Carleton University

Anti-Political Impulses: Neoliberal Globalization and the Resurgence of Religion

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by Trevor Smith

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Abstract

This thesis argues that neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion should be seen not as opposing forces, but as mutually reinforcing. Both phenomena are anti-political and this is the source of the affinity they have for each other. In arguing that the two processes are anti-political, a definition of politics is posited which centres on seeing politics as having two parts. The first part involves direct participation of citizens in speech and action, while the second part consists of the attempts by the excluded to be recognized as equal members of the community. The thesis then goes on to examine the theoretical attempts to escape from politics and how neoliberalism and the resurgent religions fit within these anti-political frameworks and how the two phenomena then become linked through a mutual desire for depoliticization.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Defining the Political.....	9
(i) Hannah Arendt and the Bios Politikos.....	10
(a) The Content of Politics I – Speech.....	11
(b) The Content of Politics II – Listening.....	16
(c) The Content of Politics III – Action.....	18
(d) Politics as the Space of Freedom and Equality.....	22
(e) The Relationship of Politics and Immortality.....	25
(ii) Rancière: Politics as Striving for Equality.....	29
(a) Boundaries.....	29
(b) The ‘Part with No Part’ Which Makes a Universal Claim.....	30
(c) Equality and Democracy.....	34
(iii) Conflict and Tragedy.....	38
Chapter 2: The Attack On The Political.....	43
(i) Arendt on Depoliticization.....	45
(a) Arendt’s Critique of the Substitution of Making for Acting.....	45
(b) The Transformation of Immortality and the Loss of the World.....	51
(ii) The Disagreement between Politics and Philosophy.....	56
(a) The Early Philosophical Retreat from Politics.....	57
(b) Recognition and Reconciliation in Kojève and Hegel.....	60
(c) Žižek’s Typology of the Disavowal of Politics.....	67
Chapter 3: Neoliberal Capitalism and the Religious Resurgence as Projects of Depoliticization.....	73
(i) Neoliberalism as an Anti-Political Project.....	74
(a) Privatization and the Invisible Hand.....	76
(b) Neoliberalism as the “Administration of Things”.....	81
(c) A Disposable Society of Consumers.....	82
(d) Charity as the Privatization of Poverty.....	86
(ii) The Resurgent Religions and their Hostility to Politics.....	88
(a) Eternity, Lack of a World, Resignation, and Submission.....	92
(b) Debate as Heresy.....	96
(c) Conflict as a Transcendental War between Good and Evil.....	97
(d) Anti-Secular as Anti-Political.....	102
(e) Religious Charity as Depoliticizing.....	104
Chapter 4: Neoliberalism and Religion as Mutually Reinforcing.....	108
(i) The Nature of the Connection.....	108
(ii) Neoliberal Globalization and its Affinity for the Resurgent Religions.....	111
(a) Neoliberal Globalization as Fragmentary Rather than Homogenizing.....	111
(b) Worldlessness and Identity.....	114
(iii) The Resurgence of Religion as Reinforcement of Neoliberal Values.....	118
(a) Evangelical Christianity and Neoliberal Values.....	119
(b) Islam and Neoliberalism.....	126
Conclusion.....	134

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen the advent of two seemingly unrelated or even opposed phenomena, namely the globalization of the neoliberal form of capitalism and a resurgence of religious fervour. At first glance it would seem that these two processes act against each other. The globalizing force of a single form of capitalist economics, bringing a McDonald's to every country, and a pair of Nikes to every set of feet, surely has a totalizing and homogenizing effect, while the resurgent forms of militant religion and ethnic nationalism surely have the opposite effect, leading to increased fragmentation. However, on closer inspection, as this thesis will show, neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion are actually complementary processes which work not to undermine each other, but to reinforce each other. The key to understanding the connection and complementary nature of the two phenomena is to place them in the context of our post-political society,¹ and to draw out how both are inherently opposed to politics.

In order to establish this link between neoliberalism and the resurgent religions as anti-political, the central concern will be to define what politics is, what counts as political, and why certain processes can be considered anti-political. In defining the political, the works of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière will be pivotal, as both have a rare focus not only on defining the political, but as seeing politics as something positive. Both Arendt and Rancière often employ the metaphor of the stage when talking about politics, with Arendt seeing politics as the ability for actors to come together and

¹ I draw on a combination of Hannah Arendt and Slavoj Žižek for this terminology. Žižek uses the term post-political age, and Arendt mass society, to both essentially refer to the same situation where politics has been replaced with technocratic social administration. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; Second edition, 1998). Slavoj Žižek, *The Universal Exception*, (London: Continuum, 2007).

engage in collective speech and action,² and Rancière seeing politics as the conflict over the existence of this common stage, who gets to be on the stage, and what their status is.³ Politics is then rooted in equality, the equality of peers that makes up the political realm and allows individuals to discuss, listen, and act in common as well as attempts to be treated as an equal, and be recognized as such.

In order to elaborate and explain this definition of the political, first I intend to engage with Arendt and her idea of politics as collective speech and action. Arendt sees politics as contingent on having a public sphere predicated on equality, where people can set aside their private difference and come together to directly engage in debate and discussion with the intention of non-violently persuading others on the best course of action to take on any given matter of contention. Bound up with her definition of politics are certain conditions, namely plurality and natality, which allow for politics to occur. Without a plurality of interests there would be no need for debate, and politics would be unnecessary, and without natality, the ability to create something new, there would be no need for action, and politics would become futile. Arendt's notions of action will be of particular interest, especially her assertion that action is inherently risky, and thus we need to be willing to accept a degree of risk when engaging in politics, and how a capacity for forgiveness can make this risk more tolerable. Also important will be how Arendt sees the desire for immortality and the existence of a permanent world as part of the nature of politics.

Drawing next on Rancière, and Žižek's work which is influenced by Rancière, the theme of a miscount of parts and the struggle to be included in the whole and make a

² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 25.

³ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

universal claim will be incorporated into the definition of politics. Rancière states that politics begins as a result of a miscount, which leads to a group not being counted as part of the whole. When this excluded group, the “part with no part” in Rancière’s terminology,⁴ makes a claim of identification with the whole, this is what Žižek calls the “elementary gesture of politicization”.⁵ Examples of this politicizing gesture given by Rancière and Žižek are the initial claim of the *demos* of ancient Athens to be the whole of Athens, as a claim against the rule of the few or the one, and the Third Estate during the French Revolution claiming to represent the whole of France against the clergy and nobility who had excluded them.⁶

In many respects Rancière and Žižek are drawing their analysis of politics as the struggle for equality and inclusion from Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. It will then be useful to look at how the struggle for recognition can be seen as both a process that is both deeply political, while at the same time having the elimination of politics as its outcome or goal. Here it will be necessary to bring the role of conflict into the analysis and how to manage it. Both Arendt and Rancière see conflict as an ongoing process which is necessary for politics, however the Hegelian project is one of reconciliation that aims for the end of conflict. Here Derek Barker’s notion of politics requiring a sense of tragedy will be useful in looking at how we can deal with the seeming paradox of politics requiring both the persistence of conflict, as well as the wish to overcome it.⁷

The second part of the thesis, having already established a definition of the political, will then turn to understanding why politics today has become a synonym for

⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30-32.

⁵ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 184.

⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 10; Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 184.

⁷ Derek W.M. Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation, and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009).

any sort of underhanded behaviour, and how modern history has essentially been the history of trying to escape from politics. Arendt provides an interesting history of the decline of the status of the political in the hierarchy of what she calls the *vita activa*. With the ancient Athenians, politics occupied the top spot and was considered as the defining activity of humanity, but with time and with changing views of immortality, politics fell from the top spot, eventually falling to the bottom while economic activity rose to the top of the hierarchy. Here we start to see the specific connection between an escape from politics and the rise of economics.

Another key aspect in the history of the decline of politics is the problem of risk. Political action is inherently risky, and thus the attempt to eliminate risk, is as Arendt explains, the substitution of making for acting. Due to the fear of risk, the model of politics as a group of people coming together to engage in action with an uncertain outcome is then replaced with the model of the craftsman. The craftsman can work in isolation, creating some object from start to finish, and having total control over the outcome. Applying this model to the public realm then is an attempt to control the uncertain aspects of political action, and results in what Arendt terms rulership, where the ruler gives orders to be followed in an attempt to eliminate risk and control the outcome of action. Rulership for Arendt is non-political because there is no ability for the people to come together in speech and action.

The original advocates of non-political rulership whose goal is the elimination of risky political action, are as both Arendt and Rancière point out, the philosophers. With politics originating in ancient Athens, this is naturally also the place of origin of philosophy, which has sought to constrain or eliminate the political. The philosophical

disdain for politics can be seen as far back as Plato with his distaste for Athenian democracy and his ideal city being one devoid of politics, through to the moderns who saw the role of government as one of protecting people from the need to engage in the nasty business of politics so that individuals could focus on their private affairs in peace. Žižek and Rancière give a kind of typology of forms of anti-politics that various philosophers have advocated, which will be interrogated in order to further elaborate the philosophical attempts to escape from politics.

The third section will then apply the developed definitions of the political and anti-political to both neoliberalism and the resurgent religions. In arguing that neoliberal economics seeks to eliminate politics, we can turn to Arendt once again, and her critique of what she calls “classical political economy”. She argues that both the classical liberal economics of Adam Smith which deeply influenced neoliberalism and the communist economics of Karl Marx both have the ultimate goal of eliminating politics. For liberal capitalist economics, it comes in the form of the invisible hand arriving at the most efficient decisions through the operation of the market. The project of neoliberalism then is to maximize the number of decisions that will be made by the market, and consequently reduce the number of decisions that are made as a result of humans coming together and deliberating and acting collectively. Neoliberalism is then the accelerated process of replacing politics with markets, which transforms the actively engaged citizen into a passive consumer.

Religion too seeks to eject politics from the world for a number of reasons, which in many cases were long abandoned due to the prominence of secularism, but have now come back to being key aspects of the beliefs of the resurgent religions. The key factor

uniting what I call the resurgent religions is their opposition to secularism. These religious movements feel that years of secularism have eroded religious values and are now making explicit claims that religious beliefs should be the guiding principle of public social organization. To be anti-secular is then to be anti-political because politics requires a plurality of views, and the ability to come together and debate and try to persuade others of your own views. The anti-secular religions seek to eliminate both plurality and debate by introducing divine law as unquestionable truth, thus reducing plurality and attempts at deliberation to the crime of heresy.

Furthermore when these religions view conflict as a transcendent war between good and evil, conflict is then depoliticized into something which cannot be coped with through human politics, but only through assertions of divine justice. Political deliberation often results in an action which might be a compromise between two entrenched positions; however if all conflict on earth is viewed as a manifestation of a transcendent war between good and evil, it makes it difficult to compromise with someone who is seen as taking the side of radical evil, while your own side is backed by divine truth.

This anti-political commonality between neoliberalism and the resurgent religions will then be explicitly argued in the context of our post-political society. Due to the fact that both processes have a goal of eroding the political, they then work to mutually reinforce each other. Here is where the idea of neoliberal globalization as a homogenizing force must be challenged. Globalization has created a single global economic system, with for the most part neoliberal characteristics, yet this has not turned everyone in the world into replica American consumers as someone like Francis

Fukuyama predicted with his end of history thesis. Instead we see global capital not only able, but willing to adapt itself to any local culture. Neoliberalism with its anti-political end goal is essentially a de-centring and fragmentary process which attempts to preclude the creation of anything universal. Since making claims of universal identification are necessary for politicization, neoliberalism and religion then go hand in hand in working for greater fragmentation through globalization, while undermining a truly universal position. The old Marxist cry for workers of the world to unite and fight capitalism falls deaf today, because the idea of an American evangelical Christian and Egyptian Islamist setting aside their religious identities and uniting over their common cause as workers seems outside of the realm of possibility.

Neoliberal economics and the resurgent religions also overlap in many very specific ways, other than the more general disdain for politics. Both are completely worldless, to use Arendt's terminology, in that neither see anything as permanent. Neoliberalism is a consumer society, there needs to be constant purchasing of goods for the economy to function, thus goods must lack permanence. The lack of worldliness is true for the resurgent religions as well; most of which have apocalyptic impulses which underscore the idea that that our earthly world is fleeting, and permanence is only found in the afterlife.

A second interesting convergence is the role of charity. With neoliberalism came cuts to social welfare programs and the rhetoric of pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps. This erosion of public welfare has opened the space for private welfare agencies, and we see this not only on a local scale, but also on a global level with non-governmental development agencies. Charity is of course one of the key tenants of both

Christianity and Islam, so we see here a prime example of this mutual benefit. The neoliberals say cut social spending and if you still need help, go see a religious charity. The religious groups say come see us, do not bother with trying to get help from the government.

A brief conclusion will argue for the need to create a global political stage and advance a politics that promotes universal positions, because the drivers of post-politics, neoliberalism and religion, operate on a global scale and thus need to be combated at the global level. A cosmopolitan ethic with the goal of generating a political sphere of global equals is likely the only mechanism which would create enough power to be able to regulate the global economy, and be able to provide people with a chance to engage in politics and thus provide ideas and actionable solutions to the truly global problems of our age. However we must begin by providing a definition of what is meant when the word politics is used.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING THE POLITICAL

In order to advance the thesis that neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion are connected through their deep hostility to politics; it is necessary to define what is meant by politics. Politics has a specific definition and content, everything is not political, because such statements strip politics of any kind of specific meaning and is equivalent to saying nothing is political. Politics is not merely an unending set of unequal power relations, nor is it the underhanded dealings of distant elites or representatives. Part of providing a definition of politics also then involves attempting to rescue its reputation, and reclaim the word as something which has a positive connotation rather than purely negative as is often the case today.

In explaining their concepts of the political, the metaphor of the stage is used by both Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière, a metaphor which will be employed here as well. The metaphor of the stage also lends itself well to the two-pronged nature of politics as both creating and getting onto the stage, as well the action and speech which occur once one is on the stage. From Arendt we see the stage as a public space where individuals can engage in the collective speech and action that make up the substantive content of politics.⁸ An important addendum to Arendt's speech and action on the stage comes from Barker who emphasizes the need to listen as part of the political process, which he derives from an interpretation of Sophocles' play *Antigone*, again drawing on the metaphor of the stage.⁹ The second aspect of the political, as emphasized by Rancière, is the "conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of

⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 25.

⁹ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*.

those present on it”.¹⁰ This struggle for recognition is primarily about getting yourself included within the political community and being recognized as an equal capable of engaging in speech and action with your peers.

Using the metaphor of the stage and putting it as concisely as possible, politics is then both about the collective deliberation through speaking and listening and the resultant action of the actors already on the stage, as well as the attempts by those excluded to get on to the stage and be recognized as equal actors. Politics is inherently egalitarian; it can take place among a community of equals or involve attempts by the excluded to assert their own equality. Politics is also democratic in the sense that all citizens are given the opportunity to directly participate. Politics accepts conflict as a given, and is a mechanism which we use to deal with this conflict in a non-violent means. Overall politics is something positive; it is what makes us human. What follows is an analysis and synthesis of Arendt and Rancière, whose ideas on politics form the basis of the two pronged approach to politics as both action on the stage, and the act of getting onto the stage.

(i) Hannah Arendt and the *Bios Politikos*

Of all the activities necessary and present in human communities, only two were deemed to be political and to constitute what Aristotle called the *bios politikos*, namely action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*), out of which arises the realm of human affairs from which everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded.

-- Hannah Arendt¹¹

¹⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 25-26.

¹¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 24-25.

(a) The Content of Politics I - Speech

Speech is in a way the basis for politics, because through speech we are first able to express our opinions and disagreements. These opinions and disagreements generate the conflict that politics thrives on. The entire reason we first come together onto a stage is precisely to state our opinions and sort out our disagreements. Without speech, violent force is our only means of sorting out these conflicts, thus the motive behind Aristotle's claim that politics separates us from the animals. The ability to speak our opinions and have our input considered is intensely important for politics, and unfortunately an aspect that is severely lacking in today's society. The workings of political speech are being taken from Hannah Arendt, while the struggle to actually get your voice recognized in the first place will be dealt with later in the chapter in the section on Jacques Rancière.

Politics for Arendt, put simply is public speech and collective action, notions which she draws out from her understanding and admiration of the ancient Athenian *polis*. Before investigating what Arendt means by speech and action, we need to first analyze what she argues are the basic conditions which are necessary for politics, namely plurality and natality. On the first page of the first chapter of *The Human Condition*, Arendt explicitly states that "plurality is specifically *the* condition of all political life",¹² thus dramatically emphasizing how important plurality is for the existence of politics. Plurality takes on such a high level of importance for Arendt precisely because she defines politics as speech and action, two activities which cannot be performed in isolation, and require interaction with your fellow citizens. She goes on to argue that part of being human is being different from everyone who has ever lived, currently lives, or

¹² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

ever will live, meaning plurality is part of the human condition.¹³ If we were all identical, politics would be pointless because our behaviour would be entirely predictable, and there would be no need for action to generate anything new, and no need for deliberative speech to talk through our disagreements.¹⁴

Seeing plurality as part of the human condition leads to the idea that conflict is a given part of being human, and politics is how we cope with the fact of conflict. In a situation of plurality, there will be a multitude of different views which will come into conflict with each other due to people living in close proximity. Conflict then makes politics necessary in that it provides a non-violent outlet to debate and argue through these conflicts. The acceptance of conflict as a given part of the human condition and something which leads to politics will become an important theme as other philosophers such as Plato and Hegel, which see the conflict arising from plurality as a problem to be eliminated, are investigated. For Arendt however, the attempt to do away with conflict, and thus plurality, amounts to an attempt to do away with the public realm and thus politics altogether.¹⁵ Arendt further sees plurality as important and necessarily because it creates the conditions for equality and distinction, two traits of the public realm which are bound up with the practice of politics.¹⁶

The second condition for politics is the human condition of natality; the creation of something new. Arendt states that action is bound up with natality in that action creates and preserves new political bodies and that with each new person born into the

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 220.

¹⁶ Ibid., 175.

world a capacity to create something new (and therefore to act) comes about.¹⁷ To engage in action is to start a process with an uncertain outcome, it involves creating something new, thus if there was no possibility for anything new to occur, action and thus politics would become impossible.

Once the conditions of plurality and natality are met, politics in the form of speech and action can then arise. Drawing once again on examples from ancient Greece, Arendt states that what made the *polis* so political was precisely that it was so talkative.¹⁸ Arendt says that for the ancient Athenians, “to be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence”.¹⁹ Political speech is then an explicit substitute for violence, and in the *polis* conflict is dealt with through attempts to persuade others of your position, rather than through violent force. For the ancient Athenians, what made their *polis* precisely political and democratic was this art of public persuasion which was differentiated from the rule of the barbarian despot or of the head of the household in the private sphere which relied on pre-political force to command rather than the persuasive speech of public politics.²⁰

Speech also has a community forming character in that talking and debating with your fellow citizens develops a sense of cohesive inclusion. This is important both because it combats alienation and fosters democracy. In order to maintain the condition of plurality, there must be a common public sphere where citizens can engage in the political acts of speech and action. Talking and debating are not meant to reconcile the differences of the plural public, but to give everyone an outlet for their views and allow

¹⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 27.

them to try to persuade others of their opinions. In doing so Arendt says we generate “common sense” or a notion of shared reality.²¹ While we will certainly not all agree on what should happen or how this reality should operate, we will at least be brought together by the basic conditions of it, and our ability to engage in speech. A breakdown in speech means a breakdown in shared reality, thus increasing alienation and leading to a retreat into our private realities which make having a public politics difficult. Although the fact of plurality means we are all different, we also do have similarities which without engaging in speech, we will not discover. Secondly since action must be by definition collective and cannot be performed in isolation, speech is necessary to maintain the connection to your fellow citizens in order to be able to engage in political action.

Political speech in the presence of your fellow citizens then has a community forming effect which naturally lends itself to an inclusive democratic political structure. Arendt is then an advocate of a form of deliberative democracy modeled on that of ancient Athens. She is careful to point out however that democracy has traditionally been used as an insult against the political form of ancient Athens, with the negative connotation of rule by the majority, meaning the poor, as is evident in Aristotle’s typology of regimes.²² Arendt states that the proper name for the political form of the Athenian *polis* was isonomy, meaning a situation in which there was no division between rulers and the ruled, where all citizens were free in the proper sense of the term.²³ Thus the “democracy” that Arendt favours is one in which citizens all have a direct means of participation in politics, and the ability to deliberate, give speeches, and act in common.

²¹ Ibid., 209.

²² Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Book 4, Chapter 4.

²³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1965; reprint 2006), 20.

The political democracy being advocated for here is then quite different from today's representative democracy. Underscoring this difference is important, because although an advocate of democracy and admirer of the American constitution, Arendt is highly critical of American-style representative democracy, which she sees as rather non-political in that it ejects citizens from the public sphere of politics and denies them the ability to engage in political speech.²⁴ Arendt admired the American constitution for enshrining the political rights of citizens in law; however she believed it had one major flaw in that it failed to provide an outlet for Americans to put these newly established political freedoms into practice. Having a government of distant representatives is not political because you cannot represent opinions, only moods and interests.²⁵ Opinions can only come about through collective debate and discussion, something which becomes impossible when the citizens are no longer directly engaging each other but merely voting for a representative.

Funnelling the interests and moods of a collective into a single representative which is chosen through isolated voting also eliminates the community forming aspects of properly political plural speech. The representative then is not representing a community but a large number of private individuals who are trying to coerce the single representative to act in their own personal interest. Arendt likens this situation to the "reckless coercion of with which a blackmailer forces his victim into obedience" rather than the community forming power that only comes about through joint speech and action.²⁶ Properly political speech is then about being a direct participant in government, and not merely registering a vote in isolation but listening and speaking with others in

²⁴ Ibid., 229.

²⁵ Ibid., 260-261.

²⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 261.

order to arrive at an informed opinion. Political freedom is not merely a set of negative rights, but positive freedom as well, as Arendt goes so far as to say that political freedom “means the ‘right to be a participator in government’, or it means nothing”.²⁷ Establishing this difference between democratic political speech in Arendt’s sense and today’s concept of voting as your democratic voice is crucial not only for the sake of clarity but in fully defining what it means to engage in politics.

(b) The Content of Politics II – Listening

Nothing is more frustrating than being in a public political forum of some kind or engaging in a political debate with someone in which those you are engaged with simply refuse to listen to what you have to say. These are the people who enjoy giving long winded monologues which they consider to be infallible and thus want no business listening to the opinions of others, or responding to critics of their own position. Speech then requires listening, otherwise political speech will lose its community forming character as it degrades into a collection of stubborn individuals giving a series of disconnected monologues.

As a supplement then to Arendt’s concept of political speech, listening should be accorded the same degree of political importance as speaking. Derek Barker has the same overall view of politics as Arendt, and cites her approvingly in relation to speech, action, natality, and plurality as political and part of the human condition, however through his interpretation of Sophocles’ play *Antigone*, he argues that the ability to listen and yield should be accorded the same level of political importance as both speech and action. Barker states that the essence of being a political citizen is to be engaged with your fellow citizens in a constant struggle of speaking and listening, a situation which, like

²⁷ Ibid., 210.

Arendt, assumes a plurality of actors and is thus rich with conflict.²⁸ The existence of conflict is important for the existence of politics, and this is something that will be dealt with at the end of this chapter.

