptions of the disuse of commodities when they are displayed because it expands the notion of a commodity culture to include forms of enchantment that they may attribute to the exhibited or even profaned object.

and Adorno both agree that original, heterogeneous use-value is compromised with the proliferation of commodities under capitalist conditions. As Adorno later puts it, the commodity as exchange-value imposes commensurability and therefore identity on two different use-values, where use-value “defies subsumption under identity” because it denotes an object’s *singular*, not commensurable, characteristics.³¹ As with Aristotle, then, the exchange of commodities homogenizes two heterogeneous objects—the identical and non-identical. According to Adorno, however, Benjamin’s historical materialism succumbs to the reactionary view that redemption in the present is found in the endurance of original use-value, which Benjamin thinks is still “stored in the unconscious of the collective” even within advanced capitalism.³² Adorno rejects this notion for reasons that help us see how use is further simplified in his thought. First, for Adorno the commodity is representative of the *totalizing* quality of modernity—which is philosophically embodied in G. W. F. Hegel—a quality that reduces everything to “identity.” That means original use-value is a relic of a pre-modern time that becomes irretrievable when everything singular is made commensurable through total commodification. Any purported non-identity—e.g., another use-value—is merely another iteration of the commodity-imposed identity or commensurability that really amounts to no non-identity at all. Put differently, under the conditions of modernity, original use-value has become a conceit through which the world’s “full diversity...will be ignored.”³³ Through Adorno’s account, the concept of original use-value is only helpful for exposing the bleak modern condition; that is, the difficulty in identifying, let alone

³¹ Which Adorno first understands as “the ineffable part of the utopia...what defies subsumption under identity.” Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 11.

³² Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (2002); cited in Vatter, *Republic of the Living*, 107.

³³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

practicing, truly alternative forms of life, of which use-value is a metonym, and the likelihood that one will impose a capitalistic form of identification—that is, commensurability—on them and thus erase their value as alternatives to capitalism.

The second reason Adorno rejects original use-value is his commitment to a progressive theory of history, despite his famed pessimism.³⁴ This commitment is betrayed when he reads use-value in Benjamin as a regression to the mythical image of a ‘Golden Age.’³⁵ In a progressive vision of history, whether original use-value can be retrieved or not, it is a relic of a past that we should not desire or attempt to reproduce. For Adorno, the only way is forward, which can only be identified with the appropriate procedure, for which he comes up with “negative dialectics.” Adorno proceeds by negatively considering the abolition of the commodified life, still with reference to objects and their non-use,³⁶ which means use has been thrice simplified and subsequently abandoned.³⁷

Agamben and the Aristotelian Turn

Having seen Benjamin’s and Adorno’s reconceptualization of use, we are now in a position to see how it is reproduced and transformed in the work of Agamben. Agamben adopts Benjamin’s

³⁴ As famously labelled by Jürgen Habermas. For Agamben’s view along the same lines, see Brittain, “Political Theology at a Standstill.” On the traits of a progressive theory of history in Adorno’s critique of Benjamin, see Vatter, *Republic of the Living*, 108-109.

³⁵ Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, 107.

³⁶ “It is through commodities, and not directly in relation to human beings, that we receive the promise of immortality [i.e., redemption].” Ibid.: 107-8

³⁷ This is despite Adorno’s allusion to “the ideal of free and just barter” (*Negative Dialectics*, 147), that he does not flesh out but that cannot be understood in terms of use owing to the way use is relied on to negatively define such an ideal form of exchange.

and Adorno's critiques of use and instrumentality even while he abandons the latter's reticence to pursue an alternative conception and praxis of use. From his earliest work, Agamben has attempted to go further than Adorno by probing what "singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity"³⁸ could be, which is his effort to develop a conception of the good human life in the face of modernity's abandonment of this question.³⁹ And rather than simply define this against use, as a non-use, Agamben tries to conceive it as an alternative form of use, a new "common use."⁴⁰ But given that "[t]he creation of a new use is possible only by deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative,"⁴¹ work on the extant operations of use is still necessary. Agamben follows Adorno and Benjamin much of the way, as in *Stanzas* when he thinks new use becomes apparent to us with the enchantment of objects that marks the end of consumption and so *commodity*, not original, use-value.⁴² As with the collection and exhibition of objects in Benjamin and Adorno, it is only when one is fully captivated by an object that it becomes a post-commodity, and only then can a new use ensue because it signals the moment that a commodity's use-value has ceased. According to Agamben, being captivated by the object is not enough for a new use, however, because exhibition effectively destroys an object and therefore designates "the impossibility of using,"⁴³ whether capitalist or otherwise. Agamben's

³⁸ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 44 (translation by Vatter, *The Republic of the Living*, 113).

³⁹ Agamben, "The Work of Man."

⁴⁰ Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation," 29.

⁴¹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 86.

⁴² "The transfiguration of the commodity into an *enchanted object* is the sign that the exchange value is already beginning to eclipse the use-value of the commodity." Agamben, *Stanzas*, 38; "A commodity...whose value consists, thus, in its uselessness, and whose use consists in its own unhandiness is no longer a commodity: the absolute commodification of the work of art is also the most radical abolition of the commodity." Agamben, *Stanze: La Parola e il Fantasma Nella Cultura Occidentale*, 51, cited in Vatter, *The Republic of the Living*, 112–13. See also Vatter, *The Republic of the Living*, Chapter 3 on the relationship between Adorno, Benjamin, and Agamben on this score.

⁴³ *Profanations*, p. 84

ultimate goal, then, is “profanation,” which names a new form of *praxis* that ushers both things and people alike into free use. “To profane,” as Anton Schütz writes, “is to lift the barriers of separation” between humans and objects that are “encountered in solemn forms[,] religious [e.g. sacrifice] as well as secular [e.g. museum exhibition], in order to give them back to use.”⁴⁴ For Agamben, then, we should not pine for original use, nor settle for commodity use value, nor be enthralled by the spectacular exhibition of objects but rather relate to them in a way that rejects any means-end relation and is closer to “a pure means”⁴⁵ or, from the title of Agamben’s book, a “means without ends.”⁴⁶ Agamben likens such a *praxis* to child’s play and through which he thinks that “the powers [*potenze*] of economics, law, and politics, deactivated in play, can become the gateways to a new happiness.”⁴⁷

But if alienation from—or *suspension* of⁴⁸—use is the first condition of Agamben’s pivot to a new use, it is not clear how exhibition and display or play manage to achieve this. In the case of commodities, by returning to Marx on the production and circulation of commodities we can see that the exhibition or display of commodities is hardly an annulment of use value. Rather, as we have already seen, Marx argues that commodities have as many use values as society has socially or naturally occurring needs.⁴⁹ One use value that commodities have, arguably their *predominant* one, pertains to the capitalist producer. That is, commodities have use value insofar as they have contributed to the appropriation and accumulation of capital, which the simple acquisition of the object, prior to its display, has already achieved. And as Marx argued,

⁴⁴ Schütz, “Profanation,” 164.

⁴⁵ Agamben, *Profanations*, 76.

⁴⁶ Agamben, *Means without End*.

⁴⁷ Agamben, *Profanations*, 76.

⁴⁸ Agamben, *Nudities*, 112.

⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 1976, 125. The relevant passages are quoted in the Introduction to this dissertation.

the accumulation of capital is but a response to the impersonal demands of capitalism that become the felt need of the capitalist. On this view of value appropriation, one could argue that the exhibition of an object excludes it from *further* exchange and therefore *further* value appropriation, but, as with Adorno and Benjamin, it is not clear that this deprives it of commodity status given the way that it was produced and acquired. Furthermore, we can only rule out further value appropriation by ignoring the diverse manifestations of capital that theorists since Benjamin and Adorno have outlined. For although use-value to the capitalist has already expanded Agamben's conception of use and use-value, this only accounts for one form of capital accumulation. So, what of the cultural capital that Pierre Bourdieu would argue can come from displaying prestigious artwork in one's home as a signal of taste or education, not to mention monetary worth? Or, in a more quotidian way, consider the ways that commodity culture produces what Jean Baudrillard called "sign value," meaning the need for social display, through advertising or, more contemporarily, social influencers, that induce greater consumption and therefore capital accumulation.⁵⁰ Is not this form of consumption also a form of exhibition and display, for example, of the fact that one is "on-trend"? Indeed, it is a form of consumption that betrays the character of capitalist consumption: a commodity does not need to have been completely worn out or "used up" in order for it to be discarded (not exhibited) and replaced (not revered) with something more up to date. And would not Gary Becker argue in turn that we understand these forms of display as an accumulation of *human* capital? These are the diverse use-values that commodities can have in order for their value to be valorized and none of them are precluded or annulled through exhibition and display in Agamben's sense.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.

These diverse use-values were arguably already anticipated by Marx in his expansive conception of production as the “exchange of [human] activities and abilities.”⁵¹ It is not clear, then, how de- or post-commodification is configured in Agamben, a move that he nevertheless makes a necessary condition for his pivot to a new use.

As theoretical work since Benjamin’s and Adorno’s exchange has expanded our ideas about the consumption of objects, they also expand our conception of use-value. But that also reveals how much further, relative to their contemporaries, Agamben simplifies use than Benjamin and Adorno. On the other side of the line that divides use and freedom, however, Agamben has gone further than Benjamin and Adorno in articulating a politics that is defined against the simplified conception of use. Benjamin, Adorno, and Agamben share the idea of a split between a realm of use and a realm of freedom, but it is Agamben who explicitly brings this framework to bear on politics, and politics in the ancient, modern, contemporary, and future worlds no less. But in articulating this politics Agamben moves us even further from Aristotle’s and Marx’s conceptions of use. For their part, Adorno and Benjamin never went so far as to explicitly read the separation of realms back into Aristotle’s work, but the same cannot be said about Agamben. Agamben begins his protracted *Homo Sacer* project with a claim about the separation of life and the good life in Aristotle. In a now-famous discussion, Agamben claims that there are two distinct Greek words for life:

⁵¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 99.

“*zoē* [*sic*], which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group.”⁵²

Agamben follows up this analysis by citing Aristotle’s *Politics*, which he thinks confines *zōē* “to the sphere of the *oikos*, “home” (*Politics*, [I.2.]1252a, 26-35)” and is “excluded from the *polis* in the strict sense.”⁵³ The *polis* is the realm that signifies the perfect community for Aristotle, and then “the political tradition of the West” for whom Aristotle’s analysis became “canonical,” because it is the realm of the good life that is opposed to “the simple fact of living.”⁵⁴ This is what Agamben takes Aristotle to mean when he writes:

“[The *polis*] comes to be for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well.”
(*Politics* I.2.1252b29-30)

These passages come from Aristotle’s *Politics* and specifically the etiology of the *polis* in Book I.2. But Agamben’s interpretation of the *Politics*’ etiology appears to be mediated through his earlier engagement with Adorno and Benjamin and the simplistic conception of use and utility, which was influenced by *another* part of Aristotle’s *Politics*. Recall that the discussion of use that informed Adorno’s and Benjamin’s work comes from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and especially *Politics*, specifically the discussion of household management (*oikonomia*). If that is

⁵² Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

one's starting point for thinking about use, then use appears to be a uniquely household phenomenon. As we have seen, that is precisely Adorno's, Benjamin's, and Agamben's starting point, but it is not Aristotle's starting point. As we will see in chapter 3, Aristotle's starting point reveals a very different relationship between use and politics. For now, we can simply note that from Adorno's, Benjamin's, and Agamben's starting point, it is no surprise that the Aristotelian household appears to be separated from the polis, politics, and the good life. And then that difference is the basis for the difference Agamben reads into two different Greek words for life, which now transplants the discussion of use into the realm of metaphysics, a realm in which Agamben locates the action of Western politics. On this basis, moreover, Agamben simply accepts that the old and simplistic sense of use is the basis from which he can develop a new use, a use that transcends but not eradicates it.

In the end, the simplistic conceptualization of use from Adorno and Benjamin and then Agamben's early work becomes the most important dimension of Agamben's reading of Aristotle, which launches and guides his *Homo Sacer* project. Having read the separation into Aristotle, Agamben turns to the ancient Roman figure of *homo sacer*, which Agamben understands in terms of "bare life" (a term he takes from Walter Benjamin) that is produced through the state of exception (a term he takes from Carl Schmitt) *within* law and therefore within politics. Whatever the complex relationship between bare life and politics that comes out of Agamben's analysis, the important point here is that Agamben first reads the separation of oikos and polis (or need and freedom, or life and the good life, or use and politics) into Aristotle. That interpretive framework then guides Agamben's entire project, including his attempt to find

a new mode of use, whose novelty is somewhat diminished when we recognize how much it still bears the stamp of his earlier work.

Recall that Adorno's, Benjamin's, and Agamben's simplification of use ignores the process of commodity production and circulation in order to establish collection and exhibition as a de-commodifying activity. Put differently, it is by ignoring collective and human use that use is simplified, and the focus on individual and object-oriented use aligns it more closely with economic approaches to utility. This same focus on the individual and the object characterizes Agamben's effort to establish a new use in his analysis of Franciscan monks and indeed Aristotle. So, in his more recent work on inoperativity and the "inappropriable", Agamben appears to distance himself from the commodity as such as he re-treads the ground of the Franciscans and "the highest poverty."⁵⁵ There "de facto use" refers to the Franciscans' use of objects without ownership.⁵⁶ Even if Agamben attempts to define a new "common use," Agamben abstracts from the collective use of humans in the Franciscan community. The final volume of *Homo Sacer* rather reveals that Agamben's *telos* is the "use of bodies" in Aristotle that he is at pains to show departs from Aristotle's, and indeed anyone's, conception of the human because it dissolves the very distinction between humans and objects⁵⁷ and even human bodies.⁵⁸ The "use of bodies" refers to the Aristotelian slave who, in keeping with Agamben's proclivity for threshold figures and spaces, is neither object nor human and neither belongs to the household nor the political realm.⁵⁹ Indeed, Agamben's redemptive subject can belong to neither, or else compromise the

⁵⁵ Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism*; Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*.

⁵⁶ For instance, *Creation and Anarchy*, 30.

⁵⁷ See especially his discussion of sadomasochism in Foucault. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 35-37.

⁵⁸ *The Use of Bodies*, 13-15

⁵⁹ "Both artificial instrument and human being, the slave properly belongs neither to the sphere of nature nor to that of convention, neither to the sphere of justice nor to that of violence. Hence the apparent ambiguity of

Manichean distinction that constitutes Agamben's approach. And so, Agamben attaches singularity to use in Aristotle but by eschewing Aristotle's *oikos*, *polis*, objects, and humans to do so, he does not shed any light on the use of humans in Aristotle or Marx. For although the use of bodies forms part of their discussion of the use of humans, it is only a part of it and a part that cannot be adequately understood when separated from a more general treatment. And in the end, as we will see in the following sections, Agamben's aversion to the question of collective human use means his approach to use is entangled in the politics of determinate utility that effectively treats the human *as* object and nullifies whatever is unique about humans over objects. As this dissertation will set out, it also nullifies the value of Aristotle's approach to use and moves us even further away from a critical understanding of use in the present.⁶⁰

It is clear that the simplistic conceptualization of use and utility that was important in Agamben's early work, under the influence of Adorno and Benjamin, informs the separation of *oikos* and *polis* and *zōē* and *bios* that Agamben reads into Aristotle's etiology of the *polis* in *Homo Sacer* and beyond. Amongst Agamben's acknowledged influences in that later and wide-ranging project, there is another significant mediator—in addition to Adorno and Benjamin—who has guided this aspect of Agamben's work. That is Hannah Arendt.⁶¹ Indeed, among modern interpreters of Aristotle, the separation of the economy as the realm of need and politics as the

Aristotle's theory of slavery, which, like ancient philosophy in general, seems constrained to justify what it can only condemn and to condemn that of which it cannot deny the necessity. The fact is that the slave, although excluded from political life, has an entirely special relation with it. The slave in fact represents a not properly human life that renders possible for others the *bios politikos*, that is to say, the truly human life. And if the human being is defined for the Greeks through a dialectic between *physis* and *nomos*, *zōē* [sic] and *bios*, then the slave, like bare life, stands at the threshold that separates and joins them." *The Use of Bodies*, 20.

⁶⁰ Others have contested Agamben's reading of Aristotle, especially the split between *zōē* and *bios* (less the split between *oikos* and *polis*). Dubreuil, "Leaving Politics"; Finlayson, "'Bare Life' and Politics in Agamben's Reading of Aristotle"; Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life*; Holmes, "Bios."

⁶¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 3ff.

realm of freedom is most drawn out in Hannah Arendt, although Agamben also credits Foucault as an influence.⁶² Arendt's influential account means various splits reappear in other influential critiques of modernity that also diminish the concepts of use and utility at the same time they are conceptualized simplistically. I turn to Arendt next in order to see how this split and the simplification of use form part of a broader and normative account of politics, one that is then reproduced by Wendy Brown. It is also in Arendt, however, that we can locate another source of use's simplification in Plato's *Republic*, which provides the opportunity to discern the politics that the split and simplification rely on as their presupposition.

Arendt, Brown, and the 'Politicization' of Use

One of the central topics of Arendt's frequent pivots between the ancient world and the modern is the place of needs and labour in each of those eras. As Arendt sees them, for the pre-moderns, needs and labour are the basis of the pre-political private realm. Based on her reading of Aristotle's theory of the *bios politikos*, the political life, Arendt contends that its prerequisite is "full independence of the necessities of life and the relationships they originated."⁶³ What we have from Arendt's reading of Aristotle, then, is life split into two realms whose activities are not only distinctive but stand "in direct opposition" to each other.⁶⁴ The household (*oikos*) is a private realm whose laboring activity is devoted to satisfying the necessary, or mere, needs of life and thus with what is useful to serve that end. The polis, by contrast, is a public realm

⁶² Ibid.; Foucault also makes an interpretation of Aristotle on the basis of a split, *The History of Sexuality*, 188.

⁶³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 12.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

devoted to the life of freedom constituted by “action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*).”⁶⁵ While the private realm takes care of “Man” insofar as he is a member of a species, action and speech are public phenomena that constitute the world in-between men and express freedom. These are premised on Arendt’s idea of natality, the fact that each individual human life begins with birth.⁶⁶ Birth, for Arendt, represents a new beginning that is intimately connected to freedom because freedom is itself “inherent in this ability to make a beginning.”⁶⁷ In the fact of natality, then, Arendt saw that human beings introduce novelty, “take initiative, [and] are prompted into action.”⁶⁸ In other words, with birth comes the singular traits of each new human being, which gives action and speech the quality of initiating something new that, when exercised, are expressions of freedom. And so, the public realm is where human singularity is realized. Arendt could not be clearer about what bearing this has on use and utility: from the *polis* “everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded.”⁶⁹ Use and utility are bound to need and necessity and therefore the household, all of which are therefore counterposed to the political life of freedom.

The distinction between realms becomes extremely important for Arendt’s critique of modernity. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt delineates the characteristic condition of modernity that she calls “the social.”⁷⁰ This names the breakdown of the ancient distinction between the public and the private realms through the incursion of “labor” into all areas of human life. Arendt

⁶⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁶ Vatter notes the “puzzlement” raised by Arendt’s basing political life in birth given that she also defines political life in opposition to labor because it is the task of the biological and necessary dimension of the human species. *The Republic of the Living*, 129 ff.

⁶⁷ Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” 113.

⁶⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Part II, ‘The Public and the Private Realm’, esp. chapters 4- 6.

argues that labor—the menial activity of providing for one’s livelihood—used to belong to the household, as the etymology of economics already discloses, but today providing for life’s necessities is the presumptive role of the state, making hers the original “economization” thesis. The idea that the provision of needs could take place “politically”—as is implied in our term “political economy”—“would have been a contradiction in terms for the ancient Greeks: whatever was “economic,” related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition.”⁷¹

This confusion of realms has consequences for instrumentality, or utility, too. When she later discusses the realm of work in *The Human Condition*, Arendt appears to extend the role of use and utility beyond the household. In the realm of work, utility was attributed to tools that were means for erecting a human world that outlasted any individual human life and thus enabled the life of action where politics could take place.⁷² In modernity and after the rise of the social, however, utility is overwhelmingly directed to the end of human needs and attributed to politics and people when they serve that end. It can only be attributed to politics, however, when the old understanding of politics as action and speech in public is lost and the reproduction of the human species becomes its object of concern.⁷³ Politics, then, becomes evaluated in terms of its provision of basic human needs, this task constituting its utility.⁷⁴ In what is the closest thing to an explicit discussion of human use in *HC*, Arendt says that utility is

⁷¹ Ibid., 28-9.

⁷² Perhaps the most detailed exposition of utility in the realm of work is Markell, “Arendt’s Work”; cf. Honig, “What Kind of Thing Is Land?” Even if Arendt is interested in use and utility with respect to objects and how they become part of the enabling conditions for human action (as Bonnie and Patchen read her), her grounding in Aristotle is still displayed in the absence of considering human use or human utility in the realm of work or action.

⁷³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 33.

⁷⁴ Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” 115.

then attributed to humans in the form of our “occupations,” whose existence is only justifiable when useful for society, understood as collective life in its biological dimension.⁷⁵ This state of affairs is sustained and given particular urgency, according to Arendt, through the innate striving of all living things to persevere (what Spinoza calls the *conatus*).⁷⁶ In other words, because life in modernity is seen as intrinsically valuable, the state in turn is endowed with great value insofar as it provides for life’s necessities. But the changing modalities of use and utility are peripheral to Arendt’s most central concern, and that is how the incursion of what was once private into the public realm has enormous consequences for politics and freedom. As the biological homogeneity of the human species comes to dominate collective concerns it precludes the manifestation of natality, and therefore singularity, since normal behaviour—not exceptional or singular actions—gains in importance as the state wields the tool of statistics to understand the field that it intervenes in and that determines its success.⁷⁷

The clear delineation of two realms that correspond to need and freedom, or economics and politics, in Arendt has found new expression in Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos*. In what appears to be an update of Arendt, in the book Brown attempts to identify and critique the main dynamics of our contemporary neoliberal condition. At the heart of her account is an “economization” thesis, according to which neoliberalism is a “peculiar form of reason” that “is

⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 92; There is one other place that I know of where Arendt discusses human utility but this time in a more positive sense. In the context of discussing the world as an “in-between,” Arendt considers the modern world as one in which people withdraw from the world. But she notes, “[t]his withdrawal from the world need not harm an individual; he may even cultivate great talents to the point of genius and so by a detour be useful to the world again.” That said, “with each such retreat an almost demonstrable loss to the world takes place; what is lost is the specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men.” Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times,” 4–5.

⁷⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 37.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

converting the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy's constituent elements into *economic* ones."⁷⁸ More than democracy is at stake, however, since she says that "[n]eoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity."⁷⁹ On this account, neoliberalism represents the ultimate "economization" of politics and indeed human life itself.

This economization thesis is premised on another split between economics and politics that allows Brown to say the one has been taken over by the other. The most prominent representation of this division comes in the contrast between *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*. In keeping with her Foucauldian portrayal of neoliberalism as a "normative order of reason,"⁸⁰ Brown depicts neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* as a bearer of a particular form of reason. If the *homo oeconomicus* of classical economics was characterized in terms of "the partner of exchange and the theory of utility based on a problematic of needs,"⁸¹ neoliberalism's *homo oeconomicus* is "his own capital, his own producer, the source of his earnings."⁸² This is because neoliberal approaches to *homo oeconomicus* understand him in terms of human capital that turns everyone into capitalists that bring something to market to make a profit and accumulate capital, now in both traditional and human forms of capital.

But while Brown takes much from Foucault, she also attempts to build on his account by critiquing it. The main point of differentiation Brown claims against Foucault relates to what she calls "*homo politicus*." *Homo politicus* is "the creature animated by and for the realization of

⁷⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 17; cf. 43.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 226, cited on Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 80.

popular sovereignty as well as its own individual sovereignty, the creature who made the French and American revolutions and whom the American Constitution bears forth, but also the creature we know as the sovereign individual who governs himself.”⁸³ Brown thinks that Foucault’s account misses this crucial element of the modern subject since he focuses only on the subject of interest and the subject of right, or the subject of the economy and the subject of the state, respectively.⁸⁴ Brown wishes to resurrect the figure of *homo politicus*, or rather revive him, since according to Brown he never completely died. In fact, as I have already outlined earlier in this chapter, Brown returns to Aristotle’s account of the *zoon politikon* in order to argue that *homo politicus* is built into our very nature. “[M]an was “by nature an animal intended to live in a polis.””⁸⁵ Brown understands this to refer to man’s “living together in a deliberately governed fashion, to self-rule in a settled association that comprises yet exceeds basic needs, and to the location of human freedom and human perfectibility in political life.”⁸⁶ The main theoretical advance on Foucault that Brown claims in this book, then, is recognize the split between and simultaneous existence of *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*.

As I have already discussed earlier, Samuel Chambers takes issue with Brown’s account because of her invocation of an Aristotelian ontology, according to which human beings are political from “the beginning,” making our political status an innate feature of life.⁸⁷ Chambers argues that such a construal misses the political work of subjectivation that is required to

⁸³ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 86.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 87; we will see in chapter 4 that a perfectibility thesis reappears in William Clare Roberts’ reading of Marx. Roberts does not go so far as the separate human perfectibility from notions such as exchange or labour, but I argue that he does miss the ways that Marx inverts the classical account of human perfectibility.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 88, cited by Chambers, “Undoing Neoliberalism,” 710.

combat neoliberalism, work that plays out in the discursive realm. But there is more to the story here. For although Brown tends to emphasize *homo politicus* in the way she traces this figure in the history of *modern* political thought and into liberal-democratic societies—which underwrites her claim that *homo politicus* never died but has at most fallen unconscious—I want to pause on another, albeit less developed, division at work in her “economization” thesis. That division lies in the difference between “basic needs,” and in Brown more commonly called “mere life,” on the one side and on the other side the “good life,” a phrase Brown attributes to Aristotle, or “the true realm of freedom,” which Brown quotes from Marx.⁸⁸ Brown glosses “mere life” variably as “concern with survival and wealth acquisition,”⁸⁹ “the struggle for existence and wealth accumulation,”⁹⁰ “basic needs,”⁹¹ “concern with mere survival,”⁹² “toiling for survival,”⁹³ “mere existence,”⁹⁴ and “human existence.”⁹⁵ Through “mere life,” human needs come to play a central role in Brown’s account. Forming the other half of the binary, the “good life” appears to be another name for the not-quite Aristotelian “*homo politicus*.” This makes it appear, at least initially, as though the “mere life” and “good life” distinction simply maps onto the “*homo oeconomicus*” and “*homo politicus*” distinction. Calling up the distinction between mere life and the good life is Brown’s attempt to translate the modern fight between *homo oeconomicus* and

⁸⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 43.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 232n45

homo politicus into Aristotle's ancient context (but not language) even if she then levels any contextual differences by making Aristotle out to be a fighter against *homo oeconomicus*.⁹⁶

Brown says precious little about the meanings of "mere life" and the "good life" or the relationship between them. But it is noteworthy that in all of Brown's mentions of it (cited above), Aristotle is the most commonly referenced. And while Brown attempts to seriously engage with Aristotle in order to ply her argument about the innate and yet currently overshadowed *homo politicus*, it is telling that when Brown introduces the split that she claims is Aristotle's, she does so with a reference to Arendt and what she calls "mere life" in addition to Marx, too.⁹⁷ While we can be circumspect about attributing the same split to Marx,⁹⁸ its prominence in Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Aristotle and the ancients is undeniable, as we have already seen. Moreover, the similarities between Brown's and Arendt's interpretations of Aristotle, which is a primary source for the split they operationalize, are striking.

Like Brown, Arendt foregrounds Aristotle's claim "man is by nature a political animal" for her critique of contemporary conditions. Like Brown, Arendt does not read the account of man's

⁹⁶ At least twice (on pages 90 and 91) Brown speaks as though Aristotle were fighting against *homo oeconomicus*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁸ A fuller discussion of Marx will be undertaken in a later chapter, but for now we can note that Brown herself seems to waver on her interpretation of Marx on this score. To Brown, Marx represents, along with Aristotle and Arendt, the argument for overcoming mere life (43) but then he also epitomizes the *inversion* of Aristotle: "Marx specifies the matter further: labor itself, not only its division, distinguishes us as a species and creates the world. Thus, the story seems to hold up: in intellectual and practical life, *homo oeconomicus* has displaced *homo politicus*. Aristotle has been inverted, if not buried" (92). Although this interpretation may ultimately come from Arendt, too, especially her "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought"; it is noteworthy that Adriana Cavarero takes Arendt to be saying that Marx was both the most Aristotelian and anti-Aristotelian thinker in the Western tradition, thus marking something of an end of that tradition. Cavarero, "Ombre aristoteliche sulla lettura arendtiana di Marx". But the evidence for the view that Marx thought in terms of the same division between necessity and freedom is very thin. It comes from one page in *Capital*, Volume III (959). Moreover, what evidence we have for it does not link it to the *zoon politikon*, nor anything else in Aristotle. In fact, when Marx does cite Aristotle's *zoon politikon*, he implicitly transforms what necessity and freedom mean precisely because he thinks with the idea of human use, which I will discuss in chapter 5.

political animality in its context of *Politics*, Book I section 2. As we will see in chapters 3 and 4, the first time Aristotle claims that man is by nature a *zoon politikon* he points to the foregoing etiology of the *polis*.⁹⁹ From Aristotle's claim about our political animality, both Arendt and Brown rather look ahead in the text to elaborate the claim about man's political animality in terms of our *logos* (speech and reason),¹⁰⁰ which informs Aristotle's view that a human "is *more* of a political animal than any bee or any other gregarious animal" (Pol I.2.1253a8, my emphasis). Moreover, Brown introduces a split, of unspecified provenance apart from Arendt and Marx, between mere life and the good life and then maps it onto the distinction between the household and the polis. This split then becomes important in Brown for reducing use to its simplistic conception. So, the household is claimed to be properly oriented around "use and need."¹⁰¹ Need finds its ultimate reference in the idea of the good life, while "use" refers to the act of provisioning for this need. Use, then, may refer to the idea of use-value as simple consumption, but Brown also recognizes that in order to provide for themselves, members of a household will need to exchange goods in a market, too.¹⁰² And so Brown embraces the Aristotelian distinction between *oikonomia* (household management) and "*chrematistics*" (wealth accumulation) in order to qualify the role exchange should play. As she interprets Aristotle, *oikonomia* entails all manner of exchange as well as household ruling relations but specifically as they form part of a good life, which delimits exchange, accumulation, and domination to what is natural, morally good, and beneficial.¹⁰³ This does not depart from the

⁹⁹ I discuss this section of *Politics* at length in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ "Man is political because he is a language-using, moral, and associational creature who utilizes these capacities to govern himself with others." Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 91.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 91.

simplistic conception of use because it is still oriented around objects for the satisfaction of individual need where need cannot be defined as simply more wealth, which is the end that defines *chrematistics*. That is, *chrematistics* reverses *oikonomia's* order of priority and therefore sees what is good in terms of wealth accumulation, which is to be avoided if one wants to live a humanly good life because it has no proper end (*telos*) or model of hierarchical authority. "Use," then, also refers to exchange, as it did in Adorno, Benjamin, and Agamben, but with Arendt and especially Brown it specifically refers to exchange for the sake of need, which is defined in terms of the good life, a life that is good precisely because it sets a limit on need and use and therefore transcends them.

The relationship between use and the good life is crucial for understanding Arendt's and Brown's interventions. In sum, Arendt and Brown want to reprise the "moral economy" of the ancients.¹⁰⁴ A moral economy is distinguished by an overall re-evaluation of what good ought to govern economic life, and therefore use in its simplistic form, with the conclusion that economic life should have a determinate place that frees people for the good life that lies *beyond* use. On this score, we can also compare Arendt and Brown with Adorno, Benjamin, and Agamben. The latter also want to leave those forms of use behind but they have less to say about the 'moral economy,' which means the place that simplistic use has in the good life. Adorno, Benjamin, and Agamben are not interested, for instance, in trying to limit exchange to a realm of need delimited by a conception of the good life. They seem to accept any purported needs that result

¹⁰⁴ There are numerous other critiques in this vein. On the moral economy, see also Booth, *Households*; Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*; More recently, Skidelsky and Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough?*; For a critique of this approach, at least in terms of the moral activity that can govern the economy in the form of "corporate social responsibility," see Chambers, *There's No Such Thing as "The Economy,"* especially chapter 1.

in exchange and therefore produce commodities excepting, of course, the needs that inform the exhibition and display of objects in their alleged de-commodification. Their goal is to relate to the already commodified object in such a way that transforms it beyond a commodity, which serves as a harbinger to their own salvation even while they have already participated in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production.

As for the relationship between Arendt and Brown, if there is a significant point of difference between them, it is a difference of degree. Brown tends to emphasize the idea of the moral economy more than Arendt. So, as Brown summarizes the moral economy in Aristotle we get a view of her priorities, too: “the household has both a moral function, entailing the proper exercise of authority over inferiors, and an economic function, provisioning for itself.”¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶ Regarding use in the moral economy, Aristotle “embraces a certain instrumentalism” but one that “could easily get out of hand,”¹⁰⁷ hence the normative discussion about the containment of this instrumentalism to “use value.”¹⁰⁸ Brown’s greater focus on the moral economy means that she expresses a slightly more capacious understanding of politics than Arendt, since the political actor must involve himself in household affairs so that proper use value prevails. It is to that end that Brown analyses and affirms Aristotle’s views concerning ruling hierarchies within the household, noting that they “are carefully specified in ways that establish them as beneficial to both rulers and ruled.”¹⁰⁹ Brown’s account of politics, broadly speaking, centers on the idea of association in pursuit of the good life, which must naturally also take place in the household in

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 89.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

order to be capable of transcending that realm. The name of that transcending politics is “democracy” and its subject is the “Demos,” which Brown glosses as “self-rule by the people, whoever the people are.”¹¹⁰ Arendt, as we have seen, stipulates politics in terms of action and freedom that must simply transcend the household because the household is only oriented to provisioning necessities. Since the *oikos* still plays a functional role in Arendt’s account, but a role that must be confined or else threaten to “economize” life, Arendt also implicitly demands the moral economy, but this is less fleshed out than in Brown. But what stands out in both accounts is the supposedly natural split, the split between mere life and the good life, or need and freedom, that is identified in Greek antiquity and central to their respective agendas. Moreover, this split is informed by the simplistic conception of use I have been tracking in this chapter.

Before turning to consider the provenance of the mere life/good life split that is so central to the simplistic conceptions of use and utility, I want to point out one further element of Arendt’s influence on Brown. Regarding Brown’s use of the term *homo politicus* itself, Chambers quips that it is at quite a remove from Aristotle’s Greek, since the term “emerges from and operates within the social scientific language of neoclassical economics”¹¹¹ in the late nineteenth century and is therefore a poor stand-in for Aristotle’s *zoon politikon*. But Brown may just as likely be emulating Arendt in using this phrase as arbitrarily picking out a quaint use of Neo-Latin. For *The Human Condition* frequently displays Arendt’s proclivity for using Latinate terms, for instance with *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, even if these have more of a historically defensible source than Brown’s *homo politicus*. In the end, this may be yet more evidence of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹¹ Chambers, “Undoing Neoliberalism,” 711.

Arendt's influence on Brown. And although Brown dismisses the similarity between their theorizations of life and politics, both Agamben and Brown bring Aristotle, Arendt and Foucault together to mobilize a split that is central to their diagnostic and normative arguments.¹¹²

The foregoing discussion firmly establishes that Brown's approach to neoliberalism forms part of a theoretical and discursive tradition and therefore cannot simply be dismissed, as Chambers does, because it attempts to ground politics in ontology. This discursive tradition has a great deal of power to constitute contemporary subjectivity and, on that score, to play on the same terrain as economics. The question that remains to be answered is whether it articulates a set of subject-power relations that democratic and critical theorists would want to affirm. This is what I consider next. I follow Chambers' critique in so far as I focus on the split that is produced between economics and politics but my concern is not over its ability to inform politics. My concern centers on the politics that it presupposes and is reproduced alongside this split.

Just as Benjamin and Adorno represented a juncture between Aristotle's and Marx's more capacious theorizations of use (of objects) and others who delimited it, Arendt represents a juncture in the politics that result from this omission. As the foregoing discussion has indicated, it is with Arendt that the simplistic conception of use and the related split between mere life and the good life turns into a full-fledged political theory, and one with significant influence to boot.

¹¹² In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben has also noted the similarity between Arendt's and Foucault's accounts of modernity through similar passages of Aristotle. Rather than focus on the household and the polis, however, Agamben focuses on two distinct conceptions of life as mere life (*zoe*) and politically qualified life (*bios*). Despite her objections to the contrary, there is more similarity between Brown's and Agamben's account than she is willing to recognize or admit. See her discussion of Agamben in *Undoing the Demos*, 233n45. Brown doesn't acknowledge Agamben's own avowed debt to Aristotle and Arendt on the same concepts as her—i.e. mere life and politics. Yes, "bare life" is somewhat different, as it is a modern and politically produced form of "mere life", but that doesn't mean there is no place for "mere life" in his work. On this, see *Homo Sacer*, 9 and 11. The latter pages seems to indicate that there is a continuum of sorts between these because it is the project of "Western politics."

Moreover, unlike Adorno and Benjamin, Arendt reads this split back into Aristotle, a move that has a significant ripple effect for the influence it had on Agamben. What licenses these steps, steps that neither Adorno nor Benjamin take? In the remainder of this chapter, I trace Arendt's conjunction of the simplistic account of use with the split that leads her to theorize politics beyond use. I find this conjunction in Arendt's reading of Plato's *Republic* and the "city of pigs," which then greatly informs her reading of Aristotle and her resulting account of politics. In doing so, however, a more complex relationship between singularity, use, and politics emerges from Arendt that complicates her relationship to the tradition with which she is nonetheless associated.

Sources

Early in the chapter of *HC* devoted to action, Arendt makes a passing remark concerning the tradition of "materialism" in political theory:

"The basic error of all materialism in politics—and this materialism is not Marxian and not even modern in origin, but as old as our history of political theory—is to overlook the inevitability with which men disclose themselves as subjects, as distinct and unique persons, even when they wholly concentrate upon reaching an altogether worldly, material object."¹¹³

¹¹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

In a footnote, Arendt clarifies the “origin” of this materialism and what the materialist view amounts to. In the first half of the footnote she writes:

“Materialism in political theory is at least as old as the Platonic-Aristotelian assumption that political communities (*poleis*)—and not only family life or the coexistence of several households (*oikiai*)—owe their existence to material necessity. (For Plato see *Republic* 369, where the *polis*’ origin is seen in our wants and lack of self-sufficiency. For Aristotle, who here as elsewhere is close to current Greek opinion than Plato, see *Politics* 1252b29: “The *polis* comes into existence for the sake of living, but remains in existence for the sake of living well.”)”

What Arendt calls “materialism,” this footnote makes clear, refers to the view that political communities have their origin in the provision for “wants” (as Plato is alleged to have called them¹¹⁴) and “living” (as Aristotle calls it), both of which Arendt subsumes under the category “material necessity.” In other words, Arendt is repeating the reading of the Greeks that opened *HC* and that I adumbrated above, but here she references two particular places that inform her interpretation. They are the etiologies of the polis provided in Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics*. These are, then, the sources that emboldened Arendt to develop the split between need and freedom into a fully-fledged political theory. Here Arendt only explicitly identifies one half of

¹¹⁴ In the next chapter we will see that this appears to be telling for the interpretation of Plato’s first city as a modern economy, at least in so far as some people think that the economy satisfies “wants” that are distinguished from needs in so far as they are boundless.

that split, the “mere life” side, but the other half, which is the realm of freedom and politics, is also implied because it is necessary to understand why Arendt calls it an error.

Recall that Arendt draws on both Plato and Aristotle in her interpretation of the Greeks’ idea of freedom as overcoming the material necessity that is an ineluctable part, but only a part, of polis life for the sake of disclosing one’s singular identity. On this interpretation, freedom is only to be found beyond the provision of needs in the household. This is what Arendt now calls the error of materialism. Given the course that this chapter has taken, this is a very puzzling development. This split, between mere life and freedom (whether political or philosophical), was central to Arendt’s critique of modernity as overly preoccupied with mere life. Moreover, I traced the way that this account has influenced other influential works of contemporary theory such as Giorgio Agamben’s and Wendy Brown’s. In light of this account, which I stand by, what are we to make of Arendt’s claim that “materialism,” which simply names one half of the split, is erroneous?

It turns out that Arendt’s engagement with ancient Greece for the diagnosis and critique of modernity was not wholesale endorsement. Antiquity rather served as a standpoint for identifying the particularity of modernity. Only later, in the chapter on action, does Arendt turn antiquity into an object of critique on the basis of her peculiar account of freedom. As I have already discussed, Arendt understands freedom in terms of the ability to begin something new, which she says is the condition of natality, simply being born. Each human being represents something singularly unique, but who a person is can only be disclosed through action and speech. Action and speech take place between men and in this each person discloses who they are. How, exactly? Action and speech require some content in order to be realized. Arendt thinks

that this content will quite literally be an object of concern. It is out of a world of objects that “arise [men’s] specific, objective, worldly interests” (HC 182). Indeed, Arendt claims that “[m]ost action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent” (HC 182). Indeed, wherever there is a concern about objects Arendt thinks that humans will inevitably disclose who they are. Now we can understand the meaning of Arendt’s claim that the materialist tradition was in error. Arendt writes that this tradition “overlooks the inevitability with which men disclose themselves as subjects, as distinct and unique persons, even when they wholly concentrate upon reaching an altogether worldly, material object.”¹¹⁵ Against this background of work and action, Arendt thinks that the materialism initiated by Plato and Aristotle errs in one of two ways. Either it “dispense[s] with this disclosure,” or denies “that this disclosure is real and has consequences of its own.”¹¹⁶

This qualification of Arendt’s earlier reading is easily missed. But this additional comment on the Greeks is far from marginal and is very significant for my task here, for several reasons. As I have argued, the Arendt that has been so influential is the Arendt of the early chapters of HC where it appears she accepts and even endorses the Greek split. Now we see that this is not Arendt’s final word on the Greeks or this split. Nor are the early chapters on the Greeks the final word on use and utility, either. Given that I have argued the split in question also implicates the conceptualization of use and utility, Arendt’s critique of it also means that Arendt’s account of use and utility is more nuanced than it first appeared at the beginning of HC where Arendt’s

¹¹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

account of the ancients looked like endorsement. But I need not undo the work already performed in this chapter. Whether or not it is the correct interpretation of Arendt, Arendt's earlier reading of the Greeks, in terms of the split, is still significant because it is the influential one. Indeed, Arendt herself understands "materialism" as a very enduring tradition, since the second half of the footnote that I quoted above links Plato and Aristotle to Cicero and then Bodin and Marx. In so far as this tradition has become influential, I have set about to understand what kind of politics it entails. Whether she wanted to or not, Arendt has become a key figure and a juncture in this tradition in at least the last few decades, even solely accounting for the influence she has had on Agamben and Brown. Recall that it was for that reason I set out to trace the source that licensed Arendt to use the split between need and freedom for a fully-fledged political theory and subject it to scrutiny. Now we have seen that Arendt locates the provenance of the split in Plato and Aristotle, and I believe we can see in Plato the reason the split has become central to contemporary theory.

I turn to focus on Aristotle in future chapters, but I will briefly say that Arendt is far from the only one who attributes a split between life and the good life, *oikos* and *polis*, and use and politics to Aristotle. Her reading is very much licensed by the modern reception of Aristotle, even by Aristotle scholars, but this continuity between Arendt's and scholarly interpretations should not detract from the role she has played in transmitting Aristotle to critical and especially political theory since. I will later do some heavy philological and interpretive work to challenge what has become the dominant, apparently self-evident, reading of Aristotle. For now, I am going to focus on Plato's role in Arendt's interpretation of Aristotle and the conceptualization of

use, which is a much more manageable task because the split is localizable to just a few pages of *Republic*.