In interpreting Sophocles' *Antigone*, Barker focuses on the minor character of Haemon as through whom Sophocles is trying to convey his message. Both the main characters, Creon and Antigone, engage in speech but essentially fail to communicate with one another. Creon's speech is the speech of command, of the dictator; he gives orders which he expects to be followed without question.²⁹ In Arendt's terms, Creon is isolated as ruler, he has no equals to engage in speech with, and thus his words are not political and are based on forceful command. Antigone on the other hand is an outcast and a rebel who disobeys without consultation, in the same manner in which Creon orders without consulting others.³⁰ Both are isolated and fail to take into consideration the views of others; although they are both quite adept at speech, they fail to listen and this prevents their speech from having political meaning.

Haemon on the other hand, who is teaching us the real lesson of the play, is the consummate listener. He speaks but he also listens and sympathizes with others, as the son of King Creon, he listens and takes into consideration the orders of the government, but he is also romantically involved with Antigone, and listens to what she has to say about her duties to bury her brother. Haemon is then the advocate of deliberation, which must necessarily involve listening to what others have to say, and yielding to others so as to not quash plurality.³¹ The message of Sophocles then is that politics requires listening;

²⁸ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 34-37.

it requires a sense of modesty which will allow you to yield and not try to force your point of views on others. Listening to others also means listening to those who have been excluded, such as Antigone, which can then facilitate a more inclusive and egalitarian politics.³² For speech to be properly political, it requires listening which will facilitate deliberation. Today we often proclaim the importance of freedom of speech, but too often this is supplemented with a claim to have freedom not to listen. Speech must be accompanied by listening and yielding for it to have real meaning.

(c) The Content of Politics III - Action

Politics of course is not just arguing your opinions with other people, but involves action. Action is how we bring about change, it is how societies advance. Action can generally be seen as the outcome of speech as speech is generally a deliberation on which course of action to take. Drawing on Arendt for a depiction of how action works, we see how actors on the stage interact to create something new. While Arendt means for action to largely apply to those on the stage, we can imagine it applying to those who wish to build a stage in the first place, or work to change the structure of an existing stage while will be dealt with later in the chapter when we turn to Rancière.

Like speech, action is conditional upon natality and plurality. Arendt does not give a list of specific examples of what counts as political action but rather describes action in general. This makes it a little more difficult to pin down what exactly she means by action, as compared to political speech in which we can easily think of a situation of public deliberation and debate where people engage in political speech. The key then to understanding action is the link back to natality and plurality. Action is not possible in isolation, it is fundamentally different from the process of fabrication, which takes raw

³² Ibid., 38.

material and generates an end product.³³ Arendt points to what she calls the superstition of the “strong man” as a political actor, who isolated from everyone else, is able to engage in concrete political action. The reason the strong man is pure myth is because it relies on the idea that an individual can, in Arendt’s terminology, “‘make’ institutions or laws, for instance, as we make tables and chairs, or make men ‘better’ or ‘worse’”.³⁴ People are not material objects, and cannot be treated as such. Again due to the fact of plurality, everyone has different views and thoughts, and cannot merely be moulded to a shape defined by one strong individual like a carpenter can shape a piece of wood.

Action is then something that can only be done in common; it is a joint exercise that establishes new connections and relationships among individuals. Action is also unlike the work of fabrication, in which you shape a raw material into an end product you have designed in advance, in that action is an ongoing process in which the end is uncertain.³⁵ Plurality again comes into play here, because even if one group of people take the initiative to engage in political action with some goal in mind, the interaction of others on the action process can end up changing the nature of the outcome altogether. An example to illustrate this point might be that of a revolution in which the revolutionaries have a vision as to what their post-revolutionary society may look like and thus initiate the political action of revolution, but over the revolutionary process, the influence of other actors on the revolution can result in a society radically different from what the original revolutionaries sought to create.

As is evident even from the above, action is deeply connected to the human condition of natality. Arendt states that “to act, in its most general sense, means to take an

³³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188.

³⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

initiative, to begin..., to set something into motion”.³⁶ Thus to be political requires a capacity for something new to come about, and thus for there to be a capacity for action. Žižek sums up this sense of natality in action nicely when he defines the true political act as something that renders the unthinkable thinkable.³⁷ He gives the examples of Nixon going to China and Yitzak Rabin recognizing the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians and thus as negotiating partners rather than as terrorists.³⁸ This natality of action also tends to make it boundless, in that action is always establishing new relationships and new processes, which as Arendt says, leads to a “tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries”.³⁹ The boundlessness of action is not necessarily a good thing as it can be destructive as well as constructive in its generation of the new, thus Arendt states that the ultimate temptation to be avoided in politics and when engaging in political action is *hubris*.⁴⁰

Due to the nature of action as an ongoing process that creates something new in the context of plural actors, action is then inherently unpredictable and involves risk.⁴¹ This riskiness is a direct result of the natality involved. The act of starting something new involves a measure of unpredictability, since if we could calculate the results of any action in advance then action would not generate anything truly new. However even with an “electronic computer”, it would be impossible to calculate the results of action in advance because action is an ongoing process due to the continual interactions of other

³⁶ Ibid., 177.

³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, (New York: Picador Books, 2008), 126.

³⁸ Žižek, *Violence*, 125-126.

³⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁴¹ Ibid., 191.

people and other action-processes.⁴² Thus to engage in action, to begin something new is to take a risk since it is impossible to know what the outcome of the initiated action will be.

The unpredictability of action can lead it to be damaging in many cases, and this has led to attempts to tightly control action, thus cutting off the ability to start anything new. Arendt states that the remedy to the problem of possible damage resulting from the inherent riskiness of action is to have a capacity to forgive.⁴³ Due to the unpredictability of action and therefore of starting something new, we must be willing to forgive people for actions that have negative effects in order to not become so paralyzed with fear of negative outcomes that we seek to abolish political action altogether. Arendt sums this up nicely when she says

But trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.⁴⁴

Forgiveness is then the opposite of seeking vengeance, and although Arendt argues she is essentially secularizing an element of Jesus of Nazareth's teachings, an element of Nietzsche is detectable here as well.

Like Arendt, Nietzsche is concerned with the ability to act, to create something new, and he states that "all acting requires forgetting, as not only light but also darkness

⁴² Ibid., 191.

⁴³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 239.

⁴⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 240.

is required for life by all organisms”.⁴⁵ For Nietzsche to become mired in history is to be saddled with *ressentiment*, a desire for vengeance. Those who are overly concerned with the past, with seeking revenge, become so obsessed with history they can no longer engage in action. Creating something new falls outside of their field of possibilities. To overcome this problem of getting stuck in history, we need to be unhistorical at times, which Nietzsche sees as “the art and strength of being able to forget”.⁴⁶ The problem of being unable to forget, thus preventing anything new from happening is evident in various ethnic-religious conflicts around the world, in which people are so mired in past grievances, the often violent conflicts seem unsolvable. Action then requires an ability to move beyond what has happened before and to start again. Arendt’s forgiveness is more useful for recent actions in which the actors are still around, and Nietzsche’s forgetting is useful for action started long ago in which the initiating actors have long since passed.

(d) Politics as the Space of Freedom and Equality

Too often today, politics is seen as the domain of oppression and inequality. With this negative view of politics, people seek refuge from the supposed horrors of politics in favour of a private realm which is perceived to be free of these problems. This attitude is promoted by both those on the right who seek to maximize the space for economic accumulation and religious expression against “political interference”, as well by the left who often see politics as nothing but a mask for economic exploitation or as an agent of discrimination. Their goal, like that of the right ironically, is then to maximize the private realm, and allow people to express their identities free from the discrimination that is believed to be inherent in public politics. Definitional problems as to what politics

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980; original work 1874), 10.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *History for Life*, 62.

actually is aside, these views fail to take seriously the nature of freedom and equality, which are political creations. Through Arendt we find that we should view politics not as the realm of oppression and inequality, but as the expression of these two important ideas.

Politics requires its own space, what Arendt calls the public realm, which is opposed to the private realm. Drawing again on the ancient Athenians, Arendt sees the private sphere as the realm of the household, which was focused on maintaining life processes. As such the private sphere is the realm of necessity, where the activities surrounding the body such as eating and reproducing take place.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the public sphere is the realm of freedom, and in particular freedom from the necessity of the household. To be free, to be able to enter into the public sphere, meant you had already mastered necessity.⁴⁸

The division between necessity and freedom also has implications for the use of force. For the ancient Greeks force was considered to be an attribute of the private sphere since force was necessary in order to overcome the necessity of the body.⁴⁹ The public sphere was then free of force, which was considered a kind of pre-political mechanism used to liberate yourself from the necessities of daily living.⁵⁰ Of course today we see things in the opposite way, the private sphere as the realm of rights and freedoms against force, and the public sphere occupied by a government with a monopoly on force.

In addition to being the realm of freedom, the public political sphere is also the realm of equality. Freedom requires you to be among your peers, thus freedom and

⁴⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

equality in the Greek polis were always connected. Since freedom requires equality, the tyrant or despot is not free because he has no peers. The same is true for the head of a household. Arendt states that even though the tyrant and the head of a household are not subject to force from others, they cannot be free because due to a lack of equals there is a lack of freedom, and thus a lack of a political space which is the sole space of both freedom and equality.⁵¹

Arendt goes on to explain that since the ancient Greeks had no concept of equality of birth, equality had to come about through a constructed mechanism, which was the *polis* made up of equal citizens. In the political realm you would meet your fellow citizens as equals and not as private persons with all their private differences, what mattered was the equality of citizenship.⁵² Ideally this would mean that any natural differences associated with the body such as skin colour or sex, would be left in the private realm and once you have entered the public realm you would be seen only as a citizen. Of course the ancient Greeks did not fully put this into practice, in particular with women being denied citizenship, but this fact does not harm the overall theory of political equality that Arendt is drawing out of her ancient Greek inspiration. Today we tend to view the place of equality in an opposite manner of that of the ancient Greeks, and place it in the private sphere, with inequality being associated with the public.⁵³ We tend to accept the popular view, epitomized by Rousseau's famous statement about being born free and society putting us into chains, that we are equal and free by birth, but politics generates inequality and oppression. Arendt's view is of course more attractive to those

⁵¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 21.

wishing to defend politics for its own sake, but also holds a less romantic view of the nature of the human species.

The space of politics then not only generates equality and freedom, but also power. Power is not about force or unequal relations between people as it is commonly thought of today, but instead power is generated when people come into the public sphere and bind themselves together for some political purpose.⁵⁴ The combination of freedom and power is what creates a political realm, thus any form of government which seeks to expel people from the public political realm is impotent and will have to rely on violent force. The loss of power in a political community then corresponds to a loss of plurality, and therefore a loss of community itself, which will make politics impossible.⁵⁵ Politics then requires power, which exists as the potential for individuals to come together and engage in joint action. Power is also inherently egalitarian and is something positive which enables politics; this should be contrasted with the contemporary view of politics as a set of power relations between unequal parties. Politics should be seen as generating freedom, equality, and power in this positive sense, rather than as generating its opposites in the form of inequality, oppression, and force.

(e) The Relationship of Politics and Immortality

An interesting aspect of politics that Arendt points to is its relationship with immortality. Part of what drives us towards being political is our attempt to leave something permanent behind, to be remembered, to achieve immortal glory. Politics both brings us together, and separates us. It creates a common bond which holds communities together, yet at the same time it allows individuals to distinguish themselves from others through

⁵⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 200-201.

political speech and action. This aspect of striving for immortality in relation to politics is worth exploring since it is not merely an eccentricity of the ancient Athenians, and will have serious consequences for proving the link between religion and neoliberalism⁵⁶ as both tend to degrade attempts to achieve earthly immortality.

Arendt once again starts with an examination of the ancient Athenians when discussing the connection between immortality and politics. She points out that in the religion of the Greeks, the gods were immortal rather than eternal, like the god of the Persians at the time, or that of the Abrahamic religions. For the Greeks then, “immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given”.⁵⁷ This view of immortality within time is in sharp contrast to the notion of eternity, which is outside time and the universe. So the Greeks saw the world as having immortal permanence, while humans were the only mortal beings in an immortal world. Gods were immortal since they did not die, and nature was immortal due to its constant reproduction of itself. Humans and animals differed because animals existed only as members of a species whose constant reproduction from one generation to the next guaranteed immortality, while humans were not merely members of a species, but individuals first and foremost.

The problem for the ancient Greeks was then precisely their own mortality in the context of an immortal world. This mortality became a driving concern for the Greeks, and striving for immortality was seen as the most human (and therefore political) function. Arendt quotes Heraclitus in demonstrating the prominence of this view, who says that those who strive for immortal fame are truly human, while those who are

⁵⁶ As will be explained later, neoliberalism is a set of economic policies centred on privatization, deregulation, trade and tariff liberalization, and cutting government spending on social programs.

⁵⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 18.

“content with whatever pleasures nature will yield them, live and die like animals”.⁵⁸ So despite the fact that animals were immortal as a species; this form of immortality was looked down upon by the Greeks, with the proper example of immortality being that of the gods, who had immortality as individuals, not as anonymous members of a species. Thus through the accomplishment and recording of great deeds, an individual mortal could obtain the same sort of individual immortality possessed by the gods.⁵⁹

There was however, a two-fold problem with the achievement of individual immortality through great deeds. The first was that the occasions for great deeds that could win immortal fame were few and far between, and the second was that they required someone to record and remember them. The *polis* was then organized precisely to deal with these two problems. The *polis* was designed to “multiply the occasions to win ‘immortal fame,’ that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself”.⁶⁰ The political organization of the *polis* was then directly influenced by this desire for immortality, and politics became a means to increase the otherwise slim chances for the citizens to appear in public and show themselves to be great individuals worth remembering.

The ancient Greeks realized that carrying out great deeds in order to achieve immortality would be pointless if there was no way to record those great deeds. The fact that the great deeds of those involved with the Trojan War were only immortalized due to the luck of having the poet Homer to record them was worrying to the Greeks.⁶¹ Thus the public nature of the *polis* was meant to facilitate the collective memory of great deeds.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 197.

⁶¹ Ibid., 197.

This is why for Arendt the faculty of action involves both a revealing of yourself in public, and the formation of relationships. Carried out individually and isolated, great deeds are instantly forgotten, thus the political action of the *polis* precisely needed to be public and involve other people in order to facilitate remembrance and recording of individual immortality. Life together in the *polis* was meant to make speech and action, which are the least durable human products, achieve an imperishable status, making them durable and memorable.⁶² Thus the desire for immortality played a major role in how the ancient Athenian *polis* was organized, as the *polis* was precisely meant to facilitate the achievement of immortality by both creating opportunities for individuals to distinguish themselves via the everyday speech and action of politics, and as well to create a permanent space where these great political individuals could be remembered for all of time.

Politics then consists of collective speech and action which rests on the conditions of plurality and natality. Politics is then both about coming together as a community, and distinguishing yourself as a unique individual. Politics creates a space where people can be free of force and the necessities of the body, and is also the mechanism through which people become equal. The egalitarian quality of politics then generates power, which is the joint action of many individuals coming together for some political purpose. Part of the drive to engage in politics is to be remembered, to overcome death by leaving something behind. In order to leave something behind via political action, we must live in a world, which is defined by Arendt as having a sense of permanence and as having a public space where politics can happen. This is the politics that happens on the stage, next we turn to the politics of getting onto and creating the stage.

⁶² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.

(ii) Rancière: Politics as Striving for Equality

Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something “between” them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where there is nothing.

-- Jacques Rancière⁶³

(a) Boundaries

For Arendt, in order to have political action, there needs to be a definite space and structure (the stage in our metaphor) in place in order to create boundaries. These boundaries correspond to the public sphere of the *polis* and its law, and are likened to the walls of a city by Arendt.⁶⁴ Legislation is then a pre-political activity, as it works on the model of fabrication, the legislator builds the laws and thus the space for politics much like an architect builds the walls of a city. Arendt is arguing this in order to demonstrate how the Romans, in their fear of the unpredictability of action, transformed politics into mere legislation and enacting of laws, thus substituting the model of the controlled craftsman for that of the risky political action of the Greeks. The problem with Arendt’s concept of politics as action on the stage is that it assumes a kind of benevolent original legislator whose boundaries do not exclude anyone from the public space, resulting in her ignoring the problem of the excluded. In *On Revolution*, when Arendt expresses her admiration for the egalitarian nature of the American constitution with its guarantee of political rights, we see this kind of benevolent foundation in operation. Of course as

⁶³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 26-27.

⁶⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 194-195.

Arendt was well aware of, the egalitarian spirit of the American constitution certainly was not practiced to the extent that it would allow everyone on to the political stage.

The question is then how do those excluded from the stage make their way onto it, and can we consider this attempt to be included as an expression of politics? Arendt does not provide a clear answer, as in one respect, this striving for inclusion would be considered pre-political activity, the founding of a new space for which politics could then take place. In another respect, is not the coming together of the excluded, in an attempt to be included, precisely fit within Arendt's definition of action? We have a forming of new relationships among a plurality of people trying to do something new, namely include themselves. Due to the fact Arendt is unclear on this matter; we will now turn to Jacques Rancière who makes the struggle of the excluded to be included the central focus of his definition of the political and provides the second part of the definition of politics being advanced here.

(b) The 'Part with No Part' Which Makes a Universal Claim

Much like Arendt, Rancière looks back to the ancient Athenians for the origins of politics, but goes back further in time than Arendt. For Rancière politics begins not with the establishment of the *polis*, but with an original political demand from the excluded, what he calls the 'part with no part', who make a universal claim to represent the whole. Thus politics begins with the struggle between the rich and the poor.⁶⁵ The politicizing move was then when the *demos*, the poor who are also the 'part with no part', interrupted the natural order of domination by claiming to be the whole of the political community. However politics does not simply come about simply from the poor opposing the rich,

⁶⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 11.

but politics is what causes the poor to exist as an entity.⁶⁶ The poor then are not merely those who are economically poor, but are politically poor in that they are excluded, or denied the capacity of revealing themselves in public as Arendt would put it. To be excluded is to be politically poor; it means you cannot take part, or that you do not have a part in the affairs of the political community. Put simply then, the “part with no part” is an excluded segment who are being prevented from participating in political action, and whose voices are not being recognized as capable of political speech.

Politics is also then about the disturbing of the counting of the parts. Rancière contrasts politics to what he calls the police logic, which is about the harmonious counting of the parts of society.⁶⁷ These parts are arranged in a hierarchical manner, thus the counting of parts is the assertion of order and inequality. Counting the parts involves ensuring everyone is in their proper place in the hierarchical whole. Rancière’s concept of the police logic as ensuring a harmonious whole is derived from his critique of Plato’s city in speech, in which justice consists of all the parts of the city sticking to their role, and all individuals staying within their part. Politics disrupts this logic by asserting that the count is wrong, and there exists another part which is not part of the counted parts performed by the police logic. Rancière states that “politics ceases to exist...wherever the whole of the community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over.”⁶⁸ Politics then assumes a lack of harmony, for there to be politics there must be conflict, and this is not only the conflict of those already on the stage with differing opinions, but the conflict over the existence of conflict itself.⁶⁹ The ‘part with no part’, before it can be

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

⁶⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30-32.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 55.

included and recognized as equal to the other actors on the stage, must first assert its own existence. The police logic then seeks to counter this assertion of existence by the ‘part with no part’ by saying “move along! there is nothing to see here!” which amounts to claiming that everyone has a place in the hierarchy of society, while politics seeks to transform this space of “moving along” into a space of appearance for the excluded.⁷⁰

The ‘part with no part’, must also not simply assert its existence, but make a universal claim, in which this excluded part claims to be the whole. As Žižek explains in his interpretation of Rancière, politics involves a strange relation between the particular and the universal. The ‘part with no part’ is a particular entity, yet it claims and desires to be universal. In making this universal claim, the ‘part with no part’ also sets itself up to not merely demand universal equality and recognition but as the opponent of particular interests.⁷¹ Thus the ancient Athenian *demos* as a ‘part with no part’, set themselves up as an embodiment of society as a whole, thus making a universal claim for equality, but also sought to oppose the aristocracy or oligarchy as expressions of the particular, and therefore as expressions of inequality.⁷² Examples of such politicizing moves would include the Czech Civic Forum proclaiming itself representative of society against the Communist state apparatus and the Third Estate in the French Revolution, which as an excluded part made a universal claim in the assertion that it was identical to the whole of France, against the particular interests of the clergy, aristocracy, and monarchy.⁷³

The universal claim is key to the political move, because it facilitates public equality. When the ‘part with no part’ is able to elevate its claim of being miscounted, of

⁷⁰ Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”, *Theory & Event* 5.3 (2001): 22.

⁷¹ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 183-184.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 184.

⁷³ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 184.

being wronged, to a universal level it can become a stand in for egalitarian justice to any excluded person or group. If an excluded group were to make a claim of recognition based on some particular demands with no universal claims to equality, this amounts to a non-political move because it does not demand public equality, but rather recognition of private difference. Rather than being a political expression of a 'part with no part' that seeks to disrupt the orderly counting of parts by asserting a universal equality, the demand for recognition of private difference fits within the police logic of counting everyone into a specific place in society. The demand of difference recognition amounts to asking the police to include your group in the ordered count of the parts which make up a harmonious and hierarchical whole, rather than disrupting this count by making a universal claim. Rancière uses the example of a strike in France in 1833, where workers did not merely make a particularistic demand for more wages, but successfully politicized their strike by framing it as an argument about universal equality, as guaranteed by the French constitution, that was not being respected.⁷⁴ The workers on strike then were acting politically precisely because they transformed their particular situation of being underpaid and overworked, into a universal claim of equality. This universal nature of politics is similar to Arendt, who saw the councils formed by workers during the Hungarian revolution as intensely political, but essentially gave up on workers movements as being political elements when they degraded into making particularistic demands for higher wages or better job opportunities without elevating these claims to a universal and therefore political level.⁷⁵ Or in other words, simply wishing to be counted among the parts, rather than disrupting the count by making a claim of universal equality.

⁷⁴ Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1995; reprint 2007), 47-48.

⁷⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 262-267.

(c) Equality and Democracy

For Rancière, like Arendt, politics is then bound up with equality and democracy.

Equality is what the politicized ‘part with no part’ making a universal claim strive for, however this is not an equality of unity where the parts come together to create a whole, but rather a declassifying mechanism, one which seeks to dissolve the former orders of exclusion.⁷⁶ In using the class struggle as an example, Rancière argues that for it to be political, the excluded ‘part with no part’ of the workers must not seek to take control and make labour the founding principle of a new society, but they must seek to dissolve class itself, and thereby eliminate labour as a category of classification.⁷⁷ Emancipation for an excluded part means to escape the status of being a minority, to demonstrate that they belong to society as a whole, that they are equals capable of communicating in public political space and of opposing reason with reason.⁷⁸ This emancipating equality has a world-asserting character, in that it “is not secession, but self-affirmation as a joint-sharer in a common world, with the assumption...that one can play the same game as the adversary”.⁷⁹

A political claim then asserts the common world, which as we know from Arendt is necessary for politics, and thus equality means to be emancipated from a private minority thus making you a public being. Any claim from a minority which seeks recognition of the minority as such, is thus not a political claim as there is no public content. Most of identity politics then is not political at all, insofar as the usual forms fail to assert a common world, and instead aim for the recognition of private identity rather

⁷⁶ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 32-33.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 34, 48.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

than attempting to make a universal claim which would liberate individuals from their perceived minority position allowing them to act as true equals in a public realm.

Of particular relevance here is Arendt's depiction of labour as associated with bodily needs and necessity, and thus as the opposite of politics. For labour to escape this position of exclusion from politics, the individuals involved must be able to prove they are not mere animals of need and complaint, but people of discourse and argument who can communicate with all in a common world.⁸⁰ For this reason emancipation can only be achieved through your own efforts and cannot "be merely a demand upon the other, nor a pressure put upon him, but always simultaneously a proof given to oneself".⁸¹

Due to Rancière's insistence that politics is a striving for equality, politics and democracy are essentially synonyms. The goal of those opposed to democracy is precisely depoliticization, to return to a stable and harmonious count of the parts, and a desire for everything to go back to "normal".⁸² Democracy is then intimately linked to conflict and is inherently adversarial. However this adversarial nature is not a drawback to democracy but one of its strengths, as democracy creates a shared world which can only be expressed in adversarial terms.⁸³ Paradoxically, the pluralism of political democracy means everyone will have their own opinions and conception of the world, thus generating conflict; however the act of communicating these opinions with others requires the assumption of a common ground and language in which others can

⁸⁰ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸² Depoliticization used in this sense where politics is about disrupting the existing order involves going back to normal in that it stops the creation of a stage or prevents the excluded from successfully making their way onto the stage. Depoliticization, when dealing with those already on the stage in Arendt's sense, also has the meaning of ejecting the actors and tearing down the stage.

Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 184.

⁸³ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 49.

understand your position.⁸⁴ Stating that the other cannot understand your position, such as due to inherent cultural or religious differences, is to deny a common world and essentially to deny the validity of your own viewpoint.⁸⁵ Relativism on this matter prevents the establishment of a common world, and therefore undermines equality and democracy. A situation in which every group simply decided that they had intractable differences and will thus stick to their own culture is one which fits within Rancière's notion of police logic, as it results in a well ordered count of the parts of society, everyone stays in place and there is harmony and no conflict. Precisely the opposite of the common-world affirming conflict that is the content of politics⁸⁶.

A second intimate link between democracy/politics and equality has to do with the problem of inequalities in existing societies. The democratic individual is not one who sets out to find inequality with the goal of reducing it, but in fact the opposite. The democratic individual starts with the assumption of equality, and sets out to assert it, with the goal of "maximizing all possible liberty and equality".⁸⁷ Attempting to seek out inequalities and then remedy them will only succeed in reproducing inequalities ad infinitum, and will result in the construction of new hierarchies.⁸⁸ To demonstrate this point, Rancière once again uses the example of the tailor's strike in 1833 in France which he sees as a properly political and democratic event. The tailors framed their argument in terms of the French Charter of 1830 which declared all people in France to be equal. Starting from this assumption of equality, the tailors stated that they were being treated

⁸⁴ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 50.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁶ The contrast again with identity politics is that Rancière's recognition as an equal is universal in nature and therefore dissolves differences, whereas much of identity politics seeks recognition of difference, rather than equality.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

unequally by their boss because he was refusing to listen to their arguments for more pay, and that therefore the boss was in violation of the Charter which declared everyone equal. As a result the tailors argued that this contradiction must be resolved, either the boss treats them as equals and sits down and listens to their case, or the Charter is changed to read that all people in France are not equal.⁸⁹ The point is that the tailors took equality seriously and framed their grievance in a properly political manner which would have universal results in maximizing equality by ensuring that the French Charter was taken seriously. Rancière contrasts this to the inequality-minimizing position which would claim that the Charter's declaration of equality is a mere trick to hide the ever pervasive inequality. The first position seeks to maximize equality by taking it seriously and starting from an assumption of it, while the second only succeeds in uncovering more and more inequality everywhere.

To be political then, is to not only attempt to bring equality about, but also to act as a kind of auditor to ensure that legally granted equality is being put into practice. In contrast, politics is then not about uncovering the hidden unequal power relations inherent in everyday life. The implications of this equality-maximizing view of politics are important for those wishing to engage in political activism. Instead of attempting to constantly find new oppressed groups in order to demonstrate that the formal legal equality is a mere deception, the goal should be to ensure that this legal equality is taken seriously by maximizing its practice. If the former method of constantly uncovering new forms of oppression is taken, with the goal of exposing legal equality as a deception meant to hide the privileges of a few, what then replaces equality as a guiding principle? This cynical method of attempting to expose legal equality as a trick has no positive

⁸⁹ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 45-47.

result and does not help build a stage for politics, nor does it help anyone get themselves included. At worse it could even convince people who were previously included, that their inclusion was an illusion, and they too are excluded, thus causing a withdrawal from politics. Obviously inequalities exist and should not be ignored, but what has been presented here are two different methods with which to approach these inequalities; one which affirms politics and one which promotes a withdrawal from it.

(iii) Conflict and Tragedy

The ability to cope with conflict is part of what defines human beings as political animals. Politics is therefore always both necessary and meaningful, even as it is in a state of perpetual incompleteness and becoming.

-- Derek Barker⁹⁰

Conflict is an integral part of politics as it forms the basis of why we need politics and why politics is something positive. With the politics of those on the stage the condition of plurality guarantees a continual conflict of differing opinions and different courses of action to take. For the politics of those excluded from the stage there is the twofold conflict of attempting to get yourself included within a political community and also the attempt to undermine hierarchical order by establishing political equality. The definition of politics being developed here is then one which accepts conflict as constant and does not try to eliminate it either through an authoritarian imposition of order, or by trying to arrive at a final reconciliation which does away with conflict.⁹¹

The omnipresence of conflict introduces a kind of paradox. On the one hand we have to acknowledge that conflict is persistent and that we cannot arrive at some kind of reconciliation and that the elimination of conflict through an authoritarian imposition of

⁹⁰ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 149.

⁹¹ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 1.

order is not an attractive option. On the other hand we have continual political speech and action which in a way aims for a solution to any given conflict. In other words conflict arises precisely due to the plurality of actors; everyone has a different opinion on how to solve a given problem. Politics is about trying to persuade others of our solution to a problem through the non-violent means of speech, however due to the persistence of conflict arising from pluralism it must be realized that all problems cannot be solved in a way that will satisfy everyone. The political individual then must be continuously striving to overcome conflict, while at the same time realizing that doing so is not only impossible but likely undesirable. At the same time, despite conflict being ever present, we cannot simply resign ourselves to this fact and give up on trying to solve problems, since doing so would eliminate politics just as much as trying to eliminate conflict would.

The way to resolve this paradox of recognizing constant conflict while still striving for solutions is to have a sense of tragedy. Barker argues that having a sense of tragedy makes us realize that mistakes are possible, especially with regard to political action, and that it protects us from “anti-deliberative overconfidence”.⁹² The tragic plays of the ancient Athenians instilled in them a sense of the frailty of life, the reversals that can happen to even the most powerful, and our constant vulnerability to suffering.⁹³ It is fitting then that the metaphor of the stage has been employed to demonstrate the view of politics being advanced here, because of the connection to theatrical tragedy. Mortality is part of the human condition, and having a sense of tragedy reminds us of our own mortality, and therefore again guards against speech-destroying overconfidence.⁹⁴ Facing our own mortality through politics is also then precisely the way to overcome it; we can

⁹² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹³ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 145.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

be remembered and essentially achieve immortality only through great political speech and action. In Rancière as well, political democracy is imbued with a sense of tragedy, due to the fact that it involves continually unsettled grievances.⁹⁵

Political conflict is built into democracy; to harmonize all conflict is then to eliminate democracy, a desire which is overcome through the tragic emotions. Barker sees pity and fear as the tragic emotions par excellence, because they are levelling emotions. Fear keeps any sense of superiority we might acquire in check, by making us constantly aware of tragic reversals which could drop us into an inferior position. Fear then protects against overconfidence which has an anti-democratic effect in that it erodes the ability to engage in deliberation. Pity is also a levelling emotion as it leads us to sympathize with and understand those who have experienced a tragic downfall and with those who are currently outsiders.⁹⁶ By recognizing these tragic emotions, which are egalitarian in nature, we can overcome both the temptation to arrogantly attempt to impose unilateral solutions on problems and withdraw from politics altogether due to resignation.

* * *

Going back to the metaphor of the stage, politics has two parts. It is both the activities that take place by actors on the stage of politics, as well as the attempts by those excluded to create a stage or to get themselves recognized as equal actors on an existing stage. Arendt provides us with a kind of ideal of what politics should look like. We have a group of equals who speak their opinions and listen to the opinions of others. Their deliberations allow for the existence of conflicting views to foster a sense of community,

⁹⁵ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 102.

⁹⁶ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 59.

as rather than engaging in physical violence to coerce people into following your plan, you are expected to talk to them, to listen to what they have to say and try to persuade them of your plan or point of view using your intellect. To be able to debate and engage with your fellow citizens over the issues of the day is to be political. When this space for talking is removed or becomes the domain of distant representatives, politics falls into decay.

To obtain the ability to have our voices heard and for us to be considered an equal citizen able to participate in the wider political process is also a form of politics. From Rancière we get this motivating factor of wanting to be heard, of having your voice count, as being considered political in itself. Thus the desire to be able to participate in politics in Arendt's sense is itself a form of politics. Rancière and Arendt then make a good pair to be read together in forming a definition of the political because while Arendt explains what politics looks like among a community of equals, Rancière tells us that it is also political to attempt to bring about this community of equals.

From Arendt we also see that politics involves action, which means the ability to start something new and to form new relationships. Political action brings about change, not always change for the better, but change nonetheless. Action then involves risk, since we can never be sure how our actions will turn out, but the risk of a negative outcome must be accepted in order to have the opportunity for positive change. Without the potential for change, a society cannot be considered political. Once again, Rancière helps the definition of action by pointing out that the action undertaken in order to be included among those who are capable of acting, is political itself.

Politics then involves direct participation, and as such holds equality as one of its primary values. From Arendt we see that politics is a space of equality where people engage in collective speech and action as equals. To assert your equality is also political, and as we learn from Rancière, it is also universal. Action must seek to bring about universal equality, otherwise it cannot be considered properly political. Demands for identity or cultural recognition which are so prominent today lack this universal aspect which brings about a wider community and forms new relationships. Our differences should be a matter of political debate and action, as politics is precisely meant for coping with this type of conflict, thus to recognize difference rather than equality, is to attempt to displace conflict and cut off the community of equals into unequal parts.

As has been emphasized throughout, politics and conflict go hand in hand. From Barker we borrow the idea that having a sense of tragedy can facilitate politics by helping us accept conflict as a constant, rather than something to be eliminated. The issue of conflict will be explored in more depth in the next chapter when we look at the Hegelian reconcilers who see politics as a means to a harmonious end, as well as the various other theoretical attacks on the concept of politics that has been advanced in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2: THE ATTACK ON THE POLITICAL

Having arrived at a theoretical definition of the political, a theoretical outline of the various attempts to escape from politics is now necessary before moving on to look at the specific anti-political content of both neoliberal globalization and the resurgent religions. The goal here is to show how the anti-political impulses of both neoliberal globalization and the resurgent religions are an acceleration and combination of various theoretical attacks on politics. While the anti-political impulse has existed since the beginning of politics itself back in ancient Greece, it has been particularly successful in the past 20 years, leading to today's post-political society which has also degraded politics in the popular imagination. Politics has come today to be a synonym for underhanded or unethical dealings, and is invoked in situations which could not be any more disconnected from politics. For example if there is some sort of competition for a job promotion, and one individual who is not necessarily the most deserving is able to curry favour with the boss and win the promotion, this situation is often referred to negatively as "politics", thus demonstrating the negative connotation the word has in popular opinion. The last chapter demonstrated a definition of politics with a positive connotation, while this chapter will seek to explain the various reasons and methods through which politics obtained this poor reputation.

The chapter will start with Arendt's depiction of how the fear of the riskiness of political action has led to attempts to control its contingent nature by attempting to transform politics into a form based on the model of fabrication. This transformation is anti-political because it explicitly attacks plurality and natality by attempting to create a controlled situation where an isolated ruler acting without peers merely issues commands

which are to be followed. This fear of risk is extremely prevalent in the neoliberal economic model, as there are entire branches of corporations and major consulting firms whose sole purpose is to calculate and minimize political risk. The less potential for politics there is in a country, the more predictable and therefore safer for business it is. The replacement of politics with a situation of supposedly rational self-interested actors along with the neoliberal flair for non-political administration is then a demonstration of this substitution of action with a model of controlled production as the organizing principle for society. Arendt's history of the transformation of how we seek immortality will also be shown to have important consequences for this thesis since the shift in thought from humans being mortal to humans being guaranteed eternal life through transcendent religions applies when looking at the resurgent religions, in which changing the world through politics is seen as pointless since what matters is the afterlife which has an eternal existence outside of earthly existence. This shift from mortal to eternal human life was accompanied by a loss of world, or world alienation, which harmed the permanence of politics and is relevant in today's consumer society in which a lack of permanence and disposability is a constant.

The second part of the chapter will look at how philosophy and politics have had an uneasy relationship, with an interpretation of the anti-political impulses within philosophy as pointed to by both Arendt and Rancière. Of particular interest here is how the philosophy of Plato was born out of a distrust with the political democracy of Athens, and how the disordered turbulence of this politics came to be seen as the root evil by philosophy. Next will be a defense of conflict from the reconciliation-driven philosophy of Hegel, with a particular emphasis on Kojève's interpretation of the master/slave

dialectic and how this fits within Rancière's definition of politics. The goal here will be to defend the role of ongoing conflict from the idea that once everyone is recognized, there is an end of conflict and politics withers away. Lastly Žižek provides a kind of typology of anti-political regimes based on his interpretation of Rancière which will be useful in giving labels to the various theoretical forms of the denial of politics which can then be easily referred back to later on.

(i) Arendt on Depoliticization

Exasperation with...action...is almost as old as recorded history. It has always been a great temptation..to find a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents.... This attempt to replace acting with making is manifest in the whole body of argument against "democracy," which the more consistently and better reasoned it is, will turn into an argument against the essentials of politics.

-- Hannah Arendt⁹⁷

(a) Arendt's Critique of the Substitution of Making for Acting

As has been shown above, action is inherently risky and unpredictable. Out of suspicion towards the risky nature of action, there have been continual attempts throughout history to seek "shelter from action's calamities in an activity where one man, isolated from all others, remains master of his doing from beginning to end".⁹⁸ This isolated activity where a single person is in control of the process from beginning to end is taken from the model of the craftsman, who by himself, produces some piece of work from start to finish. The example of the craftsman then provides the inspiration for those wishing to control the risky process of action by substituting making for acting.

⁹⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220.

⁹⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 220.

Arendt takes particular issue with the craftsman as a model for politics due to the isolation of the work done by the craftsman since politics requires a public sphere inhabited by a plurality of possible actors. This means that all attempts to replace action with making on the model of what she calls *homo faber* involve an attempt to do away with plurality, which means doing away with the public sphere, and thus politics itself.⁹⁹ Without plurality there can be neither democracy nor politics, thus the substitution of making for acting is the content of the traditional argument against democracy. The goal of the anti-democratic depoliticizers is precisely to replace the turbulent conflict of plural democracy with an ordered structure of control where politics is reduced to a situation of some giving orders and others carrying them out. The best example of this replacement of action with the model of making comes in the form of government by expert administration. By doing away with politics, and even minimizing the role of elected officials, the administrative model of government is one which attempts to control risk by having decisions made by alleged experts, which are then dutifully carried out by the bureaucracy. In this model it is assumed that even allowing elected politicians to debate and decide issues introduces too much of a risk factor. As we will see later, the anti-political governing mechanism of expert administration is one favoured by neoliberals.

Out of these attempts to do away with politics by seeking refuge from plurality and substituting making for acting, we get the idea that politics should be conceived of as rulership. Arendt states that this attempt to find salvation from plurality usually manifests itself in the form of ‘mon-archy’, be it the rule of one person such as Plato’s philosopher-king, or the form where a multitude come together to form a single entity, such as

⁹⁹ Ibid., 220.

Hobbes' Leviathan.¹⁰⁰ The problem with these forms of government is not that they are any more cruel than other forms, but that they destroy politics.¹⁰¹ Even the most benevolent despot insists on banishing the citizens to the private sphere where they are to mind their own business (often in the literal sense of economic activity!) leaving the despot or monarch as the sole inhabitant of the public sphere who will then be the master of the society's public affairs.¹⁰² Even if this ruler is overall benevolent, the long term loss of potential power in the form of the plurality of actors involved in a public sphere that accompanies such a form of government will make people worse off. Despite the fact that the elimination of plural action may have short term advantages in some situations, the long term destruction of politics is the true problem with these forms of government.

Arendt traces the source of the concept of rule which replaces action with making to Plato's philosophical separation of thought and action.¹⁰³ Traditionally in Greek thought, to begin and to act were interconnected, starting something new was risky, and thus it was considered to naturally be a form of action. Plato however, with his suspicion for action and the risk and plurality associated with it, wanted the beginner to be able to remain in control of what was started, and not have to rely on the help of others.¹⁰⁴ This desire to remain in control of what was started led Plato to propose the separation of beginning from acting. The parting company of knowing and doing is a depoliticizing move because it eliminates the space of freedom where people can engage in action, and transforms it along the lines of rulership where those who know do not act, and those

¹⁰⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 221.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 221-222.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁰⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 222.

who do not know act by carrying out the orders of the rulers.¹⁰⁵ This separation of thought and action also creates a situation of domination, which eliminates the equality needed for a truly plural politics.

The separation of knowing and doing, which was alien to politics, has its model in the everyday occurrence of fabrication.¹⁰⁶ For the craftsman knowing and doing, unlike with political action, had always been divided into two separate activities in that the craftsman first had to come up with an idea of what was to be made, then afterwards put the previously thought-out plan into action. Plato then applied this model of the craftsman to the role of the philosopher-king in the *Republic*. The philosopher-king was to make his city like a sculptor makes a statue, thus the philosopher-king's ideas would be the basis for laws which only needed to be executed.¹⁰⁷ Substituting making for acting allowed the ruler to have control over what it was that he was making, because making involves separating thought and action. This separation of thought and action provided an escape from the risky plurality of political action, into the more controllable mechanisms of fabrication and legislative rulership.

By substituting making for acting, there is also a substitution of human relationships for some tangible piece of work. Arendt gives an example of this from Aristotle, where a benefactor who helps someone is considered to have created a work, namely the life of the recipient which he has "made".¹⁰⁸ The benefactor loves his work, according to Aristotle, as much as a mother loves her child. Arendt sees this substitution of making for acting as extremely troubling because by loving the work that was created

¹⁰⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 256.

¹⁰⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 225.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 196.

the benefactor in Aristotle's example has destroyed a possible human relationship with the person being helped. Arendt goes on to say that this kind of thinking of action in terms of making "actually spoils the action itself and its true result, the relationship it should have established".¹⁰⁹ Applying this example to the legislator and to politics, what is made by the legislator is a city and law-abiding alienated inhabitants, rather than the relationships between citizens which are created through engaging in collective political action. We end up with Athens being seen as more important than the Athenians when making replaces action, to continue Arendt's example from above. Not only is this substitution of making for acting depoliticizing but it leads to the fabricator valuing the things created by his work over human relationships, which increases our alienation from each other as political citizens and makes repoliticization much more difficult.

A second line of attack on the depoliticizing manoeuvre of replacing political action with the controlled fabrication of the craftsman is that it introduces an element of violence into politics. This element of violence is derived from the privileging of the means/ends instrumental relationship that is inherent in the fabrication model of politics. Utilitarian instrumentality is the ethic of *homo faber*, for whom "the end justifies the violence done to nature to win the material, as the wood justifies killing the tree and the table justifies destroying the wood".¹¹⁰ Arendt goes on to state that in the work process of *homo faber*, everything becomes judged based on its usefulness and suitability to the end product which occupies the most privileged position in the mindset of the fabricator.¹¹¹ Violence is now seen as justified in the public realm if it is believed it will produce some positive end result.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 196.

¹¹⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 153.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 153.

When applied to the political realm, the means/ends rationality has the effect of degrading politics into a means for achieving some allegedly higher aim.¹¹² This is problematic because degrading politics to a mere means strips it of its inherent value. Politics should be outside any kind of means/ends relationship, and should be viewed as a good to be pursued for its own sake, not as an instrument to achieve something else. This degradation of politics into an instrument used to achieve a higher end has been employed throughout history; in antiquity it was applied to protect the philosopher from the rule of the unenlightened masses, in the Middle Ages it was used as a means to save people's souls, and in the modern age to increase economic productivity.¹¹³ Instead of economics being subject to politics, and being considered yet another matter to be debated and acted on, the whole of "politics" today is subordinated to economics to the point where the political realm is not seen as the space to debate different economic courses of action, but as a minimal set of institutions whose sole purpose is to ensure the smooth functioning of the private economic sphere. Politics has become a mere instrument of economics.

The critique of the substitution of making for acting centres around the fact that it ends up destroying democracy and politics by eliminating plurality and the potential to form human relationships through action. Those hostile to politics have tried to replace the uncertain and necessarily dependent relationships inherent in action with the isolated control of processes found in the example of the craftsman. This substitution, in addition to destroying politics, involves violence, to the point of justifying it. It also introduces an instrumental utilitarian ethic which degrades politics into simply a means to achieve

¹¹² Ibid., 229.

¹¹³ Ibid., 229.

something else, when we should be viewing politics as an end. Viewing politics as a mere means to an end will be a common theme later in the chapter when the political implications of Kojève's interpretation of the master/slave dialectic are examined.

(b) The Transformation of Immortality and the Loss of the World

Politics is connected to a striving for immortal glory, the desire to leave some non-perishable trace of your deeds behind in a permanent world. The transformation of how humans seek immortality is then bound up with the history of politics, and in particular the decline of politics as humans have moved away from the Greek idea of mortal humans in an immortal world that helped spur the creation of politics. Arendt then provides a kind of history of depoliticization which will be interpreted here with a focus on immortality and world alienation as these two aspects will be important when establishing the anti-political nature of both the resurgent religions and globalized neoliberal capitalism.

Two key turning points in the history of the decline of politics are the fall of the Roman Empire and the associated conversion to Christianity. Firstly "the fall of the Roman Empire plainly demonstrated that no work of mortal hands can be immortal",¹¹⁴ thus throwing the entire idea of striving for immortality through great deeds into question. If it was possible for the polis and even something as great as the Roman Empire to be destroyed, then any attempts at creating an earthly immortality seemed bound to fail since there was a new realization that the world was not as durable as it was once thought to be.

The second factor leading to the decline of political action as a means for immortality was the rise of Christianity. Christianity promoted the idea that human life

¹¹⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 21.

was everlasting, which was a stark inversion of the Greek sense of human life as the only mortal thing in an immortal world.¹¹⁵ As a result of the Christian idea of everlasting life, the world now seemed perishable while human life was seen as inherently everlasting. Thus the Christian belief in everlasting life in combination with the empirical destruction of earthly immortality in the form of the fall of the Roman Empire led to the victory of the eternal over the immortal. Striving for earthly immortality was now futile since human life itself was automatically immortal regardless of any earthly deeds, as well as the fact that it had become apparent that earthly deeds could not obtain a sense of immortality anymore due to the new found realization that 'the world' was no longer as permanent as once thought, as evidenced by the fall of the Roman Empire.

In the new Christian society of the Middle Ages, human life was seen as inherently eternal, and thus striving for earthly immortal fame was pointless, meaning that this was a non-political society. Here we have another reversal, politics from the highest activity of humans during the classical era of ancient Athens, down to the realm of necessity in the Christian Middle Ages. Arendt states that the Middle Ages lacked a true public realm, and that most of the activity of the previously public realm had been moved into the private sphere. Since earthly existence was just the first phase in an everlasting life, the main preoccupation of Christian society at this time was in other-worldly affairs. The public realm was now simply an instrument for saving souls, and had no real political content.

While previously the changing nature of immortality had affected how society was organized, with the dawning of modernity we have another reversal in that the organization of society was now having an effect on how people viewed immortality. The

¹¹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 314.