Before I do, I want to note that Arendt's critique of ancient materialism leaves open the opportunity to read Arendt against and apart from this tradition, even on the use of humans, but that is not what I choose to undertake here. Arendt still explicitly attributes use and utility to the realms of Labor and Work, which confines them away from Action, the realm of freedom, politics, and singularity. And so Arendt still works with a less capacious understanding of use than Aristotle and Marx, meaning she is not directly pertinent to a reprisal of use. If a rereading of Arendt on human use were to take place, then, it would first have to bring the framework of use from outside her work, which calls for the kind of work I undertake here. In so far as it were an Aristotelian account, it would also require reading Aristotle against Arendt's interpretation of him, as I do in the next chapters.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that a simplification of Aristotle's and Marx's conceptualization of use has taken place in twentieth-century critical and political theory that has had lasting effects

¹¹⁷ I note in passing that Arendt, speaking of Aristotle, writes, he "tentatively assumed that at least the historical origin of the *polis* must be connected with the necessities of life and that only its content or inherent aim (*telos*) transcends life in the "good life."" (*The Human Condition*, 37). I think it may be more astute to say that Arendt was the one who tentatively assumed that Aristotle assumed the same thing as Plato, or at least a charitable reading of this passage would, since the comparison is a little forced on my reading. That said, Arendt admits some difference between them (Plato blurred the lines between household and *polis* more than Aristotle because he "began to draw his examples and illustrations for the *polis* from everyday experiences in private life." *Ibid.*, 37), but the two crucial points on which she sees Plato and Aristotle agreeing are (i) the originary division between mere life and the good life and (ii) that the good life requires not only the overcoming of needs but also the overcoming of politics itself, which is merely a "necessary evil" for the real goal of leisure (*scholē*) and its philosophical form of life. ("Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," 39).

in contemporary receptions of Aristotle and influential accounts of our contemporary political challenges. Benjamin and Adorno made any connection between commodities and a broad analytic of use, still apparent in Marx, all but unintelligible when use-value became associated with consumption alone. This conception of use was further simplified with the notion of exhibition value when Adorno and Benjamin excluded the process of production and circulation, through collective and human use, from their analysis of the commodity. Despite its role in designating the singularity of objects, use in Adorno's and Benjamin's hands became radically divorced from the emancipation of the singular human being, and from politics, in their focus on individual and object-oriented use. The positing of two realms, one of use and one of freedom, proved to be central to the work of Arendt, Agamben, and Brown, however, who each in their own way took this split as the basis for reading Aristotle and outlining an alternative politics for the present. In finding the conjunction of simplified use and politics in Plato's *Republic*, I will argue that we are better able to understand the politics entailed in the simplistic account of use and the split between mere life and the good life. Although Arendt and others think there is an originary split between oikos and polis, life and good life, use and politics, which they attribute to the ontological order of things, it is only by tracing it back to Plato that we can see that it originates in a performative split between need and the power to satisfy that need, a split that entails the politics of determinate utility and its exclusion of singularity and collectivity.

Chapter 2

Plato's *Republic* and the Contemporary Politics of Determinate Utility

Arendt is surely correct to see “materialism” —the view that “political communities...owe their existence to material necessity”—everywhere in the history of political thought after Plato.¹ Human beings are needy creatures, and this fact features explicitly or implicitly in a huge range of authors, including Arendt herself. When she calls materialism an “error,”² Arendt is not denying that human beings have needs, nor denying that needs do, and ought to, factor into politics. What Arendt finds erroneous is the way political theorists have divorced the satisfaction of human needs from other meaningful activities. In the language I was using in the previous chapter, the error is to see a split between economics and politics. Arendt points out that even Adam Smith “needed an “invisible hand” to guide economic dealings on the exchange market.”³ Smith’s invisible hand evinces, for Arendt, “that more than sheer economic activity is involved in exchange and that “economic man,” when he makes his appearance on the market, is an acting being and neither exclusively a producer nor a trader and barterer.”⁴ So Arendt claims that even someone who is focused on the use of objects is an “acting being” who, together with other actors, constitutes the “web” of human relationships and through which they disclose their

¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴ *Ibid.*

singularity.⁵ The split between economics and politics, then, is materialism's error, one that Arendt thinks is committed by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Bodin, and Marx, which are only the theorists Arendt mentions by name.

There's a great deal of irony bound up with Arendt's denunciation of the split between economics and politics. As I outlined in the previous chapter, Arendt has inspired much political theory that splits economic and political realms and activities. That is, Arendt informs both Agamben's and Brown's influential works with the split between economy and politics—and the view that freedom lies beyond the former—sitting at their core. But Arendt is far from the only one to have been misread in terms of this split. We have already seen that Agamben and Brown as well as Adorno and Benjamin imposed the split on either Aristotle or Marx, or both, as evinced by their simplifications of use that I outlined in the previous chapter. Indeed, Arendt herself names Aristotle and Marx as proponents of materialism's error, which I will show in later chapters is a major simplification. It seems that the error of materialism is not quite as pervasive as Arendt thinks. What is pervasive is misreading theoretical texts by attributing that split to them.

It is not my goal here to simply correct the record and more accurately divide people into camps that split use from politics or not. My goal in this chapter, on the back of the last, is to understand what the politics of the split is. That means bracketing the politics that theorists name and claim in the split and considering the split's subjectivating effects. That involves asking, what kind of subjectivity—the situation of a subject with respect to power—does the tradition that splits economics (and use with it) from politics produce? Moreover, is this a subjectivity that

⁵ Ibid.; and 183.

democratic theorists want to affirm? In the last chapter, I began critically reconstructing use and utility in Agamben and Brown on the supposition that, first, it may lead us to seeing the deeper conditions of the split between need and politics that is so closely tied to the simplification of use in Agamben, Brown, and others; and second, that seeing the deeper conditions may help in understanding the split's subjectivating politics. That reconstruction led us to Plato because he plays a role in Arendt's reading of Aristotle, a reading that has been especially influential on Agamben and Brown. In this chapter, I turn to Plato's *Republic*, and especially the passage Arendt references in her claims about materialism, in order to examine the conditions of the split there. I argue that this is an especially illuminating text because, whatever the accuracy of Arendt's claims about a materialist tradition, the split between need and politics in *Republic's* first "city in speech" is as pure as can be. A close reading of that text helps us identify the politics of determinate utility that works through the split between use and politics because it splits people from the power to coordinate the satisfaction of their needs. At its centre stands the simplification of use that has some people focusing on the use of objects for their solipsistic ends while others use humans for the sake of some other determinate end.

Having discerned the deeper conditions of the split between economics and politics and the simplification of use, I then turn to see if and how they illuminate the politics of the split and simplistic use today. But in my attempt to illuminate the politics of use today, I believe the misreadings of Aristotle, Marx, and Arendt in terms of the split play an important role. Why? Because these misreadings point *beyond* mere textual interpretation. I argue that they point to a broader social condition that is influencing and sustaining these readings. Let me explain what I mean.

One could approach the misreadings as mere ideational or interpretive errors. After all, I began the dissertation by pointing out that the idea of a split between realms *is* pervasive in political theory, moral philosophy, and economics and that this is what makes my leading question—how useful are humans for politics?—so difficult to answer. My claim that Aristotle, Marx, and Arendt do not work with a pure split between economics and politics does not deny that; it only claims that the split is not as pervasive as many people think, a fact that motivates my project because it calls into question its natural or ontological givenness. But with that broader context in mind, it is possible to think that the intellectual tradition of the split has determining power over textual interpretations, even of texts that deny such a split. Put differently, the sustaining force of the misreadings I identified could be the tradition itself.

But such an explanation seems at once too facile and too disconnected from the very material content of the concepts in question. That is, it makes the tradition of the split to be a purely intellectual phenomenon, which accords no importance to the way that the concepts implicated in the split—for example, need, use, pleasure, satisfaction, and wealth—may be efficacious in practical life and give persuasive force and sustenance to the theoretical split, and thus the misreadings.⁶ To understand the force of the split I believe we need to connect political theory to political economy. That is, we need to appreciate the way that the split and its central concepts are bound up with a social and material condition that give them meaning and efficacy.

⁶ Giving causal priority to an intellectual tradition also results in an explanatory difficulty. If the intellectual tradition is so powerful to determine thinking about the relationship between economics and politics, then how do authors such as Arendt think outside of it? Arendt herself does not comment on what sustains the error of materialism, but the way she frames it points back to the power of intellectual inheritance, too. By linking Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Bodin, and Marx across the better part of 2500 years, Arendt implies that Plato inaugurated a tradition of thinking that has held subsequent theorists in its grip. At the same time, materialism is all of a piece in Arendt's sweeping characterisation. Both of these ideas will be challenged in the course of the dissertation.

To do so is to understand the misreadings of various texts in terms of the split as bound up with a historical and material condition that influences our apprehension of the split and its attendant concepts. As I have already detailed, that condition is one whereby the split and the simplification of use appear to be natural and eternal. In some respects, it should be no surprise, then, that we see the misreadings everywhere. Arendt is an exception among moderns for the way she denies the necessity of the split, along with Marx as we will see, but even she does not stop short of seeing the split in a broad range of theorists across large swathes of history. To the difficulty of answering my leading question, then, we can add this material and social context, too.⁷

But if understanding the pervasiveness of the split requires more than textual interpretation and some attunement to the particular historical, material, and social contexts in which these ideas move, then Plato will appear to be an unlikely source for diagnosing the politics of use today. Given the gap between his own material and social contexts and ours, what can he illuminate about the subjectivating force of the split today? To address this, I go further into the idea of subjectivation, especially in Michel Foucault. For Foucault, subjectivation—the making of human subjects with respect to power—should be understood within the context of an apparatus. An apparatus is a “system of social networks”⁸ through which human beings are made subjects. They consist of discursive and non-discursive phenomena that are principally identifiable, for Foucault, through their effects on human beings as subjects. With the idea of an

⁷ Bearing this historical, material, and social context in mind, the split and its concepts are not errors so much as they are bound to time and place. The error is to not recognize their contingent and historical qualities, which is what happens when they are naturalized.

⁸ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 224.

apparatus in mind, I show how Plato already forms part of the contemporary apparatus and is connected to the split and use's simplification in their discursive and non-discursive dimensions. By paying close attention to the similarities and differences between *Republic's* first city and our contemporary condition, I argue we can identify the politics of determinate utility today and therefore the operations of the split and use's simplification. Finally, I circle back to Agamben, Brown, and Arendt to argue that they largely think in terms of that apparatus and not against it, which compromises their efforts to reprise singularity and collectivity today. Agamben's and Brown's embrace of the split results in aporia in so far as it undermines the features of democratic life they wish to recover from the start.

In so far as the split is shared by critical, democratic, and economic approaches, this chapter implicates all of them in the politics their conceptualization entails. But I especially focus on the implication for democratic theory in so far as it is trying to be critical and democratic. On my account, buying into the split undermines both efforts and that is why use and utility, along with the split between economics and politics that it forms part of, need to be rethought. The problems I identify in this chapter are not problems of intent. None of the theorists I examine set out to constitute the politics of determinate utility. I rather suggest that the politics they unwittingly perform persists because the account of use and utility that underwrites it is so familiar, its place in contemporary life so naturalized, and our investment in it so personal that it appears to be politically neutral and even beyond question. My hope is to estrange the reader from that now-familiar understanding as a first step in conjuring an alternative account of use and utility that I expect will, in keeping with its spectral quality, appear strange at first, but that I hope will become more compelling as we come to recognize ourselves and our lives in it.

Republic' First City and the Politics of Determinate Utility

The first passage Arendt references for the ancient tradition of “materialism” is in the second book of Plato’s *Republic*. The interlocutors have already made a false start in their search for justice in the first book, and in the second book they determine to depict justice on a scale larger than the individual soul because it may be easier to see (368d7-8). And so, they set out to create a “city in speech” that, they suppose, will feature justice writ-large. The section Arendt references is at the very outset of this task that is effectively played out over the rest of the book. There are actually two cities created in this process, and it is the first one—the one that will be referred to as the “city of pigs”—that I will focus on here because it is the one Arendt references and that I believe illuminates the political effects of the theoretical tradition that has reproduced the split. This city only lasts for a couple of pages in Plato’s text and is not to be mistaken with the greatly expanded city that features in most of the book. That means the first city is not directly implicated by the most famous passages of *Republic*, such as the analogies of the cave, the sun, and the divided line.

For Arendt, Plato’s materialism boils down to the fact that there, in this first city, the “*polis*’ origin is seen in our wants and lack of self-sufficiency.”⁹ That is because Socrates states, “I think a city comes into being because none of us is self-sufficient but rather has many needs” (*polis, hōs egōmai, epeidē tugchanei hēmōn hekastos ouk autarkēs, alla pollōn endeēs*) (Plato, *Republic*, II. 369b, translation mine). From this starting point, what proceeds is a determination

⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183n8.

of the members of the polis¹⁰ based on them fulfilling the stipulated needs. But what are these needs, where do they come from, and who do they belong to? Socrates references a “we” in his claim, but it proves extremely difficult to establish any commonality in the first city because the needs of the first city are imputed to an indeterminate “we.” The needs that Socrates first stipulates are food, shelter, and clothing, which appear general enough to pertain to any human being. This interpretation is advanced by Jonny Thakkar, who writes, “Socrates does not specify which kinds of need are at issue here. The point,” he continues, “is perfectly abstract.”¹¹ Despite the imprecision in representing the passage, Thakkar seems to be saying that even though the kinds of needs are specified, they are so general that they are effectively abstract. And that means we, as readers in the twenty-first century, can identify ourselves in that “we,” diverse as readers today may be from Plato’s characters in the dialogue, Plato’s historical context, and indeed from each other. Arendt seems to be doing something analogous, from her twentieth-century context, when she claims that Socrates’ needs are “our wants” that we nevertheless fail to satisfy on our own. Despite their historical situation, the generality with which Thakkar and Arendt speak of needs and wants imputes these needs to any living human being in any time or place, which gives Plato’s account a semblance of universal applicability from the very beginning.

But this interpretation—that the needs belong to any human being in any time or place—is subtly thrown into question in the way that the stipulated needs are then satisfied in the first city. The interlocutors choose very specific types of workers to satisfy these needs. They are a

¹⁰ Perhaps it is better identified as a *politeia* (constitution), given the title of Plato’s book (*Politeia*) and the importance I will place, in chapters 3 and 4, on the distinction between acts of polis-foundation and those of politeia-foundation in Aristotle’s *Politics*. On this difference in the work of Jacques Rancière, see Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*.

¹¹ Thakkar, *Plato as Critical Theorist*, 278.

farmer, a builder, a weaver, and a shoemaker (369d6-9). Although no term for “use” or “usefulness” appears in this passage, it is clear that individuals are included on the basis of their usefulness for the satisfaction of the stipulated needs (*chreia*).¹² All of a sudden, we shift from the ostensive universality of human needs to a much less general cohort of human beings that represent a specific social and historical subset of the human species. For farmers, builders, weavers, and shoemakers have not simply always existed. These are types of workers that develop in the process of history of which human beings are the subjects. But in the dialogue, these roles do not stem from a process of development that the inhabitants undertake themselves. The interlocutors simply presuppose them. This specificity is the first thing that puts into question the generality and universality of the needs that were stipulated, which are perhaps satisfiable by these specific workers because those needs are equally social and historical, which is to say particular and not universal. But these specific roles also throw into question the generality of the “we” and the needs that are under consideration in another way. The stipulated roles serve as a principle of inclusion and exclusion for the first city. For these kinds of workers are not even a universal subset within the historical conditions in which these types of workers exist. In other words, even in a world where there are farmers, builders, weavers, and shoemakers, not everyone is one of these. The interlocutors thus presuppose a pool of individuals out of whom some are chosen for inclusion in the city as workers. The “we” whose needs really count, then, is even more delimited.

¹² As should already be clear, I am not invoking utility in terms of pleasure and pain. Those that do are more inclined to refer to Plato’s *Protagoras* as an antecedent of utilitarian themes. For instance, Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 49.

Initially, it is not clear whether the inhabitants of the city will perform just one role or all of them. For once the city has been populated by its workers, Socrates asks, “should each of them [i.e. the workers] make his own work (*ergon*) available to all in common? [...] Or should he not bother about everyone else?” (369e1-6).¹³ Adeimantus, Socrates’ companion, opts for the former, and Socrates agrees, because now a social component of need is introduced that is informed by a principle of efficiency. More “plentiful and better-quality goods are more easily produced” (370c2) when workers specialize. And this decision is justified in two principal ways. First, Socrates points to the difference between people in their natural suitedness to activities, which means “one is suited for one job, another to another” (370b1). More than a mere consideration of human nature, however, the workers will share the product of their labours on account of work’s timing. The second justification for specialization, then, is the *kairos* (opportune time) for each of these jobs (370a7-8):

...if one misses the opportune moment in any job, the work is spoiled...That, I take it, is because the thing that has to be done won’t wait until the doer has the leisure to do it. No, instead the doer must, of necessity, pay close attention to what has to be done and not leave it for his idle moments.¹⁴

¹³ In both Reeve’s translation and Grube’s (revised by Reeve in Plato, *Complete Works*), this passage is translated with “common use,” which seems innocent enough unless we are trying to be absolutely precise about what use is and how it is conceptualized here. I have opted not to rely on “use” to translate the passage because no common Greek word for use appears in it. Nonetheless, it is possible to be quite clear about what kinds of use are at work, but it requires much more than attention to this sentence alone.

¹⁴ Marx explicitly criticizes Plato precisely on account of this emphasis on timing, which gives greater importance to the community at the expense of the individual. See *Capital*, 487n57.

In this way, the workers of the city are socialized so that they do not labor and consume individually, but rather as a collective, the exact mode of which is still to be established. But if the choice of roles and the principle of inclusion makes some needs and the “we” more specific—i.e., needs belong to the inhabitants, who are specific workers—with the debate about whether work should be specialized or not, a disconnect between the way that city has been populated and the reason for it being so populated becomes apparent. The people chosen to inhabit the city were not included because they are already especially good at the roles that they need to adopt. At first, they could be required to do any of them or even all of them. But after their inclusion the interlocutors decide that they should do one job each and then share the products of it. The initial indeterminacy over the mode of socialization reveals that the choice of who to include in the city was even more arbitrary than just the choice of needs and workers to satisfy them. And that also means the justification on the basis of natural suitability is made in bad faith. Many commentators have pointed out that there is no clear mechanism for aligning natural propensity with the role the inhabitants take on. But that is beside the point, because by the time they start thinking about natural suitedness the population of the city was already decided, meaning the inhabitants were chosen when they could have been required to undertake any or all roles. Even if there were any consideration of natural propensity at the time of the inhabitants’ inclusion, it would have been for all of the roles, not just one of them. They cannot justifiably conclude that by having the workers specialize they will actually fit individuals’ natural ability to their role, because once they have decided on the principle of specialization they may have four or five people who are most naturally suited to making shoes but who cannot all make shoes or else compromise every reason that has been given to found the city.

Despite these difficulties, at least the decision in favor of specialization somewhat vindicates the decisions they have made so far. For why would these people live together at all if they could simply do all of the required roles themselves? Socrates already began with the idea that “we” are not self-sufficient, so the decision to socialize them through specialization is something of a foregone conclusion. It was already there at the beginning, built into the very articulation of the problem that the city is there to solve. It does seem odd, then, that the interlocutors would pause over this. But it does provide them with the opportunity to explain how sufficiency is gained in the city. It is gained precisely because we do not have to undertake more than one role, and this specialization means we can make better and more goods, even if the reason that the roles accord with the inhabitants’ nature turns out to be bogus.

So far, I have reconstructed the passage with a view to finding any coherence or consistency regarding whose needs are being counted (who the “we” is), what the content of those needs is (what are the needs of the “we”), and how those needs will be satisfied. Whatever success I have had so far, however, is drastically thrown into doubt again when it becomes clear that the founders themselves cannot be discounted. For an attentive reader, it is clear there is a significant difference between the inhabitants of the first city and the city of the interlocutors—whose overall character has already been depicted in the foregoing dialogue between them. But even the inattentive reader is made aware of it when Glaucon, one of the interlocutors, interrupts to point out that the inhabitants have to eat without “relishes” (372c2). When Socrates tries to amend this by adding “salt,...olives and cheese, and they will boil roots and vegetables” as well as some other miscellaneous items (372c4-9, Reeve), Glaucon reveals what he was really thinking: “If you were founding a city of pigs, Socrates, isn’t that just what you

would provide to fatten *them?*" (372d4-5). It is telling that Glaucon's comment is made *after* the city has been developed to a greater extent. The first city is no longer simply about "food, shelter, and clothing" and goods according to what the farmer, builder, weaver, and shoemaker could supply. In addition to these original workers, Socrates says that more people will be needed in the polis since "a farmer won't make his own plow...if it is going to be a good one, nor his hoe, nor any of his other farm implements" (370c7-9). All this leads to the introduction of money, buying, and selling (371b4-9), which presages the introduction of a market, with merchants and retailers. These roles are especially important because of timing, that is, the unlikelihood of the "double-coincidence of wants." The market precludes the failure of exchange that can occur if sellers and buyers come to market at different times (371b9-d8). (The market even leads to the introduction of wage-laborers (371d9-e7).) The first city now looks comparatively more like the city the interlocutors know, but it is still squalor compared to the existence of the interlocutors. For Glaucon's comment not only compares the first city's condition with that of pigs, but also compares it to the conditions of the interlocutors. Note the way that Glaucon clarifies that he interjected because he wants the city in speech to be more "conventional (*nomizetai*)" (372d8), meaning the inhabitants "recline on proper couches,...dine at table, and have the relishes and desserts *that people have nowadays*" (372d9-e1, Reeve translation, my emphasis). Glaucon thinks the first city should be more like the city that they themselves know and live in.

If we interpret Glaucon's comment at face value, we are prompted, as Socrates is, to continue the process that the interlocutors have embarked upon from the beginning. That is, the conversation continues to be about the content of needs, and they end up establishing what

Socrates calls a “luxurious” and “feverish” city rather than a simple but healthy city (372e2-8). But if we step back, Glaucon’s comment elicits a question that is nowhere made explicit. In the search for justice, *who* gets to speak? Up until Glaucon’s interjection, it was predominantly Socrates that articulated the content of needs and roles and how these would cohere in a city and the other interlocutors acquiesced. Glaucon’s interjection arrests that flow and makes it clear that who gets to say what counts is of great consequence to the kind of city that is established. And with that question and that idea in mind, there is one detail that turns out to be extremely significant, a detail that stands out in this discussion precisely because it is unambiguous. That is, the interlocutors have absolute authority and control over what happens in this city. Theirs is a discursive power that, within the framework of the dialogue, has no limits. They get to decide whose needs count, what the content of those needs is, and how those needs will be satisfied. In light of that, any doubt over the process by which the city is established, whether that is doubt about the relative commonality of or difference between the needs that are actually stipulated, or doubt about the possibility of matching people’s natural abilities to their roles, ends up being of little consequence. The interlocutors can make these things up as they go along and with impunity because the inhabitants have no option to exit, voice an objection, or profess loyalty, to borrow Albert Hirschman’s helpful schema.¹⁵ For while the interlocutors debate each other over what counts as need and how it will be satisfied, the inhabitants are completely silent. This is the split between people and the power to coordinate the satisfaction of their needs. Or, put differently, the inhabitants lack the power to use humans. Needs are imputed to the inhabitants, but the need to be involved in the process of working out

¹⁵ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*.

needs and how they will be satisfied is withheld and only implicitly raised by Glaucon's interjection. Instead, the need that is implicitly imputed to the inhabitants alone is the *need to be managed*. But this need to be managed is not explained. It is merely presupposed. That initial presupposition is what makes it possible for the other needs, roles, and mode of socialization to be presupposed, too, because they are the outworking of what now appears to be the primary and truly governing need of the first city, the need to be managed. The lack of self-sufficiency that Socrates cites as the founding principle of the city is implicitly defined as the need to live together while performing specialized roles *and* to be managed. Whatever commonality there may be between the first or even the second city and the interlocutors, there is an absolute difference between the "we" of the interlocutors and the "we" of the inhabitants with respect to this power. If we fret over the quality or content of the needs (and roles) that the interlocutors actually stipulate, it can distract from this more fundamental element at work.

So, what does the first city look like in the end? How do the interlocutors use their absolute power with respect to the inhabitants' need to be managed? It is a market, but a very particular one. The path to socializing the inhabitants through their goods in the market has been drastically smoothed. To see how, compare it to our own condition. As we will see in chapter 5, Marx identifies that one of the problems of modern markets is that there is no *prior* socialization. The market has become, in capitalism, the principal mode of socializing labor, in such a way that one can fail to be a social laborer. That is because without prior coordination, one cannot easily judge whether others will value one's work before bringing it to market. If no one values it, then whatever it may produce or mean to the individual who undertakes it, the work has failed to have a *social* quality. In Plato's market in the first city, unsocial work has been

precluded from the very beginning. The market only exists for the sake of timing, the time that exists between concretely performing work and exchanging it in the market, but not out of concern that this gap signifies the possibility of unsocial work. Rather, the market, with its merchants and retailers, merely accounts for the unlikelihood of sellers and buyers of products arriving at the same time, especially when they are also workers who must be available for the particular temporal rhythms of their work, on account of which the principle of specialization was defended (370a7-8). Viewed from the perspective of the contemporary market, we can better appreciate the significance of the way that Plato's market was founded. The delimitation of needs, roles, and socialization through specialization was a way of ensuring that the market performed efficiently through the efficient work of its constituents. The road to socialization has been paved with gold. So, the market socializes the inhabitants through their goods, but because of the way that the market has been established, the interlocutors have not really alienated their power to manage the inhabitants. They have exercised it in advance of the market doing its work in such a way that the market cannot fail, which means it is hardly a "free market" because the participants in the market have only one function: to focus on the use of objects. That means producing the objects suited to their role, and consuming the objects produced by other roles, all of which has been determined by the interlocutors. Although there was a little indeterminacy in the process, by the end of the process that establishes the first city there is a stable regulation that makes for a healthy city, according to Socrates. The end justifies the means, it seems. Only when Glaucon interjects on behalf of the inhabitants' to object to their living conditions is any of this brought into question. The changes that ensue lead Socrates to say that the healthy city has

become feverish (372e8) even though the interlocutors never relinquish their power to determine the city as they wish.

Now I am able to stipulate the characteristic features of what I call “the politics of determinate utility.” The politics of determinate utility occurs when people are split from their ability to coordinate the satisfaction of needs. By “coordination,” I mean all of the tasks that the interlocutors here undertake themselves. That means deciding how to satisfy needs in addition to determining what *counts* as needs. But it is important that we not only consider this from the perspective of the protagonists of this power, as though it can be entirely understood through its “headquarters,” so to speak. Rather, the politics of determinate utility is relational and needs to be understood through its effects on other actors. So, the politics of determinate utility can be further characterized by paying attention to the inhabitants.

With all of the power that the interlocutors presuppose, there is only one thing that involves the active participation of the inhabitants themselves, which is the production of goods in accordance with their role and the consumption of others’ goods. A tell-tale sign of the politics of determinate utility is when people can depend on each other while being almost solely focused on the use of objects. In other words, when community exists alongside an object-oriented phenomenology, so to speak. And recall that the latter is what I have been calling the simplistic conceptualization of use and utility. In this case, needs *are* social, in the sense that they are both shared by different people and satisfied collectively. But if one is solely focused on the use—whether production or consumption—of a few objects, then someone or something else has the power to socialize the objects at hand and socialize the person who uses them. But if one is dependent upon someone or something else for coordination, then it makes one susceptible

to the ends or purposes of this power. That dependence, when split from the ability to coordinate needs' satisfaction, is what makes the utility of objects and people something determinate. As we have seen, at times the end itself need not be particularly determinate for the characteristic features of the politics of determinate utility to exist. In the case of the interlocutors, there is a great deal of indeterminacy in the process of establishing the first city while it was still unclear what its end would be. Even still, that initial indeterminacy does not change the fact that the inhabitants were subject to whatever end the interlocutors came up with, which makes them useful solely in the way the interlocutors decide. In the case of the first city, in the end there is a lot of determinacy because the inhabitants are organized for sake of the market and its smooth operation.

And so, the politics of determinate utility tends to exclude three things: singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity. In the way the interlocutors populate and organize the city, singularity is effaced because people are included on the basis of their specialized job, which conforms to the pre-determined needs of the city. That means the first city is constituted at the expense of needs or work that would give free, or arguably *any*, expression to singular individuals' qualities and capacities. We can think about this in terms of method. In the introduction, I outlined the method that would guide my work in this dissertation as reading for the symptom. I stipulated this as a process of attending to the phenomenological in its most particular and singular dimensions and, at the same time, looking at the way phenomena are subsumed within totality. This method is highly suited to reading Aristotle because I, along with Bianchi and others, take it to be Aristotle's own method, albeit without the same concern for the symptom, which is what remains outside of his main causal account as a result of the

coincidence of the singular and the total. But here we can use it to draw a contrast with Plato and the generation of this first city in particular. The main problem of Plato's account of the first city is that there is practically no phenomenological dimension when it comes to the city's inhabitants. They have no singular qualities and no voice. Everything significant in this city is determined by the interlocutors, from whom the inhabitants are absolutely removed. And that means there is an equally impoverished conception of totality or collectivity, which is the second entity that is lost in the way that the city is constituted. The inhabitants are not meaningfully aware of each other and so no one within that city can even think about the collective. With no awareness of each other in any socially meaningful way, we cannot construct a phenomenological account in its specifically collective dimension, even speculatively. Moreover, it is clear that among the presupposed pool of individuals out of which the city is populated, there are the useless, from the perspective of the presupposed city, who will be excluded from the first city. The third thing that is lost in the constitution of the first city, then, is multiplicity, understood as a plurality of singularities, which remains its unacknowledged remainder.

The politics of determinate utility also has a cunning ability to efface itself. As with the first city, one can get caught up in the accuracy of the content of needs and deciding whether they can be satisfied while not realizing that in doing so one may be excluding from the debate the people whose lives are in question. This is almost inevitable for at least two reasons. First, theorists are always removed from the conditions in which all those affected by an idea or discussion can be included in the discussion. Second, if there is any justification for this distance it is because the theorist can adequately represent those who are affected. But the adequacy of representation is a thorny question in the case of needs because of the significant ambiguity

over how natural and general they are or whether they are more delimited and specific because of the ends that they serve. That is exactly what is displayed to us at the beginning of the city in speech. But this ambiguity can easily direct our attention further into the process of coordinating them, to perfect the coordination, and as theorists this will never involve amending the conditions of participation in the discussion. Again, that is justifiable in so far as we can represent others by establishing the commonality involved in the coordination of needs, but the difficulty in doing so is exactly what is displayed in the process of establishing the first city. Participation in the coordination of needs, then, may be blind to the way that it has already presupposed but not explained people's need to be managed. In so far as this goes unnoticed, a person who understands their needs while focusing on the use of objects may not appreciate the degree to which their understanding of need is determined by someone or something else.

I can put the above description (of the politics of determinate utility in the final picture of the first city) more schematically in this way:

1. People focus on the use of objects for the satisfaction of their individual needs
2. In so far as 1 happens, a split has occurred between people and the coordination of needs on the basis of an unexamined assumption that people need to be managed
3. In so far as 1 and 2 happen, some people's utility is determined by another power, which principally takes place by determining the former's needs
4. In so far as 1, 2, and 3 happen and are absolute
 - a. Singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity are excluded, while
 - b. There is a tendency to be distracted from the split, meaning

- c. People, and especially theorists, do not ask about the validity of the process and the exclusions involved
5. Mere consciousness of the above is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transforming it.

I will come back to point five later. At this point I want to relate Plato's first city to the split between need and freedom that is so central to Arendt's and then others' reading of the Greeks, which Arendt attributes to this part of Plato's *Republic* as well as Aristotle's *Politics*. There is patently a split between need and freedom in the first city, but it is accompanied by a split between people who are reduced to satisfying that need in a way that splits them from the power to coordinate its satisfaction. I think it is apt to map this latter split onto the split between need and freedom because the interlocutors represent freedom for both the ancient Greek aristocratic class and representatives of the modern tradition I have been tracking.¹⁶ Put in the most general terms, a free life is one that is concerned with need and use but transcends it, too. The interlocutors, even though they are the managers of need, are not beholden to need in the same way that the inhabitants are. The interlocutors are especially representative of the transcendence that Arendt and Brown depict, which is figured in their conceptions of politics that mostly involves associating and speaking together. Adorno, Benjamin, and Agamben do not articulate freedom as politics in this way, but their framework incorporates the split between

¹⁶ The interlocutors are characters based on historical figures in Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Some of them were metics (*metoikoi*), which means resident aliens who could not be fully citizens. This is not insignificant for my argument, especially given that I go on to identify an important exclusionary logic to the politics of determinate utility both in the dialogue and in recent social and political conditions, but for the sake of scope I cannot pursue these thoughts further here. For a consideration of the significance of metics in *Republic* and its context, see Kasimis, *The Perpetual Immigrant and the Limits of Athenian Democracy*.

need and use, on the one hand, and another realm that coordinates need's satisfaction. This condition is the presupposition for the exhibition of objects that de-commodifies them, according to Adorno and Benjamin. In the case of Agamben, it is especially clear that this split is required. He calls the two realms that of living human bodies or substance, on the one hand, and the apparatus that makes us into subjects, on the other. Freedom is found through profanation, for which individuals must first occupy the threshold between the two realms.¹⁷ In sum, the split between people and coordination is merely a fuller accounting of the split between need and freedom that informs the tradition I have been tracking and better accounts for its common features as well as some of the differences between its representatives. But if it is true that the split between need and freedom in the tradition maps onto the split between people and the coordination of their needs, then the former's accommodation also accommodates a politics that constitutively excludes singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity, which are the precise things that Arendt, Brown, and the others want to redeem. But let me be clear about what the accommodation entails. These authors all think that the split between need and its other realm already exists in contemporary life. That is, all the authors I have considered think that need and mere life have come to dominate human life through the expansion of activities that were once a necessary but limited, because constrained, part of life. When I say that they accommodate a split between need and its other realm, I mean that they reproduce this framework for their normative agenda as they try to re-assert the power and prominence of the realm that is purportedly beyond need. After my analysis of Plato, the key question is this: are the features of the split in Plato's first city representative of the split in our contemporary life? And relatedly, if

¹⁷ Agamben, 'What Is an Apparatus?'

the answer is yes, by reproducing the split, even in order to rework it, do Brown and the tradition reinforce, rather than critique and overcome, features of life that denude singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity? If so, then their project is compromised from the start, and any change they can achieve is only one of degree rather than type and may be despite the framework they rely on rather than because of it.

To answer these questions will require some careful work because they raise further questions about, for example, the nature of the relationship between Plato's text and its context and Plato's text and our context. I will address these in the following sections, but for now I want dwell a little longer on Plato's text. My critical reconstruction raises many questions about the adequacy of Plato's account for informing contemporary democratic theory and even as an adequate account of political development at all. On my analysis, it looks like Plato's account is simply riddled with significant problems. It would justifiably lead the reader to wonder, with Leo Strauss, whether Plato could have written this sincerely,¹⁸ or whether I have fundamentally misrepresented the text, or whether "disidentifying with the characters of Plato's texts, figures of authority and acquiescent interlocutors alike, including Socrates," as I have done here, is what Plato intended.¹⁹ Before proceeding to consider the import of this account for contemporary democratic and critical theory, I want to defend Plato's account to some extent. It needs to be said that *within the framework of the dialogue*, the presuppositions I have identified are fairly innocuous, not least because the book does not end with the first city in speech. As I mentioned above, after Glaucon's claim that the city is tantamount to a "city of pigs" (372d2), it is expanded

¹⁸ "Certain it is that the *Republic* supplies the most magnificent cure ever devised for every form of political ambition." Strauss, *The City and Man*, 65.

¹⁹ Frank, *Poetic Justice*, 16.

and transformed significantly, such that Socrates calls it a feverous city set against the true and healthy first city. What follows is a broader more complex determination of needs and roles in the city that turn the tables somewhat, as the inhabitants' expanded needs appear to coordinate the interlocutors. In some respects, we could see this as narrative about the transformation of the interlocutors themselves, who change through the process of collectively considering needs and roles, which may have a transformative effect on the reader in turn.

More than that, the way that Plato founds the first city can be defended within his metaphysics. On the standard interpretation of Plato's metaphysics, Plato's theory of forms means that objects find their proper identity in their form, which eternally and objectively exists in a supra-sensible world of ideas that, despite being beyond sense, is more real than any sensible objects. When it comes to a polis, then, it too is properly speaking a polis only when it participates in the ideal form of the polis in the realm of ideas.²⁰ On this account, Plato's presupposition of the polis is entirely consistent with his metaphysics. The goal of the interlocutors *should* be to model their polis in speech on its ideal form that necessarily pre-exists and ought to determine it. The only concern is whether the starting points did in fact align with the form of the polis. Later in the dialogue, the interlocutors of the *Republic* affirm that they did strike upon the correct starting points, but tellingly they disavow their own role in founding the city in speech as they attribute its founding principle to the help of some god (443b9; cf. 368d5), the gods who only give good things (379a11). The good city is indeed presupposed and its key principle—justice as specialization—was transmitted to the interlocutors by a god. The

²⁰ For the so-called "two-worlds" interpretation in the *Republic*, see Ferrari, "Philosophical Knowledge and Political Beliefs in Plato's Republic 5."

interlocutors then deduce the city and its goodness, consistent with Plato's metaphysics and resulting method.

If the first city in speech can be defended within the framework of the dialogue itself and Plato's broader philosophy, that does not also mean it translates easily into democratic theory. The democratic or anti-democratic status of *Republic* and Plato's broader political philosophy is not clear cut, as the most careful and sophisticated interpretations of his work have appreciated.²¹ But in the case of the first city, Plato's metaphysics does trouble its import into contemporary democratic theory. For instance, owing to John Rawls' influence on democratic theory, many democratic theorists subscribe to the idea that right takes precedence over the good.²² Concerns over the complementarity of *Republic* and contemporary democratic theory are compounded when we account for liberal-democratic forms of universality, such as human rights, as I have identified elsewhere.²³ But here I desist from further consideration about how amenable the *Republic* is, as a whole, to democratic theory because what I am interested in is the way that it forms part of the discursive tradition I have been tracking. That is, I am still primarily concerned with the way that the split between people and the coordination of need's satisfaction, which appears in the first city, has been transmitted in contemporary theory and the political significance of its subjectivation; that is, the way that subjects are situated with respect to power through this split. This is what I am principally concerned with rather than

²¹ See especially Monson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* and, most recently Frank, *Poetic Justice*; For an overview, see Klein and Schillinger, "Entangling Plato: A Guide through the Political Theory Archive."

²² For a discussion, see Ahlberg, "The Priority of the Right over the Good"; Cf. Thakkar, *Plato as Critical Theorist*, for an effort to reconcile Plato with Rawls.

²³ Bradshaw, "Plato as Critical Theorist."

weighing in on the democratic significance of Plato's *Republic* as a whole or simply using his account of use as a foil for an alternative.

Subjectivation

In the previous chapter, I attempted to show that Adorno and Benjamin had already been working with a simplistic conceptualization of use and utility but did not go as far as Arendt, who developed this conception of use into a much larger political analytic that she even attributed to Plato and Aristotle. Arendt's political theory proved to be very influential on the works of Giorgio Agamben and Wendy Brown, works that have become very influential in turn, including in the conceptualization of use. In the previous section I worked carefully to read Plato's first city in *Republic* because Arendt identified it as one key source for her approach to use, which, owing to her influence, means it has been a key source for the way use has come to be conceptualized today. I turned to Plato because I believed he could provide a fuller accounting of what the simplistic conceptualization of use, and the split between need and freedom, entails. But just because Plato's first city provides a fuller picture, it does not necessarily mean that it is *our* picture when use is simplified in the present and the split between need and freedom is affirmed. In the rest of this chapter, I turn to work out to what extent Plato's first city is a picture of our historical, social condition, which includes but is not limited to contemporary political theory. I do so by picking up the idea of subjectivation again, which was introduced with Samuel Chambers at the outset in his critique of Brown's splitting of *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*. While Chambers argued that Brown situated *homo politicus* in an ontological plane that

removed him from the discursive and institutional processes that make us economic subjects, I have by now established that Brown's splitting of *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus* forms part of a much larger discursive tradition, which means it plays out on the political terrain that makes economic subjects. But I still need to establish what kind of economic, or indeed political, subjects this discursive tradition produces. By tracing the tradition back to Plato, I have raised the troubling possibility that the split may produce subjects that efface the qualities and relations that its proponents want to redeem. What remains, then, is to consider whether that is the case. The question is, how and to what extent is contemporary theory implicated in this politics? This is another way of asking about the relationship between Plato's first city and our contemporary condition. I address these questions together by arguing that Plato's first city has already formed part of contemporary subjectivation processes. That is, I argue that the contemporary social condition is already reflected in recent interpretations of Plato's *Republic*, which I attribute to the number of ways that Plato's text represents our contemporary condition, including the politics of determinate utility. But these aspects of Plato's relationship to the present have not been appreciated by scholars. Taking account of them, however, shows how Brown and her tradition form part of contemporary subjectivation processes that, owing to the fuller accounting that Plato allows, compromise the values that they espouse and therefore the critical and democratic import of their work. To do this I will need to detail what subjectivation means. Chambers owes much to the work of Michel Foucault in the way he uses the term and so that is where we can get a better grasp of what it means.

In a short essay entitled, 'The Subject and Power,' that was written just two years prior to his death, Foucault provides a very useful overview of his work that also highlights the key

features of what I have been referring to as “subjectivation.” Foucault begins the essay rather defensively by pointing out that although many people think that power is the central concept in his research, that is not entirely accurate. “My objective, instead,” he writes, “has been to create a history of the different modes by which human beings are made subjects.”²⁴ Power became important to this work because Foucault thought that human subjects were not only “placed in relations of production [as Marx showed] and of signification [as linguistic and semiotics had showed]” but they were “equally placed in power relations which are very complex.”²⁵ But the effort to establish what these power relations entailed was hampered by the lack of existing tools to study power. Not content to settle for the legal models that asked after the *legitimacy* of power or its institutional models such as the state, Foucault developed an analytics of power that was particularly focused on power’s *effects*, which means analyzing *how* power operates rather than what power is and why it exists. The subject, as Foucault understood it, is one of those effects and the primary one at that. Subjectivation, then, denotes the processes by which a human being is made a subject, and this process is largely considered as an effect of power.

One of the reasons Foucault focuses on effects, or the question of “how” power works, is because Foucault distinguishes his approach to power by decentering it. Rather than, say, identifying a sovereign figure to answer what power is, or the divine right of kings to answer the question of why power exists, Foucault conceives of power as a “system of social networks”²⁶ that he elsewhere calls a “*dispositif*,” which is usually translated “apparatus.” As Agamben points out, Foucault “uses [apparatus] quite often, especially from the mid 1970s, when he begins to

²⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 208.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

concern himself with what he calls “governmentality” or “the government of men.”²⁷ In seeking to illuminate the concept, Agamben picks out one of Foucault’s most direct discussions of the term. In an interview he gave in 1977, Foucault says:

“What I’m trying to single out with this term is, first and foremost, a thoroughly heterogeneous set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the network that can be established between these elements.”²⁸

As this quotation makes clear, the apparatus signifies a development in Foucault’s work in so far as it takes into account discourse together with non-discursive elements of power. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault had been working with the notion of “episteme,” a concept that he later reflects on and calls “a specifically discursive dispositive [apparatus]”.²⁹ The concept of the apparatus was developed by Foucault in order to point to a more general set of “discursive and non-discursive” elements, which are therefore “much more heterogeneous.”³⁰ What unites these elements, however, is their shared strategic quality: “This is what the [apparatus] consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge.”³¹ The

²⁷ Agamben, “*What Is an Apparatus?*”, 1.

²⁸ Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” 194; quoted in Agamben, “*What Is an Apparatus?*”, 2.

²⁹ Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” 196–97; cited in and translation modified by Lemke, *Foucault’s Analysis of Modern Governmentality*, 92–93n19.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

strategic element means that an apparatus is oriented around a problem or series of problems at a given historical moment. Thus, the apparatus is “a response to an urgency.”³² Central to the dynamics at work in an apparatus is knowledge, which will both give rise to and also condition an apparatus as it configures the problems to which the apparatus is intimately linked. More than that, the linked operations of the apparatus will also support the knowledge that is at work in it. All of this serves Foucault’s overarching goal to understand how a human being is made a subject. And with the apparatus in mind, we can better understand what Foucault is getting at with the concept of subjectivation. For Foucault, a subject is identified through a constellation of practices and understanding how a human being is made a subject is a process of interpreting “*what* these practices are doing.”³³ These practices, on which converge the interplay of forces that Foucault tries to designate with the notion of the apparatus, disclose what, rather than who, we are at any given time.³⁴ Investigating what we are is Immanuel Kant’s purpose in his now-famous essay, “What is *Aufklärung?*,” an investigation that Foucault says his own work continues.³⁵

With the move to the notion of subjectivation, then, a key shift takes place in the way that I approach Plato’s text. From the close reading that I performed in the foregoing sections, I now move to consider the way that Plato’s text is situated within an apparatus. But the apparatus in question is not one we can easily say Plato, the historical person, or his text was part of at the time of the *Republic*’s writing. Rather, the point is to identify how Plato’s *Republic*,

³² Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” 195, quoted in Agamben, “*What Is an Apparatus?*,” 2.

³³ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 122.

³⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 216. It is the exact opposite for Arendt’s acting being, who discloses who, not what, he is, *The Human Condition*, 181.

³⁵ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 216; Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?”

and specifically the first city, is situated in a more recent and contemporary apparatus. Given it is a philosophical text, the investigation I undertake here is simply one part of an apparatus that, as we have seen, has numerous elements. For the sake of consistency with Chambers' usage, I will first consider Plato's first city in terms of discourse that is also entangled in and forms a strategic partnership with "institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions"³⁶ that make up an apparatus for Foucault. To be clear, my question is, how does Plato's first city already form part of a discursive apparatus that subjectivates us? And because of the link between Plato and recent conceptualizations of use, answering this question is about understanding their relationship to the contemporary apparatus, too. Given the way that subjectivation works through discourse—"against an institutional background," in Chambers' words³⁷—to argue that Plato's text has any power of subjectification as a discursive practice, then, is to say that it already relates to the institutional and not only the discursive background of our own context. But this is an incredible claim given the distance between Plato and ourselves, so it will need to be defended carefully. To do so, I will first turn to two recent interpretations of Plato's first city that come from vastly different methodological and philosophical schools but that, I argue, evince the way that Plato's first city is part of the contemporary apparatus precisely because that apparatus has conditioned the interpretation of the text.