Reformation is a key event in this transformation because it began a twofold process of world alienation. The first aspect of alienation brought on by the Reformation was the expropriation of church property that led to wide scale peasant expropriations and the birth of capitalism. In breaking down the old feudal system, people were deprived of their individual property, and thus lost their private place in the world.¹¹⁶ The transformation from peasant who lived their whole life working one plot of land to a property-less wage-earner in a capitalist society created a great deal of world alienation as a result of this dramatic loss of place. Thus the breakdown of the medieval private sphere that dominated Christian society was now being replaced by what Arendt calls the social sphere, whose chief concern is the national economy.

Accompanying this rise of capitalism, the Reformation also allowed for the development of modern science, which led to the condition of Earth alienation. With the invention of the telescope, we discovered that the Earth was merely one planet among many, and modern science began to view the Earth from an Archimedean point outside of it.¹¹⁷ Through the development of modern science, we realize we are no longer confined to the Earth, thus furthering this sense of alienation. This period of both economic and scientific transformation and world alienation was a very jarring experience that led to a sense of doubt as everything humans had previously believed about the world was now being refuted by modern science. This sense of doubt about what our senses and what reason had previously told us about the world further increased a sense of alienation from the world, leading to what Arendt calls “Cartesian doubt”.

¹¹⁶ Although serfs for instance had no legal title to the land they worked, it was property in the sense they continually worked the same plot of land generation after generation. See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 251.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

Arendt states that “the outstanding characteristic of Cartesian doubt is its universality, that nothing, no thought and no experience, can escape it”.¹¹⁸ This meant that doubt was extended to reality itself, and to the existence of a benevolent god. By extension, there was also now doubt that humans did indeed have an everlasting life. Arendt points out that this doubt did not immediately cause a complete loss of faith in salvation and eternal life, but this doubt was enough to rupture the previous certainty of everlasting life. It was this doubt in salvation which eventually undermined Christianity itself. It was not atheists or materialists who brought about the decline in Christianity, “but rather the doubting concern of genuinely religious men, in whose eyes the traditional Christian content and promise had become ‘absurd’”.¹¹⁹ As a result of this doubt and the loss of certainty in truth, there was a new found “zeal for truthfulness”¹²⁰ that led to the processes of secularization and rationalization.

Secularization is a major point in Arendt’s history of immortality, because secularization, as a result of the Cartesian doubt of the afterlife, robbed individual life of its eternal nature. As a result of secularization, Arendt goes on to say

individual life again became mortal, as mortal as it had been in antiquity, and the world was even less stable, less permanent, and hence less to be relied upon than it had been during the Christian era. Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown back upon himself and not upon this world; far from believing that the world might be potentially immortal, he was not even sure that it was real.¹²¹

Having been removed from the world, and thrown back into our own minds, Arendt points out that the senseless urges of the body were all that were left to reckon with. The life process itself was now of prime concern and Arendt states that the only thing that

¹¹⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 275.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹²¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 320.

could now be considered immortal was “the everlasting life process of the species mankind”.¹²² Thus the infinite reproduction of the species came to be seen as immortal in place of the world for the Greeks, and individual life for the Christians.

The transformation of a belief in the immortality of individual life to one of immortality of the life of the species was brought on by secularization and Cartesian doubt, but also by the changing economic climate and the rise of the labouring society. Labour is related to the endless processes of the body, it is related to activities in the realm of necessity which are needed to reproduce life, thus “the human condition of labor is life itself”.¹²³ This transformation of the immortality of individual life into immortality of the species was thus intrinsically intertwined with the rise of labour in dominating human activity. The labour society with its concern for biological life has a focus on the social good, which Arendt sees as embodied in modern economics, which she views as a form of collective housekeeping. The modern economics of the social which has labour as its highest good is precisely about doing enough to “assure the continuity of one’s own life and the life of his family”¹²⁴ which led to individuals becoming subsumed into the overall life process of reproducing the species. So while Cartesian doubt and the resulting secularization destroyed belief in individual salvation and immortality, the obsession with biological life that was provided by the labouring society of capitalism produced a new form of belief in immortality in the form of the immortality of the human species. With the belief that the reproduction of the species is a given fact, there is still no striving for immortal glory through politics. In fact Aristotle and the Greeks saw animals as non-political precisely due to their immortality as a species.

¹²² Ibid., 321.

¹²³ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 321.

Arendt, writing in the late 50s ends with a situation in which the reproduction of the species is our means to immortality, politics has been replaced with the economics of the mass society, and we lack any sense of a world. In describing this situation of what Foucault would later name biopolitics, Arendt likely has the ideological mass movements of the early 20th century in mind. The Nazis were obviously obsessed with life processes and the immortality of the species, wanting to create a master race, and purge what they saw as unfit segments of the population. Similarly under communism there was the concept of the New Soviet Man, a superior version of the human species who, free from the selfish aspects of capitalism, would be healthier, more educated, and less individualistic. The story does not end here however, as the 50 years since Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* have seen the development of nuclear weapons with the potential to destroy the human species, and the realization that ecological problems could seriously threaten the existence of the species. As well the loss of permanence in the world has been accelerated due to the switch from what Arendt called the “society of jobholders” of the Fordist era, to the society of consumers in today’s neoliberal era. The consequences of this loss in belief in the immortality of the species and the further loss of a world will be examined in chapter three as we see how a consumer society and a return to religion combine to undermine ideas of a permanent world thus making achieving immortality through politics seem more and more alien.

(ii) The Disagreement between Politics and Philosophy

“Political philosophy” might well be the set of reflective operations whereby philosophy tries to rid itself of politics.

-- Jacques Rancière¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, xii.

(a) The Early Philosophical Retreat from Politics

Ancient Athens was the starting point for politics, but also the beginning of its end. While it gave birth to politics, it also gave birth to political philosophy, which both Arendt and Rancière see as a system of thought aimed at essentially eliminating politics. The essential disagreement pointed to by both thinkers is that between that of the noisy turbulence of politics and the desire for quiet order found in philosophy. The goal of political philosophy, starting with Plato, is then to come up with “various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether.”¹²⁶

Arendt argues that philosophy’s original problem with politics stemmed from the unpredictability of action and the frailty of human affairs, rather than any kind of actual failings of people themselves or through any kind of Nietzschean will to power.¹²⁷ Philosophy then provided an expression of the general sentiment against unpredictable action by arguing that the only way people can live together is by having a ruler whom others are forced to obey. This is the basis of our modern conception of politics as essentially about power relations and different types of rulership.

Arendt’s critique of Plato focuses on the fact he divides thought and action and adopts the model of the craftsman. As a result, he eliminates properly political action with its plurality and unpredictability and turns it into “the mere execution of orders”.¹²⁸ What Plato is doing is attempting to colonize the public political sphere with the private sphere of the household. Plato is often accused of wanting to abolish the household and the family due to his proposals regarding the community of women and the abolition of

¹²⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 222.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹²⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 223.

private property, but what he is actually trying to do is model the entire society on that of the family.¹²⁹ The head of the household commands and gives orders which are to be unquestionably executed by the inferiors in the household. The ruler then in Plato's society would be like the master of the household, giving orders to be executed unquestionably by the ruled; much like a slave obeys the master.

Adopting the model of the craftsman also makes rulership into a matter of expertise. It would be preferable to have an expert carpenter make you a table rather than an amateur with little knowledge or training, so in the same way, politics becomes a matter of expertise where the goal is to have a ruler who is wise in political affairs (therefore a philosopher-king).¹³⁰ Here we find the origin of the rather anti-political notion of technocracy, the rule of experts. At least for the ancients these experts would still be primarily concerned with formulating some conception of public happiness, which resulted from the order of rulership. In the modern era this model of technocracy would be applied by the likes of Hobbes and Locke as a means of ensuring private gain, and in particular economic well being.¹³¹

Rancière and Žižek both see modern philosophy along the same lines as Arendt, as the continual disavowal of politics, the constant attempt to diminish it into the simple management of the social.¹³² Again for Rancière, the source of this problem goes back to Plato. While Arendt was concerned about Plato's distaste for the unpredictability of political action, Rancière focuses on Plato's aversion toward conflict. Plato seeks to eliminate conflict by creating a well ordered society which is divided into three parts. For

¹²⁹ Ibid., 223.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 227.

¹³¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 75-77.

¹³² Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 186; Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 11.

Plato justice is the harmonious operation of parts, whether these are the parts of a city or the parts of the soul. Harmony for Plato is not simply getting along but when each part sticks to performing its specific function within the hierarchical whole. For example the guardian class are meant to engage in military conflict and ensure the execution of the law, they should not be trying to make laws as this is the job of the rulers, and they should not have property or make money, since that is the role of the farmer/merchant class. Plato's desire for harmony of course conflicts with the notion of politics as disrupting ordered hierarchies by asserting universality, accepting conflict, and trying to declassify division.

If we look back to the inaugural moment of philosophy, we realize that philosophy got the root evil wrong, and our problems today stem from this fact.¹³³ Philosophy saw the division and disorder associated with ancient democracy as *ochlocracy*, or mob rule, but this was to misjudge the *ochlos*. The *ochlos* is a problem, but its real character "is not the disordered turbulence of the many but the hate-driven rallying around the passion of the excluding One."¹³⁴ With the end of the Cold War the old divisions between communist and capitalist, which allowed for an element of politics to exist, disappeared resulting in a return of the "howling of the pack".¹³⁵ We see this today in particular with the rise of anti-immigration post-fascist parties in Europe which draw most of their support from poor workers, precisely the former base of support of the now obsolete communist parties.¹³⁶

¹³³ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 31.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁶ See G. M. Tamás, "On Post-Fascism: How Citizenship is Becoming an Exclusive Privilege", *Boston Review*, (Summer 2000).

Rancière rightly insists on separating the *demos* from the *ochlos*, a move which philosophy has denied from the start in order to discredit politics. The *demos* maintains plurality, so democracy is not the rule of the poor at the expense of others, but a situation in which everyone has their own opinions. The role of the *demos* is then to divide the *ochlos*, to prevent the formation of a multitudinous One.¹³⁷ Preventing the formation of the One is not a matter of radical individualism however, as the One of the *ochlos* actually makes true community impossible as it necessarily turns its hateful exclusion toward some Other. Maintaining individuality then enables the inclusive universal, while sacrificing it out of a desire for collectivity results in enabling the exclusive particular. Philosophy then has sought to diminish the political due to an original hostility towards politics stemming from a fear of the risk associated with action and the turbulent conflict associated with its condition of plurality.

b) Recognition and Reconciliation in Kojève and Hegel

The second part of the definition of the political being advanced here as striving for equality and the act of getting yourself onto the political stage is very similar to Kojève's interpretation of the struggle for recognition in the master/slave dialectic found in Hegel. The end point of this struggle for Hegel and most of his interpreters (including Kojève, Marx, and Fukuyama) is a situation in which all conflict is reconciled thus eliminating politics altogether. Due to the similarities between this aspect of politics and the Hegelian struggle for recognition; the aim of this section is to defend the idea of conflict as ineliminable and necessary for politics, and to defend reading Rancière and Arendt together. The Hegelian critique of the definition of politics advanced here in which politics is both the activity that occurs on the stage, and the act of trying to get onto the

¹³⁷ Rancière, *Shores of Politics*, 32.

stage would centre on the idea that once everyone got themselves onto the stage and was recognized as equals, politics would cease to exist. The goal here is then to show how politics in Rancière's sense of getting onto the stage and politics in Arendt's sense of speech and action on the stage are compatible and why this first form of politics does not result in the reconciliation of all conflict thus eliminating the possibility for politics in the second sense.

As Kojève explains it, we first came to have masters and slaves as a result of a life and death fight. Out of this fight emerges a master and a slave. The master wins because he is willing to risk his biological life for the human desire of recognition. The slave loses because he values his biological life more than any human desire to be recognized.¹³⁸ As a result of the fight, the slave recognizes the master's freedom as a human being above nature, and the slave goes unrecognized. The slave is then put to work by the master for the purpose of materializing some idea. The work of the slave then brings into existence the abstract ideas of the master. Working towards a goal, or in the service of someone else means that the slave is no longer being driven by biological instinct and necessity, thus by working the slave is humanized.¹³⁹ For Kojève what makes us human, and is therefore the content of politics, is then fighting and working.

Through his humanizing work, the slave realizes he is no longer a slave to natural impulses and realizes his own work makes him a kind of master over nature. Because of this work, the slave then develops an idea of freedom, because the slave works, the slave

¹³⁸ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr; ed. Alan Bloom; assembled Raymond Queneau (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1980; original work 1969), 41.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

realizes that like the master, he has the potential to be free.¹⁴⁰ The slave then sets out to actualize the idea of freedom in material reality, to transform the social conditions into something more suited to the slave's desire to be free. This negating of given-being, to use Kojève's language, is what drives historical progress. History is based on action; this is the action of the slave overcoming his position through his own work and eventually by fighting the master. The similarities to Rancière are clear in that Rancière talks about political emancipation as a result of your own action and as a proof to yourself that you deserve to be recognized as an equal. Rancière's view of politics is also centred on the excluded making changes, and proving themselves as worthy of engaging with the "masters" on equal terms.

The difference between Rancière and Kojève arises from the fact that Kojève sees this struggle for recognition reaching a final reconciliation, the synthesis of master and slave which results in universal recognition. Universal recognition is essentially the goal of political action for Rancière as well. However he sees it as more of an impossible ideal to strive for rather than something that will materially happen like Kojève does. The problem with this final reconciliation is that since Kojève defines action as historical progress, namely the fighting and working of slaves toward their own freedom, once the synthesis of master and slave is achieved action is no longer possible since there is nothing left to do. The end of history is also the end of politics and also the end of humanity since fighting and working is how we overcame biological necessity and realized ourselves as humans. Thus the goal of political action in Kojève, Hegel, and Marx is precisely to bring about a situation (what Kojève calls the Universal and

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 49-50.

Homogenous State, what Marx called communism) which reconciles all conflict thereby eliminating all politics.¹⁴¹

Seeing political action along Hegelian lines as resulting in a reconciliation of conflict has two major problems. The first is that it reduces politics to a mere means to an end. The ultimate goal is the final reconciliation where there will be no more politics, so political action is no longer considered an end in itself, but the means by which we achieve reconciliation. Arendt warned against this type of instrumental view of politics and Hegel certainly fits as an object of her criticism. Seeing politics as the progressive elimination of itself takes a very dim view of politics as well as people. In the Hegelian view conflict cannot be coped with through politics and will tend to result in violence, thus conflict is to be reconciled. Seeing politics as an end in itself, as an expression of our humanity is certainly much more attractive than Hegel's instrumental use of politics.

The second major problem with Hegel is precisely this wish to reconcile conflict. When reading Kojève's interpretation, this final reconciliation of master and slave in universal recognition that eliminates all bloody wars is an appealing sentiment. However it reduces all conflict to solely that between master and slave. It is utterly unreasonable to assume that there are simply no other sources of conflict, especially in a plural society. What Hegel is setting out to do is to institutionalize politics, replacing the clamour and conflict of a plurality of actors with a monolithic state. The citizen who engages in speech and action arising from conflicts with other citizens is then essentially eliminated, along with the conflict between master and slave.¹⁴² These institutions will then administratively solve any disputes between people, meaning political deliberation

¹⁴¹ Kojève, *Introduction to Hegel*, 158.

¹⁴² Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 83.

between equals will not be necessary. This situation of post-political institutionalism¹⁴³ is essentially what is in place today, so it is no wonder that Hegel believed the historical struggle between master and slave had come to an end.

Having used an example from Sophocle's *Antigone* earlier, we can see how Hegel provides a problematic reading of the play as a reconciliation of state and family. As we know from Barker, the play should be read as a breakdown in communication between Creon and Antigone, with Haemon providing the lesson that listening and deliberation are necessary. Hegel reads the play as a dialectic between the state (Creon) and family (Antigone) which is eventually reconciled at the end when Creon decides to give in and release Antigone from the cave she had been sealed inside as a means of execution.¹⁴⁴ As Barker points out, Haemon with his listening skills is ignored by Hegel, but more importantly Hegel has to simply stop reading the play once Creon decides to release Antigone for his interpretation to hold. After Creon decides to release her, he finds that she has already died, leading Haemon to try to kill Creon before committing suicide. Upon hearing news of her son Haemon's death, the queen, Creon's wife, then kills herself as well. This is hardly a reconciliation of conflict with a happy ending. Creon's lack of listening resulted in tragedy as he changed his mind too late. The message is again that conflict is inevitable and we need to learn to deal with it by listening and deliberating with others, contrary to Hegel's view of seeing conflict as naturally resolving itself.

¹⁴³ The Hegelian end of history, which is also the end of history, then leads to a proliferation of institutions which are meant to prevent any new conflict from popping up. Politics is replaced with conflict-mitigating institutions.

¹⁴⁴ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 81.

Another source of Hegelian reconciliation as eliminating conflict and politics is Francis Fukuyama who gives an excellent depiction of how utterly devoid of political content neoliberal society is.¹⁴⁵ Fukuyama sees American-style liberal democracy coupled with neoliberal economics as the result of the end of the historical struggle between master and slave. For Fukuyama there are no more legitimate alternatives to debate, so conflict over differing political systems has been successfully reconciled, naturally resulting in the elimination of politics. The problem here is again with a lack of politics, there is no space for citizens to engage in speech and action. Barker rightfully critiques Fukuyama for essentially eliminating the public sphere in favour of an expansive private sphere which provides maximum room for both accumulating wealth and cultural/spiritual expression.¹⁴⁶ The only thing public is a minimal set of state institutions designed to protect these private and wholly non-political activities. Interesting to note is that in Fukuyama's outline of an utterly non-political society the two activities that are left to us are shopping and religion.

So it then makes sense to combine Arendt and Rancière's definitions of politics because both accept conflict as a constant. Although Rancière focuses more on the struggle for equality, it is not an instrument to eliminate politics, and therefore his definition of politics is not in conflict with Arendt like the standard Hegelian notions of politics are. If we were able to achieve universal recognition, using the definition of politics being put forth here, this is not the end of politics altogether, but only one aspect, as we would still have politics in the Arendtian sense.

¹⁴⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

The Hegelian argument against this concept of politics is that once the master/slave dialectic is reconciled, resulting in universal freedom and equality, there is nothing political left to do. For Kojève it is at this point that we either turn back into animals or go about engaging in cultural snobbery with no political or historical content and for Marx and Engels this is the situation where we end up with politics being replaced by the administration of things. However the question is why do people want to achieve recognition as equals? For the Hegelians it is an end in itself, but the reason the excluded want to be included always stems from some kind of grievance, they want their voices and opinions to be heard and considered on an equal footing as everyone else. Someone who is excluded from a political community who has no complaint against the community is unlikely to engage in politics in Rancière's sense or the fight that Kojève sees as political. This is why Rancière talks about politics as starting from a wrong that is elevated to universality.

The political action of Rancière's 'part with no part' is then driven by a desire to have their own conflicting voices recognized by those within Arendt's political community of equals who spend their time deliberating and acting politically. The struggle for recognition is then not a struggle aimed at eliminating conflict and bringing reconciliation, but one with the goal of elevating conflict, for the excluded to have their disagreement recognized. A situation where there is a small number of people included within the political community who are able to discuss and debate some issue will have a minimal amount of conflict. When people who disagree with the speech and action of this small number have their disagreement recognized as worth listening to, this will increase the conflict inside the political community. Thus the struggle for recognition is

essentially an attempt to transfer the place of conflict from the outside in the form of winning recognition, to the inside, in the form of having others listen to your disagreements. The Hegelian master/slave dialectic should then be read as not something that reconciles conflict and ends up eliminating politics, but as a process like Rancière describes as encouraging conflict and enhancing politics.

Interpreted in this way, the universal and homogenous state which Kojève describes as the outcome of the master/slave dialectic is not a situation devoid of all politics, but precisely the conditions that would make Arendt's ideal of politics possible. This would be a situation filled with conflict as everyone's disagreement would be recognized, which would increase the amount of conflict and make politics all the more necessary and vibrant as both a non-violent coping mechanism for persistent conflict and a situation where the ideal of the active citizen could be instituted. The structural impediments that make Arendt's view of a political community difficult to put into practice today are precisely due to the types of historical exclusions of master and slave (be they economic in the Marxist sense, or political in the Hegelian sense) which those influenced by Hegel wish to overcome.

c) Žižek's Typology of the Disavowal of Politics

Europe (in particular ancient Athens) is the origin of politics, but the history of European thought (political philosophy) has been a continual disavowal of politics which has culminated in today's post-political society.¹⁴⁷ Through his interpretation of Rancière, Žižek gives form to this disavowal by coming up with four forms of anti-politics. He also talks about a fifth form in a later work which will also be touched on here. In particular we can see how attempts to create a harmonious whole and to transform conflict into a

¹⁴⁷ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 186.

supernatural battle between good and evil are common to the resurgent religions while neoliberalism transforms political competition into a meaningless game and is increasingly seeing the body as the primary site for administration. These anti-political regime types provide useful labels for the various forms of anti-politics and will be useful to refer back to in later discussions involving religion and neoliberalism.

The first form of the disavowal of politics is what Žižek labels ‘archipolitics’. Archipolitics takes the form of a closed homogenous space where every part has a specific function and works in harmony to create a whole.¹⁴⁸ This is the model of Plato’s city in speech in the *Republic*, everything working in harmony leaving no space for any kind of change. Everything already works perfectly well, therefore politics is completely unnecessary. The goal here is to ensure no conflict arises and Žižek likens it to a medical model of politics in which social divisions are treated like diseases to be cured in order to restore the original health of the body of the community.¹⁴⁹ Much of the longing for some kind of mythological past free of today’s supposed complex antagonisms take the form of archipolitics. These can include conservative calls for a return to a 1950s style nuclear family with a male breadwinner and female at home to look after the kids as a means to restore harmony and save us from crime and social division or the calls of some environmentalists within the deep ecology movement for a return to a pre-industrial style of living to restore harmony with nature.

The second form is ‘parapolitics’ which acknowledges the existence of political conflict but seeks to constrain and tightly control it. Political conflict is reformulated into a competition for executive power based on a set of agreed to rules by the participating

¹⁴⁸ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 186.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

parties.¹⁵⁰ Parapolitics is similar to a sporting event where there are two opposing teams both wanting to win, but being a sport, have to play within the frame of sport-specific rules.¹⁵¹ Parapolitics is the dominant form of anti-politics in most of the world, going by the name liberal democracy, in which two or more parties compete with each other in elections to win executive power. Conflict is then depoliticized into the contest of the competitive election. In a parapolitical election you will likely have a favourite party that you will want to win and actively support. However it is again like a sporting event in that if your team/party wins, you will likely be happy for awhile, but chances are you will remain simply an external supporter with no role to play once your team/party wins. In fact in a country like Canada with only 308 members of parliament, you have better odds of making it into the NHL and thus becoming a sporting participant, which has a total of 660 roster spots among the 30 teams, than you do of being able to participate in politics directly. Also to be considered is that like a sporting match, the outcome of a parapolitical election tends not to have much, if any, effect on your day to day life. Arendt's critique of representative democracy which was outlined above could then be considered a critique of parapolitics.

The third form of the disavowal of politics is 'metapolitics' which is the Marxist view of politics. With metapolitics "conflict is fully asserted, *but* as a shadow theatre in which events whose proper place is in another scene (that of economic processes) are played out".¹⁵² Since economics are seen to be the driving factor, politics is simply derived from the economy and is nothing but an ideological superstructure designed to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 186-187.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 206.

¹⁵² Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 187.

obscure and justify class difference, and once again the goal is a reconciliation of economic antagonisms that would eliminate politics altogether.

The fourth form that Žižek outlines in his typology of anti-political regimes is ‘ultrapolitics’. Ultrapolitics, as theorized by the likes of Carl Schmitt, accepts conflict, but depoliticizes it by bringing it to extremes and turning it into a war of friends against enemies.¹⁵³ Ultrapolitics conceives of conflict as so entrenched that political deliberation is impossible, there is an assumption of difference so intractable that the other cannot even understand your position. Politics then becomes war by other means, to reverse Clausewitz’s famous phrase. We often see this today when politicians speak of a war on drugs for example, rather than any kind of complex political negotiation involving medical treatment, harm reduction, the legal system, and education. Drugs are conceived of as a pure evil and the only response is something military-like (such as mandatory minimum prison sentences for even the smallest offenses). Ultrapolitics is the favourite disavowal of the far right, who talk of class warfare, rather than class struggle for example.¹⁵⁴ Ultrapolitics is also the primary depoliticizing mechanism of the resurgent religions, as will be discussed later, as they tend to militarize all conflict into a war between good and evil that happens on a supernatural plane.

The above are the four disavowals of politics that Žižek extracts from his interpretation of Rancière, but a fifth form he mentions in later works is that of biopolitics. Žižek defines biopolitics as having “the regulation of the security and welfare of human lives as its primary goal” and associates it with the earlier disavowals of

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁵⁴ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 187.

politics he derived from Rancière.¹⁵⁵ Once you have successfully thrown away politics, all that is left is the management of life processes, which Arendt first pointed to as the condition of mass society. Biopolitics focuses on fear, and is concerned with protecting people from potential victimization or harassment. Here the obsession with the elimination of risk is transferred to the private, thus biopolitics is properly post-political, since once you have eliminated the risk associated with politics, risk elimination is turned toward the body. An example of this biopolitics of fear would be the recent swine flu outbreak, which prompted a fear-based campaign to corral the population into the risk management process of flu vaccination shots. Without any kind of politics properly speaking, the public sphere becomes focused on the private body.

Politics is something that has met with much resistance especially from philosophy. Politics is risky and filled with conflict and as a result there have been constant attempts to depoliticize society, to make it controlled and easy to manage, to eliminate conflict and risk. These attempts to do away with politics have intensified recently, and the next chapter will look at how neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion have been at the forefront of this depoliticizing impulse. Neoliberalism seeks to eliminate the risk which is associated with politics by adopting the model of expert administration while at the same time promoting a consumerist society which makes the world disposable thus eliminating durability. At the same time the resurgent religions with their belief in eternal life take away the impulse to achieve earthly immortality through politics while also arguing for a form of society in which there are strict unquestionable rules which are seen to bring about the harmonious society often advocated by the philosophers. The next chapter will show how both neoliberal

¹⁵⁵ Žižek, *Violence*, 40.

globalization and the resurgence of religion are manifestations of the various theoretical attacks on the political outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3: NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM AND THE RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE AS PROJECTS OF DEPOLITICIZATION

Having laid down a theoretical definition of the political and examined the attempts to escape from politics, we can now turn to the specific cases of neoliberalism and the resurgent religions and how these two phenomena are anti-political in nature. In this chapter, both neoliberalism and the resurgent religions will be shown to be fundamentally hostile to politics as it has been defined above. In proving both are anti-political in nature they will be dealt with independently, leaving establishing a connection between the two via their shared depoliticizing impulses to the next chapter. Below it will be shown how both phenomena fit within the historical anti-political processes outlined in the previous chapter, as well as how they have furthered this hostility to politics in unique ways. With neoliberalism we see a practical and largely successful project of replacing politics and its associated deliberation and action with market mechanisms which are seen as explicit replacements for political decision making and acting. Neoliberalism then operates within the context of the fear of risk and desire for harmony found in much of philosophy which was outlined in the previous chapter. While neoliberalism can be seen as primarily concerned with eliminating political action, the resurgent religions are particularly hostile to political debate and the political precondition of plurality. The resurgence has also brought a renewed interest in supernatural notions of an afterlife, thus once again we have religion devaluing the world, and making political action which seeks to leave some permanent trace behind seem meaningless. The resurgent religions then fit within the trends of anti-politics outlined in the previous chapter, in particular the attempts to depoliticize conflict by transforming it into a transcendental battle between good and evil, and to undermine the durability of the world by emphasizing belief in both group

immortality after death, and with the various apocalyptic beliefs that the end of the world is near. Neoliberalism will be dealt with in the first half, the resurgent religions in the second.

(i) Neoliberalism as an Anti-Political Project

Before arguing that the essence of neoliberal economics is depoliticization, neoliberalism must first be defined. The basis of neoliberal economic policy can be found in what John Williamson dubbed the “Washington Consensus”, which were a set of policies agreed upon by the major Washington-based international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.¹⁵⁶ Although the Washington Consensus, which has come to be a synonym for neoliberal economics, was largely aimed towards Latin America, these policies were adopted through the 1980s by governments such as the Reagan administration in the United States and the Thatcher administration in the United Kingdom. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, neoliberal economic policy became hegemonic across most of the world. This spread of a single set of economic policies was termed economic or neoliberal globalization and by 2000, had come to predominate in most countries while at the same time leading to an economy that was globally integrated.

Some of the basic policy prescriptions as outlined by Williamson and adopted by most governments which could broadly be considered neoliberal were cutting government spending, increasing the tax base through measures such as broad consumption taxes while lowering corporate taxes, liberalizing trade by lifting

¹⁵⁶ John Williamson, “What Washington Means by Policy Reform”, in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* ed. John Williamson, (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

restrictions on foreign direct investment, a commitment to free trade which involved removing tariffs and other import restrictions, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and the deregulation of industry which meant to give business more room to operate by allowing them to in effect police themselves.¹⁵⁷ These policies had the result (with a helping hand from newly developed information technologies) of elevating national economies from a matter of control and direction by individual governments into a globally integrated whole which now operates above the level of states. If we think of a short history of recent capitalism we start with international trade between the largely nationally contained economies of various states, then there was colonization where one state directly exploits another for economic gain, then with neoliberal globalization, the corporation replaces the state as colonizer, and in essence we are all colonies of global capital.¹⁵⁸ As Žižek puts it “in the long term, we shall all not only wear Banana Republic shirts, but also live in banana republics.”¹⁵⁹

So how should we perceive the overall goal of the neoliberal project? According to advocates of neoliberalism the goals range from ending hyperinflation and ensuring economic efficiency to increasing personal freedom from government interference in the economy to the spread of democracy and freedom via economics around the world.¹⁶⁰ Those critical of the neoliberal project, such as David Harvey, see it as more of a practical project by economic elites to restore their own class power rather than any type of grand ideological scheme to reconstitute capitalism globally.¹⁶¹ In Harvey’s view the essence of neoliberalism involves reworking the state in order to make the accumulation

¹⁵⁷ Williamson, *Policy Reform*.

¹⁵⁸ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 170.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁶⁰ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

of capital by the super-rich much easier. Aihwa Ong sees neoliberalism as essentially an array of disciplining techniques centred on the optimization of life meant to promote a sense of individual entrepreneurship and to encouragement “self-management” by placing the onus on individuals to make themselves competitive in the context of a global economy.¹⁶²

While what Ong and Harvey point to above may be true, the overall project of neoliberalism as both an ideology and set of practical policies is to depoliticize society and to replace all instances that contain a possibility for political deliberation and action with a market mechanism. In many ways this definition is complementary to both Ong and Harvey who also somewhat point to these depoliticizing aspects of neoliberalism. However neither gives the anti-political project inherent within neoliberalism its full due. Below the depoliticizing nature of neoliberalism will be examined in more depth by way of looking at the role of the ideology of the invisible hand, privatization by way of moves to transfer control of decisions from the public realm to the private realm of the market, consumerism, the impulse toward technocratic administration, and charity.

(a) Privatization and the Invisible Hand

In her critique of classical political economy, Arendt sees Adam Smith’s idea of the invisible hand as having an inherent anti-political goal. She points out that the outcome and purpose of the invisible hand is to replace politics with pure administration, allowing the “communistic fiction” which underscores all economics to come into being.¹⁶³ This communistic fiction is utopian in nature, and involves the assumption that conflict is eliminated, in this case due to the efficiency of the invisible hand of the market, and thus

¹⁶² Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁶³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 45.

politics (which is viewed negatively) becomes unnecessary. Political decision making is not needed as the invisible hand is assumed to automatically arrive at the best possible decisions for society as a whole. Arendt also points out that a society ruled by the invisible hand is essentially ruled by no one, which is also how she characterizes modern bureaucracy, the rule of no one.¹⁶⁴ The rule of no one is not a situation without rulership, and in fact this type of rule by a non-personified entity, such as the invisible hand, which is assumed to be working in the interest of society as a whole could, as Arendt goes on to say, very well be the most cruel and tyrannical form of rulership.¹⁶⁵

Although Arendt may be somewhat overstating the views of Adam Smith, as he did not fully favour a complete “withering away of the state” as Arendt puts it in paraphrasing Marx, her summation of liberal economics as deeply anti-political certainly applies to neoliberalism, which although certainly influenced by Smith, goes much further in its philosophical opposition to politics itself.¹⁶⁶ Smith and the neoliberals influenced by his writings reduce action to self-interested acquisition, thus reducing people to mere economic beings with no desire to shape the organization of the community they live in, to have their opinions heard and debated, or to strive for immortal greatness through their political acts.¹⁶⁷ In this economic sense, the activity of humans (self interested acquisition) is indecipherable from the activity of animals, who of course do not engage in politics.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 40. With both the invisible hand and bureaucracy, there is no visible person in charge who can be considered as a ruler, authority is exercised through non-personified structures, in this case the procedures of the bureaucracy and the structure of the market economy.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 45.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 42.

With the invisible hand ruling society, the neoliberal project then involves converting “every political or social problem into market terms,” and converting “them into problems with market solutions.”¹⁶⁸ The rationale behind this line of thought is largely centred on notions of efficiency. Neoliberals believe that the market and its associated invisible hand will always make the most efficient decisions due to the involvement of rational self-interested actors wanting to minimize cost and maximize profit. In this way politics with its debate, discussion, and unpredictable action is seen as horribly inefficient both from a time and a money perspective. Why have a public debate over where to build a new hospital for instance, when market mechanisms will more efficiently allocate private resources based on demand? Citizens are then completely removed from the picture, their opinions are not considered, there is no public deliberation of what course of action to take. This is especially devastating for citizens who lack economic clout. A hospital being allocated by market mechanisms will go wherever there is the most profit to be made and thus likely will not be built in areas where the citizens are predominantly poor. We see the invisible hand in action in allocating resources in the United States, where an extremely wealthy area like Beverly Hills will have an extremely high concentration of doctors (most of which do unnecessary cosmetic procedures) whereas a poorer area will be lacking in doctors needed to perform necessary procedures. So not only does neoliberal economic rationale disempower and alienate people by removing their ability to have their say, but it also actively discriminates against the poor, leaving them with no political recourse to have their voices heard.

¹⁶⁸ Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neo-conservatism, and De-democratization”, *Political Theory* 34 no. 6 (2006), 704.

One of the major economic policies of neoliberal economics is the privatization of state enterprises. Privatization in this respect is meant to get the government out of the economy, but we can also think of neoliberalism as privatizing not just the economy, but of politics as well. Since neoliberalism holds that the invisible hand is a more efficient decision maker and resource allocator than political debate, we end up with neoliberals wanting to shift what should be issues of the public realm into the private realm. This privatization transforms politics from being orientated toward the common and being about public political participation to a kind of personal self-care.¹⁶⁹ Barker makes the same point about Fukuyama's neoliberal vision of society as being one which emphasizes the individual at the expense of any kind of public politics. Fukuyama's ideal society is one devoid of politics where the role of "citizens" is reduced to this kind of self-care where people find fulfillment not through engaging in politics but through the accumulation of wealth and spiritual expression via culture.¹⁷⁰ Neoliberalism thus seeks to reduce the public realm to a minimal set of institutions designed to protect the private accumulation of wealth and to some extent spiritual and cultural expression. This depoliticizes society and ejects people from the public realm of politics and destroys an already weak commitment to democratic participation.

The results of the neoliberal push to privatize politics can be seen with the recent increase in the popularity and visibility of 'post-fascist' parties who promote anti-immigration policies and believe citizenship should be culturally or ethnically determined.¹⁷¹ As Tamás points out, this return of openly racist policies is a direct

¹⁶⁹ Brown, *American Nightmare*, 695.

¹⁷⁰ Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*, 92.

¹⁷¹ G.M. Tamás, "On Post-Fascism: How Citizenship is Becoming an Exclusive Privilege" *Boston Review* (Summer 2000). <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR25.3/tamas.html>

consequence of the undoing of the universal political equality associated with citizenship. When we lack a public space for politics in which we can come together and have our opinions heard, we also lack the community generating aspect of politics. The lack of a political outlet for conflict which brings us face to face with our political rivals then decreases any possibility of understanding as every person and group is seen as radically private and different. It may seem like a contradiction that having a space to directly confront those with whom we disagree would help foster community and reduce xenophobic impulses, but the lack of contact in our privatized society transforms the other from someone with a different opinion, to an exotic and incomprehensible radical other who can only be dealt with through extreme measures. This new xenophobia, which is linked to the privatization of politics, can be seen as an example of ultrapolitics, one of the forms of the disavowal of politics which was outlined above. Conflict is asserted, albeit in cultural form, but each side is seen as so different that they are enemies to be fought, not individuals to be debated with. Cultural difference is seen as so intractable that there can be no common ground to even express disagreement with others, and without the assumption you can at least talk to those you disagree with, conflict is depoliticized into a war between friends and enemies.

Not only does neoliberalism erode the equality necessary for citizenship, but it degrades democracy¹⁷² as well. In our neoliberal era democracy has come to mean nothing more than a “system of formal legality”.¹⁷³ This is how we should understand the neoliberal emphasis on the need for “democracy” in order for a country to develop

¹⁷² Used in the sense that Arendt and Rancière use the word democracy, it is essentially a synonym for politics.

¹⁷³ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 298.

economically; as the implementation of a system of formal legality.¹⁷⁴ As neoliberalism jettisons the idea of political participation from its “table of values” due to the emphasis on market-based and expert decision making, it shows itself to be inherently hostile to politics.¹⁷⁵ Without a space or even a popular will to participate in the decision making of society, politics becomes an impossibility.

(b) Neoliberalism as the “Administration of Things”

As noted above, the invisible hand is a doctrine of rule by nobody, and thus fits in the same category as technocratic bureaucracy. Although not exclusive to neoliberal ideology by any means, the neoliberal era has seen a certain recommitment to the idea that the minimal public realm which seeks to ensure maximum private space should be an administrative apparatus run by experts and free of politics. This push for non-political administration is illustrated by one of Bill Clinton’s key economic advisors in the early 1990s, Alan Blinder, who claimed that American society was “too political” and the way to solve this problem was to adopt an independent central bank model for issues like health care and welfare, thus removing these issues from the control of even elected officials.¹⁷⁶ Again an efficiency argument was made; specialists were seen as better equipped to deal with today’s complex issues thus leading to more efficient administration than if these issues were left to confused politicians and publics who likely had no idea what something like a subprime mortgage derivative might be.

¹⁷⁴ By democracy they are really referring to an entrenched system of legal property rights, not democracy in the sense of individual citizens having input in the affairs of their country or community but of legal protection for capital.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *American Nightmare*, 703.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Mair, “Ruling the Void? The Hollowing out of Western Democracy”, *New Left Review* 42 (2006), 27.

The neoliberal project then degrades politics with its technocratic impulse and the desire to reformulate problems that are not market-solvable into technical problems to be solved by experts.¹⁷⁷ Ironically then, it is neoliberal capitalism that has brought about the replacement of politics with the “administration of things” that Engels predicted would be the end result of communism. Politics and citizen engagement are then explicitly opposed in favour technical administration, and again citizens are expelled from the public realm and denied the ability to exercise the political freedom they are legally entitled to. Mair sums this situation up nicely when he says

our governors have become a self-perpetuating elite that rules—or rather, administers—passive or privatized masses of people. The representatives act not as agents of the people but simply instead of them.¹⁷⁸

The neoliberal hostility to politics then runs so deep as to even consider something so lacking in politics as representative democracy to be “too political”. This transformation of politics into administration is further evidenced by how elections are now a matter of choosing the candidate who is personally best suited to administer, thus parties have jettisoned any notion of having a guiding political ideology or platform and have given up the pretense of politics altogether. Thus you vote for your favourite potential administrator, a private individual to administer private things.

(c) A Disposable Society of Consumers

Arendt describes the depoliticized mass society brought on by the elevation of economic concerns from the bottom of the hierarchy of the importance of human activities to the top as one that results in a labouring society of job-holders. When Arendt speaks of labour, she differentiates it from work, in that labour is endless repetition that creates no

¹⁷⁷ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 3.

¹⁷⁸ Mair, “Ruling the Void?”, 48.

end product, while work has a definite end.¹⁷⁹ A labour society is then one of constant production, which implies constant consumption. Goods that are produced must necessarily be perishable in order to sustain the endless process of labour and as well to maintain growth in the overall economy. The labour society is also a consumer society, as well as a society which lacks permanence and in Arendt's terminology is worldless.¹⁸⁰ Since part of the thrust behind engaging in politics relates to the desire for immortality, to leave some permanent trace of your existence behind, a society which is designed to be disposable and consumable takes away this aspect of politics by robbing us of a permanent world in which our political acts will have a lasting effect. When we are brought up as consumers, we come to expect that nothing will last, and achieving something of permanence then seems alien to us.

In a less theoretical sense, when we are transformed from citizens into consumers, a whole new model of acting comes about. Consumers have no active role in shaping the products that they consume; they demonstrate their preferences through how they spend their money. When this model is applied to the public sphere, it seems strange to people that they might have direct input in the decisions of their community, and instead adopt the rhetoric of the passive taxpayer. The taxpayer abandons the role of the citizen who would wish to have an active role in the creation process; the taxpayer, like the consumer takes a passive approach where they simply pay money and get something in return.

As people have come to see themselves as passive taxpayers, they have stopped taking the ideal of the politically engaged citizen seriously; they now see their primary

¹⁷⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 89. An example of labour would be something like cleaning your house, it is constantly getting dirty, so you have to constantly clean it. Work is something you can finish, and that creates an end product, like making a painting.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

role in society as one of consumption.¹⁸¹ There are numerous examples that illustrate this point, from George W. Bush's calls to Americans after 9/11 to go shopping as a way to rebuke the terrorists, to the shift in rhetoric in the media from concerned citizens to angry taxpayers. When there is a complaint about government misdeeds today, the complaint is usually framed in terms of a waste of taxpayer money. No longer are we concerned that the government is not acting on the wishes or direction of the citizenry, what taxpayers care about is their money and their own private interest. Here is yet another demonstration of how neoliberalism has sought (and has largely been successful in doing so) to privatize politics itself, thus eliminating any potential role for citizens in the public sphere and purging concerns about public wellbeing in exchange for individual self-interest.

Another aspect of this neoliberal transformation from citizen to taxpayer/consumer is evidenced in the character of our public spaces. Shopping malls have become one of the most obvious public spaces today, which links public space directly to consumption.¹⁸² Arendt makes a similar point when she points out that the non-political tyrannies of antiquity would use the public square as a place for shops, rather than for discussing politics like in the democracies.¹⁸³ Not only are malls primarily aimed at consumption, but any kind of political activity is generally strictly prohibited, where simply wearing a t-shirt with a political message has resulted in people being escorted off the premises.¹⁸⁴ Mall culture started as a suburban trend but has spread to

¹⁸¹ Carl Boggs, "The Great Retreat: The Decline of the Public Sphere in Late Twentieth Century America", *Theory and Society* 26 (1997), 746.

¹⁸² Boggs, "The Great Retreat", 748.

¹⁸³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 160.

¹⁸⁴ Anastasia Economides & Matthew Chayes, "Police Arrest Anti-War Protester, 80, At Mall", *CommonDreams.org* (March 30, 2008), <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/03/30/7974>

urban cores and now through the proliferation of Wal-Mart, is an important space for the poor and working class as well.¹⁸⁵ In a consumer society, rather than coming together to engage in politics, we now only come together to shop.

The consumer model of public engagement also degrades the value of public opinions. Since consumer choice is merely a matter of individual whim between various products which are basically the same, applying this type of thinking to politics reduces differences of political opinion into mere habits, the same way we might habitually choose one brand of soft drink over another, even though they mostly taste the same.¹⁸⁶ There is no use then in taking passionate political stands on issues when such stands are viewed not as driven by any kind of rational argument about the betterment of the state of the world, but as a mere habit of the individual. We also see this consumption model being applied to elections, where we have a few parties whose policies are essentially the same, marketing a lifestyle for the electorate to consume.

There is also of course the transformation of political ideology into a consumer good. Why engage in concrete political action when you can slap a bumper sticker on your car? We can even go so far as to state that the primary means of displaying your “political identity” today is through your consumption patterns. If you want to be an environmentalist you buy a hybrid car and get your coffee at Bridgehead. If you want to be a conservative you drive an SUV and spend time at Tim Horton’s. In the wider picture these identities are largely pointless due to the fact no real political speech or action is being engaged in.

¹⁸⁵ Boggs, “The Great Retreat”, 748.

¹⁸⁶ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 34.

(d) Charity as the Privatization of Poverty

On the surface, charity seems like a wholly positive way for the well-off to give money back to those in need. However under the neoliberal rhetoric of privatization, charity amounts to the privatization of social welfare plans. Since government involvement in the economy is inherently inefficient and a restriction on personal freedom according to neoliberal logic, helping the poor must be privatized as well. The replacement of social welfare with charity depoliticizes issues surrounding poverty by moving them to the private sphere and away from being matters of potential political debate. Citizens lose any potential control over the direction of these services when they are being run by private individuals and organizations. While a citizen certainly in principle deserves to have a voice in how matters of the public sphere are handled, there can be no argument made that citizens should be able to tell individuals how and where to give their private charitable donations. Similarly a private charitable organization is free to spend its money how it pleases, without concern for wider public opinion.

Charity is then the depoliticization of social welfare, but it also has the effect of transforming the recipient of welfare or charity into a consumer. Rather than having a universal welfare program run by the government which is available to all in need, the neoliberal ideal is to have a variety of competing charities to provide these services, thus creating a more efficient redistribution system due to competition and market mechanisms. In principle having multiple avenues of help rather than just one sounds like a good idea, however this erodes the universal nature of government programs. When charities rely on private donations, the donors will give money to specific charities that usually have a specific focus, agenda, or target group. The effect of this targeted charity

is that if you are part of a certain demographic that is not currently in vogue to be helped, you may find yourself unable to receive money from any of the established charities. Shopping around for charity will not get you a better deal when no one will let you into their store.

Charity works as a replacement for the government in international terms as well. Although well intentioned, many development charities and organizations act as privatized versions of what should be government services. Where is the impetus for an African government to invest in education and health care when a Canadian non-governmental organization will come over and use its own money to set these sorts of programs up? The neoliberal state with its lack of public political space is then reinforced by this model of development, which although well intentioned, is politically disempowering due to the removal of control of these services from any potential public political debate by the people who will actually use them. While government-run social services are certainly not necessarily political, the potential exists for them to be subject to political debate and action since with a government-run system, they are considered to be in the public sphere. When social welfare issues are shifted to the private realm to be dealt with through charity, organizing a push for politicization becomes much more difficult.