³⁶ Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," 194, quoted in Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, 2.

³⁷ Chambers, *Untimely Politics*, 136.

The First City as a Picture of a Modern Economy?

Earlier, in my analysis of Plato's first city, I compared the market in Plato's first city and the functioning of our own market economy. I noted the significant difference between them on account of the smooth functioning that has been guaranteed by the interlocutors' management of the inhabitants. That is, in Plato's market in the first city, unsocial work has been precluded from the very beginning. The market only exists for the sake of timing, the time that exists between concretely performing work and exchanging it in the market, but not out of concern that this gap signifies the possibility of unsocial work. Rather, the market, with its merchants and retailers, merely accounts for the unlikelihood of sellers and buyers of products arriving at the same time, especially when they are also workers who must be available for the special temporal rhythms of their work, on account of which the principle of specialization was defended (370a7-8). It is somewhat surprising, then, that two very different interpreters of Plato's first city fail to notice this significant difference and rather read Plato's first city as a modern market economy. These interpreters are Malcolm Schofield, the prominent ancient philosopher at Cambridge University, and Jacques Rancière, the contemporary French political philosopher who was a student of Louis Althusser before breaking with Althusser and Marx in significant ways. Both readers of Plato's first city identify it as a modern economy, although for slightly different reasons. Rancière exclaims, "[a]pparently these people are already living within a modern economy"³⁸ because Plato's Socrates justifies the specialization of roles on the basis of producing more, and not only producing better quality things and more easily. Rancière quips,

³⁸ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 4.

“one need not have read Adam Smith to realize that such a division of labor will quickly produce unexchangeable surpluses.”³⁹ Plato’s first city is “apparently” a modern economy, Rancière implies, because it is concerned with producing more, even when it is completely unnecessary. Schofield can provide one response to Rancière’s puzzlement. Like contemporary economies, the first city ends up having exchange relations with other cities since the number of inhabitants, which expands to more than four or five, “can probably not be supported by local resources alone.”⁴⁰ That means imports will be required but, as Socrates notes, “if our servant goes empty-handed to another city, without any of the things needed by those from whom he is trying to get what his own people need, he will come away empty-handed” (370e10-371a1, Reeve translation). And so surpluses will be needed for export in order to support importation. But this is not the primary reason Schofield thinks that the first city represents the “concept of an economy.”⁴¹ Schofield notes that “the sustained train of thought” that informs the constitution of the first city

“is evidently an *analysis*, which by appeal to the one principle of specialisation...demonstrates a dynamic explaining the development and expansion of a whole range of economic activities, culminating in the creation of the market. Of course, Plato does not go on to offer a theory of the mechanics of the operation of the market: there is nothing here approaching classical economics. What he does supply is a sort of

³⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁰ Schofield, *Saving the City*, 66.

⁴¹ Ibid., 67

transcendent deduction of the very existence of the market, which constitutes—I submit—the invention of the concept of an economy.”⁴²

Classical economics or not, Schofield thinks that the concept of specialization is paramount and in the way that Plato deduces the existence of the market from it we get all of the principal features of an economy as we understand it.⁴³

I think Rancière and Schofield are correct to identify the first city as a modern economy, but not for their reasons. Schofield plays down the importance of needs in the city in favour of the principle of specialization. He barely notes that several needs are individually stipulated because he thinks that specialization is the most important feature.⁴⁴ While specialization is clearly important, as the rest of the *Republic* will attest, it is only established *after* needs are stipulated and the roles are determined in accordance with these needs. Moreover, emphasizing specialization over needs makes the first city look less, not more, like modern economies. That is because division of labour is not the same as Plato’s specialization of tasks. Plato’s specialization means one person-one job. The contemporary economic division of labour does break down tasks in order to increase efficiency—per Adam Smith’s famous discussion of the production of pins, which is what Rancière references—but it is far from accurate to say that this

⁴² Ibid., 67

⁴³ Contra Moses Finley, who famously “used to insist that there was no economic analysis in classical antiquity, and indeed no concept of the economy to promote interest in economic analysis.” Schofield, *Saving the City*, 66. See Finley, *The Ancient Economy*.

⁴⁴ Schofield rather draws a comparison between Plato and Diodorus on the importance of needs: “while Diodorus was to make need ‘teacher to men in all things’ (1.8, 9), Plato proposed that what man primarily needs is the things whose production is the object of the basic skills. His key move is to argue that (1) he is not self-sufficient, and therefore looks for help from *others* who possess those of the skills he lacks himself; and (2) the optimal way of satisfying the need [*sic*] specified in (1) is to collect together *specialists* in (and only in) the relevant crafts and skills, since a specialist with a natural gift for his craft will do a better job than a non-specialist, or than someone practicing more than one craft. So for Plato need [*sic*] teaches not so much skills...as the *specialization* of skills.” 65- 66.

also means only one person can do one job. It is a feature of advanced neoliberal capitalism that people have several jobs, in no small part because of the rise of the gig economy but also the casualization of labor and the use of fixed-term contracts. And while Rancière emphasizes the uncertainty over the number of needs, the mechanism through which individuals will be assigned to roles, and the reason why so many goods need to be produced, he astutely identifies aspects of contemporary market economies.⁴⁵ But these are less uncertain when we take account of the power that the interlocutors assume over the city to coordinate needs, which Rancière completely ignores. The components Rancière flags are not completely indeterminate because they are under the control of the theorist-founders who have absolute authority over them and stabilize them by the time that the first city is complete. And with this control in mind we can respond to Schofield's point about there being no "theory of the mechanics of the operation of the market" in Plato even if there is the concept of an economy. Quite simply, there are no mechanics to analyse apart from the control exerted by the founders, which is on full display. So even bearing this power in mind, how, then, is Plato's first city like, and unlike, modern economies? Or, in other words, how does it relate to our contemporary apparatus of power in which, as Chambers points out, discourse about the economy is a site of contest and struggle and so a site of politics?

Despite the significant difference I noted between it and our contemporary markets, Plato's first city is both an *idealized* market economy and a (neoliberal) economist's worst nightmare. Indeed, the smooth path to the socialization of goods in the economy is a point of difference between the first city and modern markets that also makes the first city an idealized

⁴⁵ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 4 ff.

economy. Because from at least the nineteenth century to the present, a diverse range of thinkers have evaluated the market in terms of its ability to make needs and goods—i.e., demand and supply—perfectly correspond. Take, for example, the famous nineteenth-century socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon was one of a number of nineteenth-century thinkers who were preoccupied with what they saw as the cheating of laborers out of the full value of their labor.⁴⁶ Proudhon and others thought that since money was produced and monopolized by the merchant and ruling classes—from which the laboring classes were by definition excluded—these classes could dictate the price paid for goods. Whatever the motivation, the claim was that this price was routinely less than the full value of the objects, which they believed was the product of their very labor, and the difference meant that laborers were being cheated out of money that was rightfully theirs. Different people proposed various solutions to this alleged problem, but Proudhon's is worth noting because it highlights the terms with which the market was evaluated. In his address to the Constituent National Assembly in Paris on July 31, 1848, Proudhon proposed the establishment of a free credit bank to effectively universalize the dispensation of credit. Access to credit would enable individuals, including laborers, and society as a whole to fully indulge their consumptive capacity, which Proudhon thought was infinite.⁴⁷ The result would be that anything that was produced would not only be bought by someone, somewhere, but at its full value to boot. It is clear that the perfect market consisted of a complete correspondence between demanding needs (which are actually limitless wants in Proudhon's perspective) and supplied goods.

⁴⁶ This discussion of the nineteenth century owes much to William Clare Roberts' *Marx's Inferno*, especially chapter 3, which I discuss at length in chapter 5.

⁴⁷ Proudhon, *Property Is Theft!*, 345–51.

We can also consider why Plato's first city is an idealized market from another, completely different, time and school of economic and political thinking. The famous Austrian economist and neoliberal champion Friedrich Hayek also articulates the ideal market in terms of a correspondence of demand and supply. Hayek opens his famous 1945 article, 'The Use of Knowledge in Society,' with a question: "What is the problem we wish to solve when we try to construct a rational economic order?"⁴⁸ For my purpose here, I will begin by identifying what "a rational economic order" is, because it reveals the overlap between Hayek and the first city. Hayek answers this question very tersely in "mathematical form."⁴⁹ The perfect economy exists when "the marginal rates of substitution between any two commodities or factors must be the same in all their different uses."⁵⁰ In layman's terms, Hayek is simply saying that the perfect economy exists when the distribution of resources is such that there is no single item that could replace any of my goods, or anyone else's goods, that would improve my situation or anyone else's. In other words, the perfect market means that everyone has exactly what they need given their particular life plans. In Plato, this is secured by the interlocutors stipulating needs, roles, and socialization from the very beginning, and so the first city appears to be an idealized market to Hayek, too. But Hayek is also the neoliberal economist I had in mind when I said that the first city is also a nightmare. To appreciate the reason, it is essential to understand the identity of the "we" in Hayek's leading question ("we wish to solve when we try..."). Their identity becomes apparent in the distinction he immediately draws.

⁴⁸ Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," 519.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Hayek points out how some people would answer his leading question. Look at the given preferences and the available means, assume they are stable, and then we—the people who look at this data—can establish the “best use of the available means.” But Hayek immediately counterposes this “we”—who are simply defined by their way of answering the question—with another we: “society.” The problem that the first “we” faces “is emphatically *not* the economic problem which society faces.”⁵¹ In the world in which we, members of society, live, all the things that the first “we” looked at to answer the question are simply not meaningful. That is because the data of all preferences and available means are not really data at all. “Data” means “given things,” and all preferences and available resources are not data for the simple reason that these pieces of information are absolutely *not* given to any single comprehending mind. These pieces of information are dispersed or, as in the case of preferences that inform a life plan, known only to a singular individual. In making this intervention, Hayek is adopting the point of view of the singular individual in the economy. Using Plato’s first city as analogy, he is giving voice to those who have no voice in Plato’s first city, which, you will recall, was a condition for the smooth operation of the market. Now Hayek wants to achieve the smooth operation of the market *through* the singular individuals in the market by creating the means that use their knowledge to greatest effect. That being the case, Hayek rephrases the problem that any singular individual must face, now with a crucial epistemological qualification: “It is rather a problem of how to secure the best use of resources known to any of the members of society, for ends whose relative importance only these individuals know.”⁵² Hayek goes on to explain that the answer lies

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 520.

in the market and the perfection of the price mechanism, which signals relevant changes in demand or supply to any individual. “In a free market, the price of a commodity supposedly communicates the level of scarcity (to the buyer) and the level of demand (to the seller).”⁵³ And so we can see that the perfect economy is really a perfect market, which is most likely to be achieved when we release the market from any form of interference, particularly in the form of central planning. Ensuring the adequate functioning of the price mechanism will involve some role for government, as even the most ardent libertarians agree,⁵⁴ but a strong element of central planning would be both inefficient and deleterious to individual plans. For Hayek, our energies should be applied to closing the gap between demanding needs and goods supplied—the one respect in which why Plato’s first city is ideal—but that is never achieved by central planning. As Hayek puts it elsewhere, any amount of success in central planning would only be achieved by “an omniscient dictator.”⁵⁵ This is exactly what Plato’s interlocutors represent to Hayek, and so his worst nightmare.

Neoliberalism is a term that has been thrown around a lot, especially in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. It is not within the scope of this chapter or even this dissertation to enter debate about how prevalent it is.⁵⁶ I take it as given, however, that several thinkers, who have been grouped together under the name neoliberalism, have had a profound influence on the discursive and institutional elements of contemporary life. This influence is

⁵³ Hägglund, *This Life: Why Mortality Makes Us Free*, 297.

⁵⁴ E.g., Robert Nozick: “a minimal state, limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on, is justified.” Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ix.

⁵⁵ Hayek, “Economics and Knowledge,” 51.

⁵⁶ Important works include Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and, more recently, Whyte, *The Morals of the Market*, that shows how deep the neoliberal influence has reached given its role in establishing human rights as the dominant social, economic, and political institution worldwide.

owing to their academic work but also, and perhaps primarily, to their advisory work to governments, especially in the United States, from around the 1970s and into the '90s. Friedrich Hayek is one of the central thinkers within this school. In as much as his aversion to central powers and their involvement in the market function is representative of the school as a whole, I take the dominance of neoliberalism as one influence on the economic interpretations of Plato's first city by Schofield and Rancière that saw it as a modern economy and entirely ignored the interlocutors' role.

It is also important to note, though, that the neoliberal aversion to a central planner in the economy does not make Plato's first city irrelevant to our condition. Rather, I submit that it is the opposite. My careful reading of Plato's first city attunes us to the effects of power when it is used to create an idealized market. These effects are real regardless of the locus of the power used to perfect a market, or indeed if the power is dispersed. To show this, consider Martin Hägglund's critique of Hayek. Hägglund points out that Hayek's account of the market conspicuously omits capitalists, who are predominantly responsible for the production of objects today. On Hayek's analysis of the market, all individuals in the economy are alike in that they make plans for their lives that rely on resources and through their use of objects they both take resources and make them available so that their individual needs will be met. When this is aggregated *en masse*, the resulting price mechanism communicates to people how realizable their plans are given the current availability of resources. But Hägglund aptly points out that the capitalist does not make resources available so that others' needs will be met. Rather, he does so on condition that it valorizes capital and furthers its accumulation. In other words, the capitalist holds resources hostage to that end. That is one explanation for some people being so vastly

overserved while others struggle to satisfy even subsistence needs. Under capitalist conditions—by which I simply mean where the dominant form of production is one where privately owned means produce commodities under the conditions of wage labour—profit, and therefore capital valorization, is the determinate end to which humans and their knowledge are made useful through their simplistic use of objects. As with Plato’s first city, this will include coordination for needs’ satisfaction, but we see how under capitalist conditions, with no ostensive central power, capitalist coordination still entails a determination over what counts as need. Plato’s first city is not capitalist and is more purely biopolitical in so far as the lives of the inhabitants appears to be of primary importance—Socrates even calls it the healthy city. But this merely shows that the end to which the politics of determinate utility works is less important than its form, which is mostly discerned through its effects.

Before looking for more of the effects of the politics of determinate utility in our contemporary condition, let me return one more time to Hayek. Although it is true that Hayek gives voice to the singular individual in his conceptualization of the problem that society faces with the economy, Hayek is still entirely focused on the use of objects. That is because he conceptualizes singularity in terms of the use of objects for the sake of an individual’s utility maximization according to their life plans. The “knowledge” that matters to Hayek is simply the knowledge of the circumstances of objects in use. So, humans are mere conduits to the efficient use of objects, meaning Hayek’s “use of knowledge” is still very much within the simplistic conceptualization of use and utility. Given this was the first condition of the politics of determinate utility, Hayek’s conceptualization of singularity still suffers from the effacement that is an effect of the politics of determinate utility. This is incredible, since Hayek built his entire

career around trying to stamp out the tyrannical form of authority that he thought could only be introduced in the economy through central planning. From the perspective wrought by Plato's first city, Hayek is practically implicated in it, too.

Having identified the politics of determinate utility in Plato's text and, moreover, established at least one plausible reason for identifying it even in our neoliberal context, I have subtly reversed the way I have been relating Plato's text to the contemporary context. When I was reading Rancière and Schofield's interpretations of Plato, I was examining the reception of Plato in order to show how his text has formed part of our contemporary apparatus of power. But when I critiqued Hayek for omitting the role of capitalists in the market, I did so in terms of the politics of determinate utility. That means I reversed the gaze by reading Plato's *Republic* back into the present, not to note the differences between them, but rather the similarities. I recognize that this is a risky manoeuvre because it risks flattening numerous historical differences between Plato and his context and our own while implying that Plato may be responsible for whatever affinity that is discovered between them. But I believe it is defensible in so far as the move illuminates features of our contemporary life that the discursive apparatus does not draw attention to, but without making any causal claims about Plato's role in this, even considering the transmission of Plato in the contemporary tradition that has been influential. That means we can read the politics of determinate utility back into the present, although not directly. That is because I merely want to draw attention to the contemporary presence of the politics of determinate utility through its constitutive features. I am not attempting to explain its historical causes. And I definitely cannot identify a few "interlocutors" who are the headquarters of the politics of determinate utility. I have already identified the way that the politics of

determinate utility exists today in the form of a split between people and the coordination of needs' satisfaction, at least in so far as needs are satisfied through, and so partly determined by, the production of goods by capitalists for the sake of valorizing and accumulating capital. I want to go one step further, however, and in Foucauldian fashion identify the politics of determinate utility through its effects. I do so by considering the exclusion of multiplicity for the sake of the market that is apparent in the treatment of immigrants. Then I will conclude by returning to the question of how Brown and the tradition of the split subjectivate us in light of the politics of determinate utility today.

Immigration as an Effect of the Politics of Determinate Utility

Recall that one of the features of the etiology was the presupposition of a pool of individuals from whom the interlocutors could choose in order to populate the city on the basis of their pre-determined needs. It is exclusionary of a whole swathe of individuals as a people is constituted out of a multitude. Having seen the culmination of this process in the perfected market, we can now add that it is a market metric that determines the identity of this people. This is not foreign to contemporary social conditions, either. Consider the contemporary treatment of immigrants and refugees. Describing unskilled immigrants in the wake of WWII, Didier Fassin writes:

their bodies were instruments in the service of the host country and their labour conferred upon them a legitimacy that the law often only confirmed *a posteriori*, as their work permit actually constituted their legal documentation.⁵⁷

In other words, the participation of immigrants in France was accepted on the basis of their utility to the growing post-WWII economy.⁵⁸ This analysis forms part of Fassin's work on the politics of immigration and refugees and in particular the way that the granting of asylum has changed in Western nations over the course of the last seventy years.⁵⁹ According to Fassin, a pronounced change took place in the 1970s and 80s⁶⁰ whereby refugee status was not conferred on the basis of economic utility but granted almost exclusively to asylum seekers with health problems that could not be treated in their home countries.⁶¹ For Fassin, this all but confirms Agamben's theory that bare life is the operating assumption of state sovereignty. But Fassin's characterization is only possible in so far as one focuses on the processes behind the *official* granting of asylum at the state level. What it does not give due attention to is the ongoing presence and participation in the economy of many despite not being granted either refugee status nor work permits, and often with the complicity of the respective governments. Taking stock of this invites further scrutiny of the changes in attitudes and policies with respect to immigrants over the last seventy years.

⁵⁷ Fassin, "The Biopolitics of Otherness," 5.

⁵⁸ See also Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, especially chapter 9, "The Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man".

⁵⁹ For instance, in France in 1976, 95% of asylum seekers were granted refugee status, compared with 6% in 2006. Fassin, "Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times," 220.

⁶⁰ For an analysis of the longer cycles, going back to the end of the 18th century, see Fetzer, *Public Attitudes toward Immigration in the United States, France, and Germany*.

⁶¹ Fassin, "The Biopolitics of Otherness."

For instance, what Fassin does not note is the coincidence of this change in the treatment of immigrants with the major transformations in global economics represented by the crisis of Bretton-Woods style global capitalism and the subsequent transformations of the major Western economies. In light of this, rather than abandon the economic logic that made immigrants welcome, the transformation of immigration politics seems to underscore it. Looking at the contemporary rhetoric and action of both state and non-state actors seems to reinforce this thesis. Proponents of immigration either explicitly argue for the ways in which immigrants are good for the economy since, for one, they increase demand for goods, thus providing the impetus for more production, which amounts to jobs and growth. This is represented, for instance, in the 2007 book by Phillip Legrain with the telling title, *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them*.⁶² Or more recently proponents have referred to our obligations to uphold current conceptions of human rights, but this normally pertains to people fleeing a crisis. Even then, as we have seen in the EU in the last decade, the discussion quickly moves to distributing responsibility for refugee intake among several countries. This centers the debate once again on an economic metric. Moreover, there is reason to believe that even under the auspices of protecting human life, the distribution of people is calculated in terms of their capacity to contribute to the destination country.⁶³ For instance, in 2016 Turkey blocked the resettlement of 1000 Syrian refugees to the US on the grounds that they had university qualifications. Turkey took exception to the US for supposedly cherry picking the best of the bunch.⁶⁴ The plight of refugees in Turkey at the time further supports my argument. While many of the 2.5 million

⁶² Legrain, *Immigrants*.

⁶³ As Fassin has called it, refugees are traded in a “market of compassion.” Fassin, “From Right to Favor.”

⁶⁴ Kingsley, “Turkey Blocks Syrian Refugees from Resettlement in the US – for Having Degrees.”

refugees did not have work permits, many ended up working on the black market for terrible wages and no rights,⁶⁵ a situation that harkens back to the early days of industrial capitalism. Lastly, even Donald Trump made concessions to illegal immigrants on the grounds of their utility to society, as revealed in his notorious town hall meeting with Fox News' Sean Hannity.⁶⁶

All the cited examples are favorable to immigration on the basis of economic utility. But equally familiar is opposition to immigration on the basis of disutility. In May 2016, the Australian Minister for Immigration Peter Dutton said as much when he claimed immigrants were largely illiterate, uneducated and unskilled.⁶⁷ In the end, the immigrant is susceptible to accusations of both utility and disutility, as when people complain that "foreigners are taking our jobs,"⁶⁸ which was what Dutton was actually claiming. Economic utility is patent in so far as the immigrant can get a job, but this is precisely what makes them useless from the perspective of a rival job-seeker. I point to all this to establish the affinity between the market metric that governs the constitution of the people out of a multitude in Plato's first city and the way that contemporary borders appear not to be physical lines or the presence or absence of legal status, but rather in terms of participation in the market economy.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Kingsley, "Fewer than 0.1% of Syrians in Turkey in Line for Work Permits."

⁶⁶ Schwartz, "Trump Live Polls Immigration Policy With Hannity Town Hall Audience: 'Who Wants Them Thrown Out?'" Even the Taliban, upon retaking power in Afghanistan in 2021, have objected to Afghans fleeing the country because "this country needs their expertise," as Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid put it. Doherty, "'I Am an Australian Citizen.'"

⁶⁷ Bourke, "Peter Dutton Says 'illiterate and Innumerate' Refugees Would Take Australian Jobs."

⁶⁸ The latter is as widespread as it is unfounded. Pritchett, "The Cliff at the Border."

⁶⁹ On the notion of borders, I wish to follow Martina Löw in saying that borders are not physical, but rather social (or economic). Löw, *Raumsoziologie*, 130. Cited in Wessel, "On Border Subjects," 49–50.

The treatment of immigrants is one of the ways that we can see the effects of the politics of determinate utility, even if we are not able to locate its “headquarters,” in Foucault’s terms. The politics of determinate utility can be witnessed today, then, and that minimally means that the apparatus that instantiates the politics of determinate utility exists and human beings have been constituted to some extent by its determination of needs, roles, and mode of socialization, too. But in claiming that the politics of determinate utility is manifest today and apparent through its effects, I am not claiming that it constitutes *the totality* of life today. This is especially important now in returning to the tradition that affirms the split. I have argued that the split between need and freedom—that brings Adorno, Benjamin, Arendt, Agamben, and Brown together to form a tradition—is itself one feature of the politics of determinate utility, but that in Plato it is more fully depicted as a split between people and the coordination of needs’ satisfaction. To think about how that theoretical tradition subjectivates us today, however, I have argued that it only forms part of a discursive apparatus that can only be apprehended against the background of a more general apparatus that features non-discursive elements, too. In making that shift—from the purely discursive in Plato to the discursive element of a larger more encompassing apparatus today—means that by affirming the split, theorists are not responsible for *producing* that split. Although I am not providing an historical account about the causes of the politics of determinate utility, it would be absurd to suggest that these theorists somehow brought the entire apparatus into existence. Returning to my schematic outline of the politics of determinate utility, the broader apparatus in which the politics of determinate utility inheres is

also the reason why consciousness of the way that it works is not enough to change it. To be clear, the politics of determinate utility is not an illusion that can be dispelled by lifting a veil. It inheres in practices that are in relation to an apparatus that is not readily manipulable either by a single individual or simply by becoming aware of its features. But in so far as the apparatus, of which the politics of determinate utility forms a part, is maintained by its various elements, theorists have a role to play in the politics of determinate utility, too. That is, by affirming the split, theorists reproduce a key discursive element of the apparatus and the politics of determinate utility. In so far as the politics of determinate utility effaces singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity, then, these theorists fundamentally compromise their efforts from the start.

But apart from the way that the discursive relates to the non-discursive elements of an apparatus, there is also a question about the extent to which an apparatus encompasses human life. This has been a point of contention in Foucault scholarship. That is because Foucault's frequent claims to study power relationally and with a view to subject formation can lead to the view that subjects only exist as an effect of power. But if that is true, there is no subject outside of power relations and thus no ground from which to resist or even articulate a problem. So, as Axel Honneth famously argued, "although everything in his critique of the modern age appears concentrated on the suffering of the human body under the disciplinary action of the modern apparatus of power, there is nothing *in* his theory which could articulate this suffering *as* suffering."⁷⁰ In other words, who can identify suffering if there is no true account of not-suffering? It was for lack of a subject of resistance that Judith Butler turned to Lacan who, by distinguishing between the subject and the psyche, provided the possibility to account for

⁷⁰ Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of Critique of Modernity," 131.

resistance because “the psyche is what resists.”⁷¹ But if there is no subject of resistance in Foucault then power is not truly relational because it construes power as emanating from a source that has total power to create and incite subjects as it works on human bodies, much like what we saw in Plato’s first city.⁷² In the end, Foucault wants to see power in relational terms, which means there is “no absolute outside,”⁷³ and to hold on to the possibility of resistance by insisting “there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, in groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power.”⁷⁴ But according to Thomas Lemke, “resistance remains cast in negative terms and proves fundamentally abstract.”⁷⁵ The problem, for Lemke, is that “the success or failure of political strategies cannot be addressed.”⁷⁶

But perhaps Foucault’s approach to resistance can be scrutinized through the problem of need and the politics of determinate utility in the first city. Theorizing about people’s needs runs the risk of imputing to them an additional and presupposed need to be managed. Similarly, theoretical generalizations about people’s resistance treats their resistance as something that can and even should be managed. Or, as Lemke frames it, it risks framing resistance as something that needs to be approved of by others for its success.⁷⁷ By conceptualizing resistance abstractly and insisting that power relations always “depend on a multiplicity of points of

⁷¹ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 86. For a critical discussion of Butler and Foucault, see Chambers, *Untimely Politics*, chapter 5.

⁷² Nicos Poulantzas thinks that there is no subject of resistance because Foucault’s conception of power is inconsistent: “It designates at one moment a *relation* (the power relation), at another, and often simultaneously, *one pole* of the power-resistances relation.” Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* / [by] Nicos Poulantzas ; Translated [from the French] by Patrick Camiller., 149, cited in Lemke, *Foucault’s Analysis of Modern Governmentality*, p. 117.

⁷³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

⁷⁴ Foucault, “Power and Strategies,” 138.

⁷⁵ Lemke, *Foucault’s Analysis of Modern Governmentality*, 118.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Kant’s evaluation of the French Revolution in terms of the enthusiasm it elicited in spectators comes to mind.

resistance,”⁷⁸ Foucault resists that move, trusting that there is something there that will resist without his direction and the separation that presupposes. The value of his work, nonetheless, lies in its contribution to a subject that better understands what it is up against.

Against Foucault’s approach, the tradition of the split that I have been tracking here effectively accommodates the apparatus in expectation that it can be manipulated for their ends. So, even in his direct discussions of Foucault, Agamben has taken a more straightforward approach in his conceptualization of the apparatus. Agamben thinks that there is a discernible gap between an apparatus and any living human being. So, Agamben writes, “I wish to propose to you nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured.”⁷⁹ The apparatus itself “designates that in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being.”⁸⁰ That is, an apparatus is something that has no substance itself. And so, “apparatuses must always imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce a subject.”⁸¹ But Agamben radically expands the idea of an apparatus, so that he writes, “I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.”⁸² And the definitive feature of “the extreme phase of capitalist development” in which we live means there is not “even a single instant in which the life of individuals is not modelled, contaminated,

⁷⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

⁷⁹ Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 14.

or controlled by some apparatus.”⁸³ If Agamben accommodates a split between people and the coordination of need’s satisfaction it is because he thinks that life is so totally saturated by contemporary apparatuses that it cannot be avoided. That is why he reconfigures freedom in terms of the threshold position, which can be accessed through the appropriate gestures.

More straightforwardly, Arendt’s accommodation of the split between need and freedom is less out of resignation, as it is for Agamben, and more affirmative. For Arendt and also Brown, by affirming the right end the split can support more singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity. But Arendt also seems to suppose that the forces of necessity that define the realm of labor are never so great that they entirely exclude the disclosure of singularity. Returning to her claim about ancient materialism’s error, Arendt appears to be saying that whatever the effect of splitting the realm of need and freedom, Action and therefore natal disclosure will occur. But on my reading of the split through Plato and the politics of determinate utility, if singularity can be disclosed then it will be despite the split and the politics of determinate utility, not because of them. By both accommodating the split and conceptualizing freedom in its terms, the theorists of the tradition contribute to the process by which singular humans are subjectivated in a way that excludes singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity because they think inside the discursive apparatus through which this is reinforced. My purpose in this dissertation is to refuse that discourse and its split, and in so doing refuse the politics of determinate utility. I do so by recovering the idea of the use of humans. Aristotle is my principal interlocutor in this task and in so far as his account is a critical response to Plato’s etiology as represented by *Republic’s* first city, this chapter has helped us in that recovery.

⁸³ Ibid., 15.

Chapter 3

Aristotelian Beginnings I: The Politics of Indeterminate Utility

If the problem with the conceptualization of use and utility today is that it is purportedly divorced from politics, oriented around the use of objects, and effaces human singularity and collectivity from the start, that is not the case with Aristotle. As we saw in the previous chapters, contemporary use and utility have significant affinity with Plato's conceptualization of use in the first city, the city of pigs, in *Republic*. Such a conceptualization excludes singularity, collectivity, and multiplicity at the moment its founders—the dialogue's interlocutors—discursively bring the city into existence and install a pure split between people and the coordination of needs' satisfaction. In a passage that encapsulates Aristotle's distance from this approach to use, Aristotle writes, "politics (*politikē*) takes humans from nature and uses (*chrētai*) them" (*Pol.* I.10.1258a22-23). Every term in this phrase signals a departure from Plato's and contemporary theory's conceptualization of use. Aristotle shifts use from the intrapersonal to the interpersonal as use is something that takes place between humans rather than between a human and an object. Aristotle attaches use, so understood, to politics, not economics or the satisfaction of limited needs. And Aristotle conceives of the human being that politics takes up and uses as a singularity. For as we saw in the introduction, Aristotle conceives of human beings as singularities, and the fact that politics takes humans *from nature* means it is the singular human being that constitutes politics' material, just as wool is a weaver's (*Pol.* I.10.1258a25-26).

By understanding politics as the use of singular humans, Aristotle is the right person to address the leading question of this dissertation, “how useful are humans for politics?” More than that, this is perhaps the best leading question for interpreting Aristotle’s political theory. If so, given the contentiousness of my question in the current context, Aristotle is well placed to help me approach human use and its politics anew rather than in the simplistic terms in which use has been conceptualized today, although often enough through a limited reading of Aristotle.

But theorizing the use of singular humans with Aristotle will not be entirely straightforward. As we saw in the introduction, Aristotle also says that the singularity of human beings is inaccessible to theory and to politics because they only deal with people of “such-and-such a sort (*to toiosdi*)” (*Rhetoric*, I.2.1356b34); that is, with types of people. That is because the theoretical sciences are concerned with explaining the necessary causes of things that are already given to us and therefore already determined. As something unlimited (*ibid.*), the singular is indeterminate and therefore cannot be included within the main causal account. The practical and productive sciences, like the crafts, are concerned with making something good. As Aristotle understands the good, it is something determinate with respect to types. Singularity, therefore, falls out of Aristotle’s main accounts, whether theoretical or practical.

But if it is nonetheless true that humans are singularities that also form the material of politics, then it should be the case that singularity represents a problem for politics and the use of humans. That is, there should be a certain recalcitrance manifested at the point where the singular cannot be accommodated within politics. This is what makes singularity a generative problem for politics that is an ongoing and dynamic use of humans. It is also what makes for a

richer and more complex theorization of use and utility in Aristotle than in Plato or contemporary theory. Aristotle, therefore, provides fertile material for a reorientation to use and utility. That is preeminently on display where Aristotle says we get the best theoretical grasp on the polis and politics, which occurs in the “endlessly rich”¹ etiology of *Politics* I.2, and *chrēsis* as use is its centrepiece.

The etiology of I.2 will be my focus on this chapter and the next. In this chapter, I will examine one of Aristotle’s two conceptualizations of use and utility that forms the centrepiece of the etiology and yet one that Aristotle readers and scholars have everywhere ignored. The first conceptualization of use and utility and the focus of this chapter is what Aristotle calls “the first household.” It consists of the first two communities out of which the polis grows, that of male and female and then master and slave. Aristotle elliptically sums up these relations as instances of “everyday/every-day use” (*Pol.*I.2.1252b13). By elaborating on this conception of use with reference to Aristotle’s other works and different methodologies, I argue that it is a remarkable conception of human use that better serves a democratic politics wishing to redeem singularity and democratic collectivity than the conception of use coming out of the Platonized Aristotle of Arendt, Agamben, Brown, and others. That is because “everyday/every-day use” is the result of the one place where Aristotle *must* account for singular human beings coming together in a politically significant way: at the incipient moment of the *polis’* generation when male and female come together for the first time and so begin the process of the polis’ development. As I read it, Aristotle theorizes the relationship between male and female in terms of questioning and valuing human utility for alternative use as they come together to work out their singular

¹ Pellegrin, “Is Politics a Natural Science?,” 27.

functions for an indeterminate common purpose. This is the politics of indeterminate utility that is entirely absent in Plato's and contemporary approaches to use. It is a modality of use that facilitates a transfer between singularity and collectivity whose indeterminacy stems from its open, egalitarian, agonistic, and androgynous character. With Aristotle, then, singularity is bound up with the natality of the polis, not Arendt's individual, and what Aristotle calls the "first household (*oikia prōtē*)" (*Pol.*I.2.1252b10) and not simply defined against the household, as many have thought. But everyday/every-day use further entails a human that Aristotle says is both ruled and a slave. And so everyday/every-day use instantiates both the politics of indeterminate utility and of determinate utility that helps give us the "best theoretical grasp" on politics as the use of humans.

The conceptualization of everyday/every-day use plays a specific role in I.2 and is therefore closely connected to the gender of the first two humans who come together. But there are reasons to believe that the politics of indeterminate utility, a key element of it, exceeds its delimited role and its essentially gendered nature in I.2. In the process of elaborating on it with reference to other parts of Aristotle's work, we get a sense that it is widespread, even within the mature polis of Aristotle's day, and that it is not limited to a male and a female but rather inheres in a variety of human friendships. But the politics of indeterminate utility has not been appreciated either in the etiology or Aristotle's work as a whole. That is no doubt because Aristotle himself overshadows, even disavows, indeterminate use, which begins in the etiology itself. For everyday/every-day use has barely been identified before it is transformed into what Aristotle calls "not-ephemeral use" as the first household grows into the village and the polis. This is the second conceptualization of use and utility in Aristotle and the one that dominates his

thinking about the use of humans. It is, in short, the use of humans as political rule, where some have the power to determine the use of others for the sake of some good. This will be the focus of the next chapter, and it shows where Aristotle diminishes and betrays the democratic and emancipatory potential of the politics of indeterminate utility. Indeterminate human use goes from being a generative problem for the polis to a problem that needs to be eradicated. Undergirding this transformation is Aristotle's commitment to the idea of the human good, *eudaimonia*, as a determinate good and in terms of which everything else must be determined. And so indeterminate use becomes a symptom of his ethical and political thought. Recall that the symptom names the by-product of Aristotle's distinctive scientific methodology that is committed to accounting for the singular in its irreducible moments of becoming and also folding everything within a totalizing and teleological system. There are phenomena that fall outside of Aristotle's scientific account, and these by-products are symptoms. I argue that indeterminate use is a symptom of Aristotle's thought because it is, on the one hand, an ineradicable feature of human life that stems from human singularity and the propensity to use each other to establish common purpose. On the other hand, however, it jars with Aristotle's conception of the human good and the polis as a vehicle for its emergence in human life. It will therefore take a great deal of interpretive labor to prize this aspect of use's conceptualization out of Aristotle's work. Reading for the symptom will help us disclose if and where the politics of indeterminate utility reappear, despite Aristotle's disavowal of it. But in order to look for it, we must first get a theoretical grasp of what it is, which is my goal in this chapter.

My argument proceeds as follows. I first argue that using Aristotle to think about political beginnings—as contemporary theorists have widely done—requires us to attend to Aristotle's

own beginnings. And since Aristotle begins by wishing to see how the *polis* “grows from the start,” I argue that the etiology needs to be carefully read with its methodology in mind because it distinguishes this account from much of Aristotle’s other treatments of both the *oikos* and the *polis*, although it will illuminate those aspects of his work, too. I call it Aristotle’s spectral analysis, which attempts to reconstruct the earliest stages of the *polis*’ growth through an array of methodological tools. As with the rest of Aristotle’s scientific methodology, it displays Aristotle’s dual commitment to the singular as far as possible while accounting for these with an overarching systematic narrative. Owing to the unique task Aristotle undertakes in the etiology, however, I argue that there is no symptom here. It is only in the transformation of use through greater determinacy that indeterminate use becomes a symptom and—owing to its connection with the origins of the *polis* and Aristotle’s spectral analysis—a spectral symptom. Armed with this newfound perspective, I then focus on the first realm of use, that of the first *oikos*, while subsequent chapters will deal with the village and the *polis* with its political regime. In Aristotle’s representation of the first *oikos*, we see how Aristotle mobilizes the concept of human use to explain how singular individuals establish the central dynamics that constitute the process of the *polis*’ development from beginning to end. The first of those two communities, that of the first male and female, will take up most of my attention here because it is both significantly different from male-female relations as Aristotle accounts for them in the more developed *polis* but this first couple also establishes the main elements of the politics of indeterminate utility that I wish to reprise here. It is in the first *oikos*, in sum, that we see the open, egalitarian, agonistic, and androgynous politics of human use that can serve a democratic account of human use. I finish by looking briefly at the household’s first slave and the androgynous mode of rule exercised over it,

which helps us grasp the relationship established between the politics of indeterminate and determinate use in the first household and in the subsequent larger forms of community.

The Beginning

Given Aristotle's practice of changing methodologies according to the nature of the object under consideration, it is striking that Aristotle begins his *Politics* by announcing his intention to first approach politics through the lens of theoretical inquiry. That is, in order to get clarity on what it is he is studying when he approaches human life in the polis, Aristotle intends to "investigate the matter in accord with the method of inquiry that has guided us elsewhere" (I.1.1252a17). That method of inquiry involves breaking down a compound into its incomposite parts (I.1.1252a18-20). In saying this, Aristotle is declaring his intention to first study the polis with a natural-scientific lens. He fulfils that promise in the etiology, sometimes called the "genetic account," of the polis in the next chapter of Book I.²

My focus, then, will be on *Politics* I.2, which is the section at the heart of Brown's, Arendt's, Agamben's, and Chambers' engagements with Aristotle and where Aristotle locates the *polis'* and his own theoretical beginning. As I read this section, its significance lies in *its* beginning and its account *of* beginnings, particularly the way that Aristotle employs his method "to see how things grow from the start" (I.2.1252a24). It entails a special methodology that results in the etiology's minimalism and above all its emphasis on process that is encapsulated in the word

² I prefer "etiology" to "genetic account," because etiology retains the importance of causality and therefore the starting point (*archē*).

chrēsis, “use.” Its minimalism and process-emphasis particularly show up when the account is set against two others: Plato’s, at *Republic* 369, which we have already examined in the previous chapter; and Aristotle’s elaborations on both the development of the *polis* and the components of the *polis* elsewhere in his work. Its minimalism and process-emphasis, I argue, are the keys to a more textually faithful, theoretically nuanced, and, for democratic politics, promising account of the household and its supposedly economic activities.

So, what lies “at the beginning”? Not *logos*, as Jacques Rancière would have us believe,³ nor *chreia* (need) as the Platonic reading would suggest, but rather a statement of method. It is precisely in the opening lines of this chapter, with the etiology of the polis, that Aristotle says he wants to see “how things grow from the start (*ei dē tis ex arches ta pragmata phuomena blepseien*)” (Pol. I.2.1252a24). What does this involve, exactly? When Aristotle says that he wants to consider how things grow from the start, he does so to understand, retrospectively, something that already exists and that he is familiar with in a developed form. This is, in sum, Aristotle’s theoretical-scientific method.⁴ The “best kind (*genos*) of science is that of the theoretical sciences” (*Metaphysics* XI.7.1064b2-3), Aristotle writes. When Aristotle speaks of “theoretical sciences,” he most especially means theology, mathematics, and natural science. When he is being most strict, only the former two count because they deal with “eternal,

³ For Rancière, “the beginning” means “the celebrated sentences in book I of Aristotle’s *Politics* that define the eminently political nature of the human animal and lay the foundations of the city,” and he goes on to quote and discuss Aristotle’s on *phonē* and *logos* at length. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 1.

⁴ Contra Cooper, who thinks that the etiology that traces the oikos to the village to the city in I.2 is not a biological account. He does call it a “quasi-genetic account,” however, and thinks that Aristotle introduces a biological perspective when he talks about *logos* in I.2 (Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 65, 67). For a more careful consideration of the natural-scientific elements in the etiology, see Pellegrin, “Is Politics a Natural Science?”. On the overlap and difference between Aristotle’s biology and modern scientific biology, see the introductions in Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life* and Connell, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Biology*.

entirely exceptionless facts that are wholly necessary and do not at all admit of being otherwise.”⁵ But for the purposes of explaining the etiology of I.2, it is Aristotle’s *natural* scientific method and his political scientific method that together encompass Aristotle’s analysis of the polis’ growth and the activity of human animals.

For its part, the natural-scientific method employs a certain form of explanation. It involves taking natural and given objects and explaining the causes that produced them. That is because theoretical sciences study things that “have within themselves a starting-point of movement” (*Metaphysics* XI.7.1064a15), which means their causes pre-exist the object as the scientist knows it in its final (teleological) form and are also independent of the scientist observing them. The point, then, is to reconstruct what had to happen, by necessity, in order for the object in question to have come into being. In the case of *Politics* I.2, the final object under consideration is obviously the polis. In light of this approach, it seems easy to emphasize the *teleology* of Aristotle’s method, which is even made explicit later in I.2 when Aristotle says:

...every city exists by nature, since the first communities also do. For this one [the polis] is their end, and nature is an end. For what each thing is when its coming to be has been completed, this we say is the nature of each—for example, of a human, of a horse, or of a household. Further, its for-the-sake-of-which—namely, its end—is best, and self-sufficiency is both end and best. (I.2.1252b30-35)

Anything that exists by nature, that is, will grow into something that marks its complete

⁵ Reeve, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, xii, citing NE VI.3.1139b20 and Anal. Post. 1139b27.

development. This is what Aristotle scholars call a “final cause,” as delineated by Aristotle elsewhere (*Physics* II.3.194b23-195a2). More than simply existing by nature, however, it also reveals the nature of an organism in the sense of its proper end. But when trying to account for the development or growth of the polis, which is a complex form of human association, a teleological method is also very risky for the reasons outlined in the previous chapter with respect to Plato. That is, it is easy to presuppose the thing to be explained and thereby fail to explain anything at all. This is especially risky for Aristotle who emphasizes that all actions take place for the sake of some good (NE. I.1.1094a1; Pol. I.1.1252a2-3). That is, Aristotle will account for the action that brings the polis about in terms of the good that is any action’s end. But for those who generate the polis, the end cannot be the polis (in its final form) because that would simply presuppose it.

And yet, Aristotle is well equipped to factor in and attenuate this risk. Aristotle explicitly acknowledges the importance and concomitant difficulty of identifying beginnings.

It is perhaps a true proverb which says that the beginning of anything is the most important; hence it is also the most difficult. For, as it is very powerful in its effects, so it is very small in size and therefore very difficult to see. When, however, the first beginning has been discovered, it is easier to add to it and develop the rest.” *On Sophistical Refutations*, 33.183b25-29

Aristotle’s choice of an optical metaphor—beginnings are difficult to see because they are small—evokes the metaphor Plato employs at the beginning of the city in speech. But in contrast

to *Republic's* interlocutors, Aristotle is very pre-occupied with establishing correct starting-points. To identify a correct starting-point and the methodology at work with it, one must above all be attuned to the phenomena under consideration, since one must “follow the method of inquiry suited to [the phenomena’s] nature and make very serious efforts to define them correctly” (NE I.7.1098b4-5).⁶ In the case of examining a polis, that means being attuned to the human beings that produced it.⁷ Numerous scholars have attested to the way that Aristotle’s study of human phenomena displays meticulous attention to particulars, such that even when accounting for human action in terms of nature, Aristotle’s complex understanding of human action (*praxis*) shows that human nature accommodates action’s variability rather than overdetermines it.⁸ More than that, however, Aristotle is also highly sensitive to the way that social and historical factors form part of any human activity. For instance, Aristotle notes that any mode of inquiry requires leisure (*Metaphysics* A.2.982b21-27; *Pol.* II.9.1269a33-35). Given that leisure is something produced in the polis, Aristotle’s own inquiry actually requires the polis in order for it to exist. That means the fact that Aristotle is embedded within the polis, specifically Athens, goes some way in explaining the kind of account he gives of it. And yet by virtue of accounting for scientific inquiry in this way, Aristotle is clearly aware of this enabling

⁶ Reeve (Aristotle, 2014: xxi - xlvi) helpfully discusses the complexity around the pertinent differences but also commonalities between these modes of inquiry.

⁷ Adriel Trott thinks about this in terms of Aristotle’s analysis of nature’s *archē kinesis* (principle of movement). She argues that for Aristotle, political life has internal sources of movement with the result that human beings do not consist of indeterminate matter on which form needs to be imposed through craft. Trott has an emergent account of political nature, then, where “nature does not impose form on material but form arises from within a natural thing.” Trott, *Aristotle on the Matter of Form*, 1. But as Fred Miller points out, the fact that political community has an internal cause does not mean it is a natural cause. Miller, “Aristotle on the Nature of Community, by Adriel M. Trott.”

⁸ Salkever, “Aristotle’s Social Science”; Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*; Kraut, “Nature in Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics.”

condition.⁹ But Aristotle's cognizance of this relationship between the context of a form of life and the kinds of knowledge and practices that are available to it is also precisely the kind of insight provided by scientific inquiry. In other words, Aristotle's science includes the ability to see what knowledge is enabled by, though not reducible to, context and so also to see where that form of knowledge does not, because it cannot, exist. Any scientific account worthy of the name must therefore incorporate that fact reflexively into its own account of the *polis* where necessary. An etiology that seeks to see "how things grow from the start" is precisely one of those places.

Together, these considerations should instill confidence that Aristotle's etiology of the *polis* does not simply erase the phenomenological or singular aspect of such a causal account, notwithstanding the fact that he says neither science nor craft can get a theoretical grasp on singularity. Rather, we can expect Aristotle to self-reflexively incorporate these considerations into the etiology and represent the phenomenological and singular dimensions of the very first people who came together to initiate the process of the polis' growth. That is true even if, as I will also show, Aristotle can *subsequently* hide, diminish, and attempt to eradicate some of these dimensions as his account comes closer to the political science he says cannot abide them, thus turning them into the "symptoms" that I wish to recover.¹⁰

In order to draw sufficient attention to the complex methodological work on display, particularly in the etiology, I want to name his method a "spectral analysis." I call it "spectral"

⁹ So while Aristotle does think that scientific reason/inquiry is superior to practical reason, in another sense it is reversed. Scientific reason can only exist through the outworking of practical reason—and especially a special kind of instrumental reason, as I show here—meaning it is historically prior.

¹⁰ Claudia Baracchi speaks of Aristotle's "silences" with particular reference to his discussion of *philia*. She does not, however, identify the features of that account that I focus on. Baracchi, "On Unheard-of Friendship," 39, citing Pierre Aubenque, *Le Problème de l'être Chez Aristote. Essais Sur La Problématique Aristotélicienne*.

because, in the end, Aristotle is trying to account for human activities and processes that, in many instances, long preceded the polis as he understands it. At the same time, however, in order to be an adequate and persuasive causal account of the polis, the activities and processes that produced it also have to be recognizable and identifiable in the way that human beings exist in the polis as he and others contemporarily perceive and know it. I therefore see something ghost-like in Aristotle's account because it is not strictly historical, which may allow one to point to specific people in a specific time and place under specific circumstances that account for features of life that persist into the present. Nor is the account purely philosophical or poetic, as though this is a fictional or even mythological account that imposes a purely speculative but perhaps practicable account for the polis akin to what the idea of the state of nature does in the modern period.¹¹ (Although I will point to certain poetic features that Aristotle uses in the etiology.) The etiology comes close to being both of these things, but it does not seem reducible to either of them and it cannot be adequately named a history or a fictional story, so I am going with "spectral analysis" that captures a little of the poetic dimension (the specter) and the analytic.¹² But by naming it I am not wanting to then leave it as something entirely allusive. I think that the spectral analysis entails three particularly important elements.

The first is that at least two perspectives must be accounted for in the etiology of the *polis*. There is the perspective that Aristotle himself brings from his placement in the 4th century Athenian *polis*. Then there is the perspective that the early generators of the *polis*—among the

¹¹ Kullman thinks it is best described as a "thought experiment." Kullman, "Man as a Political Animal in Aristotle."

¹² Saunders like me, notes the hybrid quality of the etiology for its poetic, historical, and anthropological features. But, as I will show in the next chapter, this is coupled with a general bewilderment concerning the etiology, most of which seems to stem from the interpretation of *chrēsis* as need. Saunders, *Aristotle's Politics, I and II*, 59–60.

first are a male and female and a master and a slave, as we will see—they themselves bring.¹³ I will call this the dual perspective aspect of Aristotle's method and it especially points to the intrapersonal elements, such as the modes of affect and reason, of the persons involved.

In addition to the dual perspective, it is important that the interpersonal dimensions of the generators of the *polis* are not presupposed, either, even where they may go by the same name as their later form. So, where Aristotle says that the *polis* originates in the formation of the *oikos* (household), it is important that we do not simply presuppose that this original *oikos* simply maps onto the *oikos* as it is embedded in the fully developed *polis*. This will require careful attention to the specific developmental moments of Aristotle's object of analysis. We could call this the dual object aspect of Aristotle's method.¹⁴

Lastly, as with other etiological accounts in antiquity, there must also be a traceable connection between the earlier and later forms of knowledge, activity, and relationality to make this a truly causal account. Because the etiology of the *polis* is especially minimalistic and terse, this final dimension will especially require a turn to other parts of Aristotle's work, both in his natural-scientific treatments of human animals and in the ethical and political works. That means the spectral analysis is a hybrid kind of analysis that neither strictly follows Aristotle's natural-scientific methods nor his practical-scientific methods. In what follows, I argue that Aristotle's spectral analysis here hangs on, as well as explains, *chrēsis* as "use" in the etiology of I.2. This will

¹³ Testimony to this is the optative mood with which this chapter of the book begins. "If we were to see how these things grow naturally from the start, we would...get the best theoretical grasp on it" (Reeve translation). Cf. Kullman, "Man as a Political Animal in Aristotle."

¹⁴ By calling it the "dual object" aspect I am not making a claim about whether something in its infancy is a distinct thing from what it becomes in maturity. This is a debate for Aristotle's metaphysics. I am simply calling it this to help underscore the distinction between the household, say, as it exists before the *polis* and once it is embedded within the *polis*.

be achieved by first identifying evidence of these methodological features in Aristotle's etiology. Let's see what Aristotle says.

Having made his statement of method, Aristotle identifies "those who are incapable of existing without each other" as the point from which everything will grow: namely, a female and male couple. Given the significance of beginnings for Aristotle, as we've seen, I want to pay very careful attention to this couple. Aristotle calls it the first of two "communities (*koinōniōn*)" (I.2.1252b10) that together make up the household (*oikos*), the other one comprising of master and slave.¹⁵ Aristotle says the male-female relationship is "necessary (*anagkē*)" (I.2.1252a26), which is tied to the fact that we cannot reproduce without each other, meaning coupling is the result of a "natural desire (*phusikon to ephiesthai*)" that we share with animals and plants "to leave behind something of the same sort as ourselves" (Pol. I.2.1252a28-30). Because this desire shares a nature with plants and animals, it does not stem from "deliberate choice (*prohairēsis*)," which is a distinctively human quality (Pol. I.2.1252a28).

With such a beginning, there are already numerous things that contemporary theory would take exception to with Aristotle's account. First, from the contemporary perspective, the claim that desire and reproduction are strictly heterosexual is contestable to say the least. Second, "necessity," of course, conjures up thoughts of what it is not, namely freedom, and makes it look like the subordination characteristic of women and slaves in the historical *polis* (and justified by Aristotle in various places) have been presupposed and interpolated here. The folly of this move would be clear: Aristotle has simply naturalized the contingent features of his

¹⁵ I follow, among others, Terence Irwin and Gail Fine in seeing the "two communities" as reference to man and woman, on the one hand, and slave and master, on the other. Irwin and Fine, *Aristotle*.

own society to make them look essential. At first appearance, then, the male-female community bears the countenance of the Platonized Aristotle, warts and all.

But though the heterosexual and gendered dimensions play an important role in his account of the polis' growth, we will later see that the element I wish to focus on—the politics of indeterminate utility—is not gender-specific in the same way. That is, the importance of the gendered, heterosexual elements for the politics of indeterminate utility is itself indeterminate. And while Aristotle has a reputation for reproducing and legitimizing the worst manifestations of sexual difference, feminist scholarship has shown that sexual difference in Aristotle is not straightforward, as I explore further in the next chapter. Even here in I.2, the relationship between male and female is not clear cut. For although Aristotle immediately mentions a ruler-ruled (*archon-archomenon*) relationship for the sake of preservation, it does not obviously refer to the male-female couple. He simply says that the distinction between ruler and ruled results from the ruler having *dianoia*, meaning it can “look ahead (*prooran*),” and the ruled who “can labor by using its body” (I.2.1252a30-33).¹⁶ Indeed, the importance of *dianoia* may even favor an interpretation that includes the female as ruler since, as Giulia Sissa has pointed out, in his natural-scientific works Aristotle consistently says that women have more of a capacity for *dianoia* than men.¹⁷ And still in I.2, Aristotle concludes the thought about ruling and being ruled

¹⁶ The editing of the Greek text itself joins the claim about ruling and being ruled for the sake of preservation to the claim about male and female coupling for the sake of procreation, which leads one to think that ruler-ruled is a reference to male-female, respectively, which he has just discussed. I am referring to W. D. Ross' editing of the Greek text in the Oxford Classical Texts. Irwin and Fine suggest an alternative rendering of the text. They see the claim about ruling and being ruled as the beginning of a new topic, signalled by the start of a new paragraph and interpolating “<rather than reproduction>” to mark the distinction that is being made. The original Greek does not prohibit editing the text this way. The difference seems to turn on the status of the Greek particle *de* at I.2.1252a30. For the reasons laid out in the rest of this chapter, I think Irwin and Fine's is a better way to edit the text. Trevor Saunders' translation is perhaps best for the way he separates the male and female relationship and the master-slave relationship in these lines.

¹⁷ Sissa, “Bulls and Deer, Women and Warriors.”

with “That is why the same thing is advantageous for both master and slave” (I.2.1252a34-35), which obviously relates ruling and being ruled to mastery and slavery, which Aristotle immediately says should *not* apply to women. Nor do Aristotle’s key terms here denote gender. As Wayne Ambler notes, the terms “mastering” and “servile” are in the neuter gender, which leads Ambler to doubt whether Aristotle is even referring to human beings.¹⁸ While I do not think the human subject is in doubt here, Aristotle does not explicitly say here that women are ruled, even if he says that elsewhere (Pol. I.12.1259b4-9). And so, although Aristotle clearly goes on to say that women should *not* be treated like slaves because they have distinctive works or functions (*erga*, I.2.1252b1), Aristotle is not drawing a distinction between ruling (a woman) and mastering (a slave), even if that distinction is made elsewhere (e.g. already at Pol I.1.1252a7-16). In fact, it is likely because Aristotle elsewhere (when treating the *polis*-embedded *oikos*) says that women are ruled and draws such a strong distinction between the ruler-ruled relationship of husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave that some Aristotle scholars have made it look like Aristotle is drawing a similar distinction here.¹⁹ But that would ignore the fact that when Aristotle makes those claims he is speaking of the *oikos* that is embedded in the *polis*. Recall that one of the important features of the spectral analysis is its dual-object dimension, which involves paying attention to the moment of something’s development. Just because it is true of the *oikos* in its more developed form does not mean that it is true of it in its earlier form. Maintaining this difference is supported by the fact that there is no textual evidence in I.2 for the claim that women are ruled.

¹⁸ Ambler, “Aristotle on Nature and Politics,” 392.

¹⁹ For example, Booth, “Politics and the Household: A Commentary on Aristotle’s ‘Politics’ Book One,” 209.

If that's what Aristotle is *not* saying about male and female relations in the pre-*polis oikos*, what is significant about what Aristotle does say about that relationship?

Methodologically, we can already identify several elements of the spectral analysis at work. On the one hand, Aristotle is accounting for the early household in terms of desire (*to ephiesthai*) and a certain operation of thought (*dianoia*, contrasted with deliberative choice, *prohairēsis*) that leads to self-preserving activity by humans. This kind of account of action—one that explains it in terms of desire and *dianoia*—is a function of scientific understanding, which we have seen includes political science (*politikē*) and is among the highest forms of human knowledge. This is confirmed by Aristotle's similar account of reproduction in another work, *De Anima*. There Aristotle confirms what he says in I.2 about this desire and also elaborates on it. He confirms the fact that the desire is of the order of plants and animals. And he seems to confirm its necessity when he states that if humans are to survive as a species, then we need to reproduce. It is in temporal terms that Aristotle further elaborates, however. He suggests that animals naturally wish to "partake in the eternal and the divine insofar as each can" (DA.II.4.415a29). That is, even if concrete individuals cannot share in eternal life they will desire to perpetuate themselves in form—e.g. the form of a human—eternally.

On the other hand, however, as I have already stipulated, in attempting to understand what causes people to come together in a city, Aristotle must also refrain from presupposing the kind of knowledge that he, as a political or any kind of scientist, has and through which his account proceeds. In other words, those who cause the city's generation could not account for their own activity in the way that Aristotle does. This is explicitly acknowledged by Aristotle when he points to the roles of desire and *dianoia*, which fall far short of *epistēmē*, scientific

understanding. In pointing to desire and *dianoia*, Aristotle is identifying that the perspective of those who enact the *polis*' generation does not map onto his. That is one expression of the self-reflexive incorporation of the relationship between context, action, knowledge and the beginnings of the *polis* that is key for interpreting I.2 and indeed other parts of Aristotle's ethical and political works, as I will further argue.

This evident dual-perspective methodology then feeds into the dual-object analysis that I have said characterizes the spectral methodology. That is, when Aristotle wishes to see how things grow from the start, we cannot collapse the difference between earlier and later forms of activity, relationships, or entities. So far, we have already encountered male and female and master slave relations that do not simply mimic what he says about these elsewhere but are rather minimal in their descriptions. And there are textual grounds here for distinguishing the pre-*polis* forms of these relations from those embedded within the *polis*. For Aristotle labels these two communities—male and female and master and slave—in I.2 as the *oikia prōtē* (“first household,” I.2.1252b10), which is then counterposed to the *oikia teleion* (final/complete household, I.3.1253b4) at the very beginning of the next chapter of Book I, when Aristotle begins to discuss what is clearly the *oikos* as it is subsumed within the *polis*.²⁰ To the latter belong not only “master and slave” and “husband and wife” (rather than male and female) and but also “father and children” (I.3.1253b6-7). Furthermore, it now comprises more complex forms of

²⁰ As will become clear, my reading cannot be more different from Booth's. In his reading of Book I through the question of what an “association” (*koinōnia*) is and whether ruling and being ruled is by nature or convention, thinks that the household is Aristotle's starting point for considering what an association is because, among other reasons, “the elements which constitute the household maintain these relationships to one another in a permanent way...” Moreover, “In the household everything has its place, both property and persons, and its order is not the subject of dispute or contest.” Booth, “Politics and the Household: A Commentary on Aristotle's 'Politics' Book One,” 212 and 224.

knowledge, principally *oikonomia* and *chrēmatistikē*, that are the subject of Aristotle's analysis for the rest of Book I but are notably absent in I.2. We will see further reasons for distinguishing between the pre- and post-*polis oikos* (hereafter "first *oikos*" and "final *oikos*") with respect to slaves when we return to the topic in the final section of this chapter. For now, I wish to trace further evidence of Aristotle's spectral analysis and the way that it highlights the importance of *chrēsis* as use.

The Everyday/Every-day Household

We can see further evidence of the spectral analysis in the curious way that Aristotle sums up the household. A very literalist English-language rendition has Aristotle saying:

The community that is formed according to nature for every day (*eis pasan hēmeran*) is the household (*oikos*)... (I.2.1252b12-14, my translation)

The phrase I want to single out that makes this sentence curious is "for every day (*eis pasan hēmeran*)."²¹ What does this mean? The phrase is not common in ancient Greek. According to the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae database of extant Greek literature, this is the only usage of the phrase, so we must carefully follow the grammar and look for near equivalents. The term "*eis hēmeran*" (i.e. without *pasan*, which means "all" or "every") is used centuries later by Strabo (VI.1), for example, when he writes "for a day and a night (*eis hēmeran kai nukta*)," which makes

²¹ Many thanks to Peter Wilson, Ben Brown, and James Collins for helping me think further through the Greek here.

the preposition, “*eis*,” one of time. But reading Aristotle’s phrase in this way does not immediately render its meaning clearly, for it uneasily denotes both eternity (every day) and the quotidian (everyday) at once, or the eternal by reference to the quotidian.²² But “*eis*” can also be used to express purpose,²³ for example, *eis kerdos* (for profit). This is more promising for interpreting Aristotle’s term, so that we get something like “for everyday purposes,” which is precisely how Harris Rackham translates it.²⁴ W. L. Newman manages to bring out the quotidian and eternal dimension with his “for the satisfaction of daily recurring needs.”²⁵ C. D. C. Reeve morphs Rackham and Newman when he translates it “formed to satisfy everyday needs.” Newman’s and Reeve’s choice of “needs” over Rackham’s “purposes” appears to come from the sentence that follows the one in question, where Aristotle writes:

The first community, consisting of several households, for the sake of satisfying needs (*chrēseōs*) other than everyday ones, is the village. (I.2.1252b16, Reeve translation)

The Greek word translated as “needs” here is *chrēseōs*—*chrēsis* in the nominative—which does not appear in the previous sentence but has been interpolated there since there is a contrast,

²² In light of Frederic Jameson on the “eternal present” of postmodernity, perhaps “the eternal quotidian” would be an apt ‘postmodern’ translation of the phrase. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*; It also calls to mind Kafka’s story ‘The City Coat of Arms,’ about the tower of Babel, which Stephane Moses reads as “an allegory of the modern conception of historical temporality” Mosès, *The Angel of History*, 3. There the expectation or even purported knowledge of Progress towards a telos arrests any building activity precisely because one never knows whether the time is right to realize the end of history or not. It is both eternally the right day and the wrong day to realize the end of history. And Peter Fenves, who brings Kafka’s topic, but not text, to bear on Francis Fukuyama’s famous book in the wake of the Soviet Union’s demise, Fenves, “The Tower of Babel Rebuilt: Some Remarks on ‘The End of History.’”

²³ Liddell et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. A V. 2.

²⁴ Rackham, *Aristotle Politics*.

²⁵ Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1973, 2:112.

indicated by the Greek *men...de*, that implies the word *chrēsis* was simply elided, but intended, in the prior sentence. So, if we not only interpolate but also translate *chrēsis* as “need,” then it is possible to formulate a translation of the curious phrase and an overall interpretation of Aristotle’s etiology.²⁶ This is the Platonic interpretation articulated by Arendt, Agamben, and Brown who see two clearly distinct realms. The first realm is the *oikos*, a private sphere characterized by “everyday” needs that surely includes reproduction, which is explicitly discussed in this chapter, but also subsistence, which appears to be an easy assumption, given that Aristotle obliquely references food production when he quotes Hesiod on the ox—the “poor person’s” servant—that is made for the plow (I.2.1252b10-11). Moreover, Aristotle will go on to discuss household relations in terms of wealth acquisition, which is how human life subsists. The second realm, then, and set against this household realm, is more mutable since it begins with “needs other than everyday ones” (I.2.1252b16), or more literally “not-ephemeral” needs, which means everything else. The first step in this journey out of the household is the village but it ends with a *polis* where we finally realize that we are capable of so much more than the mere animal activity of reproductive sex and subsisting labor. This line of interpretation appears to be summarized in and clarified by the claim we have already encountered, that the *polis* “comes to be for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well” (I.2.1252b29-30, Reeve translation).

²⁶ Newman (Ibid.) cites two other passages in *Politics* (II.6.1265b41; V.11.1313b20) where Aristotle uses the word *hēmeran* that Newman evidently thinks make “needs” an accurate rendition of the phrase. But a cursory glance at these passages shows that Aristotle does not use *hēmeran* in parallel ways between these passages. Instead of *eis*, the preposition *kata* is used in the other two passages, and they do not reference needs explicitly or in any obvious way.

Reeve's is but the latest of a long tradition of interpreting, translating and interpolating *chrēsis* in a Platonic way as "need." We have already seen that Newman translated it as "needs" at the end of the 19th Century. Similarly, 19th Century classicist Benjamin Jowett first interpolates "wants" to make sense of our curious phrase *eis pasan hēmeran* and then follows up by translating *chrēsis* in the following sentence as "needs."²⁷ Ernest Barker twice writes "daily recurrent needs," first for *eis pasan hēmeran* and then for *chrēsis* in the next sentence. More recently, Terence Irwin and Gabriel Fine leave the curious phrase as it stands, i.e. without interpolating *chrēsis*, and translate it more literally but certainly more awkwardly as "formed for every day." But then they hew towards Reeve's interpretation in a note that says "i.e., for more than a short period. Or perhaps 'for day to day needs.'"²⁸

Apart from the relative consensus over the translation of *chrēsis*, the Platonic interpretation seems so entrenched that, contrary to usual philological practice, none of these translators indicate the interpolation of *chrēsis* as needs to fill out the curious phrase *eis pasan hēmeran*. Despite the apparent scholarly consensus, I think this line of interpretation is extremely problematic. The problem begins not with the interpolation of *chrēsis* as such but with the theoretical baggage that comes with the term when translated as "need." As we have seen in the previous chapters, "need" is often interpreted by reference to what it is not, such as superfluous "wants," disposable luxuries, or perhaps more "advanced" features of life like

²⁷ By taking "wants" and "needs" as interchangeable, Jowett already marks his distance from later translators who bear the influence of 20th Century social and political theory. In their wake, needs and wants are colloquial terms for the salient difference between true and false needs. Patricia Springborg has aptly traced these debates around true and false needs and their relationship to Plato and Aristotle. Springborg, "Aristotle and the Problem of Needs."

²⁸ They then obscure "use" in a rather unexpected way when they translate *chrēsis* in the following sentence as "advantage." Irwin and Fine. Perhaps they are reflecting Aristotle's claim, "the political community too seems both to have come together at the start and to remain in existence, for the sake of what is advantageous" (NE.VIII.9.1160a10-11).

freedom or self-determination. This is especially the case when need is associated with “nature” as it is here in Aristotle. As Jill Frank points out, “[m]odern political philosophers tend to treat nature as a mark of the absence of political life and, simultaneously, as a threat to it.”²⁹ “Needs” can precisely serve as a marker of the a- or pre- or anti-political life, and especially when read through the later claim that the polis “comes to be for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well” (Pol I.2.1252b29-30), as Arendt does. It sets the end of the *polis* against the beginning. But in keeping with my argument for the dual perspective, the early generators of the *polis* cannot be informed by any such understanding of need that is set against notions such as freedom that will only come later in the development of the *polis*. Translating *chrēsis* as “need” only encourages an anachronistic reading, especially when the readers fall under the influence—as do Aristotle’s many contemporary interpreters and translators—of 20th Century theories of true and false needs.³⁰ Rather than require later ideas such as freedom and the good life, an account of needs that is sensitive to the causal account that is being made here must rather emphasize the openness and indeterminacy of needs. Whatever needs are being satisfied in the early stages of the *polis*’ generation are extremely abstract, abstract to the point of being linguistically absent in Aristotle’s account. The only need—and that is my word for it, not Aristotle’s—that we can with confidence attribute to the household on the basis of I.2 is reproduction. Even then, Aristotle appears to be making the rather banal observation that reproduction is necessary for the existence of the human species, which is obviously an

²⁹ Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, 19. Cf. Bernard Yack who claims that responsibility for this reading is especially Kant’s in so far as he was a major influence on Arendt who is a major influence on contemporary Aristotle interpreters. And note that Yack wrote this before the works that I have referred to were produced. Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 12-13.

³⁰ See note 27 above.

important factor in a causal account of the *polis*, the communal mode of life that humans produce. By translating *chrēsis* as “need,” these translators occlude Aristotle’s special methodology (his spectral analysis) as they Platonize Aristotle by interpolating distinctions—such as that between necessity and freedom—that only become apparent *after* the emergence of the *polis* and its regime, together with the forms of knowledge these enable: *epistēmē* and *politikē*. To repeat the criticism levelled at Plato in the previous chapter, they would have Aristotle presuppose the distinctions that need to be explained.

Rather than confirm Plato’s account of the *polis* in *Republic*, Aristotle’s abstract and resultingly minimalist conception of needs is in stark contrast to it. As I argued in the previous chapter, Plato’s account of the “city in speech” explicitly cites needs (*chreia*) as the founding principle of the city. It involves stipulating several needs that immediately determine who the inhabitants of the city will be and what they will do. As a result, needs are particularized from the beginning and become operative for a city not through the historical and contingent activities of its members, but rather through their imposition upon a population by a set of authoritative rulers (i.e. the interlocutors) that are themselves removed from them. Plato justifies this approach, first, by aligning it to a human nature that makes us suitable for one job that concomitantly requires dependence on others to satisfy our needs, which therefore results in the *polis*. Plato’s justification also works through a particular temporality. The satisfaction of needs first requires the availability of the worker (further justifying the one-person one-job principle) but also the interlocutors’ apparent liberation from work that allows them to be the coordinators of needs’ satisfaction. Plato’s account is distinguished by his particular account of need, then, and also human nature and temporality.

Against Plato's account, Aristotle's is extremely minimal and indeterminate with respect to the three elements—need, human nature, and temporality—that feature in Plato's account.³¹ Not only does Aristotle not use the common words for "need" (*chreia, dei*), but he rather deliberately (I will show) uses the word *chrēsis* as "use." And if we extract Aristotle's famous claims about human political animality from the etiology and make them stand for his contribution to a theory of human nature, then they do not appear to say very much beyond the fact that we are naturally made to live in cities, which actually reveals very little on its own. Perhaps this can partly explain the variety of interpretations it has come to serve in the ensuing millennia.³² Our contemporary Aristotle interpreters and many others take Aristotle's claims out of context and so hastily reduce it to the human capacity for *logos*, speaking and reasoning, which is no doubt operative in Aristotle's account of human animality but is unduly elevated given it raised *after* the considerations that Aristotle explicitly says results in his view that humans are political animals. As for temporality, this brings us back to the unusual phrase, *eis pasan hēmeran*. Its apparent obscurity hardly renders a politically informative approach to time or anything else, which is evinced by the overdetermined role that *chrēsis* as need plays when it is interpolated in the sentence. But interpolating need makes Aristotle appear to say more than he really does while obscuring what he does say. Doing so may render Aristotle's text more

³¹ Booth thinks that the minimalism of Aristotle's account is a feature of "the type of argument bring presented here." That is, "it is not an analysis at all, but rather an observation of a process of growth, or generation." That puts it in league with "the early stage of philosophy itself, for the early thinkers were familiar only with questions of generation and movement. That is, it is the simplest and most elementary sort of consideration that could be given to the topic." ("Politics and the Household," 208-209). But Booth does not recognize that since it is an account of human beings, it must also appreciate that there is purposive action at work in the process, too, which complicates a simple alignment of Aristotle's etiology with early Greek philosophy or, as I have already said, with Aristotle's natural science more generally.

³² For a flavor, see Geoffrey Bennington examine just three or four variations. Bennington, "Political Animals."

readable, but it appears to make the theoretical (and especially methodological) significance of this section more obscure, which I will now argue is more available in the Greek text.

Rather than configure *eis pasan hēmeran* entirely in terms of *chrēsis*—whether as “need” or anything else—I believe it can first be understood on its own as a play on words that becomes legible precisely through the dual perspective that I have claimed is at work here. As I said earlier, understanding it in terms of purpose seems to be the most obvious way to understand the use of *eis* here. But doing so leads translators to first emphasize the elided word *chrēsis* and then to translate it as “need.” Returning to the temporal meaning of *eis*, then, we have to take *eis pasan hēmeran* as somehow referring to both the eternal and the quotidian. More specifically, the first meaning of *eis* as a preposition of time in the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek lexicon is “to denote a certain point or limit of time, *up to, until.*”³³ While not immediately apparent how we could do this, on the basis of Aristotle’s elaboration on reproduction in *De Anima* and the spectral analysis in mind, we could now see that Aristotle is qualifying purpose by reference to the temporal. And what purpose and temporality we see will depend on which side of the dual perspective we take. As we saw in *De Anima*, Aristotle takes human reproduction to be a manifestation of our desire to partake in eternity. If we take this perspective to the phrase *eis pasan hēmeran*, then it appears to mean *every day*, i.e. eternity. In other words, the purpose of our activity in the first household is for the sake of eternity in so far as the reproduction of the species results from it. Moreover, in light of the household’s causal preconditions, the reproduction of the species is also the eternal pre-condition for politics. But owing to the fact that the scientific perspective is required to account for the eternal quality of reproduction’s

³³ Liddell et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. II. 1.

desire, this perspective is not available to the early generators of the *polis*. And if *politikē* can and does reflexively check itself on the basis of identifying what kind of account actors can give of themselves—which is based on the contexts of different modes of understanding and action—then it cannot presuppose this perspective in the early generators of the *polis*. Striving for eternity could not be the account the early generators of the *polis* give of their own activity. Taking up this latter perspective and *eis pasan hēmeran* could be understood as “everyday” to signify the generators’ perspective. The generators’ perspective is necessarily quotidian relative to the scientific perspective that can perceive the eternal quality of their activity. This is not because of any determinate quality or quantity of need or activity of these early generators, however. If we had to explain the choice of a day to characterize the generators’ perspective by reference to these then we would again be committing Plato’s fallacy. In light of that we need to be especially careful to clarify Aristotle’s account without adding to it. We can understand the choice of the day in a more literalist fashion. If the underlying but—from the generators’ perspective—unperceived purpose of early activity is the perpetuation of the species, this is secured by the generators’ own perspective and the activity that they undertake on a day-to-day basis. This is partly informed by innate desire but also *dianoia*, which we will see does not completely deny choice, even it is not “deliberative choice (*prohairēsis*)” as Aristotle makes explicit (I.2.1252a28-30). But we can also understand “everyday/every-day” as a poetic feature of Aristotle’s characterization of the early generators’ activity in so far as we take *eis pasan hēmeran* as a reference to temporal extremes—the eternal and the quotidian—achieved through a play on words to demarcate the two kinds of perspectives at work.

We can perhaps go one step further in accounting for Aristotle's choice of the day, however, by seeing how this was anticipated in Aristotle's opening methodological statement in I.2. Note that when Aristotle states his desire to see "how things grow from the start," he also claims that it is the way to get "the best theoretical grasp (*theōrēseien*)" on things (I.2.1252a24-26). Now the word that is translated "theoretical grasp" there is "*theōreō*."³⁴ This Greek word most commonly denotes the activity of spectating or looking, and in this way refers, for example, to people in the audience at the theater. But it is also used by Aristotle to refer to scientific understanding (*Metaphysics* 4.1003b15), which includes the kind of scientific perspective that Aristotle is bringing to the generation of the *polis*. In light of the dual perspective that I have drawn attention to here, we could see *theōreō* as referring to the two kinds of ways that an account of the *polis*' generation will "see." It will see the *polis*' generation in terms of the scientific perspective from which it is told, and this will reference the reproductive activity that partakes of eternity. But it will also see the *polis*' generation in terms of the generators' own perspective, which entails a more literalist "seeing" in the absence of scientific understanding.³⁵ If we bring these ways of seeing to bear on the curious phrase *eis pasan hēmeran*, a day is significant for the generators' perspective in the sense that it illuminates and thus enables but also delimits purposeful activity at this stage. That is why it can be characterized as "everyday."

³⁴ Not *theasthai* (i.e. *theaomai*), pace C. D. C. Reeve, *Politics*, p.210n8.

³⁵ In his commentary on *Politics* Book I, William James Booth contrasts the words *katebēn* and *horomen* in the opening sentences of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*: "the opening sentence of the *Republic* alludes to the Platonic *chorismos* thesis, the doctrine of separation. Aristotle's statement, on the other hand, speaks simply of what we all see, of what at first glance is plain, self-evident, and available to every man." Booth, "Politics and the Household: A Commentary on Aristotle's 'Politics' Book One," 204. But Booth does not acknowledge the ways that the everyday perspective and Aristotle's theoretical perspective become entangled in complex ways in I.2.

But the day is also significant because it is recurring, stretching out to infinity, or “every day,” and connotes the desire of species reproduction, which is only visible from the scientific perspective.

For modern understandings of science and poetry, it may appear implausible to claim that poetic devices are relied upon in a scientific account of human political life. But this is not true of Aristotle. Numerous times in his *Politics*, and indeed in this very chapter with the etiology, Aristotle directly quotes poets such as Homer and Hesiod to support his claims.³⁶ And in the *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that poetry is more instructive than history because it is “more philosophical and more serious” (*Poetics* 1451a36ff, 1459a21-24 and Saunders 1995: 60-61.)³⁷

Looking for “how things grow from the start,” then, requires both the scientific perspective that can identify growth from the start as a fitting methodology and can recognize continuity between human nature and that of animals and plants. But Aristotle’s methodology must also account for the special conditions of human action by refraining from explaining it anachronistically, and poetic devices are relied upon to achieve just that. Although both perspectives are important, I wish to dwell on, in order to better understand, the quotidian perspective. There are several reasons for doing so. First, the quotidian is admittedly a more obvious way to understand the phrase *eis pasan hēmeran* given my reliance on *De Anima* and *Metaphysics* to draw out its alternative meanings. Despite that, the significance of the quotidian perspective has not been appreciated by Aristotelians since the methodological features of Aristotle’s etiology seem to have gone unnoticed. As I will explore in chapter 4, Aristotle himself

³⁶ Newman, in his commentary on I.2, points out that in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle conveys the broad truth that lecturers at the time must support their philosophical claims with reference to the poets. *The Politics of Aristotle*, 2.

³⁷ de Ste. Croix, “Aristotle on History and Poetry (*Poetics* 9, 1451a36--B11).”

is partly responsible for this oversight given the priority he gives to understanding *virtuous* activity as the ultimate human function. But there is an important theoretical reason for emphasizing the quotidian and this comes from the methodological point that I have tried to underscore above. *Politics* I.2 is a *causal* account and he wants to identify what leads people from the earliest forms of community to the glorious heights of the polis. But it is not any kind of causal account but specifically of *human* community that also informs his account of humans' distinctive animality. Since Aristotle says that it is for the sake of some end that humans act (NE. I.1.1094a1; Pol. I.1.1252a2-3), we need to see what it is that humans saw and strove for when they generated the *polis*. In other words, we need to emphasize the process by which the *polis* came into existence. To understand this, we really need to understand what motivated and informed the early generators of the *polis* at the quotidian level. What is it that is seen from this perspective? And how does it clarify the etiology and indeed Aristotle's political theory more broadly, especially regarding human animality and the relationship between the household and the *polis*? To answer these questions, we need to get greater clarity about the process that generates the polis from the generators' perspective. This is where we have to focus on the term *chrēsis*, which will allow us to lay out a more positive account of the *polis*' development rather than simply define Aristotle against Plato. This is what the rest of this chapter and the next chapter will be devoted to. To do so, we can now interpolate and interpret *chrēsis* while bearing the spectral method in mind. From there we will be able to specify some of the qualities of the politics of indeterminate utility captured by the phrase "everyday/every-day use" both in and beyond the first household.

Chrēsis and Chrēsimon; Use and Utility

Chrēsis and its cognate terms *chrēsimon* (useful) and *chrēsthai* (to use/use oneself/be used) are frequently employed in Aristotle's political and ethical works. Take, for instance, Aristotle's claim that political friendship is useful friendship (NE VIII.9; EE VII.10, usually translated "utility friendship"). Or that "politics (*politikē*) does not make humans, but takes them from nature and uses (*chrētai*) them" (*Politics* I.10.1258a21-23). Such instances may instill doubt that Aristotelian use or utility could be reprised for democratic politics because they all seem to point toward instrumentalization in various forms, including of women by men for the sake of reproduction, or of slaves by masters on account of naturally superior capabilities, as we have already encountered in the *oikos* of I.2. But armed with the dual perspective we can encounter use with fresh eyes and see its operation in a different, ostensibly democratic, political register.

As I set out above, many Aristotle commentators and translators interpolate *chrēsis* after *eis pasan hēmeran* because of the *men...de* contrast that is at work between the sentence containing our curious phrase and the following one. Having done so, many also then translate *chrēsis* as "need," which I argued encourages a reading that obscures the deft theoretical work that Aristotle is doing in this chapter that especially distinguishes his etiology from Plato's *Republic*.³⁸ Here, I wish to change course. If up until now I have looked at the reasons for not interpreting *eis pasan hēmeran* through *chrēsis* as need, here I wish to argue for interpreting the phrase—and therefore Aristotle's spectral analysis—with reference to *chrēsis* as use, now that

³⁸ Numerous Aristotle commentators think that Aristotle is channelling Plato's *Laws* in I.2. See, e.g., Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 2:114; Lord, "Aristotle's Anthropology."

the dual-perspective feature of Aristotle's methodology is squarely in our minds. Most simply put, use is the more obvious translation of the Greek word *chrēsis*. Its translation as need indicates that commentators and translators have been unsure how it could make theoretical sense if understood as use. But use is the more theoretically faithful and meaningful translation of the term in this context because it reflects the *absence* of anything but the most rudimentary—relative to its more developed forms—account of collective need or advantage at this stage of the polis' development. *Chrēsis* as the *question of use* marks this absence. But *chrēsis* as use also signals the *presence* of a significant and underexplored activity that, first, brings the *polis* into existence and then, as I show in the next chapter, continues to *haunt it*.³⁹ More specifically, the *question* of human use leads to human *utility valuation* with the result of an open, egalitarian, contingent, and agonistic creation of alternative human uses. In other words, what I call the politics of indeterminate utility are encapsulated in *chrēsis* as use since it clearly demarcates the process by which, first, the household and, thereafter, the *polis* come into existence from the generators' perspective. Understanding use in terms of questioning and valuing captures the necessary indeterminacy and therefore openness of the generators' perspective and activity that should be front and center in our efforts to understand the activity that generates communities both small and large. Doing so avoids Plato's problems because it defers the *post hoc* perspective that makes us think the *polis* or even the household were inevitable and pre-determined outcomes of human activity, which only diminishes our agency in

³⁹ We will see that the spectral analysis also ends up producing something of a specter in the guise of androgynous rule, which is the most interesting feature of everyday/every-day use and the one that proves most allusive in the rest of Aristotle's work. But it does haunt Aristotle somewhat, as we will see when I turn in the next chapter to consider mixed-utility friendship, especially as it is discussed in the *Eudemian Ethics*. I can then say that, in the political context Aristotle lives and works in, it also an indeterminate status, which is another dimension of the spectral quality of Aristotle's spectral analysis.

the political process and concomitantly the suitability of either the *polis* or the household to distinctively human capacities such as speech and action. To corroborate and expand on these claims we need to look beyond *Politics* I.2, however, whose minimalism is both its virtue and vice. Happily, there is another place in his corpus where Aristotle describes the very beginnings of the *polis* and as with *Politics* I.2, use is central to his characterization. This description is found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which means we have moved from looking for the singular individual in Aristotle's natural-scientific method in the etiology to the methods of practical (political) science. In moving to the *Ethics*, we will also take a crucial step in qualifying the role that gender is playing in Aristotle's account and how this impacts the democratic and emancipatory potential of indeterminate use.

In the context of his discussion of *philia* (usually translated "friendship," although it is much more capacious than what we consider to be friendship), Aristotle fills out the characterization of the first oikos, as distinct from the final oikos, that he gives in *Politics'* etiology. This is first indicated when Aristotle says that the household "pre-exists and is more necessary (*proteron kai anagkaioteron oikia poleōs*)" (NE VIII.12.1162a18-19) than the *polis*. By saying the household pre-exists the polis, it may look like Aristotle he is contradicting what he writes in *Politics* I.2. There he writes:

"the city is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually. For it is necessary for the whole to be prior to the part." (I.2.1253a19-20)

But Aristotle is rather emphasizing what I have called the dual-object element of his spectral methodology. The focus is on the first *oikos* and the *efficient* cause—which is a more technical term for what I have been calling the *polis*' generators—more than the final *oikos* and the *final* cause that is the usual focus of I.2's interpreters. The fact that these two perspectives mutually inform one another and are both present in each of the works, however, is borne out by the significant overlap between Aristotle's claims about male and female in the two discussions. In the NE passage, Aristotle says that the household is prior to and more necessary than the *polis* in order to elaborate on his claim that for man and woman "friendship seems to hold by nature," so much so that "the human being seems to be by nature more couple forming than political" (NE VIII.12.1162a16-18). As with the use of the word *anagkē* in I.2 (1252a26, the only time necessity is discussed in that section), Aristotle is making a rather banal point: humans, and therefore human communities, have a material need for a body, and this comes in the first instance from human reproduction. I take that to be Aristotle's meaning because in both he is giving a causal account of the *polis*, and the reproduction of human beings is as obvious a prerequisite as the existence of humans themselves. If there is no reproduction, there is no human; if there is no human, there is no *polis*. The fact *that* there needs to be reproduction captures the valence of "necessity" here. It is not the same as saying *how* reproduction takes place—embedded within distinct forms of human life as it is—is necessary.

Despite the banality of necessity's attribution to reproduction as I interpret it, we should nevertheless see it as part of the scientific, not quotidian, perspective. This is suggested by his attendant claims about the nature of human beings but confirmed by the second reason he cites for the natural and necessary quality of male and female friendship. Namely, reproduction is

characteristic of animals, too. As with I.2, Aristotle is pointing to the continuity of human nature with that of plants and animals. And yet the generators' perspective is also evident in Aristotle's emphasis on innate desire in both passages. By referring to innate desire, we can see Aristotle's concern to explain the generators' activity in terms that do not require any prior knowledge of, or aiming for, the polis, or reflexive cognizance of humans' own nature, which would require us to impute to the generators, but also presuppose, scientific knowledge.

But despite the repeated emphasis on reproduction and the nature we share with animals and plants in the two discussions, Aristotle clearly does not want to overstate the reproductive or necessitarian aspect of the *polis'* generation. The value of the NE passage lies in its distinctive elaboration on the *contingency* of the early household, which includes a more expansive conception of sex from the generators' perspective and the co-functioning of male and female than we get anywhere else in Aristotle's corpus. For Aristotle writes:

Now with the other animals, their community only goes so far as reproduction, whereas human beings share a household not only for the sake of reproduction but also for the sake of various things necessary for life (*eis ton bion*). (NE VIII.12.1162a19-22, Reeve translation)

Given Reeve's use of "necessary" in the translation of "*eis ton bion*," it is easy to think that Aristotle is talking about necessities or basic needs. But in fact, no word for "necessity" is used here. "*Eis ton bion*" most literally means "for the purpose of life." Rather than having an *a priori* meaning that could designate some kind of necessity, "life" is the thing that Aristotle

theorizes through the ensuing discussion of male and female relations. The key questions are, then, how do male and female relate for the purpose of life and how does this relationship illuminate what life itself means? Rather than necessity, it is the open and contingent quality of male and female relations that unfolds. Aristotle elaborates:

“Straight from the beginning (*euthus*), functions (*erga*) are divided, those of a man being different from those of a woman, so they assist each other by putting their special ones into the common enterprise.” (NE VIII.12.1162a22-24, Reeve translation amended)

The word *euthus*, which means “right from the beginning” or “immediately,” again confirms that Aristotle is not talking about the *oikos* as it is subsumed within the *polis* but rather the pre-*polis* household. But in referring to the divided albeit unspecified functions of male and female, the contents of Aristotle’s claim here, as with much of Aristotle, is likely to bristle many readers. It appears to be a clear case of gender essentialism that is also suggested in I.2 (1252b1-9). As I mentioned earlier, however, sexual difference in Aristotle is not clear cut. Moreover, the specific features of the etiology’s methodology should caution against jumping to conclusions about what Aristotle is saying here. Since this is a claim about the first *oikos*, per Aristotle’s spectral analysis we need to be careful not to assume that Aristotle is making the same distinctions that are based on (purportedly) scientific understanding or the final *oikos*, as in most other discussions of males and females. Once we adopt the quotidian and pre-*polis* perspective of the male and female in question, the claim about male and female functions is rather more benign and pragmatic. Aristotle is saying that yes, from the generators’ perspective, there are

distinct functions (*erga*), and they are different functions straight from the beginning. Moreover, the difference between the functions is defined in terms of the male and the female, and when they put these together, they form a common enterprise. So, the functions are attached to two individuals who, at this stage, are differentiated only by their gender biologically understood, but that does not mean all their *functions* are defined by gender. Aristotle has only identified male and female as the first community owing to the necessity of reproduction. For the function of reproduction, their male-ness and female-ness is necessary, but from their everyday perspective these gendered attributes may be accidental to their other functions and so need not be understood as equally necessitated in this account. Indeed, insofar as we take the everyday perspective, they *cannot* be understood as essential to the others' functions or else we presuppose some kind of polis-based knowledge again. In sum, then, we ought to bracket the essentialism that is at work in the reproductive function of the first friendship and recognize the lack of essentialism with respect to the other functions that are rather worked out through the politics of indeterminate utility.