* * *

When viewed as a whole, neoliberalism should be seen as an anti-political project which is ideologically orientated against political participation. In principle and in practice, neoliberalism has sought to recast problems of the public and potentially political sphere into problems to be dealt with by the market. In many ways neoliberalism represents the

pinnacle of the modern impulse to denigrate politics and to replace it with some other form of administration. Arendt speaks of the ancient Athenians as holding politics at the top of their hierarchy of valuable activities, while economic money making was at the bottom due to its connection with base necessity. Today this hierarchy has been reversed, with economic money making being considered the most important activity for an individual, while political engagement has been knocked to the bottom, and is seen as dirty business. Neoliberal economics provides an explicitly anti-political set of policies and ways of thinking which solidify the modern idea that economic activity is much more important and fulfilling than political activity.

When speaking of neoliberalism as depoliticizing and ushering in our post-political society, this is not meant to imply that the previous era of Keynesian economics was a period of great political activity, as it was not. While the Keynesian era certainly had more potential space for politics to arise, it is not my intent to romanticize this period in any way. The key difference between Keynesian and neoliberal economics is that neoliberalism is inherently anti-political, while Keynesianism is not. The anti-political impulses during the Keynesian era did not emanate directly from the economic system like they do with neoliberal economics. So while there was certainly more potential for political engagement under the Keynesian economic system than under neoliberalism, it was by no means a model of what a political society should look like.

(ii) The Resurgent Religions and their Hostility to Politics

Before getting into why the resurgent religions are depoliticizing, we must first define what the resurgence of religion involves. In his theory of the “disenchantment of the

world”, Gauchet gives a history of religion in which religion does not reach its most developed point with the monotheistic religions, but with the original animistic religions which found expressions of the supernatural in everything around them.¹⁸⁷ The history of religion is then the progressive distancing of ourselves from the supernatural, first by displacing the supernatural from the natural world and into the figure of gods, in the form of polytheism, and then the reduction of the various gods into the single removed-from-the-world god of monotheism. The culmination of this process for Gauchet is secularism, the final displacement is made where the distant and removed god of monotheism is eliminated altogether and we have a secular society where any remaining religious beliefs are merely expressions of personal faith and have no influence on the organization of society as a whole.¹⁸⁸ Looking at the big picture, Gauchet’s account of the history of religion as displacing the supernatural until we end up with secularism is largely accurate up until the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Around this point of time, although in most places still on the fringe, religious groups around the world started to reassert themselves and started to make demands in public about how society should be run. The two key events that marked what is here being termed the resurgence of religion was the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, and the election of Ronald Reagan’s Republican Party in 1980 with the explicit support of evangelical Christian groups like Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority. These two events mark the start of a global trend toward more religious involvement in framing public issues.

The common thread linking the various resurgent religions is the idea that religion should be a central organizing principle for all of society, and not merely a private

¹⁸⁷ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of The World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; original work 1985), 27.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

expression of faith. Thus these religions have a markedly anti-secular stance and tend to be more group-oriented than the non-resurgent religions which tend to be in decline as they lose adherents to the resurgent strains. We see expressions of this new group orientation with the evangelical Christian belief in the Rapture, which makes salvation not a matter of personal belief, repentance, and good deeds, but transforms it into a mass event where all born again Christians are saved at once. We see a similar concern among Islamists for the Islamic *ummah* or community as a whole in which they tend to be just as critical of their fellow Muslims for engaging in impure practices as they are of unbelievers. Again this contrasts to a more traditional form of Islam more concerned with individual piety.

The two largest and most important resurgent religions are evangelical Christianity and Islamism. As mentioned above, evangelicals believe that we are on the verge of the Rapture, where those who have accepted Jesus will all of a sudden vanish and ascend into heaven. Although having a different approach than evangelicals to beliefs such as that of the Rapture, a renewed social conservatism emanating from the Vatican has a definite affinity to the anti-secular evangelical movement, thus alienating a large number of secular-minded liberal Catholics. Since many evangelicals reject denominationalism and simply call themselves Christians, there is a renewed acceptance of socially conservative Catholics as part of the Christian community, thus overcoming the traditional hostility between Protestants and Catholics. The numbers of evangelical or non-denominational Christians has been on the steady upswing since the early 1980s, and

has been accompanied by a fall in identification with mainline Protestant and liberal Catholic sects.¹⁸⁹

Islam has made a marked return to the public sphere as well, rejecting the relatively subordinated place it occupied in the recent past in much of the areas of the world with a large Muslim population. New groups of Islamists started emerging in the period of the resurgence demanding Islam become the guiding principle of society. These groups marked a significant change in Islamic thought as Islam played a minor role within these societies from the period of decolonization up until the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Iranian revolution was the most blatant example of this newly assertive Islam, but examples abound from Afghanistan going from encouraging secularism and female professionals in the years prior to the Soviet invasion to becoming a synonym for Islamic extremism under the Taliban, to Pakistan adopting Sharia law in the mid 1980s, to the current conflagration of sectarian religious violence in once staunchly secular Iraq.¹⁹⁰ Even Turkey, which was founded as an explicitly secular state, has seen the continued insertion of Islam into public life in recent years.

Of course the resurgence in religious fervour has not been limited to Christianity and Islam. In India there has been an upsurge in support for a militant form of Hindu Nationalism which seeks to assert Hindu values as Indian values thus undermining India's religious pluralism. Anti-secular forms of Judaism have been asserting their public claim to be the organizing principle of society in Israel, as the whole region, including the occupied Palestinian territories, are abandoning secular representatives like Fatah and Labor in favour of parties with explicit religious motivations like Hamas and

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2005).

Likud. In Tibet, Thailand, and Sri Lanka Buddhist groups have also been making demands that these pluralist countries be organized along their specific religious agenda. The scope of the resurgence is more or less global and crossing numerous different religions. Of course the effects of the resurgence vary, with it being particularly intense in the United States and the Middle East, while Latin America and parts of Europe have been affected only on the margins.

(a) Eternity, Lack of a World, Resignation, and Submission

As was shown above, the motivation to engage in politics often involves the desire to leave something behind, to be remembered, and to create some lasting legacy. Arendt calls this the achievement of immortal glory, and it requires the existence of a permanent world. A world where your political deeds will have lasting effect and your speeches will be remembered. In explaining the decline of politics throughout history, Arendt points to the rise of Christianity and its belief in eternal life as one of the major disruptions that eroded the Greek and Roman pagan beliefs that life was mortal, which led them to seek immortality through building a world and engaging in politics. Thus the religious debasement of seeking earthly immortality through political means is nothing new.

However when Arendt speaks of eternal life in the Christian sense, it means eternal life for the individual, which as she goes on to argue is adopted by the secular capitalist societies that elevate labour to the highest activity of human fulfilment thus resulting in an obsession with the endless reproduction of the human species as a form of achieving immortality. Today the immortality of the human species is no longer assured, with potential species ending threats from various forms of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, as well as the threat of ecological collapse. In addition to these real

threats, there is a sense of millenarianism in the air, both stemming from evangelical Christians who believe the Rapture is in the near future, and in popular culture with the interest in things like the 2012 phenomena, the year in which the Mayan calendar ended thus leading some to believe that the world will come to an end at this time.

With the human species no longer seen as immortal due to the above threats, both real and imaginary, we have seen a new form of belief in immortality structured around the privileged group. As the evangelical theologian Cherith Fee Nordling points out, mainline Christianity focused on getting individual souls into heaven, whereas today's evangelicalism focuses on creating an eschatological people.¹⁹¹ Under evangelical thinking, salvation is no longer open to everyone who leads a moral life, but is only for an exclusive community of believers who will be saved en masse come the Rapture. Here we have an undoing of the universalistic impulse found in Christian thinkers such as Paul, in favour of a more Jewish-influenced belief in an exclusive chosen people. We see the same sort of exclusive group formation within Islam as well, with the conception of *jihad* as an internal personal struggle to live a pious life losing popularity in favour of *jihad* as an external battle focused on purifying the Muslim community as a whole and fighting with the non-Muslim world.¹⁹² With this new form of belief in the achievement of immortality through belonging to the proper group of believers, we again have religion usurping politics as a means to transcend earthly existence and obtain immortality. If the point of our earthly existence is to prepare your religious group for eternal life, any ideas about leaving a lasting immortal legacy through politics come to be seen as pointless.

¹⁹¹ Cherith Fee Nordling, "The Human Person in the Christian Story" in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* eds. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72.

¹⁹² Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; Third edition 2003), 81-83.

One of the key ideas that is common to the resurgent religions is this notion of having an eternal life which continues after your death on Earth, whether it be the monotheistic heaven or some form of reincarnation as in the Eastern religions. This belief in a second life has a world destroying effect, as it reduces not just politics, but all life itself to a mere means to an end. Engaging in politics becomes a pointless endeavour because life on Earth is fleeting, and the point is to transcend it, thus engaging in the very earthly business of politics seems pointless. The mortality of life is a strong motivator to want to engage in politics in order to leave the world a better place than you left it. Taking away this mortality takes away the urgency of political action.

Buddhism and Taoism are two of the best suited religions for today's post-political worldless neoliberal capitalism.¹⁹³ Taoism teaches a spiritual detachment from the world accompanied with the idea of *wu wei*, which has a meaning of going with the flow and not disrupting the harmony of nature by attempting to assert your will against a flowing stream. Take a distanced view towards the world and just let things happen, since they do not really affect your core being. Similarly Buddhism teaches that the world is mere insubstantial appearance and you should retreat back into yourself through meditation.¹⁹⁴ Both teach an explicit rejection of worldly things, and have an extreme distaste for anything that might resemble political action. Worldlessness is then a general trait of today's resurgent religions, and works to either prevent people from engaging in politics in the first place, or acts as an ideological coping mechanism for the lack of opportunities to directly influence material reality via political action.

¹⁹³ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 253.

¹⁹⁴ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 253.

In addition to the general world rejecting nature of Islam and Christianity, they also contain specific doctrines which are inherently anti-political, in particular the emphasis on resignation and submission which promote a withdrawal from Earthly concerns. Within Christian theology we find the belief that

the mundane world in which we live, the world in which politics is relevant, is fallen and flawed. It is not capable of peace, love, or justice. No effort on our part can bring it in line with God's moral requirements.¹⁹⁵

Attempting to change the world through political means is then pointless, and the Christian should just resign him or herself to this flawed reality and wait for heaven. Of course as Drury also points out, Christian resignation usually only applies to situations of cruelty and injustice in the public sphere, and when life is relatively easy then we get an abundance of Christian groups abandoning resignation and demanding social restrictions to make the world more Christian.¹⁹⁶ Here is an explicitly anti-political logic at work, in the situations of oppression and cruelty such as a dictatorship where resignation is preached, we have a public sphere free of politics. When there does exist room for political action (and thus life is good as politics makes us happy), resignation is abandoned in favour of active attempts to assert Christianity as the guiding principle of society thus attempting to undermine the plurality and debate of the public sphere. We see the same sort of impulse in Islam, in which the very name Islam is derived from an Arabic word meaning submission. You are meant to submit to all the regulations of Islamic law which penetrate every aspect of life, right down to the proper use of toothpicks, but then when it comes to unbelievers submission is thrown out in favour of

¹⁹⁵ Shadia Drury, *Terror and Civilization: Christianity, Politics, and the Western Psyche*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 47.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

active struggle against them in various ways.¹⁹⁷ The general message is that engagement with the material world is negative and pointless unless you are attempting to prevent others from engaging with it, which is a very anti-political sentiment.

(b) Debate as Heresy

Since politics embraces conflict through its talkative nature involving debate and deliberation between multiple viewpoints, religion is inherently anti-political due to its claims to immutable truth. Whereas two differing opinions on a political issue can be detached from the individuals staking the positions, thus allowing conflicting opinions to actually bring people together, a differing opinion on religious matters is often taken by the believer as an attack on their very being. We see this manifested today when critiques of Jewish Zionism or Islam are labelled as anti-Semitism or Islamophobia even when these critiques are dealing strictly with ideology and are completely divorced from the individuals expressing or engaging in these religious practices.

Taking a questioning of their views so personally by the religious is a result of the fact that religious views are seen to be expressions of divine truth, and not merely the opinions of differing human beings. When the American evangelical theologian Harold Netland states that pluralism is a form of unbelief he is directly targeting those believers who would accept that there are different ways to interpret the Bible or that other non-Christian religions and belief systems might have merit as organizing principles for people's lives.¹⁹⁸ Instead we have a commitment to one single divine truth, one way to interpret this truth, and one way to go about living your life according to this truth. Again

¹⁹⁷ Ibn Warraq, *Why I am Not a Muslim*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995; reprint 2003), 164.

¹⁹⁸ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Evangelical Theology and the Religions" in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* eds. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 202.

this marks a difference from the declining varieties of mainline Christianity which Netland sees as too privatized and thus open to individual interpretations. Politics requires open debate of everything, and if people want to submit religious principles to the public as ways of organizing society, they have to be open to having those principles ruthlessly debated and critiqued, like any other potential organizing principle would be. The silencing of debate is the silencing of politics.

(c) Conflict as a Transcendental War between Good and Evil

If politics can be seen as a way of channelling conflict into non-violent means and turning it into a positive by embracing the pluralistic community-fostering aspects that people of differing views coming together to deliberate can have, Islam and Christianity depoliticize conflict by moving it to a supernatural realm. The resurgent forms of Christianity and Islam then have a double method of depoliticization. The more militant elements will translate conflict into a supernatural war between the forces of good and evil, while less extreme factions will frame conflict and disagreement as part of a wider attack on their religion. Examples of conflict being seen as part of a supernatural war would be the various religiously-motivated terrorists from al-Qaida to Aum Shinrikyo who often start with a specific material grievance about society (American intervention in the Middle East for al-Qaida, the overly hierarchical nature of Japanese society for Aum Shinrikyo) and magnify these grievances into examples of a larger spiritual conflict.¹⁹⁹ This elevation of conflict to a war between good and evil fits the anti-political model of ultrapolitics outlined above. When the rhetoric of supernatural war is invoked, there is a sense that any attempts by humans to try to manage conflict through earthly political

¹⁹⁹ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 12.

Aum Shinrikyo is famous for the sarin nerve gas attack on Tokyo's subway system in 1995 and has a syncretic religious ideology based in Buddhism that blends in elements of Hinduism and Christianity.

means is mere arrogance, as these conflicts humans have with each other are expressions of some bigger conflict that is beyond our ability to control. The conflict over specific issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage is often translated into part of a larger attack on religion by the forces of “secular progressives” as Bill O’Reilly calls them. Rather than debating the pros and cons of something like same-sex marriage, the specifics of the issue are ignored as it is seen as another manifestation of a larger war on Christianity itself.

An example of the depoliticizing mechanism at work in the ultrapolitical religious view of conflict as a transcendental battle between good and evil came in 2003 when Lieutenant General William G. Boykin was appointed deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence in the United States. Shortly after being appointed to the position, with his main task involving working on intelligence to find key al-Qaida and Taliban leaders in Afghanistan, he gave a press conference stating that the real enemy in the American ‘war on terror’ is “a guy named Satan”.²⁰⁰ So the enemies of the United States are not merely human beings, but the embodiments of radical evil. Statements such as this then make debate and criticism over the war amount to heresy and also dehumanize the enemy making war and torture more acceptable since after all, it is not human beings being killed and tortured, but a guy named Satan and his many minions.

Viewing the world as a war between good and evil then justifies violence, as it is impossible to sit down and have a reasoned debate with Satan. This recourse to violence is noticeable not just in an increase in religious rhetoric coming from various military officials but in non-state terrorism. Mazarr and Cooper both point to a transformation in

²⁰⁰ John Henderson, “Religious Groups Want Outspoken General Punished”, *LA Times* (October 17, 2003), <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/oct/17/nation/na-general17>

terrorism which started to occur in the late 1980s.²⁰¹ Previously most terrorists and terrorist attacks had been instrumental in nature, the goal was either to directly accomplish some goal, such as get a prisoner released in exchange for ending an airplane hijacking, or to bring public awareness to a cause. Despite being terrorism, there was a conscious effort to minimize casualties as terrorism was only a means to some end and these groups were ultimately concerned with winning sympathy for their cause. Today terrorism is mostly religious in character and terror attacks are no longer instrumental in nature but ends in themselves. The goal is to kill unbelievers, not to win sympathy or effect some sort of specific action or policy change, thus today's religious terrorism is more violent as it seeks to maximize casualties. With the religious terrorists, it is not simply killing unbelievers, but striking a blow for God against his enemies in the larger battle of good versus evil. The secular left-wing terrorists of the 1970s like the Red Army Faction and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine are gone, replaced by religious-motivated terrorists like Hamas, al-Qaida, and Timothy McVeigh's Christian Identity movement.

The recourse to terrorism by religious groups can be both seen as anti-political in itself, and a result of a depoliticized society. While the older secular terrorist groups of the left like the aforementioned Red Army Faction and the right like the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina had a direct concern with material conditions, today's religious terrorists do not engage in terror to accomplish anything material, but as part of the wider spiritual war between good and evil. In his interviews with various religious terrorists

²⁰¹ What follows is drawn from Michael J. Mazarr, *Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions, or An Analysis of Modern Terrorism*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

from a variety of different faiths, Juergensmeyer found that they had no direct “political” purpose with their attacks, with most providing rambling justifications centred on religion.²⁰² So while the older instrumental forms of terrorism cannot be considered political in the proper sense, they were motivated by political issues. Today’s religious terrorism operates on an otherworldly plane, where the goal is not to violently change the material conditions of this life, but to take part in a larger transcendental battle with consequences in another plane of existence.

Today’s religious terrorists should then not be viewed as political activists who having become desperate and lacking any other outlet turn to terrorism. However while their motivations are wholly religious, there is a sense of displacement of political grievance happening. Where once an Egyptian youth with a general discontent with the nature of the world and wanting to express a sense of independence could rally behind a secular leader like Gamal Abdel Nasser, in our post-political societies, the major groups organizing discontent are religious, thus the Egyptian in question might join the Muslim Brotherhood and then have his discontent funnelled into religious complaints, whereas upon joining Nasser’s Arab Socialist Union, his discontent could have been articulated in material terms leading to a potential for political activism. The religious groups benefit from a lack of politics and also reinforce this post-political situation by channelling generalized discontent away from political activism and into religion.

The focus on terrorism above is not meant to characterize terrorist groups as the primary expression of the resurgent religions being discussed, nor is it to imply every evangelical Christian or Islamist is necessary a terrorist. However you cannot divorce the terrorism of Bin Laden from Islamism or the terrorism of McVeigh or abortion clinic

²⁰² Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 125.

bomber Michael Bray from evangelicalism. As Žižek points out, the constant claim that terrorists are not really part of the true religion is like the joke “my fiancée is never late, because when she is late, she is no longer my fiancée.”²⁰³ The actions of these terrorists are deeply rooted in the ideologies of these resurgent religions, which leads to another depoliticizing mechanism, this time by the non-terrorist members and leaders of these religions. This is the claim that religious terrorists actually have nothing to do with religion and their actions are a result of politics. Although anecdotal, there is an amusing scene in Bill Maher’s documentary *Religulous* where Maher is visiting with various religious leaders and asking them about terrorism. After the first couple of people proclaim that today’s religious terrorists have nothing to do with religion and are politically motivated there is a montage with a stream of people of various faiths all blaming politics as the cause of terrorism. This move to deny religious responsibility and blame “politics” has a depoliticizing effect by associating the word politics with terrorism, while religion is seen as staying pure and is above such temporal concerns. The word politics then becomes degraded in the mind of the non-terrorist religious believer, thus reinforcing religious depoliticization. Regardless of any specific content that the politics being blamed for religious terrorism may have, the language of condemnation has the effect of separating religion from earthly matters. Matters of material reality, which can be the grounds for politics, are then seen as impure and base, while the realm of religion operates on a higher and more pure spiritual plane which again paints any sort of political speech and action as less important or even impure activities. Engaging in politics is then knocked down to the realm of necessity, while contemplating God is seen as a much more important activity.

²⁰³ Žižek, *Violence*, 137.

(d) Anti-Secular as Anti-Political

The common thread among the various resurgent religions is their hostility to secularism, which amounts to a hostility to politics itself. Secularism can be defined as a situation where religion is considered a private matter and makes no claims to be the basis for the organization of society as a whole. Since the resurgent religions are demanding to be the basis for organizing society, and not merely personal beliefs, bringing about the religious society they envision would amount to not just an end to secularism but an end to politics. A non-secular religious society would eliminate the basics needed for politics. Plurality would be constrained, there could be no open public debate on important issues, and the act of creating something new would be next to impossible. We see expressions of these problems in the utter lack of political space in a religiously-organized country like Saudi Arabia. To attempt to engage in political action over even the most minute issue in a place like this is to risk your life.

While it is certainly possible to have politics without secularism, the manner in which secularism is attacked by the resurgent religions is to go after the aspects of secularism that facilitate politics. Politics without secularism would accept that religion could be brought into the public realm and that it did not necessarily need to be kept private, but any such religious arguments or proposals would be subject to the same critique and deliberative scrutiny that any other argument or proposal would face. The resurgent religions are expressly anti-political in their desire to eliminate any aspect of criticism or debate of the merit of their religious proposals and simply wish to impose their religion as the organizing principle of society. They view secularism then mainly as a mechanism which prevents public religious claims while at the same time being

opposed to a non-secular politics which would treat religion the same as any other ideology. Secularism and politics are then conflated in the rhetoric of the resurgent religions as they are both seen as denigrating religion, either by keeping it private or encouraging critique of it, even though secularism can be non-political and politics can be non-secular.

An example of the religious critique which conflates secularism with politics are the evangelical Christian groups who rail against “big government” and “political elites” who corrupt morals and erode personal freedom as part of their critique of secularism and argument in favour of adopting Christianity as the organizing principle for society.²⁰⁴ Politics itself is then seen as an enemy, something that needs to be replaced with religion in order to purify the morals of the community. Examples of this sort of hostility to secular politics abound. In Juergensmeyer’s interviews with various religious terrorist leaders, virtually all of them cited secular politics as the primary evil which they were fighting. The Sikh militant group once led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who were later involved in the assassination of Indira Gandhi cited her as a secular enemy of religion as their reason for opposing the Indian government, notions of Hindu dominance were secondary at best.²⁰⁵ Their stated goal in the creation of an independent Khalistan state was to protect the Sikh religion from secular forces. Israeli Orthodox Jewish leader Meir Kahane stated that the primary enemy that Jews should be fighting in Israel was the secular government, with Palestinian Muslims as only a secondary problem.²⁰⁶ When Juergensmeyer interviewed the 1993 World Trade Centre bomber Mohammed Abouhalima in prison, he expressed admiration for Christian Identity terrorist Timothy

²⁰⁴ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 23.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

McVeigh and said the US would be better off as a Christian nation, and that the real problem was their secularism.²⁰⁷ Although these statements come from individuals engaged in terrorism, by no means is this anti-secularism limited to the more extreme edges of the resurgent religions. We can witness how mainstream it is with the constant attacks on the evils of secularism by the likes of mainstream cable news pundit Bill O'Reilly in the United States.

The root problem for these resurgent religious groups is precisely what they perceive to be as overly political societies. Given how little potential there is for politics in most of the countries that are targets of criticism and even attack by these groups, their hostility to anything even remotely resembling politics runs extremely deep. Politics as has been defined here is then utterly anathema to the resurgent religions, especially in the non-secular version which would be subjecting religion to constant analysis and critique. While the rhetoric is generally anti-secular, politics is indirectly attacked due to its promotion of plurality, debate, and natality. For the resurgent religions, opposition to secularism then implies an opposition to politics as well.