To put the point differently, consider the remarks of nineteenth-century Oxford commentator J. A. Stewart on Aristotle's claim that the household "pre-exists and is more necessary" (NE VIII.12.1162a18-19) than the polis and with which the discussion of about male and female functions and common purpose begins. Like me, Stewart takes Aristotle to be referring to the pre-polis *oikos*. Stewart quotes Sir Alexander Grant's commentary that was published some seven years earlier in 1885: "In point of time the family is prior to the state, but in point of idea (*logoi*) and essentially (*phusei*) the state is prior."⁴⁰ Moreover, Stewart, like me,

⁴⁰ Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, quoted in Stewart, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, 323.

points to the claim in the etiology that “the city is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually. For it is necessary for the whole to be prior to the part” (I.2.1253a19-20). Stewart then writes, “Aristotle argues that without the idea of the “state,” the terms “man” and “family” would lose their meaning. Thus,” he continues, “the idea of family presupposes that of the state, which will accordingly be prior.”⁴¹ When Stewart refers to “man,” he may be referring to the gendered male or he may be referring to mankind, since both are plausible given the specific passages he has in mind. But whatever the reference, the point is essentially the same as mine. If the idea of man, or woman, or family, or human animal finds its definition in the polis, then at the moment that the household was first coming into existence, these lexemes would have had no meaning to the original male and female. It is not possible, then, reading these passages with the spectral analysis at the forefront of our minds, to say that the functions of the first male and first female were essentially gendered in the same way they would be later in the polis-embedded oikos.⁴²

What deserves our attention here is Aristotle’s claim about male and female bringing their functions into a common enterprise. It reveals that the questioning and valuing of human use is a central feature of the first *oikos* in at least two ways. First, bringing any two people together for a common enterprise requires discovering and valuing the kind of common enterprise that you could and will want to pursue. That is, it requires some kind of determination about feasibility—whether the people who organize around the common enterprise are able to realize it—but also one about desirability—whether they *want* to realize it. But when we factor

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² On diversity and functions in Aristotle, see Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, chapters 8 and 9; Saxonhouse, “Family, Polity & Unity”; Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, 145–146.

in the quotidian perspective, there is also significant indeterminacy to these processes because, to begin with, if there is any knowledge of the other on which to draw it is only negatively constituted in the sense of the other's function being "different."

It will be helpful to see an example of the way this process of indeterminate use may play out. Right after he claims that "straight from the beginning" male and female functions are divided and they put them together for the common enterprise, Aristotle writes:

Because of this, both utility and pleasure seems to be found in this form of friendship. It may also exist because of virtue, however, if both parties are decent. (NE VIII.12.1162a23-25)

Take Aristotle's reference to the pleasure (*to hedonē*) to be found in the male-female friendship. What does this pleasure consist of? Just prior to this discussion (NE VIII.3.1156ba32-b7), Aristotle had said that among the young, at least, pleasure friendship largely coincides with erotic friendship. But as we have seen, in NE's discussion of the early human household Aristotle limits the significance of reproductive sex because he wants to distinguish humans from other animals who couple only for reproduction. So, recall that "human beings share a household not only for the sake of reproduction but also for the sake of various things for life (*eis ton bios*). (NE VIII.12.1162a19-22, Reeve translation, amended). Pleasure friendship in the early household, then, is at least a partial reference to non-reproductive sex. Sex for pleasure, then, appears to form part of the common purpose and advantage of the male-female relationship that results from questioning and valuing each other's possible uses. This has important implications for the

way that we interpret *chrēsis* and the utility valuation that is central to the process of generating the *polis*. By so conveying sex in the first household, even something supposedly necessary like sex involves a diversity of uses and is therefore led by an expansive, indeterminate conception of use—marked by questioning and valuing—that endures through time.

If the discovery and valuation of a common purpose is the first way that use is evinced in the male-female relationship, we have already encountered a second dimension of use, too. As with sex for pleasure, *individual* functions themselves also need to be discovered, or created, and valued since the quotidian perspective means that, as with the common purpose, there is no antecedent knowledge that can pre-determine their content. Moreover, the very fact of bringing two people together for an activity that cannot be performed alone means that individual functions have to be learned. While this is already apparent in the case of sexual pleasure, this dimension is also signaled by Aristotle's reference to the (possible) virtue that can characterize the male and female relationship. When Aristotle says that there may be virtue in the friendship between the first male and female, he qualifies it by writing, "if both parties are decent" (NE.VIII.12.1162a25). In other words, Aristotle admits that the virtuous qualities of each are contingent and unknown, and therefore need to be discovered. Relatedly, Aristotle elsewhere points out that virtue friendship requires time to develop precisely because it requires people's distinct virtues—i.e. their qualities—to become apparent (NE VIII.3.1156b24-32; NE VIII.4.1157a22). The male-female friendship in the first *oikos* involves not only the creation of common purpose but also open, contingent, and agonistic uses oriented by the question and valuation of *individual* human functions; or in other words, their individual utility in relation to each other.

Taking stock, then, use involves discovering common purpose as well as individual functions, which is about discovering human utility. Pleasure and virtue are modes of both the common purpose that constitutes the male-female friendship as well as the functions, and therefore means to, its discovery. Insofar as pleasure and virtue form part of the common purpose, they are also characterized by utility since Aristotle suggests that forming part of a common purpose not only constitutes a community but also endows it with utility (EE VII.10.1242a7-15).⁴³ Together, then, use and utility capture the various dynamics at work in the generation of the male-female friendship and, as we will see, beyond it. This is why we ought to recognize the primacy of questioning and valuing use, which I have called the politics of indeterminate utility, in the etiology of the *polis*. For although pleasure and virtue go some way in specifying the character of the male-female relationship, they are still only broad characterizations of use and utility, especially because Aristotle does not claim that pleasure or virtue fully disclose the contents of the first *oikos*' common purpose. Indeed, the spectral analysis here requires use and utility's minimalism or lack of determinacy. Pleasure and virtue rather allow us to clarify the common purpose that drives the male and female relationship in negative terms as *alternative* use and utility. As a goal of the first *oikos*, alternative use and utility captures the trajectory of the male and female relationship in the first household because the forms of use and utility are radically indeterminate.

We have now grasped the essential characteristics of the politics of indeterminate utility in the friendship between the first male and female that plays an essential role in explaining the

⁴³ My claim that pleasure and virtue *philia* in the male-female relation are really forms of utility/use *philia* is backed up by Aristotle's claim that every community involves a kind of *philia* (NE VIII.9.1159b26-32), and all communities are parts of a political community (NE VIII.9.1160a8-10).

polis' generation. But there is another layer of complexity to this story. Still in the NE discussion, Aristotle says that just to the extent that the household is prior to and more necessary than the city, so a human "seems to be by nature more couple forming than political" (NE.VIII.12.1162a18-19). Here Aristotle raises an intriguing question: What if the first oikos evinces a form of relationality that is more characteristic of human animality than the fully developed polis? In so far as the first household represents an accommodation of singularity amidst commonality through indeterminate human use then it does provide for what Aristotle says is the natural condition of the human individual, i.e., a singularity. To be convincing, however, the question will need to be further explored, which I do in two parts. Here, I turn to Aristotle's *History of Animals*, which suggests that the friendship of the first household is itself one modality of political animality, albeit one still attached to the gendered elements of the household. In the next chapter, I pursue the more radical claim that in so far as the first friendship is characterized by indeterminate use, it represents a more democratic mode of political animality that also better provides for human flourishing. That is because it accounts for forms of friendship that are widespread and not saddled with the hierarchies of gender or power that form part of Aristotle's more famous account of human political animality. For now, let us see what *History of Animals* says about political animality.

Although *Politics* I.2 makes the male-female friendship of the first household the mere beginning of a process that generates the polis, there are intriguing points of overlap between this account and what he says about *human* animality more generally. This is especially true in his natural-scientific works, which, you will recall, is also the methodology through which Aristotle is producing the etiology of the polis in *Politics*. It is also striking that the discussion of

the first oikos in NE is largely descriptive rather than prescriptive, which is more of a piece with his natural science. So, in *History of Animals*, Aristotle says that what characterizes political animals is “some common work (*hen ti kai koinon...to ergon*)” and he references “man, bees, wasps, ants, cranes” (*History of Animals* I.1.488a9-10). But this claim is preceded by a very terse and very interesting discussion about human and other animals. Because there are a number of features I want to identify, I will reproduce the whole text:

“Here are some further differences (*diaphora*) with respect to animals’ manner of life (*biou*) and activities (*praxeis*). Some are gregarious (*agelaia*), some solitary (*monadikos*): this applies to footed animals, winged ones, and swimmers alike; others are dualizers. Some of the gregarious animals are political (*politika*), whereas others are more dispersed (*sporadika*). Examples of gregarious animals are: birds—the pigeon class, the crane, the swan (*N.B.*: no crook-taloned bird is gregarious); swimmers, many groups of fishes, *e.g.*, those called migrants, the tunnies, the *pelamys*, and the bonito. And man dualizes.

The political animals are those which have some one common activity; and this is not true of all the gregarious animals.” (*History of Animals*, 487b32-488a7, Peck, translation, amended)

Perhaps the most curious and significant of the claims here is that a human “dualizes.” What does this mean? John Cooper and Carnes Lord have both noted that there is some ambiguity

over whether humans dualize by being gregarious and solitary or political and dispersed,⁴⁴ though some scholarly consensus has formed around it referring to being gregarious and solitary.⁴⁵ But since Aristotle says that it is the gregarious animals that are political, Cooper and Brill think that in so far as a human is solitary, he is not political. They see in the claim that a human being is sometimes solitary a reference to the famous passage in *Politics* where Aristotle says a human who lives outside of the polis must be a beast or some god (1.2.1253a28-29). That means solitariness is a “failure...[and] is an exception to normal human behavior.”⁴⁶ For her part, Brill invokes the Homeric heroes at their most anti-social to evince the point, which complements her identification of Homeric metaphors about cranes, bees, and ants to describe the more functioning parts of the Achaean army, which are “the very animals that Aristotle will describe as political.”⁴⁷ But there is, crucially, an issue with the Greek text here. As the manuscript has been transmitted to us, Aristotle actually says that some animals are both gregarious *and* solitary, not gregarious *or* solitary. Moreover, Aristotle says about these gregarious *and* solitary animals that some are political and others are more dispersed. Here is how C. D. C. Reeve translates the received text:

“For some animals are gregarious (*agelaia*), others solitary (*monadikos*), whether they are footed, winged, swimmers, or dualizers. Also, *of the gregarious ones and solitary*

⁴⁴ Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship”; Lord, “Aristotle’s Anthropology.”

⁴⁵ In agreement on this are Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship”; Depew, “Humans and Other Political Animals in Aristotle’s ‘History of Animals’”; Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life*.

⁴⁶ Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life*, 131n5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

ones, some are political (*politika*), whereas others are more dispersed (*sporadika*).” (my emphasis)

The text that Cooper and Brill are working from is clearly the one in which “and solitary ones” is secluded and, as Reeve points out, is based on an interpretation that one cannot be gregarious and solitary at the same time. But Reeve helpfully points out that this is not consistent with Aristotle’s view on human sociability. So, in *Politics*, Aristotle says that humans can live in a city that is solitary in the sense of isolated, and it is clearly political owing to its *internal* complexity:

“It is not necessary for even those cities to be inactive that are situated by themselves and have deliberately chosen to live that way, since actions can take place even among their parts. For the parts of the city have many communal relations with each other.”

(Pol. VII.3.1325b23-26, Reeve translation)

Aristotle even goes on to suggest that an individual human being can be isolated and yet be political because of internal complexity, which accords with Aristotle’s claim elsewhere that the individual has relations of rule between soul and body. While Brill does not explicitly consider this text, it does support her insightful claim that the most appropriate way to approach the animal in Aristotle’s work is not in terms of some special trait or quality that is in-born, but is rather much more about *topos*, the particular place in which the animal is situated, whether water, land, air, or polis. On the basis of this reading of the text, we can also consider the oikos in

this category, but especially the *first* oikos.⁴⁸ That is, there is an internal complexity in the first oikos owing to the way that the inhabitants put “their special [works/functions] into the common enterprise (*eis to koinon tithentes ta idia*)” (NE VIII.12.1662a23-24) for the sake of life, a common enterprise that also defines them as “political (*politika*)” animals (*History of Animals*, 488a4).⁴⁹

More than representing complexity, the notionally democratic character of this form of friendship should not be overlooked or understated. It is notionally democratic because it is attributed to human political animality in the *History of Animals* and forms part of the account that will lead Aristotle to conclude that humans are political animals in I.2. Even when the two humans in question are the first male and female, however, in the absence of forms of knowledge that purport to establish the relative superiority of males over females, the quotidian, human perspective on use denotes the openness, equality, contingency, contestation, learning, and fallibility by which the common is established and therefore the household, and ultimately the polis, comes into existence.

In sum, then, Aristotle says that part of working out common purpose is finding and creating *alternative* uses through questioning and valuing people’s utility in at least two interwoven ways. First, in terms of the common enterprise to which the individuals are put. Second, in the way that the individuals form part of that common enterprise, which must be

⁴⁸ Reeve also implies as much: “So it might be that Aristotle is thinking of animal communities (even families) that live in isolation from others.” Reeve, *Aristotle’s Generation of Animals & History of Animals I, Parts of Animals I*, 4n13. And yet there is one more element to consider that Reeve does not identify. As I study in detail in the next chapter, I.2 says that the households of the Homeric kings, and even the Cyclopes, lived *sporades*, which is what Aristotle opposes to relations that are “political” in HA. Since I argue that the *sporades* households in I.2 are examples of patriarchal rule that determine the household but do not (necessarily) conform to the good as Aristotle understands it, it is possible that Aristotle says they are *sporades* because they are not even complex enough in their relations to be deemed political.

⁴⁹ Cf. NE VIII.9.1160a22: “the political community...seeks not the advantage that is present at hand but the one that is for all of life (*eis hapanta ton bion*)...”

informed by the kind of people they are and can be—which means their singularity. In some senses, this is a perfectly obvious result of the move from isolation to human relationship since inter-human use for a common purpose makes action in concert possible for the first time. But the process of discovering and creating alternative uses continues beyond this moment of inception, as is clear when Aristotle describes the process of bringing functions together for a common purpose as discovering that utility, pleasure, and perhaps even virtue, as he goes on to say, are generated by use of the other person. It is also clear from the fact that the male and female are not the only members of the first household, as we will soon see.

Use and the Causal Connection

Having established the centrality of use as denoting the process of questioning and valuing human utility in the first male-female relationship, we can now return to the spectral analysis with which I opened this chapter. If noting this methodology was crucial before we could grasp the importance of use, now that we have seen the operation of *chrēsis* as use we can also see how it clarifies the methodology itself. Its first two features—the dual-perspective and the dual-object analysis—have already been prominent, meanwhile the third, regarding the causal connection between earlier and later forms of community, has received less explicit attention. Here, I wish to note three ways that the analysis of use establishes the causal connection between the earlier and later forms of the *polis* so that we see the importance of use beyond the first *oikos* and into the *polis* itself.

The first is Aristotle's characterization of the male and female couple. The three attributes—utility, pleasure, and virtue—of the male and female couple in the first *oikos* become three different forms of friendship in the mature *polis*. Unlike their co-existence in the first *oikos*, in the *polis* these forms of friendship are distinct and mostly inhere between *different* people, or at least that is how Aristotle would have it. As we will examine more closely in the next chapter, Aristotle notes the possibility, even propensity, for people to mix different friendships at the level of the *polis* and warns against it. This is especially the case in utility or political friendship, which Aristotle thinks is corrupted when mixed together with virtue friendship (EE.VII.10.1242b-1243a14; cf. NE IX.1.1164b11-21). The discussion of political friendship in *Eudemian Ethics* is particularly pertinent here. While Aristotle wishes to keep utility and virtue friendship distinct, he notes that there is a propensity for people who are “decent (*aretē*)” to mix them together with destructive results for just and peaceful relations in the *polis*. The same word for “decent,” *aretē*, is used in the discussion of the first male and female in NE, where Aristotle accepts that there will be both utility and virtue in that relationship if each person is in fact “decent.” But while Aristotle condemns their mixture in the *polis* setting, he accepts their coexistence in the male-female relation of the first *oikos* as given. Again, the etiology's methodology is useful here since the difference between the first *oikos* and the *polis* on this score turns on the kind of decency or virtue that the friends have, which is context specific. For in NE (IX.1.1164a35-1164b1), Aristotle points out that being able to discern reciprocal good in a virtue friendship—which means keeping it distinct from utility friendship, which should be based on contract—is a function of *prohairēsis*, deliberate choice, which is a virtue of thought (*dianoia*, NE I.13.1103a5-6) that is not available in the first *oikos* (*Politics* I.2.1252a28). In sum, then, the causal connection is made as

we see distinct manifestations of the three modes of friendship according to the functions that the parties have—i.e. their utility—, which is also a reflection of their communal context and the uses it cultivates, especially of thought (*dianoia*). Relatedly, the discussion of non-reproductive sex in the first male and female anticipates the Greek world's very active and complex sexual culture that included homosexual, lesbian, pederastic, and intercrural sex.⁵⁰ These latter forms of sexual relations are not presupposed in the first household but are rather explained by it, as they can be understood in terms of a process that began in the early *oikos* with *chrēsis* at its heart.

The second and third ways that use connects the earlier and later stages of the *polis*' development relate to the role of the common. According to Aristotle, relation to a common purpose—which we have seen is a relationship established through use—is what makes the male-female friendship a community, as Aristotle calls it in I.2,⁵¹ and also something that defines political community as such (Pol. VII.8.1328a26-28). This is made clear in the treatment of political friendship in *Eudemian Ethics*. There Aristotle says that friendship in a community is “political friendship” (EE.VII.1242a2). Moreover, “political friendship exists because of utility above all else” (EE.VII.1242a7), a relation that is specifically defined by its basis in equality. The equality requirement means that community and friendship only exist in political regimes in which inhabitants relate on equal terms (*politeia* and democracy). In other regimes (e.g. tyranny and oligarchy), relations are based on superiority, which Aristotle equates to hierarchical relationships between “a saw and its craft” (EE.VII.1242a13), a body and its soul, and a slave and its master. All of these relations are based on superiority and are therefore different from

⁵⁰ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*; Sissa, *Sex and Sensuality in the Ancient World*.

⁵¹ Cf. EE.VII.10.1242a33, although Aristotle appears to be talking about the male-female relationship in the household within the *polis*.

political friendships because they are not based on “a common goal (*heneka koinou*)” (VII.10.1242a13-14). Those are instead defined by one goal, that being the goal of the superior party (EE.VII.9.1241b18-24). Having a *common* goal, then, is what defines a political friendship and therefore a community, which is likened to the relationship between husband and wife, “a utility friendship and a community” (EE.VII.10.1242a33). So, relation to a common purpose is the second way that a causal connection is established between the early and later forms of community because it both characterizes male-female friendship in the first *oikos* and the fully-fledged *polis*. However, given the existence of *poleis* based on relations of superiority—for example, tyranny and oligarchy, as above—, common purpose is also something that can be lost in the development of the *polis*. We will see how this takes place in the next chapter with the development of the village out of the first *oikos*.

The third way that use connects the earlier and later stages of the *polis*' development lies in the way that different parties participate in the common, which establishes a connection in terms of political rule. We have already seen that Aristotle draws a distinction between those who participate in the common and those who do not participate in it because they are in hierarchical relations where the superior determines the inferior's goal in accordance with his or her own. Those who relate around a common goal, by contrast, are in a relationship of equality. It is significant that by calling the male-female relation a community based on a common goal, Aristotle is also saying that they are in a relationship of equality. But Aristotle further distinguishes between two kinds of equality: arithmetic and proportional equality (NE V.3-4). Arithmetic equality denotes a 1:1 ratio of participation whereas proportional equality relates parties proportionally according to some quality that they have in varying amounts.

Whether it is defined by proportional or arithmetic equality, participation in the common, or lack thereof, also defines one's relationship to rule (EE 1242b 1 ff). As we have already seen, Aristotle thinks that the relation of superior to inferior—where there is no common purpose, as in “a saw and its craft” (EE.VII.1242a13), a body and its soul, and a slave and its master—is that between ruler and ruled in regimes *other than politeia* and democracy, his ideal and second best regimes, respectively (EE VII.10.1242a9-15; 1242b10-11). As we saw above, in these cases the goal is set by the superior, so in these examples the craft, the soul, and the master. If the relationship based on superiority is that between ruler and ruled, what of the relationship between equals? Is it a relationship between rulers? Sort of. The fact that Aristotle thinks these relations persist in *politeia* and democracy is telling, because in those cases people rule and are ruled in turn. So much is confirmed when Aristotle goes on to clarify that there is another kind of relation between ruler and ruled that “occurs in rotation” (EE VII.10.1242b29-30) and is “by agreement” (EE VII.10.1242b36), as buyers and sellers do with a contract (EE VII.10.1242b34). It is not based on superiority but is “the equal kind” of friendship and, pertinently, “based on utility” (EE VII.10.1242b22-27). It is in terms of utility, then, that Aristotle characterizes political regimes in which people take turns in ruling and being ruled.

How, then, does this reflect on the male and female relation? Aristotle has clearly said that it is a community and a relationship based on a common goal, meaning there is equality between them, but which equality? In the *final* household, Aristotle will say that the husband-wife relationship is one of equality albeit proportional, not arithmetic, equality, as befits an aristocracy (EE.VII.9.1241b30-31 and 38-39). That being the case, Aristotle thinks that a man should rule aristocratically and therefore “in accord with his worth” but also that “whatever is

fitting for a woman he should give over to her” to rule (VIII.10.1160b32-33). In other words, women do take on a ruling function in the *oikos*, albeit determined by the man (Aristotle does not note that this makes it look more like relationships based on superiority where there is *no* common purpose, but he clearly says that the male and female relate around a common purpose). But is it the same for the male-female relationship in the *first* household? There are a few reasons for thinking that it is the arithmetically equal kind. To begin with, from the generators’ perspective, on what basis could a relationship of superiority and inferiority be established? As we have seen, there is no antecedent knowledge of the other or principles of communal organization that could inform such a hierarchy. Moreover, even in the final *oikos* there is a degree of mutability in terms of whether a male or a female rules. While he thinks that males should rule aristocratically, in NE Aristotle says that it can also be the case that either the man *or the woman* of a household “controls everything” in which case he *or she* “changes it into an oligarchy,” and therefore a relation of superiority not equality, since it “exists because of wealth and power” (VIII.10.1160b34-1161a2). Even in the final *oikos*, then, it is possible for women to rule men or for men to rule women, which makes them arithmetically equal in the sense that *either* one is capable of ruling the other *as an oligarch*. It is not a complete stretch of the imagination, then, to take the relationship between male and female in the first *oikos* as between arithmetic equals and a model of sharing political rule. This is supported by the fact that, as I have argued, Aristotle appears to interchange ruler and master when speaking of the specifically *male* slave of the first *oikos* in I.2. If so, it means that the female of the first *oikos* is never referred to as ruled, which is not strong enough on its own to say that she is a ruler in that context, but neither does it rule out that possibility, especially when weighed against the other

pieces of evidence. But to better understand the connection that rule establishes between the first *oikos* and the mature *polis*, we need to finally turn to the master-slave relationship that we have only briefly discussed so far.

My interpretation of the male and female relation in the first *oikos* through *chrēsis* as use provides the context required for understanding its accompanying slavery. For on Aristotle's account, the master-slave relation is the second "community (*koinonia*)" that constitutes the first *oikos* that also needs to be accounted for to understand the meaning of everyday/every-day use and the causal connection between first *oikos* and mature *polis*. I argue here that the slave of I.2 is a truly unique figure because he appears to have several attributes at once that Aristotle will later say are attributes of distinct subjects. It means that he is neither simply what Aristotle called a "natural slave" nor someone who is in a rotating relationship of ruling and being ruled. He is *both* slave *and* ruled, as evinced by Aristotle's use of both terms in this section. The difficulty of comprehending this subject comes from the fact that he does not exist in Aristotle's mature *polis* because as Aristotle theorizes slave and ruled there, one person cannot be both. He is, in some way, a hybrid but also an early form of both natural slavery *and* political subjection that reveals more about the nature of the male-female relationship. Most importantly, however, we will see how this first slave manifests another iteration of the politics of determinate utility.

Use and Slavery

There has been little consensus regarding the slave in I.2. The eminent Aristotle commentator W. L. Newman thought that "Aristotle's theory of natural slavery is already

indicated”⁵² in this figure, referencing Aristotle’s theorization of natural slavery in some of the subsequent chapters of *Politics* Book I. While commenting on this figure, Trevor Saunders similarly refers to the later chapters of Book I for “the main discussion of slavery”⁵³ as though that were adequate for understanding him. But other recent interpreters have been less confident. Ambler notes the discrepancy between the simple givenness of the first slave and the controversy of the topic of natural slavery when it is dealt with later. But this is just one of numerous differences between Aristotle’s pithy treatment of slavery in I.2 and what is said elsewhere.⁵⁴ In addition to this, we can see the way that I.2’s slave combines features of both the ruler-ruled relation between equals and the master-natural slave relation.

The slave of I.2 is like the ruler-ruled relation between equals because Aristotle first calls it a “community (*koinōnia*)” (I.2.1252b10). As we have already seen in the male and female relation, a community, in the way Aristotle uses the term, properly exists only when there is a common purpose (EE.VII.1242a7-33, esp. 13-14 and 29-33; cf. Pol. VII.8). But we have also seen that in the context of discussing political friendship in his *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly differentiates the male-female relation from the master-slave relation, which is not a community but akin to a craftsman using a tool (EE.VII.10.1242a10-18) that is also Aristotle’s famous analogy

⁵² Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1973, 2:106.

⁵³ Saunders, *Aristotle’s Politics, I and II*, 64.

⁵⁴ Wayne Ambler is the only commentator I have encountered who notes various oddities in the I.2’s discussion of slavery. While his claim about the difference between slavery’s natural givenness in I.2 and slavery “as subject of great disagreement” (Ambler, “Aristotle on Nature and Politics,” 392) later is well taken, other claims about I.2 are less helpful. Ambler ignores the significance of Aristotle calling the ruler-ruled or master-slave relationship a community when he questions whether Aristotle is even referring to human beings with these terms (*ibid.*). And Ambler’s claim that Aristotle “does not speak directly of actual masters and slaves” is not true, since they are named at I.2.1252a34, even if not in the prior sentence from which he quotes. And the fact that Aristotle uses the terms for “ruling and ruled in the neuter gender” to “describe the relationship between the soul and body”—which he uses to question whether Aristotle is even talking about human beings—supports the fact that he is talking about human beings since Aristotle frequently likens the master-slave and soul-body relations (e.g. EE.VII.10.1242a30; Pol.I.5.1254b3-5 and 16-18).

for the natural slave in *Politics* (I.4). In other words, by calling the first master-slave relation a community, Aristotle completely departs from his theorization of slavery in the ensuing chapters of *Politics* and also his treatment of community and friendship elsewhere.

Relation to the common is also pertinent to a second salient feature of I.2's slave: the master-slave relation is mutually advantageous (I.2.1252a34). When Aristotle discusses mutual advantage later in *Politics*, it is precisely in considering the common good, which Aristotle says separates the "correct" from the "deviant" constitutions (Pol. III.6) as we have also already encountered in the previous section in the discussion of common purpose and political friendship. Notably, however Aristotle departs from the claim in I.2 when he says that in the case of "what is by nature a master and what is by nature a slave," the rule of the master is only coincidentally advantageous to the slave because, Aristotle suggests, the slave must be kept alive for mastership to exist at all (Pol. III.6.1278b31-36). This suggests a very minimal advantage for the slave, although in this there is some overlap with I.2 where both ruler and ruled exist "for the sake of [mutual] preservation" (I.2.1252a30; cf. I.5.1254b11-12). But returning to the claim that the master-slave relation is a community, it appears that there is more of an advantage to their relationship than mere preservation. When Aristotle discusses common advantage elsewhere, it is over and above the advantage of preserving life (Pol. III.6.1278b21 ff), which leads me to think that the mutual advantage of I.2 does not refer to mutual preservation but rather the division of functions that serve a common purpose, which is encapsulated in the term "community (*koinonia*)" (I.2.1252b10; cf. NE VIII.9.1160a12-14).

In the way Aristotle describes their distinctive activities, the way that master and slave relate for mutual advantage in I.2 reflects some features of natural slavery. In I.2, Aristotle says

that the natural ruler and master is “capable of looking ahead by using thought,” while the natural slave is “whatever can labor by using its body” (Pol. I.2.1252a33). This echoes what Aristotle later says when discussing the nature of the slave’s instrumentality. In Pol I.5, Aristotle writes:

Those people, then, who are as different [from others] as body is from soul or beast from human (and they are in this condition if their function is to use their bodies, and this is the best thing to come from them)—those people are by nature slaves. (1254b16-18)

Furthermore, in keeping with the discussion of slavery in *Eudemian Ethics* that we have already examined, the goal of I.2’s master and slave appears to be set by the master since “it is capable of looking ahead by using its thought” (Pol. I.2.1252a31).

But these similarities are also accompanied by some subtle differences that should not be ignored. So, it is odd that the master should seem to set the goal when Aristotle also says that there is common purpose and mutual advantage. That is because elsewhere Aristotle says that by setting the goal for his slave the master precludes the existence of common purpose and mutual advantage, except for the accidental advantage of preserving his slave’s life (EE VII.10.1242a1-33). Moreover, regarding the use of one’s thought and one’s body, Aristotle usually claims that the use of one’s body “is the best thing to come from” a slave, thereby entailing a claim about *lack* of ability as well as ability. But this is not what he says in I.2. In I.2, Aristotle simply says that the ruler is, and presumably must be, “capable (*dunamenon*) of looking ahead (*prooran*) by using its thought (*dianoia*),” and only that the slave is whatever is “capable

(*dunamenon*)” of laboring with it its body. Aristotle makes no claim about this slave’s lack of ability to use its thought, only that it will relate to the ruler and master through the use of its body. Are these details significant for understanding I.2’s slave? I believe they are, and they can be accounted for, once again, through the etiology’s spectral analysis and the centrality of use.

Perhaps the most significant methodological feature for considering I.2’s slave is the dual perspective. As discussed with reference to Aristotle’s claims about nature in I.2, *Politics*’ discussion of natural slavery requires the scientific perspective that is only possible within the context of the *polis*. Concerning slavery in I.2, then, neither the master nor the slave of the first *oikos* could possibly articulate their own relation in terms of Aristotle’s natural slavery. In so far, then, as it is the generators’ perspective that Aristotle is attempting to outline, “slavery” there cannot mean natural slavery considered from the scientific perspective. A difference between the accounts in I.2 and concerning natural slavery is therefore to be expected.

Connected to the matter of perspective is the very object under consideration. As Aristotle signals with *prōtē* and *teleion* with respect to the *oikos*, here, too, Aristotle is considering a *prōtē*, “first,” slavery, which is not necessarily the same thing as the *teleion*, “final,” slavery that exists in the final *oikos* embedded in the *polis*. This is especially significant for Ambler’s observation about the difference between the matter of fact quality of the first slave and the contentious existence of natural slavery. If Aristotle were simply talking about natural slavery in I.2 then casting doubt on natural slavery’s existence also casts doubt on his causal account of the *polis*. That is not the case, however, if “slavery” in I.2 is different from what is discussed later.

Tying these two points together is the overall purpose of Aristotle's etiological account, which is to explain the causes that created the *polis*. As with the discussion of the male-female relationship above, to do so Aristotle prioritizes the generators' perspective in the creation of the *polis* so as to avoid Plato's approach in *Republic*. Once we take these methodological points into consideration, it becomes easier to account for all of the features of the master-slave relation in I.2.

First, regarding the label "community" and the existence of a common good, if Aristotle is dealing with a "first slavery" then it need not reconcile with the later claims about the lack of community, because lack of common good, between master and slave. It is only incumbent on Aristotle to explain how the relation was transformed from a community for the common good to one where the slave's good was only coincidental. This is precisely what we get here in I.2 with the movement out of the first *oikos* and into the village, which I will treat in the next chapter. But we also see it in Aristotle's etiology of the *politeia* (regime) in *Politics* Book III onwards—which I will treat in chapter 4—where Aristotle explains the way that people pursue versions of the good that, due to human error, can lead to despotic relations, evidently in the *polis* and in the *oikos*, where the ruled do not share in the common good.

Once we take on the quotidian perspective of the generators it is also perfectly understandable that the slave contribute the use of his body *and* that no claim about the slave's ability to look ahead be made. Regarding the latter, to make a determination about ability would require a knowledge of the would-be slave as well as criteria for differentiating between "looking ahead" and inability to do so that could justify a person's subjugation. In the first instance, there are no grounds for knowing the would-be slave since the community is in the process of

becoming. In the second instance, rather than presuppose this knowledge and these criteria, which would be part of scientific knowledge, it is more appropriate to first understand the claim in practical terms as a result of the preeminence of the early male and female relation. Its preeminence arises from the necessity to reproduce, which we have seen is crucial for a causal account of a plural and growing human community. Given the way that our own and many other societies treat and have treated monogamous relationships as having a special claim to intimacy and autonomy, it should hardly surprise us that the inclusion of new members to the household takes place on different and inferior terms. Again, it is practical and quotidian considerations that are represented in the slave's inclusion to make the first *oikos*, not philosophical or scientific ones. If my interpretation is right, the slave's secondary status is perhaps less spectacular, and perhaps even less controversial. The slave joins a pre-existing community of male and female who set the vision and terms of the relationship and the slave contributes his own function albeit one that is limited to his bodily use, hence the apparent hierarchy. This hierarchy, however, is not enough to diminish the fact of community and therefore common purpose as it would be in the mature *polis*. It rather points to a further instance of bringing unique functions together to create common purpose. A further reason may be apparent in the nature of the hierarchical relationship, which is established by the use of *dianoia*. What does it mean to "look ahead using thought," exactly?

In the explanatory notes to his translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, C. D. C. Reeve points out that *dianoia* has a rather unclear meaning in Aristotle's thought. Its meaning is more defined by what it is not than what it is. *Dianoia* is *contrasted*, not aligned, with the usual things associated with the mind, such as "perception, imagination, belief, knowledge, desire, virtues of character,

and other such things.”⁵⁵ The closest that Reeve comes to a positive definition is “a process of reasoning that can culminate in a belief or an asserted proposition,”⁵⁶ going on to cite two examples from Aristotle’s *Politics*. One is helpful for illustrating the kind of process he means, for Aristotle gives an example from everyday life. Aristotle notes that small expenditures of money can deceive our thought (*dianoia*) because, when frequent, they add up to a large sum but “the expense goes unnoticed because it does not occur all at once” (Pol.V.8.1307b34-35). He concludes, “thought (*dianoia*) is led to reason fallaciously by them, as in the sophistical argument, “if each is small, so too are all”” (ibid.35-36). The point, then, is that *dianoia* is an exercise of thinking in a process. And although theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), comprehension (*sunesis*), and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) are the virtues of *dianoia* (NE.I.13.1103a5-6), it is clear from this example that *dianoia* is far from always exercised in their manner.

This is significant for the approach to I.2 taken here. I have tried to emphasize the process aspect of Aristotle’s etiology and the minimalism of Aristotle’s account that differentiates his account from Plato’s. In the use of the term *dianoia*, this is again apparent. At the culmination of the city of speech, Plato has Socrates say:

There are also other servants, I think, whose minds (*dianoia*) would not altogether qualify them for membership in our community, but whose bodies are strong enough for hard labor. So they’ll sell the use of their strength for a price called a wage, and that is why they are called wage-earners. Isn’t that so?” (*Republic*, 371d9).

⁵⁵ Reeve, *Aristotle Politics*, 211n10.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

In contrast to Plato's servants, whose minds (*dianoia*) fail to warrant their inclusion in the *polis*, Aristotle does not make any determination about the quality of the slaves' *dianoia*. Aristotle rather explains the terms of their inclusion by way of the practical process that generates the *polis* from the generators' perspective. Moreover, given its specific meaning in Aristotle, the *dianoia* that is attributed to the ruler and master lends further credence to I.2's process emphasis.⁵⁷

With all this in mind, we can see that the master-slave relation is both an extension of and a differentiation from the pre-existing male-female relationship. It is an extension because it is established in terms of a common good, denoted by the use of "community" and confirmed by the claim of mutual advantage for both master and slave. But it is also a differentiation because it is in fact a *second* community that is also characterized by a form of hierarchy, manifested by the use of one's thought (*dianoia*) or body, as the male-female relation is not (yet). In this discussion, we can again see the way that Aristotle is establishing a causal connection between first *oikos* and mature *polis* that is illuminated by the use of humans through a process of questioning and valuing human utility for alternative use. Given the thought-body nature of the hierarchy, it is possible to see the development of relations of equal rule, based on a practical rotation of roles, where capabilities of thought are discovered (through use) to be equal. But in the split between thought and body it is also possible to see the development of hierarchical relations between master and natural slave when capabilities are claimed to be unequal. Recall

⁵⁷ And unlike Plato, it is the generators themselves, not Aristotle the scientific observer, who are attributed with having the *dianoia* to establish the polis.

that it was for lack of *dianoia* that Plato's interlocutors admitted wage laborers into the first city so that their bodies were at the disposal of the city. It is not hard to see that a split between the ruled and the ruler in Aristotle's first oikos will also be defined in terms of the coordination to satisfy needs. But the difference in Aristotle is that this split *only* arises with the introduction of the slave. It is not an original split as it was in Plato's first city, it is derived from the primary relationship of androgynous rule for the reasons I have explained.

The apparent coexistence of the mastery and rule in the slave of I.2, as well as the development of distinct and separate forms of mastery and rule out of this unique slave, may also account for Aristotle's use of both "ruler" and "master" as well as "ruled" and "slave" to refer to the same relationship. As I have argued above, I do not take the reference to ruling and mastering here to refer to women and slaves, respectively. This leaves us with a puzzle, however, because it becomes necessary to explain how these two terms—ruling and mastering—can ostensibly refer to the same relationship. To do so, it is especially important to recall that in the opening chapter of *Politics* Aristotle already announced the error of treating "the positions of politician, king, household manager, and master [of slaves]" as the same (Pol. I.1.1252a7-16) and the chapter following I.2 reiterates the point. It would be strange, then, if Aristotle used the terms interchangeably even if Aristotle elsewhere talks about mastery of slaves as a form of rule (e.g. Pol. I.5.1254b2-3; EE VII.10.1242b10-11). If this were an isolated oddity concerning the discussion of slavery in I.2, it would be difficult to explain it. But taken together with the other differences, I believe it can be explained in the terms already presented earlier in this chapter, meaning Aristotle's etiological methodology.

Androgynous Rule

The analysis of the slave in the last section has only strengthened the case I have been making in this chapter namely, that the original form of use is open, egalitarian, agonistic, and androgynous, as male and female come together to work out their singular functions for an indeterminate common purpose but that necessarily entails alternative use. That is because the slave of I.2 can be understood as an extension of the male-female community even while it is also differentiated from it. But on account of this differentiation, Aristotle not only helps us specify the politics of indeterminate utility but also the politics of determinate utility. That is, by introducing hierarchy between master and slave based on the precedence and preeminence of the male-female relation, we see a version of the politics of determinate use because the master establishes the (emergent) common goal and the slave exists for its sake. Although, as we have seen, this is not so hierarchical or unilaterally beneficial for the ruler to be denied the title of a community. Here in the first household, then, Aristotle brings the politics of indeterminate and determinate utility together in a complex and interesting way. The first *oikos* evinces the importance of indeterminacy as humans come together to use each other for the first time. But it also evinces the fact that various claims to precedence and preeminence are bound to accompany such indeterminate relations and thereby complicate any claims to do away with the politics of determinate utility altogether. In doing so, however, the first *oikos* challenges us to justify the grounds on which the politics of determinate utility are manifested while admitting that the uses of the human animal, at least from the quotidian perspective, are radically indeterminate and therefore always prone to alternative uses. Such an admission presses rulers

into justifying the grounds for the politics of determinate utility that also amounts to questioning and valuing people for their utility and therefore still incites the *politics* of utility. The complex interweaving of indeterminate and determinate uses is called “everyday/every-day use” by Aristotle but in light of my account here I wish to call it “androgynous rule.” “Androgynous” is a fitting attribute for three reasons. First, it is androgynous in the etymological sense because a combination of man (*anēr*) and woman (*gunē*). Second, it is also androgynous in the sense of *indeterminately* gendered because of the indeterminacy of gender’s importance since the same qualities are also attributed to *human* animality, not simply the male-female couple. Third, it is fitting because of the very indeterminacy of the division between the politics of indeterminate and determinate use that I have just described.

In the end, androgynous rule names the process by which use gives rise to the polis: that is, by the questioning and valuing of human utility for an indeterminate common purpose that will involve alternative use. We have seen, then, the way that Aristotle’s approach makes human natality—the singular uniqueness that Arendt thinks is conferred by human birth—contingent upon the natality of the *polis* in the original household. Moreover, in the following chapter we will see how the complex interweaving of the politics of indeterminate and determinate use are simplified and prized apart in the next steps of the *polis*’ development, beginning with the village, and, eventually, the mature *polis*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have dwelled at length on the first household that Aristotle describes in terms of everyday/every-day use. I have argued that it paints a picture of human use that brings singular individuals together to create common purpose in an ongoing process of questioning and valuing each other's utility that is characterized by openness, agonism, androgyny, and indeterminacy. That said, it is accompanied by a form of human use that, despite the claim to mutual benefit, is more determinate, hierarchical, and reminiscent of the split that pervades Plato's first city. Reading Aristotle's effort to account for the polis in both natural- and political-scientific terms for the symptom, we can already see that there is a mixed result in terms of the transfer between singularity and collectivity. The features that recommend the use between the male-female couple are counterbalanced by the loss of singularity in the determinacy of the first slave. In the following chapter, I continue to follow Aristotle's etiology of the polis and reading for the symptom in order to disclose the ways that singularity become configured in Aristotle's account of politics. There we will see how Aristotle's account of human use becomes significantly more determinate—to the detriment of singularity and collectivity—but in instructive ways for contemporary democratic theory.

Chapter 4

Aristotelian Beginnings II: Politics and the Determinacy of the Good

By concentrating on the particularities of Aristotle's method in *Politics* I.2, I argued in the last chapter that we can identify a radically different conceptualization of the first household in Aristotle's causal account of the polis. This conceptualization embraces and explains, rather than distorts, the specific term that Aristotle uses there; namely, *chrēsis* as use, which Aristotle scholars have interpreted as need. But in advancing this novel interpretation, I have also raised a lot of questions about how to situate this first household and what I call its "everyday/every-day use" within Aristotle's broader political thought. Indeed, this question is immediately raised in the etiology itself. If Aristotle's first household is comprised of relationships *eis pasan hēmeran*, (for everyday/every-day [use]), the new phrase *chrēseōs heneken mē ephēmerou* (not-ephemeral use) (*Pol.* I.2.1252b16) that Aristotle uses to designate a new kind of community indicates that a transformation of human use is underway. The connection between these two phrases may not be immediately apparent, but in some respects it is very simple. The Greek word for a day is *hēmera*, and so "ephemeral" translates the Greek *ephēmeros*, which means "for a day." So much is confirmed in *History of Animals* when Aristotle discusses a fly that is called *ephēmeron* because it is special "with regard to its lifespan (from which it gets its name)" (*HA* I.5.490a34, Reeve translation). As Aristotle correctly apprehended, it lives for just one day (*HA*.5.19.552b23).¹

¹ The animal he is referring to is the may-fly, whose contemporary scientific name still bears its Greek name: *Ephemera longicauda*.

But by using this word privatively (“not-ephemeral use”), at least three things are immediately apparent. First, Aristotle is confirming that the phrase *eis pasan hēmeran*, which I have translated “everyday/every-day use,” does indeed refer to a single day, although as I argued in the previous chapter it is a play on words that invokes the day while simultaneously referencing eternity (*every day*). Second, the transformed use he is about to describe is defined against the day in some fashion and so also signifies a transformation of the use of humans he conceptualized in the first household. Third, the transformation of use is central to the designation, and therefore conceptualization, of the new communities that develop after the first household.

It is my goal in this chapter to explain what this transformation of use in the transition from household to other communities, including the polis, involves. Apart from the fact that it completes the account of use that Aristotle has begun there, I do so because it is essential for understanding Aristotle’s contribution to the central problematic of this dissertation—how the use of humans is a problematic fact of human community. In the last chapter, we saw that the use of humans is a fact of the first communities and a problem in so far as humans have to creatively work out what their uses will be. That is, human use is *the* generative problem that builds community. That generation is characterized by both indeterminacy and determinacy in human use but especially the former. On the back of this understanding, I will argue that the transformation into not-ephemeral use, as a community completes its development in a polis, constitutively marginalizes the indeterminacy characteristic of everyday use—a central feature of the friendship between singular individuals who come together in the first household in an open, agonistic, androgynous, and alternative way in an ongoing process of questioning and

valuing each other's utility. In other words, the indeterminacy of use becomes a symptom of human community in Aristotle's conceptualization because it falls outside of his causal and normative account of politics. That is because, I argue, that account rests on the completed and therefore determinate development of a polis and its political regime, which is underpinned by a theory of human flourishing that makes determinacy paramount. The indeterminacy of use then becomes a different kind of problem. No longer the generative problem of political becoming, it is a destructive problem that threatens the determinacy of the good and therefore needs to be eradicated. These are the keys to understanding the transformation of everyday use into not-ephemeral use, and in so far as a good human life and a polis' regime are defined in terms of not-ephemeral use, they will also always be defined against the indeterminacy of everyday use and the first household. As a result, indeterminate use becomes a fugitive aspect of political life that nonetheless haunts it. Indeterminate use haunts the polis because it is bound up with the fact of human singularity *and* the propensity to couple, making indeterminacy an ineradicable feature of human animality.

I begin by examining the next steps of Aristotle's etiology of the polis in *Politics* I.2, whose beginning was extensively analysed and elaborated in the previous chapter. I argue that chresis as use makes better sense of I.2's argument beyond the first household than existing accounts that interpret it as need. This requires paying attention to the gendered dimensions of the household, in the course of which we see the way that determinacy is ultimately privileged over indeterminacy in Aristotle's treatment of human use. On the back of this interpretation, I examine Aristotle's discussion of friendship to show how the politics of indeterminate utility becomes a symptom in his political theory. There we see how ordinary people are disciplined by

the law to make their relations as determinate as possible, also with a view to conserving the status quo. I argue that Aristotle may have misinterpreted the phenomenon he uses to justify his approach, a phenomenon that admits of an alternative interpretation of human flourishing that features, rather than eradicates, indeterminacy in use.

Problems of Need in Aristotle's Village

As with the first household, the etiology of I.2 is characteristically minimalist in presenting the ensuing development of human community in the form of the village and the polis. And as with the first household, *chrēsis* is central to it. For as I have already indicated, *chrēsis* first explicitly appears in the summary description of the village immediately after Aristotle has presented the first household. Scholars interpolate *chrēsis* into *eis pasan hēmeran* (the description of the first household) because of the Greek *men...de* phraseology, which indicates a contrast is being made in the two adjacent sentences. Interpolating and translating *chrēsis* as need has allowed Aristotle scholars to make some sense of the household, through an interpretation that at least partly overlaps with the interpretation of Aristotle proffered by the tradition of the split, as we saw in chapter 1. That is, scholars see everyday needs mapping on to the two communities that make up the first household. So, the male and female fulfill a need for reproduction, and the master and slave relation fulfill the need for preservation through subsistence.² It follows, then, that if interpreters have overwhelmingly interpreted *chrēsis* in I.2's household as need, they have also interpreted the village and indeed the polis, which consists of "several villages" (Pol.

² Trott, *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*, 44, 47; Saunders, *Aristotle's Politics, I and II*.

I.2.1252b27), in terms of need, too. So, parallel to the “everyday needs” for which the household exists, the village and polis are understood to exist “for the sake of satisfying needs other than everyday ones” (Pol. I.2.1252b15-16), which is Reeve’s translation of what I will refer to more literally as “not-ephemeral” *chrēsis*.³

Unlike the first household, however, it proves to be much more difficult to explain the village, and therefore the rest of Aristotle’s argument here, when *chrēsis* is interpreted and translated as need. As Trevor Saunders puts it, “Aristotle’s villages are mysterious things; his account is brief, allusive, and ambiguous...”⁴ Saunders’ concern seems to particularly center on needs, since he is unsure in what way needs are “other than everyday.” What he tendentiously comes up with is an “accretion” of needs. So, in answer to the question, “What then can one achieve in a village but not in a household?” he responds: “More secure defence...Friendship with a wider range of persons...A more assured supply of material goods, acquired by (non-monetary) exchange...”⁵ In other words, the village stands for a marginal improvement in the satisfaction of the same needs that existed in the first household.

These may be elements of the village, but as a specification of “not-ephemeral” *chrēsis* this interpretation is hampered by several difficulties. To begin with, it is not clear how these needs amount to a distinction from, let alone privation of, the first household’s needs indicated by the phrase *mē ephēmerou* (not-ephemeral/not-everyday). Moreover, Saunders notes that “there is an irritating lack of hard information” in the next step of the argument, concerning the

³ Or, alternatively: “something more than the supply of daily needs” (Benjamin Jowett); “for long-term advantage” (Irwin and Fine); “for the satisfaction of other than daily purposes” (Trevor Saunders).

⁴ Saunders, *Aristotle’s Politics, I and II*, 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

way that need is entailed when the polis is formed out of several villages.⁶ Specifically, “[h]ow is the ‘good life’ of the state related to the ‘other than daily needs’ of the village?”⁷ Saunders is addressing Aristotle’s claim that the process of polis development is completed when “it has already reached (one might almost say) the limit of total self-sufficiency,” which Aristotle also glosses as “living well” and famously counterposes to “living” (I.2.1252b28-30, Reeve). So, in addition to the difficulty of explaining how needs are “everyday” in the household and then “not-everyday” in the village, Saunders points out the difficulty in understanding how living well relates to either, and indeed both, of these needs when they are, in the dominant interpretation, subsumed and preserved within the polis.⁸⁹ But after raising these crucial questions, Saunders leaves them unanswered and moves on. He admits that the only clear feature of the village is that it is made up of several households that are founded by the children of the first male and female.¹⁰ But even this proves to be problematic because it then makes it difficult to explain what Saunders takes to be the “core” feature of the village, which is its rule by kingship. For Aristotle begins *Politics* by insisting that the head of a household is distinct from a political ruler, and the master of a slave, and a father. But in the village as Saunders understands it, the king of a village is also the head of a household as well as a father to his subjects. In the end, Saunders

⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” 128.

⁹ As I noted in the previous chapter, numerous Aristotle scholars think that the first household is simply always the same. This is especially pronounced in Booth, but it also comes out in more subtle ways, too, such as the use of ‘husband and wife’ (e.g., Keyt, “Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” 128) to refer to the first male and female, which is anachronistic on my interpretation. Earlier in this piece, Keyt is explicit about seeing the eternity of the household (122).

¹⁰ Saunders, *Aristotle’s Politics, I and II*, 66. Keyt thinks “[a]lmost everything [Aristotle] has to say about the village is contained in one sentence: “The first community formed from several households for the sake of nondaily services is the village,”” but only elaborates on the idea that “the village ministers to a wider range of needs than the household, which exists to meet everyday needs...” (“Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” 129).

simply assumes that Aristotle speaks of the household manager as conceptualized in the rest of Book I. The household manager has several roles—father to children, master to slave, and ruler to wife. In doing so, however, he is required to flatten any distinction between the household, the village, and the polis, which again annuls the meaning of *mē ephēmerou* and any real development between the founding of the first household and the polis.¹¹

In the face of these and other difficulties, scholars have come up with numerous ways to deal with this chapter other than reconsider the interpretation and translation of *chrēsis* as need. For instance, while I emphasized the etiology's uniqueness of method in order to explain the peculiar features of the first household, many Aristotle scholars take refuge in the etiology's uniqueness of *purpose*—which is somehow clear, even if the arguments for its sake are not—in order to explain *away* its peculiar features, including its methodology. For instance, even while identifying the difficulties, Saunders discounts them because “Aristotle has bigger fish to fry.”¹² By that Saunders means Aristotle is arguing for the naturalness of the polis, which is used to overlook the difficulties of interpretation. Similarly, consider Newman, who says the “genetic method [i.e., looking at how things originate and grow from an internal source] which Aristotle follows in this inquiry may surprise those who remember that he lays down the principle elsewhere, that the genesis of a thing is to be explained by its nature or essence (*ousia*), not the nature of it by its genesis.”¹³ Newman explains the aberration in terms of Aristotle's purpose to show that the polis is natural, not show what the polis is, which is where the essence explanation

¹¹ Saunders, 67.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1:28, citing De Part. An. I.1.640a13sq.

is appropriate.¹⁴ Booth also remarks that the etiology's genetic method involves nothing but the most simple and elementary observation, not analysis, of "generation and movement" that "reproduces the early stage of philosophy itself" because it is so rudimentary.¹⁵ And, like Newman, that method can be explained by its purpose because "the conclusions are, it seems, what is really at stake,"¹⁶ chief among which is the naturalness of the polis. But like Saunders, Booth thinks that the conclusions also "reveal the limitations" of the etiology's method because Aristotle draws more conclusions than his observations of the polis' growth can support.¹⁷ The real purpose of I.2, according to Booth, is to raise a question in our mind: "what is an association [*koinōnia*]?"¹⁸ The purpose of the section, then, is simply to raise "the need for the analysis that will begin on page 1253B,"¹⁹ which means the next chapter of Book I. Booth is adamant that the etiology's method requires special treatment in light of its unique purpose, so much so that "[t]o say that an inadequate argument is presented here is to misunderstand Aristotle's intention."²⁰

Booth's interpretation has not in the least deterred others from pointing out the inadequacy of Aristotle's argument here. For while Newman, Booth, and Saunders tend to apologize for Aristotle's arguments by reference to his purpose, David Keyt and Fred Miller do not hesitate to assess Aristotle's purpose—the thesis that the polis is natural—and find that it is significantly wanting precisely because his arguments are, at least in part, inadequate. Their treatments focus on just a few lines at the conclusion of the genetic argument. Just after his

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Booth, "Politics and the Household: A Commentary on Aristotle's 'Politics' Book One," 209.

¹⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 211.

¹⁹ Ibid., 209.

²⁰ Ibid., 211.

claim that the polis comes into being “for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well,” Aristotle says:

“That is why every city exists by nature, since the first communities also do. For this one [the polis] is their [the first communities’] end. For what each thing is when its coming to be has been completed, this we say is the nature of each—for example, of a human, of a horse, or of a household.” (I.2.1252b29-34, Reeve).

This portion of Aristotle contains two claims. The first is what, in the literature, is often called the “transitivity of nature” argument in the etiology. It amounts to the claim that the polis is natural because the first communities are. Now, Aristotle could be referring to the household and village (as Keyt understands him) or he could be referring to the first two communities that formed the first household, or he could mean all or any combination of these. What is unambiguous, however, is that Aristotle thinks there is some kind of transference of naturalness in the way that he has accounted for the polis’ generation.

The second claim centres on the idea of an internal source of movement. We have already encountered this in my discussion of Aristotle’s methods and their differences according to the objects under consideration. A chief difference concerning objects is whether they are natural or artificial. Natural things have an internal source of movement that bring the thing to completion in accordance with its form (*morphē*). Artificial things, on the other hand, have an external source of movement where the form of the object exists in the creator’s head and is imposed on material in order to bring the thing into existence. Aristotle here likens the polis to a

horse because both are completed when an internal source of movement has run its course and produced its nature as form (*morphē*). Something is natural, then, if it has an internal source of motion.

But Keyt and Miller are largely dismissive of these arguments. Miller follows Keyt's objection to the transitivity of nature argument because it is not clear that something's naturalness is bestowed on whatever it forms part of. A house can be made out of timber—a material that exists by nature—but it does not mean the completed house exists by nature.²¹ And while Keyt accepts that only natural things have an internal source of movement, since the naturalness of the polis is what Aristotle is trying to prove, he cannot enter it into the argument without presupposing that the polis is natural and so begging the question.²² Both of these objections, however, hinge on *chrēsis*'s interpretation.²³ Regarding the second claim, about the internal source of movement, Keyt can only say that Aristotle is question-begging if he has not already established that there is an internal source of movement at work in the polis' generation. A more charitable reading of Aristotle would look to see whether he has already shown how generation occurred through an internal source of movement, which makes his claim ("For what each thing is when its coming to be has been completed, this we say is the nature of each...") a summary restatement. But this is precluded when *chrēsis* means need. Even if needs are natural

²¹ Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle's Politics," 130–31; Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*, 39–40.

²² Keyt, "Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle's Politics," 130.

²³ As is made clear in Keyt's formal reconstruction of the arguments. So, as with most interpreters, the household is considered natural because it fulfills "everyday needs," which arise out of a "natural instinct" for self-preservation (master-slave relation) and "the relation of husband and wife [sic], on the natural instinct to procreate" (128). While admitting that the argument for the village existing by nature "is more obscure," Keyt nonetheless claims that "the village ministers to a wider range of needs than the household, which exists to meet everyday needs...but to a narrower range than the polis" (129). Again, Keyt is not confident that this allows one to "connect this idea with the idea that the village exists by nature," but he tries to come up with a series of premisses that lead to the right conclusion all the same. These are nonetheless subsequently undermined, as I detail here.

(as interpreters take them to be, at least in the first household), that does not necessarily mean that their satisfaction is natural. On the basis of his interpretation of *chrēsis*, then, Keyt has no way to deal with Aristotle's claim other than dismiss it.²⁴

Keyt's rejection of the first claim, about the transitivity of nature, also appears to be informed by the interpretation of *chrēsis* as need. The example that Keyt relies on to undermine it—the building of a house—is telling in its focus on the materiality of the house. That is, Keyt measures Aristotle's claims about a household's, village's, and polis' naturalness in terms of the materials from which they are created as though each community were a physical house. This seems to be informed by *chrēsis* as need because, as we have seen in previous chapters, need tends to be accompanied by a focus on the use of objects and even reduces humans to another object. Indeed, Keyt even manages to treat humans as another object when he considers the salient material differences between a physical house and a polis made up of humans. He does so by comparing wood and humans *as material*, one being dead while the other is alive. He considers whether humans, as a living material, allow for the transitivity of naturalness because the polis helps to realize that living nature. But he denies there is a meaningful difference because as material in a polis, humans are no different from shoes that more fully realize "man's ambulatory capacity" but are made by art, not nature.²⁵

²⁴ Conversely, Adriel Trott argues against Keyt by insisting on the internal source of movement in the etiology but does so by saying that Aristotle is not susceptible to question-begging because this relies on a "view about the ontological status of the individual that is more Hobbesian than Aristotelian." *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*, 62n74.

²⁵ Trott, by contrast, understands the polis to consist of the activity of the humans that constitute it and on the basis of which she defends the argument for the internal source of movement. It requires, however, that she interpret *chrēsis* as need and in a way that effectively presupposes the polis, too, since the needs in the first household are already coded as incomplete with respect to human needs as they are completely satisfied in the polis. On this interpretation, nature becomes the manager or coordinator of humans for the satisfaction (through the definition) of their needs in a way that is reminiscent of Plato's politics of determinate utility, which it is revealed to be managed by some god who gave them the conception of justice from the beginning.

Suffice to say, then, that the interpretation of *chrēsis* as need is extremely embedded within scholarly interpretations of Aristotle, and not solely at the level of translation. In so far as this interpretation overlaps with the interpretations of Aristotle proffered by the democratic and critical theorists I examined in chapter 1, we can see that the Platonized Aristotle is not entirely the latter's fancy. Unlike those treatments, however, the more detailed examinations of I.2 reveal that *chrēsis* as need turns it into a series of unclear and possibly fallacious arguments about the polis. But for all the reasons we have for questioning need as the best interpretation of *chrēsis*, it is not obvious that replacing it with use makes any more sense of the village. On first appearance, what Aristotle says about the village even appears to contradict aspects of my interpretation of the first household. Consider what he says about the household in the context of the village. Aristotle says that the village is formed out of several households (I.2.1252b15) and is ruled monarchically because "those who came together were living under kingly rule, since every household is ruled by the eldest as king" (I.2.1252b20-21). This seems to contradict my reading because I argued that the first household entailed a special form of androgynous—i.e., shared—rule. And since Aristotle further suggests that the household has been universally ruled in this way since "ancient times" (I.2.1252b24), he appears to say that it has always been this way. But a more careful consideration allows for another interpretation. There are three key features of the village's description that boost the interpretation of *chrēsis* as use, help reconcile what is said about the village's household with my interpretation of the first household, and will allow us to explain the transformation of everyday use into not-ephemeral use between the first household, the village, and the polis.

The first feature is what Aristotle says defines the existence of a new kind of community: the good for which it is formed. In the very first sentence about the village Aristotle writes:

“The first community, consisting of several households, [formed—*sunestēkuia*, from *sunistēmi*] for the sake of not-ephemeral use is the village.” (I.2.1252b15-16)

Note that I have interpolated the word *sunestēkuia* in this sentence, but that has a strong textual basis. As with the conceptualization of the first household and indeed of the book as a whole, the emphasis here is the good (*agathon*, I.1.1252a2) for which the community was put together (*sunistēmi*, Pol.I.2.1252b13; cf. I.1.1252a2). This feature is important for understanding the relationship between the pre- and post-village household because it means there is nothing to prevent us saying that the first household changed between its own formation and the moment at which the village is formed. Indeed, owing to the fact that the village is a collection of households spawned by the children of the original male and female, there *had* to be development between the first household and the household embedded in the village because there are no children to speak of in the former.²⁶ But when the meaning of *chrēsis* is obscure, it is easy to think that the existence of several households is itself the defining feature of the village. Recall that having noted the difficulty of understanding how needs were being conceptualized, Saunders says that the only clear feature of the village is that it is comprised of several households that are founded by the children of the first male and female.²⁷ Seeing it this

²⁶ Keyt rather assumes that children were simply there in the first place, “Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle’s Politics,” 128.

²⁷ Saunders, *Aristotle’s Politics, I and II*, 66.

way makes it look like the key difference is one of numbers, which, according to Saunders, is the feature that enables the more secure satisfaction of needs—the *same* needs that were already present in the first household—which means the community merits a new name. But it does not make sense to treat the village as a new kind of community principally because of its numbers. In addition to Aristotle’s emphasis on the good that informs a community’s formation, I have already noted that Aristotle’s communities are not defined by their numbers.²⁸ And, as Saunders and others have shown, when we think about the village in terms of needs and numbers, it becomes extremely difficult to explain what “*not-ephemeral*” means, since those qualities require continuity rather than disjunction.

The way Aristotle defines a community in terms of the good it pursues does not rule out my interpretation of the first household, then, but it does not significantly improve our understanding of the etiology because it does not in itself clarify the meaning of “not ephemeral,” or *chrēsis*, which appears to be the crucial term for understanding the first household, the village, and the polis. When the first feature is considered together with the second and third features of the village, however, not-ephemeral *chrēsis* can be explained. For although the addition of children cannot explain the designation of a new community on account of numbers, the addition of children is an essential feature of the village for another reason. That is, they are significant for their connection to the village’s mode of rule:

²⁸ *Pol.* I.1. Trott notes this too, but she also interprets *chrēsis* as need, which is the “reason” that the various communities of I.2. are formed. On her interpretation of I.2, the household and the village are defined by the lack that their needs signify, which can only be comprehended from the perspective of the polis where the complete form of human needs is apparent. In that way, she thinks that the whole process of generation can only be understood from the perspective of the polis, meaning Aristotle *is* presupposing what he is also trying to explain, but Trott thinks this justifiable in light of the ontology with which Aristotle works. *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*, 44-50; 62n74.

“And above all, the village in accord with nature seems to be a colony of the household, consisting as it does of what some have called “sharers of the same milk,” sons and the sons of sons. *That is why cities were at first ruled by kings, as [barbarian] nations still are...*And so the same holds in the colonies, because of the kinship [of the villagers]” (I.2.1252b18-19, Reeve translation, my emphasis).

Aristotle says that the cause of the village’s mode of rule is the existence of children who make the village a community of family members. But how, exactly? These children do not appear to be the cause of its mode of rule at the moment they found their own households. Rather, Aristotle says that “those who came together were living under kingly rule, since every household is ruled by the eldest as king” (I.2.1252b19-21). That is, Aristotle says that the household was already ruled in a kingly fashion and this carried over to the village. That means the mode of rule that defines the village began at some point in the household’s existence prior to it becoming part of a village. As we have seen, the standard reading would simply say, against my account of the first household, that the household was ruled in a kingly way from the very beginning. But, in addition to being unable to account for the distinction Aristotle introduces with the terms “first” and “final” household, this interpretation also fails to explain the relationship between everyday/every-day and not-ephemeral *chrēsis*, whether one understands *chrēsis* as need or use. Moreover, this interpretation discounts the fact that Aristotle only explicitly names kingly rule alongside the existence of children, with which the first household could not have originated because it originated out of the *desire* to have children (but not only

that). The fact that the village's mode of rule pre-exists it does not warrant a rejection of my interpretation of the first household, then, but rather presses us to explain this feature in our account of it. So far, then, the key features of the village are, first, the new good for which the community exists and, second, its kingly mode of rule, and both appear to be closely linked to a third feature, which is the existence of children. In what follows, I attempt to explain the way these three features are connected in order to shed light on the meaning of not-ephemeral *chrēsis* and, in turn, the fate of everyday use within the context of the village and the polis.

Fathers, Elders, Despots, Gods, and Cyclopes

I want to begin bringing these three features together by looking at the connection between rule and children. The first thing we need to do is specify it more carefully. From the discussion of the village, it is patent that Aristotle thinks about the rule of children in terms of sexual difference, because what he is describing is patriarchy. So much is clear when we consider the broad set of figures that Aristotle subsumes under the Greek word used to designate village rule: *basileuō*. Reeve has translated it as rule by a king, which is good enough, but we need to understand "king" quite loosely here. For in the space of just a few lines, Aristotle uses it to encompass a very diverse set of relations, such as that of a father over children, the oldest (male) over the younger, an 'Oriental' despot over his subjects, and a kingly god over other gods. The set becomes even wider with Aristotle's quotation from Homer, "Each one lays down the

law for his own wives and children" (I.2.1252b22-23).²⁹ For what Aristotle does not make explicit but would have been obvious to an ancient reader is that this is a description of the Cyclopes. Its use here is remarkable for the fact that the Cyclopes are usually described as markedly different from human beings, and especially Hellenes.³⁰ But this wide range also helps to identify that, despite other differences, the common denominator is patriarchy, the rule of a male head whose authority at least partly stems from his status as father. We have therefore further pinpointed what needs to be explained: how rule becomes patriarchal and indeed patrilineal, since it is clear that it is always the eldest son that takes over rule of the village. We can now put our investigation in the form of several questions: What distinguishes the eldest male from the others in the household that warrants his rule? And, after that, how does this connect to the first feature of the village, the good for which it is formed? And lastly, why is that good called "not-ephemeral" *chrēsis*? To answer these, we need to turn to Aristotle's account of sexual difference.

Having raised sexual difference as a crucial element of Aristotle's account of human use, one may question what value there is in understanding it at all. That is because it is of course possible to think that Aristotle's philosophy of sexual difference is pure ideology, where Aristotle is simply the mouthpiece of broad social practices whereby males are accorded capacities and

²⁹ The passage in Homer comes from *Odyssey*, ix.112-15, and the original actually has "wife" instead of "wives," which Aristotle correctly quotes in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9.1180a28. Plato also quotes this passage at *Laws*, 680, which is one reason that some scholars believe Aristotle has Plato's *Laws* in mind when composing this etiology. See, for example, Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 2:114.

³⁰ This is especially because, as Mercedes Aguirre and Richard Buxton point out, the Cyclopes under discussion are the pastoral ones, who are one of three kinds of Cyclopes. The others exhibited at least some more sociality and even common enterprise. But considering the others are more like the human animal as Aristotle conceptualizes it, Aristotle's choice for comparison is the least flattering but also makes the form of rule in question most encompassing. Aguirre and Buxton, *Cyclops*, 167–70.

thereby authority over subordinate females and minors.³¹ But despite Aristotle's reputation for misogyny and gender essentialism, feminist scholarship over the last several decades has led the way in showing that his treatment of sexual difference is more complicated than that. This is especially apparent when the topic of sexual difference is approached through the sheer breadth of Aristotle's work, ranging from his natural-scientific works, his 'biological' works, through to his ethical and political works.³² That breadth is important because, as Brooke Holmes has pointed out, it increases our sensitivity to important distinctions in that treatment, such as that between sexual difference in principles (*archai*) and in animals. So, Aristotle accounts for all natural generation in terms of first principles that are defined by sexual difference. "The male possesses the principle of movement and generation, while the female possesses that of matter."³³ In his account of four causes (formal, final, efficient, and material), Aristotle says the first three are active and belong to the male, while the fourth is passive and is the female principle. So far, Aristotle looks like "the worst kind of essentialist."³⁴ But sexual difference is not so apparent in his analysis of animals. Turning to Aristotle's biological works, one sees that Aristotle's treatment of animal species tends to emphasize the extensive commonality and continuity between males and females within species. Where there is difference in, for example, the case of reproduction, it does not amount to strict male determinism either.³⁵ At the level of ethics and politics, some

³¹ G. E. R. Lloyd basically thinks this, *Science, Folklore and Ideology*; cf. Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*.

³² I use scare quotes around "biological" because, as I pointed out in the last chapter, there is some debate over whether what Aristotle writes can easily be understood within the terms of modern biology. See the introductions in Brill, *Aristotle and the Concept of Shared Life*, and Connell, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Biology*, for two informed but somewhat divergent views.

³³ Holmes, *Gender*, 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42

³⁵ *Ibid.*; cf. Deslauriers, "Sex and Essence in Aristotle's Metaphysics and Biology."

scholars have even argued that there are apparent and sometimes radical differences between Aristotle and the cultural norms of his context.³⁶

The complexity of Aristotle's treatment of sexual difference is apparent in the etiology, too. We have already engaged with this to an extent in the previous chapter, but there I largely deferred the question of sexual difference because of the special circumstances of what Aristotle was describing. In line with the dual-object dimension of Aristotle's spectral analysis—which maintains that the first household is not simply the same thing as the final household as it is embedded in the polis—Aristotle was accounting for the male and female coming together for the first time. Bearing in mind the dual-perspective dimension of Aristotle's analysis, that meant whatever protracted observations informed Aristotle's ideas about what these humans are useful for had to be discounted. In their place there is a process of questioning and valuing the use and utility of the other that was characterized by openness and alterity, to name just two of its features.

By the time we get to the village, however, our task has somewhat changed. The process of questioning and valuing of use also results in determinations of human use that become more or less established and form the presuppositions of human life. That is the process that helps establish the village as a determinate form of community. Indeed, this is already true of the household prior to the village, too, since the village's kingly mode of rule came into being in the household at some point prior to the village's formation, as I have observed. What can we say about these determinate human uses? Because of the causal connection that Aristotle is establishing between each stage of the polis' development, it is also true that as time goes on

³⁶ Levy, "Does Aristotle Exclude Women from Politics?"; Mulgan, "Aristotle and the Political Role of Women."

and the process of working out human use plays out, male and female relations come closer to what Aristotle takes to be true of sexual difference in the developed polis. That means what Aristotle says about sexual difference across his work should now be considered for its value in explaining human relations in the developing household, village, and polis of the etiology. That said, we still need to respect the dual-object and dual-perspective features of the etiology, which maintains a distinction between what can be observed and said from Aristotle's perspective in the developed polis—which is a theoretical-scientific perspective—and what the inhabitants of human communities in their development will say about their own activity. That is still the only way that we can account for the polis' generation without simply presupposing it and therefore missing what I think Aristotle's account achieves that Plato's did not.

With all that in mind, I will proceed to explain the connection between the three features of the village in two stages. The first will address the difference in disposition between males and females, or fathers and mothers. We will see that males are distinguished, for Aristotle, by their capacity to rule, which is fleshed out in terms of their ability to determine what is indeterminate. Building on that, the second stage will address the connection between that capacity and the definition of the village and the polis in terms of not-ephemeral use. In doing so, we will see the way, and the reasons why, Aristotle diminishes his own conception of indeterminate use and conceptualizes his own politics of determinate utility. That means we also see indeterminate use's transformation into a symptom; that is, the by-product of the causal account by which singular human animals come together for the sake of common purpose.

Patriarchy, Prohairēsis, and Phronēsis

It is not hard to establish that sexual difference is an operative feature of Aristotle's thought. Pertinent to the topic at hand, Aristotle infamously claims that males are more capable of rule than females. In his words, "a male, unless he is somehow formed contrary to nature, is by nature more capable of leading (*hegemonikōteron*) than a female" (Pol I.12.2159b1-3). Why does he think this? Setting aside for the moment, though not dismissing, the possibility that this is an ideological position at its base, I want to consider two explanations for this claim that emerge out of a broad consideration of Aristotle's corpus. This will give rise to an explanation of indeterminate use's transformation into determinate use as the first household becomes a village and the reason that indeterminate use is thereafter diminished in Aristotle's thought.

Later in the *Politics*, Aristotle says the ruling element is spirit (*thumos*, Pol. VII.7.1328a7). In *History of Animals*, among a series of sweeping claims on the differences between male and female animals, Aristotle notes that females are "less spirited" (*athumotera*) than males (HA IX.1.608a33-34). While this may go some way to explain why males are more fit for rule than females, how it does so is not clear cut. Marguerite Deslauriers, for instance, argues that Aristotle mostly observes and reports on the standard dispositions and practices of male and female animals in his day, differences that he accepts but does not ever argue for or explain as caused by gender. And while Aristotle does argue "that one sex must be deficient relative to the other, there is no argument to show that it is the female who is deficient;" Aristotle "regularly assumes rather than argues for that claim."³⁷

³⁷ Deslauriers 140.

Supporting Deslauriers' interpretation is Aristotle's related observation of females as mothers. Still in the *HA* discussion, he notes that they are, with rare exceptions in the animal world, "more attentive to nurturing the young" (*HA*.IX.608b2-3, Balme translation, amended). In keeping with Deslauriers' interpretation, Aristotle does not argue that this attention stems from any innate quality, but neither does he rule it out. In *NE*, however, Aristotle explains the differences between a human father's and a mother's relation to children as a circumstantial, not congenital, function. For Aristotle notes that parents "feel affection" for their children more than children do for their parents because parents, having the faculty of "comprehension or perception," have effectively spent more time with children, who have not yet acquired "comprehension or perception," than children have with parents. Pertinent to the discussion of sexual difference, however, is Aristotle's further conclusion: "[f]rom these observations it is also clear why mothers love their children more" than fathers (*NE*. VIII.12.1161b23-27). Again, Aristotle is observing a difference between male and female and the cause is circumstantial and therefore contingent, not congenital.³⁸ And the circumstance Aristotle reports reflects his historical situation, of course.

Whether Aristotle's views on sexual difference are argued for or not, Deslauriers does not deny that the assumed differences play an important structuring role in Aristotle's works. Giulia Sissa has recently shown just how deep these assumptions reach in a way that complicates, if not quite falsifies, Deslauriers' reading. Sissa connects the difference in thumos, and therefore capacity for rule, to Aristotle's claims, in his biological works, that females are

³⁸ Cf. *NE* IX. 1168a25. For an interesting discussion and overview of the literature on this, see Ward, "Mothering and the Sacrifice of Self."

congenitally colder than males.³⁹ But what kind of challenge this is to Deslauriers' argument depends on two things. First, it depends on the soundness of Aristotle's natural science. Is Aristotle's 'science,' including the view that males are hotter than females, mostly ideology and so still based on mere observations and assumptions?⁴⁰ Or is his science defensible, even in light of contemporary scientific practice?⁴¹ Since Sissa makes her argument to establish the inextricably gendered dimension of Aristotle's approach to self-government, she does not take an explicit stance on the legitimacy of Aristotle's science. But the second consideration is the strength of the connection between thumos and rule. As I did earlier, Sissa links thumos and maleness to rule through the claims in the *Politics*. But Sissa goes further by connecting thumos, maleness, and rule to Aristotle's account of deliberative choice. The key passage is the conclusion of his summary outline of deliberative choice in *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle makes a striking analogy between deliberative choice and kingship. He writes:

“Proper objects of deliberation and proper objects of deliberate choice are the same, except that proper objects of deliberate choice are already something determinate, since it is what has been discerned as a result of deliberation that is a proper object of deliberate choice. For each of us stops inquiring about what way to act when he brings back the starting-point to himself and, within himself, to the leading element (*hēgoumenon*), since this is what he deliberately chooses. This is also clear from the

³⁹ Sissa, “Bulls and Deer, Women and Warriors.”

⁴⁰ Lloyd, *Science, Folklore and Ideology*.

⁴¹ As Robert Mayhew argues. Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle's Biology: Reason or Rationalization*.

ancient constitutions that Homer described, since the kings announced to the common people what kings had deliberately chosen.” NE III.3.113a2-8⁴²

Sissa interprets Aristotle’s phrase “the leading element” as the executive part of the soul that displays the connection between a male’s congenital qualities, such as heat, and political status. But even if *thumos* and ruling capacity are connected to thermic endowment, the latter cannot explain deliberative choice because Aristotle does not think that it issues from *thumos*. In his searching inquiry as to what deliberative choice is, he rules out appetite—which is concerned with the pleasant and painful—wish, and belief, then concluding, “[s]till less is deliberate choice spirit (*thumos*), since actions done because of spirit seem least of all to be in accord with deliberate choice” (NE.III.2.1111b17-18). Sissa is correct to see deliberative choice as an expansion on rule, however. And the reference to the “ancient constitutions” and Homer’s kings should prick our ears given my foregoing discussion of Aristotle’s village. For, as we have seen, Aristotle also refers to the “first poleis” that were “ruled by kings (*to proton ebasileuonto hai poleis*)” in “ancient times (*to archaion*)” (*Pol.* 1252b19; 25-26) in his description of the village and not-ephemeral use. The reference to Homeric kings to illuminate deliberation and choice in the NE passage allows us to triangulate Aristotle’s understanding of kingly rule. In other words, we can supply another element of kingly rule that is inexplicit in *Politics* I.2: kingly rule is predicated on a capacity for deliberative choice. What is deliberative choice for Aristotle? At its core, it is *determining the indeterminate*. While I cannot engage in a lengthy discussion of this key concept of Aristotelian ethics, an outline of its main features will be enough to see that it involves

⁴² Cf. NE VI.8.1141b26-28

determining the indeterminate, which sheds light on the transformation of rule in the early household to form the basis of the village and its good: not-ephemeral use.

For Aristotle, deliberative choice (*prohairēsis*) is a component of practical reason or wisdom (*phronēsis*), which is most of all “concerned with oneself as an individual” rather than politics (NE.VI.8.1141b29). This distinction between the individual and political good is already somewhat telling for the kind of good that the Homeric king, and Aristotle’s village, is concerned with. Both the Greek term and its English translation capture its dualistic quality, being the way we deliberate in order to choose something (*hairēton*) before (*pro-*) other things (NE.III.2.1112a15-17). So, Aristotle says that we engage in deliberative choice when our actions are preceded by deliberation, *bouleusis*, about certain things. What kind of things? Most generally, we deliberate about things that are within our power, or in Aristotle’s terms, things that “are up to us” or have their “starting point” in us (NE III.3), which is really just to say we deliberate about our actions. But the reason they need to be deliberated over in the first place is that they contain an element of indeterminacy. That is, we deliberate over things where circumstances are predictable in so far as they are regular, or natural (they “hold for the most part,” III.3.1112b8), but where “it is unclear what way things will turn out” (*ibid.*, 9) nonetheless.

We can get some clarity on what Aristotle means by this by reference to what we do *not* deliberate over. For Aristotle, we do not deliberate over the ends of action.⁴³ Or, to use Daniela Cammack’s felicitous translation of *telos*, we do not deliberate over the *point* of action.⁴⁴ That is because Aristotle thinks the point of our action is already determinate. It is eudaimonia

⁴³ This has been a highly contentious problem in Aristotle interpretation, but it has been brilliantly illuminated by Cammack, “Aristotle’s Denial of Deliberation About Ends,” on which my summary draws.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 249.

(flourishing or happiness). That is, Aristotle thinks that it is self-evident that human beings act for the sake of their own flourishing or well-being. Moreover, he thinks that flourishing consists in one thing: excellent, or virtuous, activity in accordance with reason.⁴⁵ But just because the end is determinate, there is still some indeterminacy, because humans do not always succeed in acting for the sake of it. There are at least two different ways someone can fail to achieve flourishing, and so two sources of indeterminacy with respect to what is, nonetheless, determinate.

Someone can fail to correctly grasp what flourishing consists of. For example, they can think that flourishing means accumulating wealth for its own sake, which means they spend all of their energy and time simply trying to acquire wealth. But Aristotle holds that accumulating wealth is only an instrument for flourishing, the content of which has therefore not been grasped by the person in question. And if the content of flourishing, the “point” of action, has not been grasped, then they will almost certainly fail to attain it. Aristotle distinguishes, then, between the point of action that is a good (*agathon*) and an *apparent good* (*to phainomenon*, NE. III.4.1113a24).⁴⁶

What influences whether we perceive the end correctly? Given the determinacy of the end of human action, eudaimonia is part of the way things are, and this we perceive through our intellect, *nous*. But how well it does so depends on our character (*ēthos*). Our character either clouds or brightens our intellect as we act in accordance with vice or virtue, respectively,⁴⁷ and these are largely a function of habit. Being a function of habit, they are shaped by the way that we act over time, but the way that we act is itself greatly influenced by other factors, such as our

⁴⁵ NE.I.7; Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*.

⁴⁶ On this distinction, and the most sustained examination of apparent goods, see Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire*.

⁴⁷ NE 1140b15, 1141a7, 1145a2, 1176a15; DA 433a25; EE 1227b21-28; MA 701a30-35.

childhood, upbringing, and even our physical environment.⁴⁸ All these things, then, are relatively indeterminate and subject to change, though not arbitrarily. As with deliberative choice, Aristotle thinks they are regular because they are among things that “hold for the most part,” (III.3.1112b8) but, all the same, “it is unclear what way things will turn out” (Ibid., 9).

But someone may fail to act for the sake of flourishing in a different way. They may grasp flourishing correctly but fail to discern “in what way and through which things it will come about” (NE. III.3.1112b13-15). Whether or not they do depends on one’s deliberations, since deliberation is the inquiry into the means to the point of action (Ibid). So, I may realize that wealth is an instrumental good for the sake of flourishing, meaning I have not misapprehended the point of my activity, but I think gambling is a good means to achieving wealth in spite of the evidence that the vast majority of gamblers lose more money than they make. This is a failure of deliberation because when there are multiple avenues for achieving an end, the inquiry turns to discerning through which ones the end “will most easily and best come about” (NE.III.3.1112b16-17). Gambling, it seems, is normally just one of several ways to acquire wealth but very rarely is it the easiest or best way. But there is indeterminacy here, too, since there are some people who make a living through gambling, which may be contingent on them having an exceptional set of skills (such as an eidetic memory). Or it may be that someone is simply without capacity to acquire money in any other way, which will also likely be because of exceptional, rather than widely shared, circumstances. Further still, it may be that the person who deliberates is indecisive, meaning they go on deliberating without actually choosing a course of action and

⁴⁸ NE 1137a5-20, 1144b5. On the relationship between human qualities and environment, see Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life*, especially chapters 3 and 4. Cf. Sissa, “Bulls and Deer, Women and Warriors.”

therefore acting. This last possibility may be the way Aristotle considers women. Returning to the discussion of males and females in HA, Aristotle says that women are “more afraid of action (*oknēroteron*), and in general less inclined to move (*akinētoteron*) than the male” (IX.608b14-15). For although they are analytically distinct, deliberation and choice are intimately linked. Aristotle says that the two processes necessarily meet, because the final thing that is deliberated becomes the first thing, or cause, in action (III.3.1112b18-19; 23). Deliberation ceases the moment that we have chosen, and we have chosen when we have acted. Deliberation thereby determines the proper objects of choice (III.3), which, having been chosen, finalizes the process with the help of our desire (*orexis*), which aligns with our deliberation so we can act (III.3.1113a11-12). If one is disinclined to action, then, they will also be disinclined to fully deliberate. Conversely, they will be wanting in their deliberative capacities precisely because they are wanting in their capacity for action.⁴⁹ And so Aristotle also says women have the deliberative capacity but it is without “authority (*akuros*)” (*Pol.*I.13.1260a13).

But women’s incapacity for action is surely tied to their historical situation, which, as Aristotle reports it, is one where they are determined by the patriarch. Their incapacity for action is again circumstantial, not congenital. And since deliberation is not about *thumos*, I do not think we can say with Sissa that it boils down to thermic endowment. Rather, with Deslauriers, women’s apparent deficiency in deliberation is something Aristotle reports on as a feature of his own society. If he approves of the gender difference at all, it is not because he has strictly biological reasons for doing so. It appears to have more to do with what he thinks is good for

⁴⁹ To be clear, if this is a woman’s failure it does not appear to be a result of an inability to perceive eudaimonia or a general incapacity for it. As S. L. R. Clark Points out, nowhere does Aristotle suggest that women are like children or slaves, who are deficient in these respects. Clark, “Aristotle’s Woman,” 184.

humans as a whole—determinacy—a good that we can see is nonetheless entangled with patriarchy.

We have now seen the way that Aristotle's rulers are distinguished by their capacity for determining the indeterminate, an account that is enhanced by a sensitivity to sexual difference. How then, can this illuminate not-ephemeral use, and the transformation of indeterminate use, in *Politics'* early household, village, and polis? I think there are three important aspects to the phrase "not-ephemeral *chresis*" that have been illuminated by the discussion of deliberative choice alongside sexual difference.

First, it is clear that Aristotle thinks what is indeterminate in the first household is made determinate through the ruler. In so far as everyday use in the first household was indeterminate and is now determined, then, it is not-ephemeral, which is another way of saying not-everyday. Moreover, it is relatively clear that Aristotle believes there is a gendered dimension to this, whether he argues for it or merely assumes it. Aristotle thinks that the male will be the ruler, which is both an historical observation (per his reference to Homer's kings) and true of his own context, too. And so it is the male who will make determinate what is indeterminate. The relative capacities of the male and female for action is influenced by the arrival of children, to whom the woman gives greater attention, which is again a circumstantial feature. Since children arrive after the formation of the first household and before the foundation of the village, we can now explain why rule could be androgynous in the first household and then patriarchal before the village is even founded.

Second, as the patriarch makes the indeterminate determinate with a view to the good, he becomes the user of the house. For Aristotle says that the user of an object is the one who

judges what is best for it, as distinct from an object's maker. So, it is not the maker of the house—a role that is arguably shared between the activities of all members of the house, who are themselves made by nature—that judges what is best for it, but the user, just as a “ship's captain, too, is a better judge of a rudder than a carpenter is” (Pol. III.11.1282a20-23).⁵⁰ And so, as the patriarch determines the house by arranging and using it for the sake of the good he perceives, the good for which the household, and then village and early polis, exists is a certain *use*. We have more reasons, then, for interpreting and translating *chrēsis* as use. And although a transformation of use takes place, the process of using is continuous in so far as Aristotle thinks not-ephemeral use is the natural result of the process that was at first indeterminate and called everyday use and then becomes more determinate over time owing to what is learned through the process of questioning and valuing each other's use and utility.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Aristotle ends up conceptualizing the politics of determinate utility because he has the ruler determine people—such as the woman, children, and slave(s) of the household—and so split them from the power to coordinate the satisfaction of their needs. And we can now see that this split, through the transformation of the politics of indeterminate to determinate utility—i.e., from everyday to not-ephemeral use—is underpinned by a key assumption that is even more fundamental to the process than the alleged assumption that males are better than females at determining things. That more fundamental assumption is that human life can be explained by determinacy over indeterminacy, both the determinacy of

⁵⁰ Relatedly, someone with practical reason (*phronesis*)—which may include the user of the household, if pursues the good well—knows not only *that* something is the case but *why* it should be the case (NE VI.9.1142b31-33).

the good and, relatedly, the determination of everything for its sake. This remains an assumption because it is nowhere explained.