(e) Religious Charity as Depoliticizing

Much like the neoliberal impulse toward charity, the resurgent religions have the same view of charity as a way to get social assistance out of the public realm and into the hands of private religious groups. While leaving the symbiosis between neoliberal and religious views on charity to the next section, we can see how an emphasis on private charity over government welfare programs is anti-political and beneficial to these new religious formations. Having a wider pool of people in need of financial help has the double benefit to the resurgent religious groups of allowing them to use charity as a way of

²⁰⁷ Jeurgensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 65-69.

reaching people with the goal of bringing them into their religion and also of demonstrating the moral character of the individual believers.

When social assistance is largely handled by the government this is seen as robbing individuals of their ability to demonstrate their high moral character before God by being able to give to charity. There is also a sense, especially among Lutheran evangelicals that social welfare coming from the government is something inherently bad, as Luther believed that acts of charity that were not driven by faith were perverse in nature and would lead to a greater evil down the road.²⁰⁸ The “good works” of charity then must be left to the religious; otherwise they are not actually good deeds and could lead to problems later on.

The charity doled out by religious groups is often one of their greatest recruitment tools. In the Palestinian territories, prior to forming a government, Hamas operated a vast charity network that provided cash for the poor, shelter for orphans, primary education, and even medical clinics.²⁰⁹ Religious organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah can then use charity to draw people in initially then start to push a religious message as part of their charity. The same phenomenon occurs in Pakistan where Islamist groups run things like X-ray clinics which double as meeting places for the local Islamists.²¹⁰

Evangelical Christians have used charity to their advantage in terms of recruitment as well. Evangelicals see charity as involving a kind of exchange, in which the often middle-class donor expects a spiritual transformation in the recipient as a way to

²⁰⁸ Drury, *Terror and Civilization*, 13.

²⁰⁹ Jeurgensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 79.

²¹⁰ Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, (London: Verso, 2003), 264.

complete the exchange.²¹¹ Elisha argues that this idea of exchange stems from evangelical theology itself in which salvation is conditional on fully accepting Jesus.²¹² By believing in Jesus you are then saved, and since this is the only way to be saved, it is often framed as a kind of deal or exchange where you let Jesus in, and in exchange you will be saved come the Rapture. Doing good deeds and living a moral life is not enough to save you, you must participate in the direct exchange of accepting Jesus for salvation, just like the charity recipient should not expect to receive assistance without completing their end of the exchange. Charity can then be seen as a means for religious groups to both promote depoliticization, as well as win recruits to their anti-political cause.

* * *

Neoliberal economics and the resurgent religions are both inherently opposed to any kind of politics in the sense that was developed in the first half of this work. Neoliberalism and the resurgent religions have been concrete projects with an explicit goal of bringing about a post-political society in which the rationality of the market is freed from political control to make the most efficient decisions pertaining to the public good and where religion would once again become an organizing principle for society as a whole and not merely a belief to be held in private. This chapter has treated the two phenomena separately in order to demonstrate how they are depoliticizing on their own terms, while the next chapter will establish the argument that the two processes should be viewed as mutually reinforcing and thus part of the same depoliticizing process. The next chapter will establish how neoliberal globalization should be seen as a fragmentary rather than homogenizing force, and how this cultural fragmentation suits the resurgent religions. As

²¹¹ Omri Elisha, "Moral Ambitions of Grace: The Paradox of Compassion and Accountability in Evangelical Faith-Based Activism", *Cultural Anthropology* 23 no. 1 (2008), 178.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 157.

well the resurgent religions will be examined and shown to contain beliefs that are not only not in conflict with neoliberal economics, but outwardly friendly towards it.

CHAPTER 4: NEOLIBERALISM AND RELIGION AS MUTUALLY REINFORCING

We now turn to establishing the connection between the resurgent religions and neoliberalism; a connection which will be based on the fact that both are anti-political and thus create a kind of feedback loop of depoliticization. In this chapter the nature of the connection will be established, emphasizing that neither phenomena is the cause of the other, but that they have a mutually reinforcing relationship. Specific examples will then be investigated in order to demonstrate how both neoliberalism promotes the religious resurgence, and the religious resurgence reinforces neoliberalism. Although these examples are being taken from evangelical Christianity and Islam, this is not to imply that these are the only two resurgent religions which have this relationship with neoliberalism.

(i) The Nature of the Connection

To reiterate the thesis being advanced here, neoliberal globalization and the resurgent religions should not be viewed as opposing forces, but should be read as part of the same depoliticizing process and that the two phenomena have a mutually reinforcing effect on each other. This argument runs counter to much thinking on this issue, which usually posits neoliberal globalization as destructive of local cultures and the reassertion of a more fundamentalist type of religion as a way to oppose this process. This line of argument is typified by Benjamin Barber's jihad vs. McWorld thesis in which he argues that today's post-Cold War world is one where "the planet is falling precipitantly apart

AND coming reluctantly together at the very same moment.”²¹³ Barber argues that neoliberal globalization involves a rush of economic forces

that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize the world with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network: one McWorld...²¹⁴

At the same time, we have the forces of jihad, by which he means a proliferation of tribal religious identities (including but not limited to Islam) wishing to destroy “every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality”.²¹⁵ The two forces at play are radically opposed, but as Barber points out, they both erode democracy and are both anti-political.

The argument being advanced here is that rather than ‘jihad’ and ‘McWorld’ destroying politics in two radically opposed ways, what we are really dealing with is a case of McJihad. Neoliberal globalization is not as homogenizing as Barber thinks, but is actually a fragmentary process which reinforces the tribal religious attitude that Barber ascribes to ‘jihad’. At the same time, the resurgent religions are in no way antithetical to the products of neoliberal globalization, after all, as one of Osama Bin Laden’s henchmen told the British journalist Robert Fisk while driving him through the rough mountains of Afghanistan en route to interview the al-Qaida leader, “Toyota is good for jihad”.²¹⁶

Neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion are then not opposed processes, but in arguing they are connected, no causal relationship is being asserted. Neoliberalism did not cause the resurgence of religion, nor did the resurgence of religion

²¹³ Benjamin R. Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld”, *The Atlantic* (March 1992), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/3882/>

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Fisk, *Great War*, 3.

cause neoliberal globalization. However they are also not simply two disconnected processes that happened to both be anti-political. The depoliticization brought about by one has opened space for the other, allowing it to promote its own further depoliticizations allowing the two to act in concert to mutually reinforce each other without one being a cause of the other. Depending on the context, there have been different relationships between neoliberalism and the resurgent religions as to which one might have initiated the push for depoliticization that started the circle of reinforcement, and in some cases they worked in concert from the beginning. In the United States resurgent Christianity and neoliberals were linked from the beginning in Reagan's Republican Party, in India and Turkey, neoliberalism was not put into effect until after religious parties took control, while in countries like Canada or the United Kingdom, a religious resurgence was not visible until long after neoliberal reforms had been enacted. These different initial relationships further complicate any attempts to assert one as the cause of the other, but in all cases they did have a mutually reinforcing depoliticizing effect.

The mutually reinforcing relationship that is being asserted here between neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion is the same type of relationship that Weber pointed to between the Protestant ethic and capitalism. While Weber was critical of the Marxist historical materialist view that the Reformation was the result of economic processes, he was also not asserting the "foolish and doctrinaire thesis...that the spirit of capitalism...could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation."²¹⁷ In a reply to one of his critics, Weber stated that Calvinism has an

²¹⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1958; reprint 2003).

“elective affinity” for capitalism, and that the bourgeois have an “elective affinity” for certain lifestyles, including Protestant asceticism.²¹⁸ By elective affinity Weber is theorizing a way of positing relationships between ideas and material processes which are an alternative to both “mechanistic causalism” and functionalism.²¹⁹ Using Weber’s terminology, neoliberal globalization and the resurgent religions can be said to have an elective affinity for each other. The goal here is to show how the resurgence of religion has influenced neoliberal capitalism, as well as how neoliberal capitalism has influenced the resurgence of religion, without stating one as a cause of the other.

(ii) Neoliberal Globalization and its Affinity for the Resurgent Religions

There is no global “capitalist world-view,” no “capitalist civilization” proper; the fundamental lesson of globalization is precisely that capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu and Buddhist.

-- Slavoj Žižek²²⁰

(a) Neoliberal Globalization as Fragmentary Rather than Homogenizing

When Barber speaks of neoliberal globalization as ‘McWorld’ it conjures up images of the Americanization of the world. Differences are swept away as we all accept American-style consumer culture. Barber sees this Americanization as problematic, while someone like Fukuyama views it as essentially positive.²²¹ However the fear or hope that everyone would turn into Americans which existed shortly after the Cold War when neoliberal economics was sweeping across the world has not come to fruition. In fact while neoliberal globalization has resulted in a truly global economy, cultural fragmentation has

²¹⁸ Richard Herbert Howe, “Max Weber’s Elective Affinities: Sociology Within the Bounds of Pure Reason”, *The American Journal of Sociology* 84 no. 2 (1978), 368.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 367.

²²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, “Multitude, Surplus, and Envy”, *Rethinking Marxism* 19 no. 1 (2007), 52-53.

²²¹ Fukuyama, “The End of History?”.

increased. To claim cultural fragmentation solely as the work of the forces of 'jihad' and to claim it as an opposing force to those of the globalizing 'McWorld' as Barber does is to confuse the global with the universal.²²²

The forces of neoliberal globalization do not demand or spread any one sort of cultural model or lifestyle. We should not view today's globalized neoliberal capitalism as an expression of a certain culture, it is not inherently American or even Western for that matter, it manages to float above the level of states and cultures and is all too willing to adapt to the local cultural climate.²²³ Profit and the free circulation of capital are the only guiding ideals, thus we can have advocates of neoliberal globalization in the United States who are conservative Christians who equate neoliberalism with democracy and Christian values just as easily as the Hindu Nationalist Party in India can implement neoliberal reforms as part of its overall project to reassert Hindu culture and religion in India.²²⁴

Neoliberalism in its lack of a specific culture can then eat up any religion or lifestyle and integrate it into its overall framework. Examples of this abound, from the transformation of religious symbols like the *hijab* headscarf worn by Muslim women into consumer commodities marketed by transnational corporations such as Calvin Klein to the adaptation of fringe anti-establishment lifestyles like punk rock or even political activism and transforming them into mass marketed products. The ever popular t-shirts depicting the iconic image of Che Guevara as a mass marketed phenomena is a testament to the flexibility and lack of any kind of specific culture or world view other than the

²²² The difference between global and universal will be clarified later in the chapter.

²²³ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 204.

²²⁴ Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 85.

pursuit of profit and the associated depoliticization that is able to transform even a symbol of anti-capitalism into a product of capital.

Founder and long time Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew's statement that he was developing capitalism with "Asian values" is an excellent example of global capitalism being able to integrate local traditions into its global whole. Opening Singapore up into a bastion of free trade and finance capital did not mean adopting American style democracy or culture, but meant that values of discipline and respect for tradition become more pronounced and Singapore came to be seen as a model of how to do globalization for other East Asian countries.²²⁵ Neoliberal globalization is then not a matter of opening up and being subjected to foreign American ideas, but more of a realization that "Asian values" are actually neoliberal values. In a similar vein, as neoliberal economics fostered a retreat from public politics and into the private realm of self-care, New Age and East Asian religions became more popular in places such as the United States, as they had a similar "retreat into the self" message that was being promoted by neoliberalism.²²⁶

Neoliberal globalization is then not a project of universalization, but one that reinforces the fragmentary nature of the proliferation of exclusive religious identities. The true opposition today is then not ethnic and religious fundamentalists against the forces of neoliberal globalization, but the fragmentary impulse of globalization or what we might call McJihad, against anything universal.²²⁷ Since politics involves making universal claims, as was outlined above, to oppose the universal is to oppose politics. The global economy is another name for the perceived harmonious whole which is made up of a

²²⁵ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 205.

²²⁶ Boggs, "The Great Retreat", 754.

²²⁷ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 204.

number of different parts, which are all seen to have their place within the hierarchical whole. Globalization then does not eliminate local cultures or identities in favour of some forced Americanization, but incorporates them into the whole. To make a universal political claim is then to disrupt this global mosaic of cultural identities by making some particular injustice be representative of injustice as a whole, which can bring people together across cultural lines as part of a universal struggle. The assertion of particular identities in the face of neoliberal globalization is thus not a threat to it, but in most cases a source of profit to be embraced as these identities can be harnessed to sell new products. As Žižek argues, “multiculturalist openness versus a new fundamentalism is thus a false dilemma: they are the two faces of today’s post-political universe”.²²⁸ Contrary to much established opinion then, to disrupt the logic of economic globalization means asserting the universal, rather than the particular.

(b) Worldlessness and Identity

To lack a world is to lack a sense of permanence and grounding. Worldlessness is also a situation in which we lack shared meaning which results in a loss of common sense and an increase in superstition.²²⁹ Arendt goes on to describe the situation of worldlessness as one that is lacking in reality, the world in which we live is not seen as permanent, we have a sense of futility in our actions, and thus life loses its reality.²³⁰ As was argued above, neoliberal capitalism with its consumerism lacks a world, and thus the globalization of neoliberalism is in many ways synonymous with alienation from the

²²⁸ Ibid., 205.

²²⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 209.

²³⁰ Ibid., 120.

world.²³¹ To be globalized is then ironically then to have your world taken away from you.

Again we see that neoliberal globalization is not the imposition of a single homogenous Americanized culture on the world, but in actual fact something of the spread of meaninglessness. This erosion of previously stable ideas of the world was especially felt with the end of the Cold War as the stable notion of a conflict between two radically opposing world views became meaningless. Thus neoliberal globalization deprived people of any kind of “cognitive mapping” to explain the world, thus generating a lack of reality and causing people to search for new mappings, usually in the form of religion as the political options had been eroded.²³² The spread of neoliberal globalization then facilitated a return to religion by eliminating older ways of making sense of the world through either the Cold War conflict or the various secular nationalist movements of the post-colonial states. The return to religion is then not an attempt to resist the Americanized McWorld of neoliberal globalization, but a way to create new meaning in a world stripped of reality. The spread of neoliberal globalization is then the ultimate elimination of ‘grand narratives’ as the single world economy provides no sense of meaning as it actively depoliticizes the world and thus strips people of the ability to make sense of a common world through the world-affirming nature of politics.

The return to religion also acted as a kind of shock absorber for the spread of neoliberal globalization. In the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, making the often shocking transition from communism to a neoliberal form of capitalism had a jarring effect (which was even termed ‘shock therapy’) which resulted in the

²³¹ Žižek, “Multitude, Surplus, and Envy”, 53.

²³² Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 307.

disintegration of the old social order and of people's 'cognitive mapping' of how the world worked. The return to religion then acts as not a way to oppose this transition, but a way to make the transition easier by returning to religious forms of meaning which are less concerned with events happening in the material world, thus providing a sense of meaning and comfort to people.²³³ The return to religion is then the shock absorber which provides a 'cognitive mapping' for people to help them cope with these changes. Similar shock absorber effects can be seen in developed countries like the United States, as the onset of neoliberal globalization saw many jobs moved to poorer countries where manufacturing wages were much lower. The outsourcing of jobs generated a large increase in unemployment in the manufacturing belt of the United States, which is today the site of the largest concentration of Evangelicals in the country.

In the Third World countries of the Cold War era, religion had a shock absorber effect in two different ways. In addition to providing a 'cognitive mapping' in the wake of the destruction of communist parties and the discrediting of secular nationalist parties, religion provided a way of grounding their identities during periods of rapid economic development and modernization. Many newly middle class and relatively wealthy people in various countries supported the project of neoliberal globalization for its capacity to make them money, but at the same time wished to differentiate themselves from Americanism.²³⁴ Adopting a renewed commitment to religion allows participation in the global capitalist economy, without turning oneself into an American. One of the most blatant displays of this phenomenon of the middle class embracing religion can be found in the background of al-Qaida terrorists. Most of their more spectacular attacks or

²³³ Žižek, *Universal Exception*, 30.

²³⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 72-76.

attempted attacks have been the work of middle class professionals, often engineers, architects, or doctors, and not desperate poverty stricken victims of neoliberal restructuring.²³⁵ Furthermore al-Qaida has not consistently targeted the symbols of global capitalism. Although the World Trade Center was their most spectacular and symbolic attack, it should be seen as part of an overall attack on the pillars of American power, with the military and government in the form of the Pentagon and White House also targeted. The problem is then not so much “world trade”, but the American dominance of it at the time.

As neoliberal globalization swept across the planet depriving people of a world, the accompanying erosion of politics opened up space for religion. When people lack a political outlet for their discontent, they end up feeling helpless and often look to religion as a way to provide guidance and tell them what they can do.²³⁶ Lacking an earthly outlet for your grievances in the form of politics can then lead to these grievances being channelled into religious terms. The turn to religion as a remedy to the lack of political outlet of course ends up reinforcing the lack of politics that drives many people to religion in the first place, and we once again have a situation of mutually reinforcing depoliticization involving religion and neoliberal globalization. Harvey makes a similar point in arguing that since politics generates community, the alienation from the world and lack of political community due to the depoliticizing effects of neoliberalism leads people to seek out communities and solidarity in other forms.²³⁷ The deprivation of

²³⁵ Examples include 9/11 ringleader Mohammed Atta who held degrees in engineering and architecture and worked as an urban planner; 1993 World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef was an electrical engineer, two of those accused in the 2007 attempted al-Qaida attack on the Glasgow airport were medical doctors.

²³⁶ Boggs, “The Great Retreat”, 755-757.

²³⁷ Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 171.

community associated with the lack of a political world then leads people to seek out solidarity with others through everything from religious institutions to gangs.

Neoliberal globalization and its various depoliticizing mechanisms is then directly linked to facilitating the resurgence of religion. It promotes fragmentation rather than anything universal through its anti-political worldlessness which strips the world of meaning and brings about changes which have been difficult to cope with. The erosion of politics as a means of providing the world with reality and meaning has then opened up space for religion to be the prime means of providing meaning in much of the world. The various ways in which neoliberalism directly confronts and erodes politics then sets up an affinity with religion, as it provides people with a sense of meaning and way of understanding the world which is not necessarily a threat to neoliberal globalization and in fact has a mutually reinforcing effect due to the fact that the resurgent religions are also hostile to politics, thus providing an ally in the quest to erode political space.

(iii) The Resurgence of Religion as Reinforcement of Neoliberal Values

There has been in England, ever since the rise of the textile industry in Lancashire, a close alliance between missionaries and the cotton trade, for missionaries teach savages to cover up the human body and thereby increase the demand for cotton goods. If there had been nothing shameful about the human body, the textile trade would have lost this source of profit. This instance shows that we need never be afraid lest the spread of virtue should diminish our profits.

-- Bertrand Russell²³⁸

As we have seen above, neoliberal globalization is certainly no enemy to the resurgence of religion, as it has facilitated this resurgence in many ways. More contentious is the argument in the other direction, that the resurgent religions have an affinity for neoliberal

²³⁸ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, (New York: Touchstone, 1957), 153.

globalization. David Harvey goes so far as to make the claim that “evangelical Christians, Wahabi Islam, and some variants of Buddhism and Confucianism preach an intensely anti-market and specifically anti-neoliberal stance”.²³⁹ He says this despite the fact that earlier in the book he notes the confluence of evangelicals and neoliberals in Reagan’s Republican Party of the 1980s and the connections between the rise of the Hindu Nationalist Party and India with the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms. Harvey gives no examples or evidence to support his claim that the resurgent religions are actually hostile to neoliberalism, so there is no argument to directly refute thus this section will concentrate on demonstrating that the resurgent religions with their anti-political stances not only work hand in hand with the anti-political project of neoliberal globalization, but that these religions reinforce neoliberal values and are actually quite friendly to the neoliberal project.

(a) Evangelical Christianity and Neoliberal Values

One of the most obvious connections between the resurgent religions and neoliberalism is with charity. The state rolls back social spending, and religious charities jump into action to fill that gap. This is the case in much of the United States where charity given out by evangelical churches and individuals benefit from the retreat of the state by channelling people in need of help toward religion. However just as importantly is that evangelical Christians tend to not simply benefit from the retreat of the welfare state under neoliberalism but actively encourage it, as the state is linked with moral decay due its perceived liberal stance on issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage.²⁴⁰ Thus the privatization of welfare services and the impetus to rely on charity rather than state-run

²³⁹ Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 186.

²⁴⁰ Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 50.

programs becomes a bottom up demand by evangelicals. The neoliberal ideology of getting the state out of the economy and making it less “political” finds common ground with the evangelical desire to get the state out of moral issues and therefore make them religious issues, rather than potentially political issues to be debated and discussed. Here we again see the relationship of mutual reinforcement at work, as both neoliberals and evangelicals promote the same depoliticization of poverty and morality. Neither was a cause of the other, as religious charity has been around long before neoliberalism, or even capitalism for that matter, and neoliberals certainly believed in cutting back the welfare state independent of the support it received from religious groups.

Not only do evangelical Christians aim to win new recruits through charity, but this sort of religious charity also has a disciplining mechanism in which charity is meant not to be handed out simply to try to recruit people to Jesus, but also to create neoliberal subjects out of the recipients. In her study of evangelical Christian groups in suburban Tennessee, Elisha found that a common theme among both church-wide charity and the charity given by individual Evangelicals was a desire to hold the recipient accountable.²⁴¹ While the stated overall goal of most of those involved in these charities was to bring new people into the church, Elisha argues that a constant theme among the various groups and individuals studied was that they were attempting to instil a kind of self-enterprising entrepreneurial discipline consistent with neoliberalism into the recipients.²⁴² Here again are religious groups generating ideological support for the neoliberal notion of the ideal subject as a self-responsible privatized individual whose prime concern is taking care of themselves economically and spiritually, with no notion of any kind of public

²⁴¹ Elisha, “Moral Ambitions of Grace”, 161.

²⁴² Ibid., 176.

content associated with political citizenship.²⁴³ Evangelicals also then provide a critique of state-based social programs as mere handouts, which lack the disciplining mechanism that the evangelicals attempt to instil in the recipients thus making them both better Christians and neoliberal subjects at the same time.

To further unearth the promotion of neoliberal values inherent in evangelical Christianity, the popular *Left Behind* novels provide a good basis as much of popular evangelical beliefs surrounding issues such as the Rapture are largely derived from these books. The evangelical theologian Daniel J. Treier begrudgingly admits that these books have been extremely influential in shaping evangelical beliefs, much more than any kind of scholarly evangelical theology.²⁴⁴ In Strombeck's analysis of the books, he finds that they are a consistent hybrid of religion and neoliberal economics with the main characters being a kind of cross between wealthy suburban professionals who might live in a gated community and far right survivalists who stockpile guns and obsess over religion.²⁴⁵ The novels' depictions of post-apocalyptic Christians provide numerous insights into the role that evangelical Christianity has played in endorsing neoliberalism from below.

The first of these insights provided by the *Left Behind* novels is in the substantial activity of the Christian heroes. They operate as something of a guerrilla force distributing information about Christianity and trying to convert people, but they are also involved in setting up an underground free market economy since the antichrist's global government has set up a state-run economy.²⁴⁶ Neoliberal ideology is then bound up with

²⁴³ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 2.

²⁴⁴ Daniel J. Treier, "Scripture and Hermeneutics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* eds. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41.

²⁴⁵ Andrew Strombeck, "Invest in Jesus: Neoliberalism and the Left Behind Novels", *Cultural Critique* 64 (2006), 169.

²⁴⁶ Strombeck, "Invest in Jesus", 163.

evangelical theology as trying to minimize government involvement in the economy is seen as just as important an activity for Christians as spreading the message of Jesus. The take away message for the average Christian reading the books is then that a free market economy is associated with Christianity while government involvement in the economy is essentially satanic. Here we have another demonstration of the ultrapolitical impulse among religious groups to elevate conflict to a supernatural battle between good and evil which prevents any rational debate.

Thus when Obama proposes health care reform, it is viewed as bad not simply because it is perceived as an increase in government involvement in the economy and thus contrary to neoliberalism, but as actually an expression of evil due to the link between state involvement in the economy and the antichrist established in these novels, resulting in outrageous comparisons of Obama to Hitler or Stalin by popular Christian commentators such as Glenn Beck. The anti-political impulse to transform conflict into a transcendental battle between good and evil among many evangelical Christians helps explain why discussion around Obama's health care bill in the United States has been so irrational and where there has been so little actual discussion of the proposal's merits and problems. To try to promote a piece of public policy through explanation and argumentation is pointless when people you see as evil incarnate. This example shows another mutually reinforcing anti-political affect as evangelical Christians successfully derailed a possible opening for political debate surrounding the merits of government involvement in health care in the United States.

In addition to its link to neoliberalism through a mutual hostility to politics, evangelical Christianity with its belief in the impending Rapture is extremely worldless,

and therefore has a certain affinity with consumerism. In the perishable society of consumerism in which nothing is durable and in the evangelical belief that the world will end in the near future, there is of course the tendency to see politics and the attempts to leave some permanent trace behind, as pointless. Both attitudes tend to generate a sort of hedonistic impulse to enjoy what you can now before it all disappears. On this point today's evangelical Christians differ from Weber's Protestant ascetics who saw accumulation of wealth without enjoyment as their duty, although otherwise there are many similarities. Strombeck points out that the Christians in the *Left Behind* novels all tend to use all the latest high tech gadgets and drive SUVs, but not just any SUVs but the most excessive gas guzzlers available, Hummers and Range Rovers.²⁴⁷ Of course any kind of environmental politics which would have us consider the impact that our actions might have for the future of the world are rendered pointless due to the evangelical belief in the coming end of the world. The consumerist ethic of rampant and wasteful consumption which environmental politics would question is then reinforced by the evangelical Christians who lack a sense of reality due to the fact they believe the world will end soon.²⁴⁸ The neoliberal ethic of consumerism is then reinforced by the worldlessness of evangelicals who believe that the Rapture will happen in the near future, thus caring about any effect they have on the Earth for future generations is a pointless endeavour.

Even the means of spreading evangelical Christianity by way of the *Left Behind* novels is an expression of consumerism. While Christian groups have traditionally handed out Bibles free of charge, the *Left Behind* novels are consumer commodities in

²⁴⁷ Strombeck, "Invest in Jesus", 168.

²⁴⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 120. Arendt explains that when you believe the world will end soon, life loses all reality.

themselves. The authors of the novels and the publishing company have thus found a way to link profit with saving souls.²⁴⁹ To enter into the community of evangelicals, who have made the series of novels best sellers, starts with purchasing a commodity, so it is no surprise that consumerism has been integrated into the evangelical ethic.

This hedonistic impulse toward more and more consumer items as part of evangelical thinking was on display during the subprime mortgage bubble in the United States. Many evangelical churches preach a 'prosperity gospel' leading people to believe that faith in Jesus will lead to material rewards.²⁵⁰ Subprime and no down payment mortgages given to people who otherwise would not qualify due to a lack of funds were interpreted as gifts from God, rather than risky financial investments which could result in dramatic increases in monthly payments and even foreclosures down the road as market conditions changed and the housing bubble burst. The prosperity gospel of these churches then made willing participants out of church goers as they were reassured by their religious beliefs to take on a risky mortgage while at the same time made them easy targets for "greedy brokers".²⁵¹ Combine these sorts of beliefs with the often extravagant displays of wealth by some of the so called 'megachurches' and the average believer will be left with the sense that God wants them to live a luxurious lifestyle, even if they cannot actually afford it. Maxing out your credit card not only fuels a consumer-driven economy in which people cannot afford many consumer items due to the loss of jobs to places where labour is cheaper but it also pleases Jesus.

²⁴⁹ Strombeck, "Invest in Jesus", 183.

²⁵⁰ David Van Biema, "Maybe We Should Blame God for the Subprime Mess", *Time* (October 3, 2008), <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1847053,00.html>

²⁵¹ Van Biema, "Maybe We Should Blame God".

Not only do we find a general hostility to politics among evangelicals, but there is a particular fear of the creation of any sort of universality. In the *Left Behind* novels, the antichrist is the Secretary General of the United Nations who goes on to convert the UN into something called the ‘Global Community’ which is described in the books as being essentially humanitarian in ideology but morphs into totalitarianism on account of the government-managed economy.²⁵² Strombeck argues that this hostility to anything global by evangelicals is in conflict with the essentially globalizing impulse of neoliberalism, and thus represents a contradiction within the fusion of evangelical Christianity and neoliberalism.²⁵³ However as has been argued above, there is a difference between global and universal, and both neoliberalism and the evangelicals are actually opposed to the universal and not the global. While neoliberalism has fostered an interconnected global economy, at the same time it is explicitly hostile to any form of universal politics. The creation of a universal political stage that operated at the same level as the global economy would allow for politics to achieve a scale in which the economy could be made subject to political debate and action. The *Left Behind* novels are then entirely consistent with neoliberal thinking in seeing the formation of a “global community” as a potential political threat to the unregulated free market. Evangelicals fear such a global community not only for explicitly pro-neoliberal reasons but due to the general hostility towards politics and the link between politics and secularism.

Evangelical Christianity has operated in the United States and to a lesser degree elsewhere to provide bottom up popular support for neoliberalism and its hostility to politics. At the same time evangelicals have benefitted from the depoliticization brought

²⁵² Strombeck, “Invest in Jesus”, 163.

²⁵³ Ibid., 171.

on by neoliberalism thus creating a cycle of mutual reinforcement. Neoliberal logic cuts state services and tells people to instead find some charity; evangelicals tell people not to rely on the state but instead come get some of our charity. Both have a worldless consumerist ethic, and both remain fundamentally opposed to any form of universal politics, especially at a level that transcends the state and might operate on a similar scale to the economy. To state the claim that evangelical Christians are somehow opposed to neoliberalism is then not borne out by the evidence.

(b) Islam and Neoliberalism

Making the argument that evangelical Christianity is complimentary to neoliberalism is not contentious due to the association of conservative evangelicalism with the Republican Party in the United States, who have since Reagan actively pursued neoliberal policies. To argue Islam has an affinity for neoliberalism is much more controversial, especially when so many radical Islamist groups see the American way of life as their prime enemy. However as has been emphasized above, we should not conflate neoliberal globalization with Americanization. To be a participant in the globalized economy and to adopt neoliberal rhetoric about economic self-responsibility, the evils of government intervention in the economy, consumerism, and individual entrepreneurship does not necessarily mean you are adopting American culture. Again neoliberalism is essentially cultureless and adaptable, it can enter into a symbiotic relationship with evangelicals in the United States just as easily as it can adapt itself to and be claimed by the proponents of “Asian values”, Hindu nationalism, or Islam.

The return to Islam should not be seen as a reaction against globalization, but part of the process. Opposition to American foreign policy in the Middle East also does not

equate to opposition to neoliberal globalization, as even Osama bin Laden's first career was as a transnational businessman. Neoliberal globalization has not been destroying the traditions of the Middle East with its imposition of a single culture but has interacted with Islam and the two phenomena have affected each other's development and acted as supports for each other.²⁵⁴ The important commonality of course is the fact that neoliberalism and Islam are both inherently anti-political, and thus the depoliticization brought on by one benefits the other.

The most blatant example of the mutually reinforcing relationship between Islam and neoliberalism is found in Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) which, like Reagan's Republicans in the early 1980s, combines neoliberal economics with conservative religious-based social policies.²⁵⁵ The introduction of neoliberalism and integration into the globalized economy has meant for Turkey not the imposition of a secular, rationalist, and supposedly American culture, but the exact opposite in the rollback of Turkey's once staunch secularism in favour of a return to localized culture in the form of a resurgent Islam. Islam and neoliberalism then become integrated in popular opinion, and many Muslim supporters of neoliberalism in Turkey explicitly link economic development with the return to Islam, thereby linking secularism and nationalist import substitution economic policies as the cause of underdevelopment.²⁵⁶ The neoliberal economics of the AKP are then seen as Islamic economics, which means globalization is endorsed by Islam. Again we see the fragmentary effect of neoliberal globalization, which although promoting a singular economic system, causes a diffusion

²⁵⁴ Emin Baki Adas, "The Making of Entrepreneurial Islam and the Islamic Spirit of Capitalism", *Journal for Cultural Research* 10 no. 2 (2006), 115.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁵⁶ Adas, "Spirit of Islamic Capitalism", 125.

of cultural attitudes. While neoliberalism can be seen as an expression of Islamic economics in Turkey, it can just as easily be seen as an expression of Christian economics in the United States.

Islamic business owners and entrepreneurs see neoliberal economic policies as not only endorsed by Islam but as an expression of it as well. Much like Weber's Protestant ascetics, economic activity becomes a spiritual work. Adas gives an example that came from the president of MUSIAD, a major Islamic business organization, who stated that since God puts minerals in the ground, it would amount to a denial of God not to build a mine, process, and then export those resources.²⁵⁷ Neoliberalism then becomes integrated into theology, with business groups such as MUSIAD providing references to the Koran and the hadiths to justify neoliberal principles such as government non-intervention in the economy. Adas cites one such Islamic economic consultant as saying that Muslims should support free market principles and oppose government intervention on issues such as prices saying that "it is Allah who determines prices".²⁵⁸ As it turns out, the invisible hand of the market is actually just the hand of God. Another Islamic businessman interviewed by Adas, in arguing that neoliberalism and Islam are fully compatible stated that "had the prophet lived today, on his business card it would have been written 'exporter and importer'".²⁵⁹ Islam is then cast as explicitly supporting neoliberal principles and cannot be read as a reaction against it.

One of the more important anti-political synergies between neoliberalism and Islam is their mutual hostility toward unions. For neoliberals unions are seen as political interference in the smooth operation of free markets. For Islamic entrepreneurs,

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 129.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 134.

²⁵⁹ Adas, "Spirit of Islamic Capitalism", 125.

corporations are viewed as a kind of extension of the family, with the CEO being like the father who gives orders and is to be obeyed by the rest of the family. To form a union amounts to children uniting to rebel against their father, and is seen as not only an economic problem, but as an affront to Islamic social principles. To use the terminology of the classification of anti-political regime types outlined in the second chapter, this is an example of archipolitics, in that the corporation is seen to be a harmony of parts, each with a role to play in the hierarchy. Politics amounts to dissent and disruption of harmony, and thus political activism in the form of unionism is to be strictly opposed as disruptive and heretical. Islam is then an important factor used by business owners as it already contains an ethic of regimented self-discipline, which is then applied to the work place to enforce an anti-union and self-sacrificing work ethic which helps keep labour costs down.²⁶⁰

Many of these pro-neoliberal Muslims see their religion as providing a necessary moral component to economics that is seen to be lacking in the West. Thus to criticize Western lifestyles as decadent or lacking morality as some Islamists are prone to do, is not a condemnation of the economic system, which gets separated out of the criticism. The hybrid of Islam with neoliberalism is then a superior version of capitalism in the eyes of the Islamic neoliberals because unlike the neoliberalism of secular countries, the religious aspect provides moral guidance to the entrepreneurs.²⁶¹ To increase your profits is then both pleasing to God in and of itself as well as a way to strengthen the Islamic community as a whole through increased charity as a result of increased wealth.²⁶² To remain poor and be concerned with living a modest pious life as much of more traditional

²⁶⁰ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 82.

²⁶¹ Adas, "Spirit of Islamic Capitalism", 127.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 130.

forms of Islam have taught, is then directly critiqued by members of the resurgent brand of Islam since it does nothing to help the community as a whole. Here we once again have this group aspect coming into play which separates the resurgent religions from the older versions which are in decline.

Rather than directly opposing neoliberal globalization, a common theme in resurgent Islam is to try to shape it by providing a moral dimension to it through Islam. Complaints about the permissive Western lifestyle from the more militant variations within Islam are often interpreted as a critique of consumerism, but they tend to focus on the idea that there is a lack of morality in the West, resulting from their secularism.²⁶³ Consumerism is then not inherently bad; it can be redeemed by providing an Islamic morality which would attempt to prohibit people from the consumption of certain items such as alcohol which represent the immorality of Western consumerism. The real target of the rhetorical attacks on the West and Western lifestyle are not neoliberal globalization but more precisely the perception of the West as lacking a moral element provided by religion. To assume that the rejection of a Western secular lifestyle amounts to a rejection of neoliberal globalization requires the assumption that globalization is a culturally homogenizing force, when in reality it is culturally fragmentary with neoliberalism willing to take on various social or religious beliefs as long as the economic aspects remain basically intact.

On the surface, the militant terrorist groups within the resurgent Islam seem to provide a counter example, as they often explicitly attack capitalism and globalization. Early Islamist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb who would later have significant influence

²⁶³ Stephen Vertigans and Philip W. Sutton, "Globalization Theory and Islamic Praxis", *Global Society* 16 no. 1 (2002), 36.

on groups such as al-Qaida, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Islamic Jihad, linked capitalism with secularism and saw the two operating together to corrupt American society. He even went so far as to predict (writing in the 50s) that communism would win out in the Cold War due to the utter moral corruption of American capitalism, and that once the world went communist, people would abandon it for Islam.²⁶⁴ Similarly in his video speech marking the sixth anniversary of 9/11, Osama bin Laden urges Americans to abandon capitalism for Islam and cites globalization and corporations as causes of the corruption of the Bush government.²⁶⁵ However bin Laden goes on to equate capitalism with polytheism and secularism arguing that capitalism is problematic because it allows humans to make laws, when all laws should come from God. He describes capitalism as polytheistic since instead of giving credit to God for profits people make, they give credit to themselves or corporations.²⁶⁶ The term capitalism here is largely a stand in for secularism as these complaints with capitalism have little to do with economics, profit is not necessarily bad; the real problem for bin Laden is again the lack of acknowledgement of God and Islam in the money making process.

One of the few specifically economic complaints that bin Laden makes with regard to capitalism in the 2007 speech is that it involves “insane taxes”.²⁶⁷ At the end of the speech when he calls for Americans to convert to Islam, one of his most prominent arguments is that under Islam there are no taxes, just the *zakat* which is the mandatory charity in Islam, which amounts to a mere 2.5% of income. So despite blaming

²⁶⁴ John C. Zimmerman, “Sayyid Qutb’s Influence on the 11 September Attacks”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16 no. 2 (2004), 232.

²⁶⁵ Osama Bin Laden, “‘The Solution’ – A Video Speech from Usama bin Laden Addressing the American People on the Occasion of the Sixth Anniversary of 9/11”, transcript and translation by SITE Intelligence Group, <http://counterterrorismblog.org/site-resources/images/SITE-OBL-transcript.pdf>

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Bin Laden, “The Solution”.

capitalism, bin Laden is adopting the rhetoric of neoliberalism, arguing people's economic activity under Islam would be free from government interference in the form of taxation. Bin Laden made similar arguments sympathetic to a neoliberal point of view in his 1996 declaration of jihad against the Americans and Saudis in which he specifically complains about the Saudi government imposing high taxes and trade tariffs, which likely had a direct effect on his construction business.²⁶⁸ He also rails against the Saudi monarchy for being economically corrupt and for engaging in wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars, which are both consistent themes of neoliberalism.²⁶⁹ These economic complaints are interspersed among complaints about the Saudi government ignoring *Sharia* law, allowing the "International Atheists" (Americans and their allies) to set up bases in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War, and various complaints regarding Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.²⁷⁰ So while many militant Islamists like bin Laden will rhetorically attack capitalism, they use the term to essentially mean an economy which operates in the context of a secular society.

Islam is then not the expression of a radical rejection of neoliberal globalization, but yet another example of how neoliberalism is supported from below by various religious groups who adopt it as an expression of their own theology, rather than viewing it as an alien imposition which threatens their traditions as it is often argued. Governments such as the AKP in Turkey have explicitly integrated Islam into their policies of economic development in the age of globalization, while cycles of depoliticization brought on by both the resurgence of Islam and neoliberal economic

²⁶⁸ Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites", translated by the Combating Terrorism Center, West Point Military Academy (1996).

<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/AFGP-2002-003676-Trans-Meta.pdf>

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

policies have led to an affinity between the two in other countries where Islam and neoliberalism are not so formally integrated.

* * *

The resurgence of religion and neoliberal globalization, both of which started to occur at roughly the same time, should not be viewed as opposite forces or as mere coincidence. The two phenomena have had a mutually reinforcing affect on each other; with the depoliticizations brought on by neoliberalism having opened a political void which is being filled by religion. At the same time religion has been providing a basis of grassroots support for these neoliberal economic reforms, as the resurgent religions claim neoliberal economics as part of their theology due to the attractive anti-political aspects contained within these economic policies. The resurgent religions associate politics with secularism and thus see politics as corruptive of morality on certain trigger issues. A generalized anti-political economic ideology such as neoliberalism then fits nicely into the overall world view of the resurgent religions. The mutual hostility to politics then creates a feedback loop of more and more depoliticization, thus accelerating the hold each has on society. Neither phenomenon is the cause of the other, but both certainly have an elective affinity for each other.

CONCLUSION

The anti-political impulse and mutually reinforcing effect that both neoliberal globalization and the resurgence of religion have had has resulted in a situation today largely deprived of politics. This post-political society is then insulated from change as a lack of politics means a lack of natality; the creation of something new becomes extremely difficult. With the economic crisis of 2008, neoliberalism as an economic system largely fell into disrepute as neoliberal policies were rightfully seen as precipitating the crisis. However having been successfully eroding politics for the past twenty or so years, neoliberalism remains mostly dominant²⁷¹ despite the disrepute it suffered, and there seems to be next to no prospect for a significant reordering of the economy. To bring about such a substantial change would require a space for politics at the global level which does not currently exist. In this way neoliberalism has insulated itself from change, even after it has demonstrated itself to be a failure in economic terms. The lack of actual action despite a realization of the importance of the issue can be seen on the issue of climate change as well. Despite the fact most world leaders recognize it as a legitimate problem, there is an inability to engage in concrete action due to the lack of politics resulting from the structure and continued prominence of the international state system.

Before we can arrive at a situation where politics is possible on a global stage along the lines of what Arendt describes in terms of speech, action, and natality we must engage in politics in the manner suggested by Rancière in terms of striving for equality as part of the act of creating a stage for politics. One of the key points that Rancière makes

²⁷¹ Although most countries have been adopting Keynesian-style deficit spending policies to get out of the recession, it is highly unlikely they will maintain Keynesian counter-cyclical policies in a growth period, and will likely go back to standard neoliberalism. We might call this neoliberalism-lite.

is that political action must be universal. Before we can even conceive of a politics that is global in scope, we need to attempt to generate universal positions. A universal politics would be precisely the opposite of most of today's anti-political demands for the recognition of cultural or religious difference, made by everyone from the postmodern left to the xenophobic right. Our attempts at politicization need to elevate particular wrongs to be stand-ins for universal injustice, rather than the fragmentary and particularistic demands to be recognized as different made by and on behalf of religious, ethnic, and cultural groups. Before we can think about making structural changes, we need to foster a universal cosmopolitan attitude which will bring the people of the world together as equals, and thus create the conditions for the formation of a global political stage that would allow us to debate and act on the most important issues of today, which are all global in scope.

At the same time, the resurgence of religion continues to be a significant factor in world affairs, and is a major obstacle to fostering a sense of cosmopolitan equality necessary for the creation of a new global political stage. While religion deserves to be undermined in its own right for its hostility to politics, its fragmentary effect is not something to be ignored. When Hardt and Negri call for the creation of a global political movement, they expect workers to form the basis of the movement.²⁷² In today's divisive cultural climate, it is not realistic to believe that people would set aside their particularistic religious identities and come together over shared economic grievances. Religion cannot be ignored when attempting to create new political spaces, as it is incredibly divisive and often provides support for the structure of the global economy

²⁷² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

from below. To be political means to take universality seriously, a universality which seeks to undermine the fragmentary and exclusionary nature of the resurgent religions.

To be in favour of politics then requires opposition to both neoliberalism and the resurgence of religion, as both are mutually reinforcing agents of depoliticization. While the two processes are often viewed as opposites, with the affirmation of religious identity interpreted as resistance to neoliberal globalization, it has been shown above that the two phenomena are closely linked through their opposition to politics. Politics is something inherently positive, it allows people to have their voice heard and their opinions considered and thus brings people together. Through political action we are able to create something new and bring about change, while at the same time establishing new relationships with people and reinforcing a sense of equality. This is the politics that happens on the stage, whereas the act of striving for the recognition of your voice as equal to everyone else's and as deserving to be heard is part of the politics of creating and getting on to a political stage. Defining politics in this way demonstrates how both neoliberalism and the resurgent religions have acted in concert to both destroy existing stages for politics as well as undermine attempts to create new ones.

By providing this positive definition of politics it is hoped that the reputation of politics can be restored, and that we can start to see politics as an activity that is desirable to engage in. Attempts to promote repoliticization will fall on deaf ears if politics continues to be seen as an expression of oppressive power relations or the distant and underhanded dealings of unrepresentative elected politicians. By viewing politics in this light, it becomes apparent that we suffer from a lack of space and potential for politics today. This post-political situation should be seen as an underlying problem that needs to

be dealt with before there can be substantive action on other issues. Before we can deal with the specifics of very real and pressing issues such as the organization of the economic system, the place of religion in society, the environment, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, human rights, or any other number of issues, we need a space for politics so that we can not only bring about change and action but to have the various opinions on these issues considered and debated. The desire to create a space for politics should be seen as the root issue which can bind people of different backgrounds and concerns together. The desire for a stage for politics can be seen as a new universal position which can replace the now irrelevant calls for the working class to form this universal.

In dealing with the resurgence of religion and neoliberal globalization, I have touched on two of the most important developments of the past few decades in terms of the overall impact they have had not just on politics but on every aspect of life. There is a third major development which has similarly important and wide-ranging effects; the development of advanced computer, robotic, and information technology as well as its application to advanced understandings of the human body through genetics and brain science. The impact these new technologies are having and will have on politics is an area for further study. Could the internet facilitate politics by overcoming the space and populations concerns that have previously been cited as the major reason why direct participation in politics is impossible, or is it simply fostering more fragmentation and exclusion by allowing people to more easily find and stick with people who share their point of view thus actually eroding plurality?

There are also questions surrounding the development of intelligent robots and certain bioengineering experiments. Without a realm of politics to debate the possible implications of such novel technology we could end up with either religious groups forcing uninformed prohibitions on us or the development of technologies which would be better left undeveloped. A blanket ban on stem cell research brought on by religious groups without a proper debate could be just as destructive as the development of military-use intelligent robots free of any political debate or control. There are also questions surrounding the relationship of politics to mortality. It has been argued above that seeing our lives as mortal produces motivation to engage in politics, but could there be politics in a situation where physical death has been overcome technologically? Questions such as this need to be considered before such technologies are developed and need to be considered in the context of politics.

In today's post-political society, when problems are increasingly global and therefore have potentially catastrophic consequences, politics is needed more than ever. To deal with world spanning problems such as the environment, economic crises, nuclear weapons, and religious terrorism, we need an equally global political stage to play out the debates surrounding these issues and to create a space to engage in the action needed to deal with these problems. In a global context, the recognition of the existence of a plurality of opinions and the consequential conflict among them is absolutely necessary to avoid the potential violence which could result if there is no political outlet for these disagreements. A reinvigorated politics may be the only thing that can save us.

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