Now for a causal account, it seems to be both important and indeed compelling to assume that determinacy will be introduced over time as male and female, and slave and children, use each other and learn what their respective uses can and should be. It goes without saying that there is no way that human beings could abide indeterminacy in all aspects of their lives, and so determinacy will, as a matter of course, come to structure human lives to some extent. But the way that determinacy is introduced in Aristotle's etiology does more than that. In addition to clarifying the meaning of not-ephemeral use, the discussion of *prohairēsis* has also given us a sense of the way that with not-ephemeral use Aristotle's causal account also gives rise to, and is informed by, his normative ethics and political theory. That is, with the introduction of determinacy in the early household, there is a subtle pivot from the theoretical-scientific description of the polis' development to the prescriptive mode of Aristotle's practical science. Why? Because in Aristotle's account, the determinacy of the community is instrumental to the emergence of the human good. To see how this is the case, I wish to address two issues that remain unexplained about the transformation from everyday to not-ephemeral use, which will then help us to see how the politics of indeterminate utility becomes a symptom in Aristotle's political thought. The first is how it is possible for the patriarch to pursue a good when Aristotle says that practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which includes deliberative choice (*prohairēsis*), relies on the fully developed polis (NE.VI.8.1142a7-9).⁵¹ Or, put another way, if one's wellbeing relies on

⁵¹ The cited passage also says household management, but I have omitted it from the main text to avoid confusion. As I have discussed in this and the previous chapter, most interpreters think that the first household in the etiology is the same thing as the household in the developed polis, meaning household management (*oikonomia*), which is

the developed polis, how is it possible to develop a polis for one's own wellbeing? Answering this is essential for understanding the conclusion of the genetic account in I.2, for Aristotle thinks that after the first poleis that are ruled by kings have developed, there is a further stage in which "it is complete," because "it has already reached (one might almost say) the limit of total self-sufficiency" (I.2.1252b27-29). In the words of Aristotle's famous summary, the political community "comes to be for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well" (I.2.1252b29-30). What is it, though, that allows that transformation from mere determinacy to wellbeing to take place, exactly? And, relatedly, what kind of value does determinacy have before wellbeing and the good have emerged?

The second issue is why the village is said to come into existence only when the children have founded their own households that remain tethered to the father and mother's. If, as I have argued, the founding of a community depends on the existence of a new good, and a male assumes the power to determine the household in light of the good once the differences between male and female have been established, which is more apparent than ever when children arrive, why does it take the maturation of the children for a new community to come into being?

I believe there are answers to both of these remaining issues, and they rely on understanding the common thing that all poleis, despite differences in their form of regime, supply that enables wellbeing. This is leisure time, which Aristotle thinks virtuous character, and therefore a good

discussed in the remaining chapters of Book I, already exists with the first two communities that make up the household of I.2's etiology. But since I distinguish that first household from the "final household," where the latter prefaces the discussion of *oikonomia*, I think that household management only really exists within the context of the developed polis, of which the village does not count.

life, depends upon for its own cultivation and development, as when he writes, “leisure is needed both for the development of virtue and for political actions” (Pol.VII.9.1329a1-2).⁵² And that is because Aristotle defines virtue, political actions, and leisure time as a whole against so-called vulgar activities such as exchange and production.⁵³ “But,” as Aristotle writes elsewhere, “the way to provide this is not easy to grasp” (Pol II.9.1269a33-35). Why? Because providing leisure time does not primarily depend upon dividing one’s *own time* between leisured and non-leisured activities, but dividing *people* between leisured and non-leisured activities.⁵⁴ The result is that this distinction in activities operates to divide populations, then subject a portion to labour, and thereby provide leisure for others. And who are the leisured? Primarily, it is the rulers, or unconditional citizens, of regimes who enjoy freedom from necessary labour.⁵⁵ It is through whatever virtues and political capacities—truly good or not—that they exercise and the divisions in the polis that support them that diverse regimes acquire their defining characteristics in Aristotle’s political taxonomy (Pol V.9.1309a33-38).

The discussion of deliberative choice and practical wisdom, however, reveals that the division between rulers and ruled rests on shaky ground. It is not the good or the virtue of the ruler as such that entitles him to divide himself from others because apprehension of the good relies on

⁵² Although this is specifically with respect to the best constitutions—which means at least three of the six variants that Aristotle names—the justification for leisure time on the basis of the need to engage in political activity is overtly denied to anyone but the rulers in *any* constitution. Cf. Pol.VII.1.1323b39-43; Met.A.2.982b21-27.

⁵³ E.g. Pol. VIII.2.1337b8-11.

⁵⁴ Pol. II.9.1269a33 ff.

⁵⁵ In the case of democracy, the common complaint by aristocrats (such as the so-called ‘Old Oligarch’) is of course that farmers and craftsmen participated in rule. But this still presumes that they could afford to leave their work and travel any distance to the institutions of government, meaning they still required discretionary time. But we should not call this ‘leisure time’ insofar as we are considering Aristotle, because for him these citizens were far from leisured, even if they were in some sense ‘free’. And this, Aristotle notes, is usually because they are paid to participate (Pol. IV.15.1300a1-3). But it’s worth noting that democracy is part of the deviant constitutions in which ruling does not require leisure, properly speaking, but still leisure time.

intellect (*nous*), which itself relies on virtue of character, which itself relies on a community that supports its emergence. Unlike Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory, Aristotle's etiology does not feature an external lawgiver to inspire him. And so it is only the ruler's ability, or mere willingness, to determine life and the lives of others in accordance with an apparent good—i.e., whatever good takes their fancy—that allows for the division between ruler and ruled to be instantiated and for leisure time to be created. Rather than *the* good creating determinacy, the patriarch determines the lives of others for an *apparent* good and his supposed virtue.

From Aristotle's perspective, by transforming everyday use into not-ephemeral use, the patriarch creates the conditions for the good to emerge. As he writes near the end of *Politics* I.2, "the person who first put [political community] together was also the cause of very great goods" (I.2.1253a31-32). And although Aristotle announces this from his theoretical perspective—as one of the leisured,⁵⁶ speaking from the mature polis—he thinks it serves everyone since "the impulse toward this sort of community exists in everyone" (I.2.1253a30), and most likely because of his view about the determinacy of *eudaimonia*. What are we to make of the fact that people will be split from leisure time, and subjected to vulgar activities, even when their rulers cannot lay claim to any true good? And this is not only a question for those in the early household, village, or first poleis. Aristotle famously orders political regimes—which are *mature* poleis—into a taxonomy of "correct" and "deviant" regimes. The distinction between correct and deviant regimes is made in terms of what Aristotle calls the "common good," which he thinks

⁵⁶ Although it is worth noting that Aristotle was a metic, which is a resident alien, in Athens, meaning he was not entitled to participate in formal politics.

monarchy, aristocracy, and polity all pursue. What is the common good, exactly? In sum, it describes a regime where not only the rulers share in the good, but also the ruled. How is this determined? We can better understand Aristotle's claim about the common good if we note that the three regimes that produce the common good—monarchy, aristocracy, and polity—are *also* the constitutions that Aristotle thinks are in accordance with virtue and therefore aim at *eudaimonia*, the best kind of human life (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a30-33; *Pol.* IV.11.1295a25-b13).⁵⁷ An unconditional citizen or ruler, in these cases, is identical to a good man, meaning someone who can participate in complete virtue, which is also somehow pursued by the city (*Pol.* III.4.1276b20-35). Others deserve to be ruled proportional to the virtue that they are able to participate in.⁵⁸ Deviant constitutions, however, do not align rulers and ruled in accordance with true virtue or *eudaimonia*, but rather in accordance with their own notions of capacity and equality.⁵⁹ In other words, the deviant regimes can make no claim to determining people's lives in line with the good. These differences notwithstanding, Aristotle is no advocate of revolution or revolt. Rather, Aristotle's "[j]ustice is not a relationship between the parts of one's soul," as it was in Plato's *Republic*, "but a relationship among separate human beings, and political justice (the most important aspect of this virtue) requires that one treat others in ways that accord with the rules of one's community—*defective though that community may be.*"⁶⁰ Even if people are split from leisure time and subjected to vulgar activities in the absence of the good, it is a condition Aristotle justifies because of the overall good of determinacy.

⁵⁷ And as Reeve points out, "polity [Aristotle's ideal regime] also conceives happiness in this [perfectionist] way but aims at a level of virtue—and so of happiness—that many people and cities can hope to attain" C D C Reeve, *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness*, 106.

⁵⁸ *Pol.* VII.8.1328a36-1328b2.

⁵⁹ *Pol.* IV.3. 1290a7-12; V.1.1301a28-33.

⁶⁰ Kraut, *Aristotle*, 101, my emphasis.

But abiding by the rules of a defective community is evidently difficult for people to bear, and Aristotle knew it. Returning to Aristotle's claim that grasping how to provide leisure time for rulers is difficult,⁶¹ he clarifies that it is because *maintaining* a state of affairs where some are leisured and others subjected is difficult. As Aristotle goes on to observe, subject populations are amenable to rebellion and he cites the historical cases of Sparta and Thessaly. Creating the conditions for *the good* (as Aristotle understands it) to emerge is evidently an insufficient reason for many to accept the terms of their political exclusion, and not even one Aristotle can expect them to apprehend. And despite the rebellions he references in Thessaly, Aristotle has obvious admiration for the way they managed their population. In the course of discussing his ideal city in Book VII of the *Politics*, Aristotle observes that in Thessaly there are two marketplaces, each with their own distinct character and function. One "upper marketplace is intended for being at leisure" while "the lower, [is] for necessary actions" (Pol. VII.12.1331b11-12). Aristotle leaves us in no doubt about how Thessaly serves as a model for his ideal city. The marketplace intended for leisure "should be kept clear of all merchandise, and...no vulgar person, farmer, or anyone of that sort, may come near unless summoned by an official" (Pol. VII.12.1331a33-35). It is rather to be populated by "officials" of the city as well as those upper classes who are leisured enough to attend the "gymnasia" (Pol. VII.12.1331a36-40). Aristotle also calls this marketplace "free", giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "free market" (Pol. VII.12.1331b1). While the free marketplace should be kept clear of "vulgar" people, the marketplace for "necessary actions" and "merchandise"—or what I have called the "use of objects"—seems to be its mirror image, with Aristotle implying that those suited to the free market ought to keep out of the

⁶¹ Pol II.9.1269a33-35.

merchandise market. But Aristotle goes on to make recommendations about the “boards of officials that are made to supervise contracts, legal accusations, summonses, and other administrative matters of that sort, as well as those that deal with marketplace management and so-called town management” (Pol. VII.12.1331b6-9). If anything were in doubt about what the role of these “managers” and “supervisors” is, Aristotle specifies, “one should establish their seat near the marketplace and in some public meeting place, and the area around the necessary marketplace is of this sort” (Pol. VII.12.1331b9-11). This location is expedient because their purpose is, more specifically, “keeping guard on things” (ibid. 16). Far from there being *mutual* exclusion from the markets, the exclusion is rather one-directional. It is only the vulgar, then, who are entirely excluded from one half of the two-market system, while those of the free market are tasked with overseeing the merchandise market even if Aristotle thinks that they should not engage in its activities. For “[a]ny function should be considered vulgar, and so too any craft or branch of learning, if it renders the body, the soul, or the thought of free people useless for the uses and actions of virtue” (Pol. VIII.2.1337b8-11).

The use of humans is unambiguously split in two, between those for whom human use is virtuous and those for whom it is vulgar because it entails focusing on the use of objects. So herein lies Aristotle’s split between people—singular individuals—and the power to coordinate needs’ satisfaction. But the contrast with Plato is instructive. Plato’s interlocutors—with the help of some god—presuppose the good city and thereby split people from the power to coordinate the satisfaction of their needs. Aristotle, rather, supposes that a patriarch will introduce a split by determining the members of the household in accordance with his apprehension of the good. But Aristotle legitimises this by arguing that it will eventually bring about the true apprehension

of the good and the determination of life, both individual and collective, in accordance with it.

That is the assumption that leads him to think that the polis will reach a stage of full development and self-sufficiency. Indeed, it appears to be the assumption that leads Aristotle to believe that the polis has been created and destroyed many times over and will continue to rise and fall in this fashion.⁶² The conditions that Aristotle describes and prescribes *may* foster the emergence of the good. But it comes at a high price, which is that some must simply comply with subjection in the meantime.

This is undoubtedly a questionable model for politics as it stands. These subjects may as well be ruled by the Cyclopes, as Aristotle's etiology suggests. But recall that it is also underpinned by the assumption that people want determinacy. And this assumption begins as one dimension of the more strictly causal account, but soon gives rise to the normative account that makes determinacy the correct way for humans to achieve flourishing lives. In this transformation the indeterminacy of human use—that stems from singular individuals coming together to work out common purpose—goes from being the generative problem that stimulates human activity and to which the community owes its existence to a problem that needs solving by establishing determinacy as far as possible. Although Aristotle must rely on the propensity of singular individuals to couple and to create common purpose in order to account for the polis' initiation, with the determinacy that defines human flourishing that same propensity becomes a problem for the polis that must be instituted in a way that abrogates it.

⁶² The determinacy of the good, for Aristotle, means that there is a degree of inevitability to the development of political community. And so Aristotle can believe that human political communities have existed before and been completely destroyed but then rebuilt (Pol. VII.10.1329b25 ff; cf Kraut's commentary and reference to other passages, Kraut, *Aristotle Politics Books VII and VIII*, 111–12.

Because in so far as the politics of indeterminate utility are open, alternative, androgynous, etc, that politics stands opposed to the determinacy that is introduced by political regimes, beginning with the village's kingship, that is required for the good to emerge. Grasping this transformation, which is the transformation from everyday use to not-ephemeral use, has now prepared us to see how the politics of indeterminate utility becomes a symptom in Aristotle's thought. Since it is based on the assumption of the good's determinacy, the need to marginalise indeterminacy remains unexplained in Aristotle's account, which is a defining feature of the Aristotelian *sumptōma*. And as a symptom, it is a window "onto hidden worlds,"⁶³ in this case, of use's indeterminate politics. But as a symptom it can also form part of the "phenomena that help to generate and sustain worldviews,"⁶⁴ in this case, Aristotle's political worldview.

In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to see how indeterminate use reappears as a symptom where determinacy structures Aristotle's account of the mature polis in his treatment of friendship. The indeterminate friendships Aristotle testifies to there, especially in exchange relations, will preface the turn to Marx on the use of humans, which is the subject of the next chapter where we can go beyond simply reading for the symptom and theorize the use of the symptom itself. That is because it supports the radical suggestion, raised in the last chapter, that the indeterminate use featured in the first male-female friendship—and that Aristotle calls a mode of political animality—is a more democratic form of political animality that better accounts for widespread human flourishing. That is because it raises the possibility that indeterminacy is itself a good that humans pursue, which is reflected in the mixed modes of friendships Aristotle

⁶³ Bianchi, *The Feminine Symptom*, 14, quoting Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject*, 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

reports but denigrates in his normative account that is constructed around the determinacy of the good.

Before doing so, I think we are now in a position to explain why it takes the founding of new households for the village to come into existence. It is only with the new households that there is a sufficient expansion in productive capacity to create some leisure time for the patriarch and thereby allow for a transformation of the good. The patriarch may be determining things before then, but it is only later that a new good actually emerges. Aristotle's misquotation of Homer in the course of describing the village is therefore telling: the more the merrier.⁶⁵

The Politics of Friendship

As with other aspects of Aristotle's ethical and political thought, there is a basic assumption undergirding Aristotle's theory of *philia* (friendship): people want goods; that is, determinate goods (*agathoi*, *NE.VIII.3*). By "goods," however, we should not think primarily of objects, since Aristotle tends to reduce objects to instruments or tools, which are precisely precluded from friendship.⁶⁶ It is the same reason that there can be no *philia* with a slave *qua* slave, only *qua* human (*NE 1161b*).⁶⁷ Since Aristotle divides friendship into three kinds, there are three general

⁶⁵ i.e., Aristotle has Homer saying that the patriarchy "lays down the law for his own wives and children," where the original has "wife."

⁶⁶ To claim that people want determinate goods is not to say anything about how they arrive at wanting those particular goods. That is a debate about Aristotle's understanding of the soul in its internal and external relations. On this, see Cammack, "Aristotle's Denial of Deliberation About Ends."

⁶⁷ If there is no *philia*, there is also no *politics*, which requires *philia* around common purpose (*EE VII.10.1241b12-24*). This means that Giorgio Agamben's focus on the use of bodies is of little interest when working with an Aristotelian conception of politics or an interest in the use of *humans* since he rather embraces the dissolving of subject and object in master-slave relations that Aristotle thinks makes slavery an exception from politics.

categories of goods people want: pleasure, virtue, and utility or advantage, all of which are relational and therefore uses of humans.⁶⁸ Aristotle has high praise for virtue friendship, which he calls the “primary and full sense of friendship” (*NE* VIII.4.1157a30) because these friends “are eager to provide benefits to each other, since this is characteristic of virtue and friendship” (*NE* VIII.13.1162b6-8). At the same time, however, it is among the most exclusive of goods since one can only have a few virtue friends (*NE* IX.10.1171a2-13). Principally, then, people want goods for themselves, which Aristotle groups under pleasure and utility. Pleasure is the least complicated of the two. Aristotle says that pleasure friends consort with each other only so long as it is pleasurable (*NE* IX.10.1171a13-15; *EE* VII.10.1243a4-5). When it is not, they dissolve the friendship and move on. Utility friendships, however, are more complicated. Utility friends use each other “for their own benefit (*ōphēleia*)” but “always need more, thinking they have less than is proper” (*NE* VIII.13.1162b16-18). The result is, as Aristotle frequently notes, that complaints and grievances arise in these kinds of friendships. These grievances are a problem for Aristotle, because he understands the *polis* as made up of political friendships, and these to consist of utility friendships. So, the same relations that bind the *polis* together also subject it to complaints and instability. For although these utility relations can be dissolved to an extent (*NE* VIII.13.1163a1-18; 14.1163a23-25), Aristotle will show us how one’s *polis* provides ample and recurrent opportunities for utility friendships to begin and to endure. This use of humans is a

⁶⁸ I will be following tradition by calling the last form of friendship “utility friendship” but it is an unfortunate translation in the current context. That is because utility now means pleasure that arises from the consumption of an object. But in Aristotle, utility friendship is something different from pleasure friendship, and its connection with *chrēsis* (utility translates *chrēsimon*) means it should be studied alongside Aristotle’s ideas about the use of humans. All this is basically lost when *chrēsimon* is translated as utility. I would suggest “useful friendship” because the absence of any common-sense meaning would at least direct the reader to inquire further into Aristotle’s meaning.

problem for politics, then, and a “puzzle” for political philosophy (*Pol.* III.12.1282b22; *EE* VII.10.1242a19-20).

Aristotle responds to this with a set of prescriptions for the *polis*’ exchange relations that he calls “legal” utility friendship (*EE* VII.10.1242b33). But the work of many Aristotle interpreters who have now devoted themselves to Aristotelian exchange shows that it is far from straightforward.⁶⁹ At the heart of these friendships and conflicts is the question of equality. That is, how is it that the right quantity of desired goods can be acquired by those in utility friendships? Since for Aristotle equality—which can be either arithmetic or proportional (*NE* V.3-4)—is the principle problem of justice and justice a problem of political regimes, one thing is clear from the outset: ensuring that the right quantity of goods ends up with each utility friend, and therefore justice is achieved, is not simply a matter of economic exchange as opposed to political rule. Despite longstanding interpretations to the contrary, Aristotle did not stringently divide the *oikos* (household) from the *polis*, nor *oikonomia* (household management) from politics.⁷⁰ It is a political problem from the beginning, whether understood in terms of interpersonal reciprocity⁷¹ or distribution.⁷²

⁶⁹ Danzig, “The Political Character of Aristotelian Reciprocity”; Eich, “Between Justice and Accumulation”; Finley, “Aristotle and Economic Analysis”; Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*; Gallagher, “Incommensurability in Aristotle’s Theory of Reciprocal Justice”; Mei, “The Preeminence of Use”; Meikle, *Aristotle’s Economic Thought*; Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*.

⁷⁰ For correctives of these views, especially in Arendt, see Salkever, *Finding the Mean*; Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle’s Political Philosophy*; Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*. On these concepts in Agamben, see Dubreuil, “Leaving Politics”; Finlayson, “‘Bare Life’ and Politics in Agamben’s Reading of Aristotle”; Holmes, “Bios”; Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life*.

⁷¹ Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*; Danzig, “The Political Character of Aristotelian Reciprocity”; Eich, “Between Justice and Accumulation”; Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*; Mei, “The Preeminence of Use”; Meikle, *Aristotle’s Economic Thought*.

⁷² Frank, “Democracy and Distribution.”

The political quality of exchange and the political quality of Aristotle's solutions both depend on the assumption I identified above: that the goods people want are determinate. So much is clear when Aristotle's prescribed "legal" utility friendship must take place "on specified terms (*epi rētois*)" (*NE* VIII.1162b25-26). Despite seeing exchange as a political problem from the beginning, then, existing interpretations begin the study of political friendship with *exchange* and therefore the assumption that underlies it: people want determinate goods. Since this is Aristotle's own guiding assumption, there is obviously much to commend to this approach. Moreover, insofar as our starting point is the way that people acquire the goods they need, it is clear that they want something determinate. Does it mean, however, that this is the right starting point for considering exchange relations as such?⁷³ More fundamentally, how does one recognize an exchange relation *as* a desire for determinate goods?

These questions are not alien to Aristotle's text. Despite the scholarly attention given to exchange and the need to mitigate conflict, it is not often noted that Aristotle's treatment of the issue is largely informed by his perception and interpretation of particular *phenomena* that, upon close inspection, trouble Aristotle's schema in so far as it is predicated on the determinacy of friendship's goods. These phenomena include disputes around exchange generally, but Aristotle says most complaints come about when "the way in which people think they are friends is not the same as the way in which they are friends" (*NE* IX.3.1165b5-7). The example that Aristotle provides to illustrate this is what he calls "ethical" utility friendship (*EE* VII.7.1242b33; *NE*

⁷³ Yack differs from others' approaches to *philia* because he begins with an examination of the difference between community and political community. The former is about mutual concern arising from any situation of sharing, whereas political community is about giving what is due (*The Problems of a Political Animal*, 35-36). But by also considering community in terms of Aristotle's *philia*, he stills works with the assumption about determinate goods.

VIII.13.1162b23). It is “ethical” in the sense that it appears to be based on the goodness of the friends and, like virtue friendship, to involve wishing good to the other for *their* sake rather than one’s own (*EE* VII.7.1241a1-14). As a result, people “entrust things to each other” (*EE* VII.10.1242b37), while exchanging objects it seems, but accusations of wrongdoing frequently arise because the ruse of their friendship is revealed when one fails to receive good in return (*EE* VII.1243a37-38). The friends fight because one has given something over to the other while not stipulating the reason for doing so. But the reason matters because if he expects to benefit in some way then he will be very disappointed if the other does not reciprocate adequately. Aristotle says that this *philia* is “contrary to nature” (*EE* VII.10.1242b38) because it mixes two kinds of friendship that are actually distinct.

There is some significant overlap between *EE* and *NE* on this ethical utility friendship. For instance, Aristotle recommends avoiding it by being clear about mutual desires (e.g. *EE* VII.10.1243b4-5; *NE* VIII.13.1163a1-8). That way, any disputes that arise are amenable to resolution in the courts (*EE* VII.1243a7-9; *NE* VIII.13.1162b21-25). But there are also some apparent and perplexing differences, both in his reporting and interpreting the phenomenon to which his prescription is an ostensive solution. In *NE*, Aristotle reports something similar to ethical utility friendships but is quite vague over the exact nature of the transaction. For instance, he indicates that at the time of exchange the debt was clear and not disputable, but he also says that it was not conducted on specified terms because something was first given as “a gift or whatever as to a [virtue] friend” (*NE* VIII.13.1162b27-32). Can a debt be clear if not specified, especially when we consider the apparent complexities of making incommensurable objects and people commensurable, as interpreters of Aristotelian exchange have amply

demonstrated? Aristotle himself admits:

“All such matters [relating to equalization in exchange] are difficult to determine with any exactness, aren’t they? For they involve all sorts of differences both in greatness and smallness and in nobility and necessity” (*NE* XI.2.1264b27-28)

Whether or not Aristotle has a clear understanding of the process by which exchange *should* take place, Aristotle does not convey a firm grasp of the main phenomenon he has deemed a problem.

Aristotle discusses other kinds of cause of complaints and disputes, too. Rather than simply confirm the need to stipulate terms, they revealingly display the extent of indeterminacy in relations of exchange even when efforts have been made to do so.⁷⁴ So, for instance, Aristotle takes a stab at the sophists while describing cases where a person receives money on the basis of a promise to give something but then underdelivers. It is the sophists’ *modus operandi* “because no one would pay them money for what they do scientifically know” (*NE* IX.1.1164a30-32).⁷⁵ Aristotle also deems oligarchs and so-called “base people” always to be seeking more (*pleonexia*), meaning they will try to take what they can no matter what agreements may or may not have been made (*NE* IX.6.1167b1-14). It is clear, then, that disputes arise even when the parties have attempted to stipulate the terms of the exchange. Indeed, when discussing the

⁷⁴ Some examples can be found at *NE* IX.1.1164a13-22 and *NE* IX.1.1164a28 ff.

⁷⁵ Aristotle, along with Plato, has a low opinion of the sophists’ ideas. Because he assumes people want to learn scientific knowledge, Aristotle thinks the sophists are a paradigmatic case of overpromising and underdelivering, which it does not take a business consultant to know is a way to raise complaints.

ethical utility friendship, Aristotle notes that sometimes polities ban disputes over voluntary contracts from coming to court because the principle of justice is unclear (*EE* VII.10.1243a9-11; *NE* IX.1.1164b11-21). He says that it is because these relationships should dissolve in the same way they were formed (*NE* IX.1.1164b13-14). It also implies, however, that the cases of voluntary transactions that *are* admissible to court arise from disputes even when terms have been stipulated.

On the basis of the evidence, if there is a general term that could sum up the problem Aristotle is identifying it is indeterminacy.⁷⁶ Or, in his own words, “many accusations arise in friendships for parties whose relations are not straightforward, and it is not easy to see what is just” (*EE* VII.10.1243b15). This indeterminacy arises either because people have not stipulated clearly enough what they want or, in the case of ethical utility friendship, they have wanted two things at the same time—utility friendship and virtue friendship—that for Aristotle are naturally two different things (*EE* VII.1242b38-41). As Bonnie Honig reads him, Jacques Derrida sees the *politics* of friendship—as distinct from *political* friendship—in these passages as the indeterminacy over what kind of friend another is.⁷⁷ But that is not how Aristotle would have it. Aristotle cannot abide indeterminacy in relationships. How can two people, he asks, be friends “when they are neither satisfied with the same things nor find the same things enjoyable or painful? Not even with regard to each other...” And if they cannot be friends then they “cannot

⁷⁶ Although there is no particular Greek word that I have in mind when I say “indeterminacy,” in *EE* (VII.10.1243a12, 25), Aristotle uses the term *amphiballō*, albeit in a rare way, to describe the lack of clarity involved in exchange. There is also the word *aoriston* that Aristotle uses to denote the indefinite that remains beyond the theoretical grasp of science.

⁷⁷ Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 54; Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 204-5.

share a life (*bion*)” (*NE* IX.3.1165b27-30).⁷⁸ Given that Aristotle talks about life (*bion*) as the common purpose of the household as well as the political community (*NE* VIII.12.1162a21; *EE* VII.10.1242a23), it seems he will abide indeterminacy there no more than in any other friendship. Aristotle’s prescribed “legal” utility friendship principally expresses his earnest wish for determinacy between friends.

Given that, on Aristotle’s understanding, people act for the sake of what they deem to be good—in general and in political friendships (*NE*. I.1.1094a1; *Pol.* I.1.1252a2-3; *NE* VIII.3.1156a13-16)—Aristotle’s solution is only a solution if the exchangers themselves actually want determinate goods. What if, however, the exchangers are not wanting something determinate? What if they, or at least some of them, want indeterminacy itself? Or some good that is indeterminate? Such an interpretation of the phenomena Aristotle is reporting is recommended when we compare them to Aristotle’s account of indeterminate use elsewhere. And so I wish to compare the androgynous friendship of the first household to the indeterminate forms of friendship Aristotle reports here while being sensitive to obvious differences.

So, to begin with, there is ostensibly no sexual reproduction grounding other indeterminate utility friendships. But if sexual reproduction is merely an anchor for what takes place thereafter, then there is something else more universally shared that could play a comparative role. In *Politics* I.2 (1253a29), again, Aristotle says that the “impulse (*hormē*)” to political community exists in everyone, which therefore draws people together so they can establish common purpose. Or, perhaps more concretely, recall that Aristotle says that in the

⁷⁸ See my introduction on the claims that Aristotle respects indeterminacy by refraining from prescribing determinate choices or actions in specific context and how these relate to the problem of indeterminacy raised by singularity.

ethical utility friendship, something is given “as if a gift” before asking for a return payment some time later as if he had been “making a loan” (*NE* VIII.13.1162b31-33). Elsewhere, Aristotle says that benevolence is the “starting-point of friendship” and, tellingly, like “pleasure from sight is the starting-point of erotic love” (*NE* 1167a3-4). Read through Aristotle’s understanding of benevolence, ethical utility friendship is a version of androgynous friendship in the first household.⁷⁹

The impulse to political community mentioned in I.2 may be more helpful for explaining the observed indeterminacy in exchanges even when terms were stipulated. Rather than being a failure to specify the exchangers’ desires, if the exchanger(s) desired indeterminate use itself—a manifestation of their human animality—then *no* stipulated terms could preclude its indeterminacy. But such a friendship is also a threat to the existing regime because it exists outside the terms in which people come together in political community; namely, justice, which is grounded in concord (*homonoiia*), which Aristotle understands as agreement over one’s place with respect to rule (*EE* VII.7.1241a31-33). Concord is one of the things that monetized exchange, part of legal utility friendship, is meant to secure, and its relevance is represented when Aristotle reproaches indeterminate friendships because their justice is indiscernible and their disputes should be banned from the courts.⁸⁰ But this friendship could only be remedied by *imposing* determinacy on these exchangers’ desires, not by discovering it.

⁷⁹ It could be a more quotidian and accessible version of the kind of gift giving that Aristotle approves of. See *NE* 1133a2-5, but Aristotle evidently thinks everyone needs reminding to return such an act, betraying his continuing concern about indeterminacy.

⁸⁰ On money’s relationship to concord and justice in Aristotle, see Eich (“Between Justice and Accumulation”).

I do not want to insist that all the indeterminate friendships Aristotle reports were a search for alternative use and therefore indeterminate desire. Some of them may simply have failed to specify their determinate desires. But if some of the phenomena are indeed versions of androgynous friendship, then a number of conclusions can be drawn.

First, androgynous friendship is immanent to exchange relations, not male-female relations, which are simply their archetype. Exchange relations, then, represent a democratic mode of friendship in the sense of accessibility. Whether or not every indeterminate exchange expresses a desire for alternative use, indeterminate exchanges are themselves prolific, even in the ancient Greek world. We have seen that Aristotle approves of banning voluntary exchanges in the case of ethical utility friendships. What I did not note is that Aristotle reports that several polities legislated against indeterminate friendship (*EE* VII.10.1243a9). Indeterminate friendships are at least as common as they are legislated against, then. But given the original male-female relation was so crucial for initiating the *polis*' generation, why are the indeterminate friends of the mature *polis* derided by Aristotle?

We have already seen that determinacy is built into Aristotle's account of eudaimonia, which also informs his account of political regimes. But I think we can add two further reasons for the different roles that indeterminate friendship play between the opening and mature stages of the *polis*' existence. The key element may be the one unique to the male and female: reproduction, or the biopolitical quality of androgynous friendship. Recall that Aristotle said the male-female friendship of the first *oikos* "is more necessary" (*anagkaioteron oikia poleōs*)" (*NE* VIII.12.1162a18-19) than the *polis*. That is because the *polis* requires humans and so requires, in his context, male-female copulation. But there is another important sense of reproduction for

Aristotle: the reproduction of the regime through its preservation (*Pol.* III.4.1276b28-29). This will also require human reproduction but more specifically the regime's justice, which requires "friendship toward the regime that is in place" and virtue that is internal to the regime (*Pol.* V.9.1309a33-38, my emphasis).⁸¹ As soon as these demands are born, *any* indeterminate friendships take on an insurgent quality. Insofar as indeterminate friendships recreate the natal conditions of the *polis*, so they expose any existing regime to heterogeneous common purposes and therefore heterogeneous regimes of justice. This is another way to interpret Aristotle's claim about justice's inscrutability and his approval of banning disputes arising from ethical utility friends from the courts. The Greeks had a word for the breakdown of regimes due to insurgency—*stasis*—and they generally avoided it like Covid-19, especially the philosophers. That said, it is still not clear whether Aristotle denigrates indeterminate friendships because he had a firm grasp on them or if he did not have a firm grasp of them but would further denigrate them at least for the reasons I have provided here.

Conclusion

"Politics takes humans from nature and uses them," writes Aristotle (*Pol.* I.10.1258a22-23, my translation). It is clear that what Aristotle means here is "rule," and rule is about concord, and concord is about determinate goods that result in political friendship (*EE* VII.7.1241a31-34).

Aristotle can theorize friendship through the assumption about humans wanting determinate

⁸¹ But as Sara Brill observes, Aristotle even comes to think about human reproduction in terms of regime reproduction. Brill, *Aristotle on the Concept of Shared Life*, chapters 5 and 6.

goods because his starting point is eudaimonia as a determinate good that informs his account of the use of humans *as rule*. By asking after human use as such, my interpretation of Aristotle has been able to see that these assumptions about determinacy do not capture the phenomenological experience of friendship. Aristotle's own theory of human animality, where singular individuals are drawn together to create common purpose, can help us see why. But Aristotle never considers the reappearance of this in indeterminate form to be good for the polis or for human eudaimonia. But in the next chapter I will argue that the indeterminate use of humans is precisely what Marx thought exchange relations were good for and thus moves us from reading for the symptom of use to conceptualizing the use of the specter become symptom.

Chapter 5

Marx and the Use of the Spectral Symptom

We have seen that with respect to political development, Aristotle plots a trajectory from indeterminate use and utility to determinate use and utility. The spectral indeterminate use that generated the polis gives way to the determinacy introduced by the patriarch and then the rulers of developed political regimes. Aristotle justifies the transformation of everyday/every-day use into not-ephemeral use on the assumption of the good's determinacy and that its apprehension, by the virtuous, requires determinacy to create the polis and thus the conditions for living well. But the use of humans proves to be a problematic fact of human community owing to human singularity. Spectral indeterminate use becomes an ineradicable symptom of Aristotle's political thought. This spectral symptom haunts the polis— as in ancient exchange relations that Aristotle calls "ethical" utility friendship—and continues to be generative of politics, now the politics of determinate utility that, on Aristotle's account, should eradicate indeterminacy as it splits people from the power to coordinate human use. This precludes the possibility of indeterminate use for a large swathe of the human population even while Aristotle says it is a manifestation of the human animal's political qualities, testimony to which is its ongoing presence in ethical utility friendships.¹ Over the course of his conceptualization of human use and utility, however, Aristotle unwittingly raises a question: what if we treated indeterminate human use as a good

¹ For Aristotle, nature is what happens for the most part, meaning there may be exceptions, but these exceptions are surely outnumbered by the disenfranchised in various regimes.

for human beings and something that political community was collectively organized to support rather than abolish?

According to Marx, capitalism represents such a community, albeit in distorted form. Contrary to his widespread reception—which I noted in chapter 1 focuses on and simplifies the use of objects—Marx was concerned about human use and utility from his early work through to his mature writings. And as his views on capitalism matured, so indeterminacy in human use became a larger theme in his work. This aspect of his work has been made prominent in recent Marx scholarship, especially William Clare Roberts' pioneering book, *Marx's Inferno*. Roberts argues that the early chapters of Marx's *Capital* take up the question of value and money from 19th century socialist discourse, in which it was a central theme. Together with his contemporaries, Marx recognized that commercial society had made it radically indeterminate whether workers would receive the full value of their labor, which made the useful status of their labour itself radically indeterminate. It is not only ancient exchange relations that testify to the way that indeterminacy features in human relations. This is a feature of capitalist exchange, too. Consensus formed around the idea that indeterminacy in human use had been made a determinate feature of commercial society in a way that erodes human flourishing. It is with his unique analysis of value, money, and production that Marx departed from his socialist contemporaries, which also leads him to identify different solutions to the problem of human use that capitalism represented. On Roberts' reading, capitalism represents a problem of human coordination to Marx that requires a political solution above all.

Roberts has helped shift scholarly conversation on Marx, which for many years has treated him as an historical relic, an economic thinker, or ignored him as a communist ideologue.

By centering his analysis of Marx on the question of human coordination, the use of humans emerges as a central element of Roberts' interpretation at the same time he connects it to the political theory of *Capital*. But in Roberts' treatment, which accords a classical republican conception of freedom as non-domination a central role in Marx's critique, it is not only the indeterminacy of capitalism that Marx singles out for criticism, but indeterminacy as such. Roberts takes Marx to be a moral perfectionist along with his ancient forebears, which denigrates wealth accumulation as an end in itself and considers virtue to be the good of human beings. Such a conception informs Roberts' interpretation of the communist society that Marx envisions will replace capitalism. In this chapter, I rather argue that Marx conceived of communist society as a realization of indeterminate human use that served human satisfaction instead of capital accumulation. Drawing on Marx's notebooks that were published as *Grundrisse*, I argue that Marx reconceptualizes human satisfaction in a way that shuns both wealth and virtue as the good of human life. In their place is what Marx calls "true wealth," which is a process of human self-development that is radically indeterminate and realized through free time. Recognizing this as Marx's conception of the human good has important implications for understanding Marx's political theory. As something that could only be realized through the process of historical, social, and political development, Marx understood that indeterminacy in self-development was also inextricably tied to the interpersonal relations of community, i.e., the use of humans. The goal that Marx hopes communist society will realize is making indeterminacy in human use determinate in a way that liberates it, not eradicates it. In this we can see that Marx represents an inversion of Aristotle, not his heir as Roberts understands him, as Marx plots a trajectory from capitalism's determinate indeterminacy for the

sake of wealth accumulation to determinate indeterminacy that represents human satisfaction. This moves my effort to reorient the conceptualization of use and utility from reading for the symptom to conceptualizing the use of the spectral symptom in a way that is empowering and emancipating.

The chapter will be organized in the following manner. In section 1, I will first identify Marx's enduring concern with the politics of human utility, ranging from his early 'On the Jewish Question' to *Capital*, volume 1. We will see in section 2, however, that Marx's analysis developed between his early and mature work. In Marx's mature critique of capitalism, his concern centres on the way that capitalism institutes indeterminacy in a way that is good for the valorization of capital but depoliticizes human life at the individual and collective level. In section three, I pan out to see that human use was not only something that Marx singled out for criticism. In Marx's scattered remarks on the future communist society, we can see that the concept of indeterminate human use is helpful for understanding Marx's vision for collective human life, a feature of his work that has consistently frustrated Marx commentators. This is especially clear in Marx's account of free time, which I argue Marx conceives as the time of indeterminate use and therefore the enabling condition for the politics of indeterminate utility.

Section 1 – Human utility and the Critique of Modernity

In 1843, not long after he had completed his doctoral dissertation and all but abandoned the possibility of an academic career, Marx wrote an essay called 'On the Jewish Question.' There Marx provides a powerful and sophisticated articulation of the political institutionalization of

need and utility in modernity. This piece was a response to Bruno Bauer's discussion of Jewish and indeed human emancipation in the early decades of the 19th century.² Bauer wanted to politically emancipate German Jews given that they were still debarred from enjoying full citizen rights. Marx's discussion ranges well beyond the status of religion and identity in politics, although it is in these terms that political theory has mostly taken it up.³ The piece can also be read as an indictment of the quality of human relations in our contemporary political and social condition and we can already see some of the key themes of the politics of determinate utility, especially need and human nature, now in a modern idiom.

Marx argues that the perfection of the state—which he claims is represented in his time by the USA—results in the reduction of people to “mere means.”⁴ This is because the state eliminates “private property, education, occupation” from its considerations and in doing so actually turns them into its presuppositions. Because they are emancipated from the state, property, education and occupation are allowed to “act after *their* own fashion...and to manifest their *particular* [as opposed to universal] character” which is to say their egoistic tendencies.⁵ Thus the state, far from abolishing the destructive role of egoism in civil society, actually serves to strengthen it. The result, according to Marx, is that society's members become the means to my security, “the supreme social concept of civil society”⁶ Marx says. In the language of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* of 1793, security is “the protection afforded by society to each of its members for the preservation of his person, his rights, and his

² Tomba, “Emancipation as Therapy. Bauer and Marx on the Jewish Question,” 161.

³ Brown, *States of Injury*, chapter 5; Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, chapter 5.

⁴ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

property.”⁷ In Marx’s own words, security means bolstering the particular focus on individual “bare needs.”⁸ According to Marx, then, the perfection of the bourgeois state makes bare need the *first problem* that politics addresses and by doing so it is to this that politics must answer thereafter. Marx laments that “political life declares itself to be only a *means*, whose end is the life of civil society.”⁹ The state has been reduced to a protector of the bare needs of isolated and egoistic individuals in civil society because these have been posited as the state’s timeless presupposition. In sum, the state and the people are reduced to evaluating everything (including themselves) based on its utility in meeting the individualistic needs thrown up in civil society. Because this is framed through the supposedly eternal and universal rights of Man and citizen, such an approach is dignified by the idea that it aligns with human nature. In OJQ, then, we can see at least two traits of the politics of determinate utility as we encountered it in Plato: human nature and need.

Although Marx does not cite Plato—who has provided me with the archetype for the politics of determinate utility in chapter 1—in this early work, in his later *Capital* volume 1 Marx identifies in Plato’s *Republic* the third dimension of the politics of determinate utility that I singled out in chapter 2, namely the temporal dimension. Citing the same “city of pigs” in *Republic* Book II that informed my approach to the politics of determinate utility, Marx notes that “the labourer must adapt himself to the work, not the work to the labourer.”¹⁰ The problem, as Marx notes, is one of timing. An efficient productive system means, according to Plato’s

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 487–88n57.

Socrates, “the thing that has to be done won’t wait until the doer has the leisure to do it. No,” Socrates continues, “instead the doer must, of necessity, pay close attention to what has to be done and not leave it for his idle moments” (*Republic*, 370b10-12 (Reeve translation)). Marx raises this in *Capital* because he thinks that this “Platonism” can be found in English factories:

“The same Platonic idea can be found in the protest of the English bleachers against the clause in the Factory Act providing for fixed meal-times for all the workers. Their business cannot await the convenience of the workmen, they say, because ‘in the various operations of singeing, washing, bleaching, mangling, calendaring, and dyeing, none of them can be stopped at a given moment without risk of damage...to enforce the same dinner hour for all the workpeople might occasionally subject valuable goods to the risk of damage by incomplete operations.’”¹¹

Here we see Marx linking the temporal dimension of the politics of determinate utility to the processes of capitalist production. The bleachers wish to adapt their workers’ schedule to the demands of the work, which the Factory Act interferes with since it sets out that workers are entitled to meal breaks at certain times of the workday. In sum, we can see that in the capitalist factory’s schedule, the productive system is preeminent to the detriment of the workers who are merely useful instruments in production.

Evidently, in Marx’s turn from a critique of politics and the state in the early OJQ to the critique of capitalism in *Capital*, the dynamics of human use continued to concern him. Of

¹¹ Ibid.

course, this does not come close to summarizing Marx's critique of capitalism. It only goes to show some of the overlapping concerns of Marx's analysis of social life from his early to his mature work. Doing so, however, also provides a way to measure how much Marx's thinking developed between his early and late efforts to "ruthless critique of everything existing."¹²

Although Marx's early critique of modernity fits rather nicely with my outline of the politics of determinate utility, it would be a mistake to think that this was Marx's last word on human utility. In the course of Marx's developing analysis of capitalism, the *indeterminacy* of human utility comes to define Marx's critique of capitalism. As with Aristotle, Marx's thinking about the indeterminacy of human use is closely connected with exchange, which means my focus will largely be on the capitalist market for commodities, including human labour. We will also see that Aristotle's effort to understand value was Marx's starting point. And yet, owing to the unique combinations and dynamics of capitalism, Marx will examine exchange in a way that both follows aspects of Aristotle's analysis as we have encountered it in the previous chapters and also *inverts* it. To show how, I will first focus on the opening chapters of *Capital*, Volume 1 in dialogue with the important and recent analysis of William Clare Roberts' book, *Marx's Inferno*.

Section 2 - Indeterminacy of Human Use

The indeterminacy of human use in capitalism emerges as a central theme of William Clare Roberts' reading of Marx's *Capital*, owing especially to two distinctive ways that Roberts reads that work. First, Roberts invokes the method of the so-called Cambridge school of intellectual

¹² Marx, "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing," 13.

history by reading Marx's work as a speech-act intended to intervene in a debate with his contemporary theorists. In this case, it means reading Marx in dialogue with the socialist theorists of the nineteenth century, principally Robert Owen, Owen's followers (the "Owenites"), and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. The second distinctive feature of Roberts' reading that brings indeterminacy to the fore is Roberts' original and contentious claim that Dante's *Inferno* served as a structuring device for volume one of Marx's *Capital*. These interpretive lenses mean that the theme of human use emerges out of Roberts' analysis of three particular concepts: value, *akrasia* (lack of self-mastery), and freedom as non-domination. I will take these up in turn.

Marx's Theory of Value

According to Roberts' account of Marx's intellectual context, the theme of indeterminacy already appears in Marx's socialist forebears. According to these thinkers, indeterminacy in human utility is characteristic of life in a market in so far as there exists a divergence between value—which they understood to be determined by labour—and price, which they understood to be manipulated by merchants in the pursuit of wealth accumulation. The mere possibility of this divergence meant it was "impossible for producers to know that their efforts will be rewarded, and all too possible for money owners to pay too little for goods."¹³ In light of this uncertainty, "no one can deliberate well about how hard they ought to work or whether the objects of their desires are worth the trouble of obtaining them."¹⁴ The *useful status* of one's

¹³ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

own labour is radically indeterminate, according to the socialists, because the *outcome* of work is radically indeterminate so long as the value and price of objects are allowed to diverge.

The cause of this divergence was often articulated as a result of greed and lust for wealth; that is, in moral terms. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this response to market life and its perils has a long history, being central to the twin pillars of ancient Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. The socialist critique went beyond these moral criticisms, however. Many socialists claimed that these moral flaws were exacerbated by the money system, which became the target of their diagnosis. As they saw it, money had become mysterious and as such could be used for nefarious purposes. For instance, Roberts cites William Cobbett's *Political Register*, in which Cobbett claimed that the Bank of England was a means by "which artful and impudent knaves have contrived to rob the laboring part of mankind," citing in particular the "paper-money mystery."¹⁵ William Thompson echoes Cobbett's estimation when he claims that the "arbitrary alterations in the currency by the portion of Idle who form the governing classes" has doled out "more extensive misery" to the industrious classes than even the most overt forms of "force and fraud," such as the "iniquities of human wholesale butchery under the name of wars."¹⁶

How, exactly, did this purported manipulation and deceit work? For their part, the Owenites claimed that the mystery could arise because of a fundamental division of the population into two classes. One class of people made things under their own labour. Opposite them was a wealthy class who possessed the vast majority of the money to buy the products of

¹⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Labour Rewarded: The Claims of Labour and Capital Conciliated; or, How to Secure to Labour the Whole Product of Its Exertion*, 62, cited in Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 71.

labour. The resulting dependence of the labouring class on the moneyed class also facilitated the manipulation of exchange in favour of the wealthy, a situation that further aggravated the working class for the fact that the wealthy simply seemed to print their money.¹⁷ And so, Roberts sums up the socialist diagnosis of the problem:

“The near monopoly of the wealthy over the means of exchange is a self-perpetuating engine of unequal exchanges. The bargaining power it gives to the wealthy ensures that the poor producers are never able to exact a fair price for their products, leaving them in the same penury and need of purchasers as before.”¹⁸

Incidentally, it would take nearly one hundred years for the socialist critique to receive any attention from the field of economics. In the 1930s Joan Robinson came to call this kind of situation a ‘monopsony,’ which names a monopoly of *buyers* who can dictate to the seller of labour the price it will fetch.¹⁹ While Robinson, who was a collaborator of John Maynard Keynes, thought that government regulation was the appropriate response, ironically the nineteenth-century socialists were rather more like twentieth-century proponents of the free market, believing that “if market transactions were actually free and voluntary exchanges between equals, then there would be no problem.”²⁰ One solution was to lessen the distorting effects of exchange by getting rid of the money that was created by the banking elite. This could be

¹⁷ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 70.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁹ Robinson, *The Economics of Imperfect Competition*, 211–31 and 292–304.

²⁰ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 68.

achieved by putting the means for exchange in the hands of the industrious class themselves in the form of, for example, “free credit, labor exchanges, combinations, [or] cooperative communities.”²¹ Once the obstacles to free exchange were cleared, it would be possible to establish exchange in accordance with “the only equitable principle,” which is “to exchange the supposed prime cost of, or value of labor in, one article against the prime cost of, or amount of labor contained in any other article.”²² In other words—and with Aristotle in our mind this will now sound familiar—, the answer to the problem of indeterminacy is more determinacy in exchange. Cost should be determined by the value of labour in an object. Without the distorting effects of money, the socialists believed there was no reason this could not be realized. Moreover, in this new world of exchange it was almost certain that every produced object would find a buyer, since, as Proudhon put it in his address to the Constituent National Assembly in Paris, “the power to consume, in society and in the individual alike, is infinite.”²³ Whatever indeterminacy existed could be laid at the feet of the money system. Since people want to consume continually, any produced object will find a buyer. At the same time, any productive labour will be determinately useful.

This is the context that Roberts has Marx speak into and in terms of which the account of indeterminacy in Marx is made. While Marx shares the focus on indeterminacy caused by exchange and the importance of value and money for understanding this, he diverges quite significantly from the accounts of value and money reconstructed above. Money is not something imposed on exchange by a class of money-makers, and it cannot be used to

²¹ Ibid. 72

²² Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings*, 268, cited in Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 68.

²³ Proudhon, *Property Is Theft!*, 347–48, cited in Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 73.

manipulate a divergence between price and value and so rob the worker their full due. Money, rather, is a necessary result of generalized commodity exchange. According to Roberts, it is Marx's purpose in the opening chapters of *Capital* to argue not only for the necessity of money under conditions of generalized exchange, but that "commodities are already money in 'germ'".²⁴ Simply put, that is because whatever commodity is exchanged for another takes on the form of money because both are equivalent forms of value. We can understand this better if we understand what value means for Marx. In sum, as Roberts reads Marx, value only exists *relationally*. The value of a commodity is relational because it is only ever expressed in something else for which it is exchanged. That is, the value of x can only be expressed in y. At this level of analysis, it does not matter what takes on the form of x or y. Marx simply calls x the relative form and y the equivalent form. Marx gives the example of twenty yards of linen. Say this amount of linen is exchanged for one coat, then one coat is the equivalent form of twenty yards of linen. When this happens, it looks like a coat has value in and of itself and that is why it is able to express the value of the linen. But actually, the reverse exchange is also possible—in fact, necessary²⁵—, and this shows that no object can "be related to itself as equivalent, and therefore cannot make its own physical shape into the expression of its own value, it must be related to another commodity as equivalent, and therefore must make the physical shape of another commodity into its own value-form."²⁶ Whatever commodity expresses the value of another commodity is a kind of proto-money because the function of money is to express the value of an object. Money properly speaking only comes to exist when one particular commodity

²⁴ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 74, quoting Marx, *Capital*, 163.

²⁵ Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, chapter 3.

²⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1976, 148.

comes to serve as the general equivalent of all other commodities. Since money is nothing but equivalent value that has been generalized in one commodity for all, whenever exchanges take place the money-form has already been generated.

This means that Marx disagrees with the Owenites, Proudhonists and others that money is the source of indeterminacy and that there is an underlying reality—based on labour and its creation of value—that is truer and more transparent. The problem of indeterminacy, as Roberts reads Marx, cannot even be grasped by looking at exchange, money or value as *economic* phenomena. Rather, these phenomena can only contribute to our understanding of indeterminacy when we see them as *social* phenomena, which means as things that arise from, attend to, and influence human relationships. In Aristotle's language, they are problems of human use. As a result, Roberts reads the Marx of *Capital* as a social theorist rather than an economist, and therefore reads Marx's treatment of value and money in terms of cooperation and coordination rather than the other way around.²⁷

What does this perspective render? In a world that appears as “an immense collection of commodities,”²⁸ generalized commodity exchange is the means by which people, and especially the producers and consumers of commodities, relate to and depend upon one another. And yet, while producers are dependent on a system of commodity exchange, their activity is undertaken independently of others, both fellow producers and consumers. This independence in the context of dependence allows several sources of failure to creep in, which means indeterminacy and the negative image of what we saw in Plato's first city in chapter 2. First, the independence

²⁷ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 79n98.

²⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 1976, 125.

of the producer, at the moment of production, from the consumer means there is no guarantee that the goods actually produced correspond to things needed by consumers. After all, in the first pages of *Capital* Marx takes Aristotle's distinction between use-value and exchange-value and defines commodities as objects with both of these characteristics. Use-value attends to the needs of a person, and if an object does not meet anyone's perceived needs then it simply will not be exchanged and will fail to have exchange-value. If that is the case, then it is not only the object that is deemed useless but also the labour that went into producing it. The indeterminacy of the utility of the object also expresses the indeterminacy of human utility within the capitalist condition, then. If objects may fail to be useful, they may fail to produce exchange-value. And if humans are only useful in capitalism because they produce exchange value, then their failure to produce useful objects makes them useless, too. Their utility, then, is as indeterminate as the utility of the objects they produce. And as this is a direct result of the independence of producers and consumers from each other (meaning they are dependent on the market to socialize objects and human utility), indeterminacy is a defining feature of capitalism. It is one feature that distinguishes it most from feudalism, where relations were determined by the state:

“The old civil society [feudalism's] had a *directly political* character; that is, the elements of civil life such as property, the family, and types of occupation had been raised, in the form of lordship, caste and guilds, to elements of political life. They determined, in this form, the relation of the individual to the *state as a whole*; that is, his *political* situation, or in other words, his *separation and exclusion from the other elements of society*.”²⁹

²⁹ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 44.

But even if there is a need for the produced good and therefore of the human labour that made it, a second source of failure may arise from the fact that producers are independent of each other at the moment of production, too. To understand this, we need to better understand the relationship between price and value for Marx.

As we have seen, commodities are only exchanged if they are useful. Assuming that there is a need for the object but also that there is both competition, i.e. more than one seller of it, *and* a consumer's "encyclopedic knowledge of commodities,"³⁰ Marx takes it that a buyer will seek out the lowest price for an equivalent good while the seller will attempt to sell it at the highest price possible. Within this dynamic, the price of a good will reflect its value, which is determined by the socially necessary labour time to produce something. That is, the social conditions of production are the way the society is able to produce needed goods in an average way and value is consequently established. As a result, any divergence between price and value actually functions to reveal the value of commodities, since "overpriced goods lose market share until they are no longer overpriced."³¹ But in so far as production takes place independently of other producers, one cannot, at the moment of production, know whether this is taking place merely in an average way *or* in a more or less than average way. It is possible that an individual labourer's work is slower than average, meaning labour is not producing value effectively enough based on the price that its products will fetch. Conversely, it may be that the labourer's work will be more productive than average, in which case there will be a divergence between

³⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 126n5.

³¹ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 79.

price and value in favour of the producer. It is out of fear or hope of these eventualities that creates the impetus for innovation and ever more efficient labour.³²

In both of these cases, the problem of indeterminacy exists because there is a gap between the conditions under which producers undertake their work and the moment of exchange when consumers reveal their needs, meaning every produced object and producer must *prove* that they represent value and value-producing activity, respectively. The fact that they may fail in this means there is indeterminacy of production. The problem of indeterminacy is a *coordination* problem, in other words. Understanding this is important for seeing the solution that communist society is to Marx, for these are the problems that Marx wants communist society to solve.

To sum up, the difficulty of the market as Marx understands it is not the difficulty of getting price and value to match up, as his socialist contemporaries understood it, but rather to get any object to fetch a price or value. That is because of two special conditions of generalized commodity exchange. First, a commodity must have a use-value before it can be realized as an exchange-value. But, and this is the second condition, there is a gap between the concrete circumstances in which one labors and the moment that (social) judgment is made about the value of that work and whether it will count as commodity-producing labour or not. The result is indeterminacy regarding human utility within capitalist conditions of production.

³² To these two sources of failure we could also add that there may be a need for the good but because it relies on money to be exchanged, a person who needs the good may not have the money for it, meaning there is a problem of effective demand (although I think Marx largely brackets this question and takes it up further in *Capital* Volume III as a crisis of capitalist production).

What, exactly, is wrong with this system? Many different answers have been given to the question, especially because the sections of *Capital* from which Marx's account of value are drawn are among the most discussed in Marxist literature. For his part, Roberts' critique takes up two interrelated ideas. The first comes from the ethical discourse of *akrasia*, which pertains to the degree of mastery that an individual has over their actions. The second idea is freedom, specifically freedom as non-domination, which comes from the political discourse of republicanism. The theme of indeterminate human use is implicated in both ideas even though it is most explicit in the foregoing characterization of the system. Equipped with the reading of Aristotle in the foregoing chapters, however, it will be possible to tease out the way that indeterminate human use is configured in the critique and the proposed alternative that Roberts discusses at the end of his book. On the basis of this teasing out, in the remainder of this chapter I argue that Roberts has helpfully explicated Marx's reading of how capitalism functions and the way it dominates us, but where Roberts seems to buy into the determinacy of human use that the ancient ethical and political traditions prescribe, as we have seen, I think Marx rather wishes to invert those traditions and make indeterminacy a constitutive part of communist society.

Marx and Market Anarchy

Still reading Marx in terms of the prevailing socialist discourse, Roberts identifies a prevailing view among socialists that the market was a sphere of anarchy. For although Marx disagreed with the socialist theorization of value, money, and, therefore, their proposed alternatives, Roberts argues that the sources of their critical concern were largely overlapping.

In their efforts to diagnose the problem with an anarchic market, Roberts discerns the influence of two ancient traditions at work. The first is that of *akrasia*, a “moral discourse”³³ that has been prevalent in moral philosophy since Greek antiquity. *Akrasia* is the problem of incontinence, lack of self-mastery, or weakness of will that signifies a lack of virtue. The sources, and even the possibility, of *akrasia* are a point of contention in ancient philosophy, with Plato’s Socrates famously undermining the very possibility of someone truly knowing what the correct action is and then not acting accordingly, to Plato and Aristotle arguing that it arose from a misalignment of the parts of an individual soul, where desire displaces the rule of deliberative judgment.³⁴ That being so, Roberts argues that the first central concern of the socialists’ and indeed Marx’s critique of the anarchic market is practical judgment, or “rational calculations.”³⁵ What is of particular salience in the ancient discourse is the attribution of *akrasia* to *market* actors. Market goers were frequently considered to be driven by the desire for more (*pleonexia*) that made them slave-like because, like slaves, they did not act in accordance with virtue.

While Marx, Roberts asserts, knew this discourse “from many sources,”³⁶ the centrality of this theme in part one of *Capital* is supported by one of the key interpretive lenses for his reading: Marx’s purported decision to structure *Capital* on Dante’s *Inferno*. Incontinence is the concern of the upper circles of Hell. In Dante, “we find a Christianized version of the classical problem, for what matters is how to secure a proper ordering of the soul, and then how to secure a proper political order that reflects this order of the soul. Self-mastery is Christianized,

³³ Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*, 57.

³⁴ For an informative survey of these debates about *akrasia*, see Stroud and Svirsky, “Weakness of Will.”

³⁵ Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*, 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

for the achievement of continence depends upon grace; the disorder of the soul is a heritage of original sin.”³⁷

Unsurprisingly, although there is overlap in the general akratic theme, Marx’s framing of the problem is rather different than Dante’s. Marx’s approach is more contiguous with his socialist contemporaries who shared the second ancient tradition that informed Marx’s critique of market anarchy: a republican discourse about virtue and vice that centred on the idea of freedom. In the ancient Roman context whence this discourse comes, one’s virtue indicated that one ought not to be dominated because it was unfitting for one of virtuous character. Indeed, domination was to be avoided pre-eminently because it precluded you from being virtuous. The thinking was that to be dominated means to live a life of dependence on someone and this dependence made you subject to the arbitrary will of the dominator. Living your life in accordance with this will is both difficult for practical reason or judgment (because the master’s will is arbitrary and also incontestable) and also undesirable in so far as staying on someone’s good side does not mean living in accordance with virtue. But in the Roman context, this discourse was aristocratic insofar as it understood non-domination as befitting some people who were virtuous while assuming that some people should be dominated because they were vicious.

In the nineteenth century, by contrast, a radical republican approach arose that disputed the assumption that servile behaviour warranted servility. It rather altered the attribution of cause and effect by seeing servility as the cause of servile behaviour. People, the argument went, would be virtuous if they were not dominated. Freeing them from domination, then, is a prerequisite for virtuous and free individuals, which is what they *should* be. When the issue is

³⁷ Ibid., 62.

framed in this way, the important thing to do is achieve your freedom; virtue will follow. Roberts' discussion focuses on the specifics of *capitalist* domination with that end in mind because this is what he takes Marx to be doing, too. Marx "conceived politics in obstetric terms,"³⁸ meaning "Marx leads his readers into the Hell of political economy in order to clarify the problems facing socialism, and hence the historic task of the proletariat."³⁹ If human beings are free from capitalist domination then it will liberate them for virtue, meaning Marx was concerned with the virtue of the workers as the end result. In the words of Mary Wollstonecraft, who Roberts quotes in a footnote, "how can a being be...virtuous, who is not free?" Roberts thinks that a defining feature of Marx, compared to his socialist forebears, is the rejection of "moralistic socialism" that puts "virtue ahead of freedom."⁴⁰ Roberts rather endorses, because he thinks Marx would endorse, what Eric MacGilvray calls a "problem-centered definition of republicanism," meaning "republican thought centers around the problem of securing the practice of virtue through the control of arbitrary power."⁴¹

This is not a novel task in and of itself, since there have been numerous and indeed famous attempts to theorize capitalist domination. Arguably most famous is that of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Yet what existing accounts of capitalist domination miss, Roberts argues, is the fact that to understand capitalism's domination we need to approach it like any other form of domination, meaning something that inheres in *human, social* relations.⁴² By

³⁸ Ibid., 232.

³⁹ Ibid., 232-233.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 242n28.

⁴¹ MacGilvray, *The Invention of Market Freedom*, 22, cited by Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 247.

⁴² This may sound a lot like the neo-republicanism of Philip Pettit, but as Roberts himself points out, Pettit explicitly rules out thinking of market discipline in terms of domination. See Pettit, "Freedom in the Market"; Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 97-98.

contrast, the Frankfurt School thinkers tend to refer to domination by abstractions. For example, Gyorgy Lukács was concerned about the quantification of deliberation that occurs when we have to base our judgments about objects on their price in addition to their qualitative characteristics. For Lukács, it is the “autonomous movement of things on the market” that is responsible for this transformation of individual deliberation.⁴³ Or take Theodor Adorno, for whom “domination is fundamentally conceived as a process of subject formation, whereby individuals become integrated into capitalist society by internalizing, or, better, by *becoming* ideology.”⁴⁴ According to Roberts, these tendencies have been reduplicated in the work of Moishe Postone and Michael Heinrich, “two of the most sophisticated followers of Lukács and Adorno.”⁴⁵ With the emphasis on abstractions and individual subject formation, the personal relations that produce these abstractions are annulled with the result that domination “becomes nothing more than a metaphor.”⁴⁶

I agree that we need to concern ourselves with human relations. Indeed, it is Roberts’ insistence on this and his consistent focus on social relations that makes him a good partner for thinking about the use of humans, especially in light of the fact that so many other theorizations of use and utility have objects as their ultimate focus. But on the basis of working with *Capital* alone, one question remains unclear. Is Marx’s critique of the anarchic market a critique of indeterminacy in capitalism—because of its distorting effects on judgment—, or is it a critique of indeterminacy as such? *Capital* does not provide much of an answer to this question, mostly

⁴³ Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*, 90, quoting Vandenberghe, *A Philosophical History of German Sociology*, 148.

⁴⁴ Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*, 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

because, as Roberts has forcefully argued, Marx is focused on the task of disclosing capitalism's distinctive dominating traits, not outlining a philosophical position on judgment or the good society. And so Marx can show us that indeterminacy is a problem in capitalism because it is akin to arbitrary domination that republicanism has always wanted to exorcize. The question remains, however, is all indeterminacy dominating? Looking to context is unlikely to yield a clear answer to this question either, since the two traditions that Roberts thinks Marx is working with give different responses. The old republican tradition will follow Aristotle's aversion to indeterminacy as such. Indeed, some critics of republicanism worry that republican liberty effectively turns individuals into robots for the sake of state preservation.⁴⁷ The socialist tradition will not likely give a clear answer because, as we have already seen, it is primarily concerned with securing *freedom*, the attainment of which requires clarity about the current sources of domination. Once capitalist domination has been overcome, virtue will spring out of freedom, before which time we probably don't know what virtue will look like.⁴⁸

Roberts provides something of an answer in the final chapter of *Marx's Inferno* when he sketches the political means Marx thought necessary for realizing communist society, for which he looks at texts other than *Capital*. There Roberts makes explicit that his, and Marx's, problem-centered republicanism is tantamount to a "perfectionist" approach to virtue, in that it involves a concern with human flourishing as the "complete development" of human beings.⁴⁹ Roberts cites David Leopold's and Norman Geras' work on Marx's writings from the 1840's, who argue

⁴⁷ Herzog, "Some Questions for Republicans."

⁴⁸ See, however, Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*, especially chapter 5, on virtue in the labour-republican tradition in the nineteenth-century United States.

⁴⁹ Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 247n54.

that “the young Marx was...a perfectionist.”⁵⁰ The term “full human development” that Roberts re-translates as “complete development” comes from *Capital*, which he takes to be evidence that “the Marx of *Capital* retains this position” from his youth.⁵¹ But what does that position amount to? Marx uses the term “full human development” in a brief discussion of ancient views on machinery, where he notes in passing that the ancients “may perhaps have excused the slavery of one person as a means to the full human development of another.”⁵² In the context of the phrase and against the background of my discussion of determinate utility in previous chapters, we can see that “full human development” means the virtue of the ruler that, in the best case scenario, aligns with true eudaimonia as the human good. That also means, as we have seen, determinacy over indeterminacy in human life. By seeing Marx as a “perfectionist,” then, Roberts implies that Marx’s critique of indeterminacy in capitalism is also a critique of indeterminacy as such.

The grounds for seeing the Marx of *Capital* as a perfectionist in this classical sense are not particularly strong, but this interpretation does prove to be important for Roberts because it informs his understanding of Marx’s communist society. There is a reason why Roberts leaves it to the last chapter to explicitly discuss human nature. Roberts thinks that an account of human nature may be necessary for thinking about communist political institutions but it is not necessary for diagnosing the problems of capitalism. The latter is, overall, an anti-humanist project because it requires attention to “historically local explanations of social structure and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 533.

dynamics.”⁵³ Roberts refers to his discussion of Althusser in chapter 3, where he argued that readers of Althusser had missed the point in so far as they read him as a commentator on agency rather than freedom. To focus on agency means that you ask, for example, whether people “continue to make decisions based on their beliefs and desires.”⁵⁴ Looking at capitalist subjects and one cannot but admit that people do make decisions based on their beliefs and desires. To focus on freedom, however, is to see whether something can be contested. In other words, “they cannot get together and talk about what sorts of things that should and should not be done, and what sorts of reasons should and should not count as good reasons” (96). That makes people into “personifications of economic relations” and “systematically irresponsible for our economic life.”⁵⁵ Returning to his discussion of human nature, then, Roberts implies that such an account of capitalism is anti-humanist because one cannot get from an account of human nature to this kind of explanation.

Marx’s view of human nature matters for Roberts, then, because it will guide his prescriptions for good political institutions and his advice for people who seek freedom. On the basis of his claim that Marx was a “perfectionist” in wanting to realize the “complete development” of human beings, Roberts focuses on the “real bone of contention”⁵⁶ in Marxist scholarship, which is the means by which to realize it. Given that in the final chapter Roberts looks beyond *Capital* in order to think about Marx’s envisaged communist society, it is unclear why he did not consider in greater depth the passages in which Marx talks about the good of

⁵³ Ibid., 247n54.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 247.

human beings in communist society *and* how it relates to conceptions of the good life in antiquity and modernity. This is what I will take up in the rest of this chapter in order to understand Marx's operative understanding of human good, which will become the basis for judging any future society's claims to the good.

Section 3 – Wealth and Human Satisfaction

We do not have to guess what Marx thinks about the connection between wealth and the good of individual human beings. Between October 1857 and mid 1858, Marx furiously filled seven notebooks with preliminary thoughts regarding the research into political economy that had occupied him for more than a decade. Preserved and published as the *Grundrisse* (groundworks), these notebooks contain some of Marx's most extensive treatments of the ancient world outside his early dissertation work on materialism in ancient philosophy. In Notebook V, there is a particularly salient discussion of wealth and the human good that speaks directly to the question raised about the place of indeterminacy in Marx's thought. In so far as human ends intersect with wealth, and therefore production, Marx notes that there is a clear split between the modern and ancient worlds. In antiquity, "the human being appears as the aim of production."⁵⁷ Marx cites Cicero's letters to Atticus to evince the point with Cato and Brutus, two eminent citizens of republican Rome. While "Cato may well investigate which manner of cultivating a field brings the greatest rewards, and Brutus may even lend out his money at the best rate of interest," the purpose of their doing so is unambiguous. "The question is always which mode of

⁵⁷ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 487–88.

property creates the best citizens.”⁵⁸ Marx may just as easily have cited Aristotle here because since at least the Italian Renaissance Cicero and Aristotle were metonyms for living the noblest life for the sake of the city—i.e. civic virtue.⁵⁹ In “the modern world,” by contrast, “production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production.”⁶⁰ The result of this inverted priority of wealth and human life is profound. “The bourgeoisie,” who Marx pronounced to be the leaders of this inversion in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, “...has been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about.” Speaking again from the standpoint of antiquity, he continues, “[i]t has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.”⁶¹ But Marx thinks that these wonders have also come at a considerable cost. Returning to the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes, “this complete working-out of the human content” also “appears as a complete emptying-out,” and “total alienation.”⁶² The modern preoccupation with production has achieved incredible feats, but it has also annihilated the idea of wealth as an instrument of human well-being. But in making this direct comparison, Marx by no means says that we ought to return to the ancient order of priority, as though we should invert the relation between human beings and wealth once again to restore things to their correct order as determined by classical philosophy. Marx rather calls the ancient view “childish,” “limited,” and “one-sided.”⁶³ In comparison to the modern, the “world of antiquity appears on one side as loftier,” but “it really is loftier in all matters where closed shapes, forms

⁵⁸ Ibid., 487.

⁵⁹ Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*, Chapter 2, esp. pp. 39 ff.

⁶⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488.

⁶¹ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 222.

⁶² Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488.

⁶³ Ibid.

and given limits are sought for.”⁶⁴ If determinate forms and ends are sought after, then Marx suggests one need look no further than the ancient approach. It offers “satisfaction from a limited standpoint,” which is still *something*, given that “the modern gives *no* satisfaction; or, where it appears satisfied with itself, it is *vulgar*.”⁶⁵ But Marx makes these qualifications about the ancient approach because he thinks human existence is bound for something more. In fact, as much as the bourgeoisie has accomplished with its mode of production, Marx in turns calls it limited, too. The reason it is limited can only be grasped if we consider wealth as something else:

“when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as humanity’s own nature?”⁶⁶

The language of “mastery” here evokes pictures of the ancient ethical and political forms that Roberts has relied on. But Marx clarifies that the point of mastering nature and human nature is not to determine it in the sense of closing it, but rather of opening it up, for Marx continues:

“The absolute working out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historical development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a *predetermined* yardstick? Where he does not

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., my emphasis.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?"⁶⁷

This mastering and opening is what Marx here calls "wealth (*Reichtum*)" and will later call "real wealth (*wirkliche Reichtum*)," as we will see. But what this passage conveys has been an issue of much dispute in Marxist scholarship. G. A. Cohen represents a classic and widespread interpretation. In *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, Cohen reads the passage in light of earlier texts such as *The German Ideology* and *The Holy Family*,⁶⁸ which makes this text a commentary on the abolishment of roles in communism. "In a communist society," writes Marx of *The German Ideology*, "there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities."⁶⁹ Later in the same text, Marx writes "free activity is for the communists the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of *all* abilities."⁷⁰ In essence, Cohen thinks that Marx aligns freedom with the *full* development of human abilities. He thinks this is an impossible ideal and possibly a mistaken identification of the free development of an individual in *any* direction with the full development of an individual in *every* direction. Patricia Springborg attributes a similar view to Marx, too, and thinks it is a result of Aristotle's influence on Marx.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 351n5.

⁶⁹ *The German Ideology*, 132, quoted in Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 350.

⁷⁰ *The German Ideology*, 242, quoted in Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 351.

⁷¹ "Aristotle maintained, and Marx affirmed, that the polis better realizes the human *telos*...Only the proximity and multifaceted communal ties produced by contiguous existence permit...the full flowering of the many-sided individual." Springborg, "Politics, Primordialism, and Orientalism," 196. Although note that Springborg is not commenting on the passage from the *Grundrisse* directly here, though this article is about the section of the *Grundrisse* in which this passage appears.

These and other writers focus on the *achievement* of totality, that is, of arriving at the point of totality from which vantage point we can say that all our powers have been worked out.

But when I read this passage, I see Marx accentuating the *process*, not the goal. I grant that there is evidence for both process and goal interpretations. For the goal interpretation, “The absolute working-out (*Das absolute Herausarbeiten*)” and “produces his totality (*seine Totalität produziert*)” suggest that Marx has in mind some finality. Alongside this, however, Marx is clearly accentuating wealth as a process when he writes, “the *development* of all human powers as such *an end in itself* (*der Entwicklung aller menschlichen Kräfte als solcher...zum Selbstzweck macht*)”, which means one strives “not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming (*Nicht irgend etwas Gewordnes zu bleiben sucht, sondern in der absoluten Bewegung des Werdens ist*)”. It is important to bear in mind that these lines come from a notebook and were not polished and clarified for publication. A little ambiguity is to be expected and forgiven. Returning to the question of wealth in a good human life, it is clear that Marx does not want antiquity’s satisfaction or modernity’s lack of satisfaction. Marx recasts wealth and the satisfaction it gives to human beings as both determinacy *and* indeterminacy. *This* is the idea that we need to work out. We do not have to settle for this sparse discussion, however. Marx takes up the idea of real wealth elsewhere and confirms the emphasis on process as the goal.

Marx picks up the concept of real wealth again in Notebook VII that was also compiled in and published as the *Grundrisse*. In the *Grundrisse*’s famous ‘Fragment on Machines,’ Marx connects wealth with a number of other ideas that allows us to pinpoint what he means with greater accuracy. This section of *Grundrisse* has received a lot of attention because it seems to

spell the qualitative and radical transformation of labour as humans come to rely on machines for production. Thus, Antonio Negri sees in this discussion the outline of the social factory and the transformation of labour into immaterial labour.⁷² Others compare the fragment on the machine with the section of *Capital* that deals with machines. In this comparison, interpreters claim that the Marx of the *Grundrisse* was Cohen's Marx—a modernist who put his trust in the development of the modes of production to usher in the conditions for communist society. On this reading, machines would transform human labour into supervision and regulation of machine work and simultaneously liberate us for our own development.⁷³ The Marx of *Capital*, still on this reading, betrays his disillusionment with modernism because he came to recognize machines as degrading people. But I will argue that this interpretation is based on a misunderstanding of the *Grundrisse's* claims, and that if there is a difference between the two works on the machine, it is mostly one of emphasis. But this discussion has mostly distracted commentators from the light this passage sheds on wealth and human satisfaction, which comes by connecting it to the sections on real wealth discussed above.⁷⁴ This is what I will pursue here.

We can begin with what real wealth is *not*. Real wealth is not what the Englishman Charles Wentworth Dilke meant by wealth in a pamphlet written in 1821 and circulated anonymously. Marx quotes this pamphlet numerous times in the *Grundrisse* in order to provide a foil for his own notion of real wealth. "Truly wealthy a nation," writes Dilke, "when the working day is 6 hours rather than 12. *Wealth* is not command over surplus labour time," it is "*disposable*

⁷² Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, 140 ff.

⁷³ Amy Wendling's argument on this point Roberts cites approvingly (168) with the caveat that "[t]he contrast between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* ought not to be overplayed; there are many passages in the earlier notebooks that are as pessimistic as anything found in the published text" Wendling, *Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation*, 168n96.

⁷⁴ Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* is an exception.

time outside that needed in direct production, for *every individual* and the whole society.”⁷⁵ For Dilke, wealth means that the people of a nation are able to work less and thus enjoy “disposable time,” which is clearly defined as not-working. In this he was echoing the earlier view of William Godwin that “the genuine wealth of man is leisure”⁷⁶ but is mostly of a piece with the classic philosophical view that wealth ought to be subordinated to leisure because it is a key condition of virtue. Of course, this was usually an aristocratic perspective, and so Dilke’s concern for the mass of workers differentiates his view but the relationship between wealth and human well-being is essentially the same.⁷⁷

Despite the fact that Marx deploys the term “disposable time” on numerous occasions within a few pages of the *Grundrisse*, he does not consistently invoke it normatively in the way that Dilke does. Marx differs from Dilke in one major respect, and it can be gleaned from the way that the above quotation from Dilke appears in Marx’s text, which I omitted above but have italicized here:

⁷⁵ Dilke, *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties, Deduced from Principles of Political Economy, in a Letter to Lord John Russell* p. 6, quoted by Marx, *Grundrisse*, 706.

⁷⁶ Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, London 1797, p. 167. This quotation is cited by Roberts (p. 150)—who in turn takes from Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money, and the Millennium*, p. 32—in the context of discussing the lure of capitalist production. People go in for capitalist production on the promise that it will minimize necessary labour, only to defraud them by either extending that day or intensifying the labour day for the sake of surplus value. Roberts only fleetingly discusses Marx’s discussion of wealth in the *Grundrisse* (168) but, as I observed in note 74 above, he cites Amy Wendling (*Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation*) who, like Massimiliano Tomba, says that a significant shift in tone or expectation has taken place between *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. Moreover, he cites G. A. Cohen as the “most careful and sophisticated defender of the claim that capitalism’s mission is to produce the technological presuppositions of socialism”. Cohen’s interpretation of this technologism is related to his interpretation of Marx’s “real wealth,” which, as we have seen, does not grasp Marx’s meaning. It is my contention that his interpretation of technologism is resultantly flawed, too.

⁷⁷ On p. 240, Roberts evinces the fact that he hasn’t considered Marx on real wealth. Discussing Cohen, he says that “a modicum of real wealth” is what “an advanced technological basis” provides everyone. In other words, real wealth consists of material goods that release people from the grip of scarcity. But this is not how Marx uses the term “real wealth,” it is how Dilke uses it. Granted, Roberts disagrees with Cohen’s reading, but that doesn’t nullify the way that he has used “real wealth” to convey Cohen’s meaning.

‘Truly wealthy a nation, when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours. *Wealth* is not command over surplus labour’ (*real wealth*), ‘but rather, disposable time outside that needed in direct production, for every individual and the whole society.’⁷⁸

Just after Dilke has written, “*Wealth* is not command over surplus labour,” Marx has added “real wealth” in parentheses. I take Marx to be saying that real wealth is *precisely* command over surplus labour. Why? In short, because surplus labour develops productive forces, and productive forces respond to (because commanded by) the capabilities for production and consumption created by developing individuals in society. Let me elaborate.

Marx says that real wealth amounts to free time, which is not the time of work, non-work, or what Dilke has decried as machine-erecting work. Free time is specifically and simultaneously the development of capabilities for production and consumption, which makes it the time of developing productive force. Why? Because free time is time away from labour or production, but it is “in no way *abstinence from consumption*.”⁷⁹ Free time is “rather the development of power, of capabilities of production, and hence both the capabilities as well as the means of consumption.”⁸⁰ Marx thinks that a developing individual, whose free time is used for almost anything—from “idle time” to “time for higher activity”⁸¹—becomes the spur both for new production and new consumption. This spur is what will then develop production, which otherwise always runs the risk of repetitively producing the same in the pursuit of capital

⁷⁸ *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties, Deduced from Principles of Political Economy, in a Letter to Lord John Russell*, 6, quoted by Marx, *Grundrisse*, 706.

⁷⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 711.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 712.

accumulation but failing to develop the productive forces. That is because capital commands labour and surplus labour in specific ways. Capital commands labour to produce value in order to, in the first instance, replace the value that has been advanced in purchasing labour power from the wage labourer. As capital seeks to accumulate value, surplus labour can be deployed to replace the wage labourer and therefore save the capitalist a production cost. It can do so by employing machinery. But machinery, as Marx sees it, is almost useless for developing the productive forces. It either goes on producing the same thing with the likely result of overproduction, or it decreases the rate of profit, or it involves the labourer in menial supervisory work that does nothing to develop him or her and therefore nothing to develop productive forces.

In sum, free time is true wealth for Marx because it stands for a seamless and complementary process of creating new capabilities for consumption and new capabilities for production. In so far as they are new, they represent a development in productive forces. In so far as the mediation between production and consumption is seamless, this mode of production is a huge advance on the capitalist mode of production, whose indeterminacy, as we have seen, stems from the possible failure of productive efforts to translate into value because they are not desired or needed by consumers. In the case of real wealth, indeterminacy, if it exists at all, does not come from uncertainty about the utility of produced goods or the human labour that produced them. Indeterminacy only comes in the form of open development that cannot be known or determined in advance. But as an historically realized form of individual life, it is *determinate*. This is the determinate indeterminacy of human use that Marx wants a communist society to realize.

Conclusion

Far from an endorsement of ancient virtue ethics and politics, Marx's conceptualization of indeterminate human use as the satisfaction of human beings amounts to an inversion of that ancient view, at least as it is formulated by Aristotle. In making this inversion, Marx takes up a question that is implicitly raised by Aristotle and answered in a distorted form in capitalist society: what if we treated indeterminate human use as a good for human beings and something that political community was collectively organized to support rather than abolish? Ancient and modern exchange relations testify to the fact that indeterminacy plays a role in human conceptions of the good. Both ancient and modern societies tend to disempower and constrain rather than empower and emancipate humans in the ways that indeterminacy are made determinate. Marx stands out for the way that he envisions a determinate indeterminacy of human use that what amounts to the use of Aristotle's spectral symptom. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx notes that men, in the effort to do something new, have a farcical tendency to "nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes in world history."⁸² In this chapter, I hope to have shown that Marx rather summons up the spirits of the past only to thoroughly interrogate and transform them for his own purposes, informed by the historical conditions to which he was so attuned. The result is that in Marx there remains only one specter to be contended with, which is the spectral existence of real wealth's determinate indeterminacy

⁸² Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 32.

under current conditions. Having conjured it, he lays down the challenge to work out how this means to human satisfaction could be realized.

Conclusion

Guided by the question, “how useful are humans for politics?”, in this dissertation I have worked to reclaim human usefulness as an important dimension of political thinking and to conceptualize use and utility for a democratic vision of politics. Given the contentiousness of the question in light of the contemporary theoretical and political context, why pursue this reclamation and reorientation to use and utility? What does it enable that existing political theories and political practices do not?

A reorientation to use and utility supplies us with an enhanced critical perspective. That is because human beings are born into a world that they inherit and that is constituted, to a greater or lesser extent, by human activity or, which is the same thing, the use of humans. On a daily basis, we are dependent on, and therefore use, each other to undertake even the most basic of tasks, such as eating butter on our bread, wearing shoes with rubber soles, or riding in a vehicle as we navigate the world. These objects are part of an inherited world that we depend on, a world that Karl Marx calls the presupposition of human life that humans take up and use in the further reproduction of life, whatever form that resulting life may take. Approaching utility this way makes it a basic fact of human community. But these objects and their use only come into being through human activity, and so the use of objects is always a use of humans. When the concepts use and utility lose sight of human use, they become oriented around the use of objects in a way that is telling for the condition of human community. Human utility and community are still there, but now in diminished form. When use and utility are oriented around the use of objects, humans still depend upon each other, but it amounts to the politics of

determinate utility that works through a split between people and the power to coordinate the use of humans, which is the power to satisfy needs. A narrow conceptualization of use and utility, focused on objects, distracts us from that condition. The reorientation to use and utility that I have pursued in this dissertation enlivens us to the ways that contemporary life instantiates the politics of determinate utility that erodes singularity and collectivity.

But the reorientation also supplies us with an emancipatory perspective. The use of humans attunes us to the possibilities that stem from human use. Human singularity exceeds any determinate use of humans and always harbors the possibility of contesting, revising, and reworking those uses. In other words, human singularity represents the ineradicable indeterminacy of human use. And that possibility points to another: that indeterminate use may be something humans pursue as a good in itself. To some extent, we can recognize that in the prevalence of indeterminacy in human relations as we engage in the twin activities of what I have called the politics of indeterminate utility: questioning and valuing what uses people and, to some extent, things ought to have. But under current circumstances, the politics of indeterminate utility are delimited by the historical conditions of the capitalist social formation that make indeterminacy determinate, in its own way, for the sake of capital valorization and accumulation, not human flourishing. From the perspective of the use of humans, however, we are able to ask the question, what would it mean to recognize indeterminate use as a human good around which society was collectively organized? How could this be realized in a way that better empowers and emancipates people?

Aristotle and Marx have provided some central considerations for answering these questions. With Aristotle we saw that the politics of indeterminate utility are open, agonistic,

egalitarian, and ongoing, as singular individuals come together to work out common purpose that involves questioning and valuing feasible and desirable individual and collective functions. With Marx, the possibility of making indeterminate use, so understood, the common purpose of society was raised because he conceives of real wealth as free time, which is the time of indeterminate use. But in addition to the leading question—“how useful are humans politics?”—on the back of reading Aristotle and Marx on the use of humans we can add another question: “how can one afford to be called useless?” I take this to be the next question to pursue because it reflects the ever-present threat that the politics of determinate utility will present to indeterminacy. That is, indeterminacy is characterized by an openness that can easily succumb to determinacy because of its susceptibility to charges of uselessness. To affirm the politics of indeterminate utility, then, is to work out how it can be practiced in spite of others’ protestations and efforts to instate the politics of determinate utility. That being the case, Aristotle and his context acquires new value as we can take our cues from those rulers who so successfully managed to reserve leisure time for themselves. The point now, however, is to direct these strategies for Marx’s “free time” and a democratic politics of indeterminate utility.

For some, the most telling detail about Aristotle’s rulers and their use of humans in the creation of leisure time may be eminently material: the way that goods are produced. As we saw in chapter 4, Aristotle is evidently alert to the material condition in which some other portion of the population engage in labour to provide the necessities and thereby enable leisure and virtue cultivation for others. Consequently, dedication to work would prevent these workers from having the time or requisite qualities to threaten the rulers’ leisure time. In addition to this consideration, sheer geography may dictate that many people, especially farmers, who engage in

labour cannot possibly engage in politics that would threaten the monopoly on leisure time enjoyed by the rulers. The sheer distances between people outside the city makes even the kind of indeterminate encounters immanent to exchange quite difficult. To approach the enjoyment of leisure time in this way means the use of humans is a problem that can be resolved at the level of material scarcity and abundance and distribution.

But even a superficial consideration of the vast transformations in society between Aristotle's and our own time, however, make it clear that Aristotle's conditions are not the same as ours today. As is patently clear, modern productive methods have enabled production on a scale that the ancient world could scarcely dream of, from which perspective leisure is ostensibly within reach for more people than in Aristotle's context. Moreover, telecommunications technologies make it possible to connect with people in a way that qualitatively changes geographical space and social and political relations with it. As Marx observed in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization.¹

For some, these changes are the *only* pertinent differences between modern and pre-modern social formations. For example, even nineteenth-century socialists such as Jean-Baptiste Say and Saint-Simon could put great faith in the technological advancements of modern life for

¹ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 224.

the qualitative transformation of social and political life. These thinkers had in common the view that in the past, need satisfaction was dependent on war and plunder but now is based on the development of industry in the context of peace.² Engels' famous line "The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things" is actually a summary of Saint-Simon.³ Such a picture was probably never more feasible than the period following the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the beginning of the hundred years' peace. And yet these vast changes at the technological level, undeniable as they are, do not simply result in more democratic distributions of goods or the leisure time that would ensue. That did not occur in the 19th century and it has not occurred today, where inequalities of wealth are reminiscent of 19th century levels⁴ and time is increasingly colonized, as Nichole Shippen has put it.⁵ In considering the validity of Aristotle's account for us, then, it is not a simple question of scale, as though his limitations are denuded by modern industrial productivity and the advances in communication technologies.⁶ While modern productivity and communication technologies are indisputable, then, we need to be alive to the features of life that preclude and enable the enjoyment of free time, and therefore indeterminate use, beyond the framework of scarcity and abundance.

Here the use of humans is again helpful. The use of humans situates the question of free time within the terms of organizing for power because it is specifically the time of indeterminate

² Steadman Jones, "Introduction," 173.

³ Engels, "Anti-Dühring: Dialectics of Nature," 268.

⁴ Piketty and Goldhammer, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

⁵ Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*; Cray, 24/7.

⁶ Wendy Brown's account of Aristotle seems to suggest that his limitations can be overcome in such a fashion. When she affirms Aristotle's account of political life for the sake of liberal democratic politics, it seems that Aristotle's political actors (the leisured) are simply expanded to a level commensurate with liberal-democratic enfranchisement. Here, by contrast, I wish to invert Aristotle's preference for determinacy over indeterminacy in politics, which I think Marx was trying to do, too. Modern productivity is important, then, but solely focusing on that aspect distracts from the way that Marx's and a democratic account *qualitatively* differs from Aristotle's.

utility. This complements that fact that, as Aristotle understands regimes, it is because of their organization around common virtues, and therefore shared values, that rulers have the capacity to use humans for the sake of leisure time. This capacity depends upon the determinacy of shared values—which may also include determinate indeterminacy—, but it is exercised and secured in political institutions and a culture that values these, too. To answer the question “how can one afford to be called useless?” requires an understanding of political institutions and political culture that can help secure the politics of indeterminate utility, although they can only enhance, and not replace, the generativity that that stems from human singularity and the desire to create common purpose. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to tease out the complexities of these additional issues, but my hope is that the reorientation to use and utility attempted here can instil the desire for that further work.

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Vita

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