Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt on Labor

Author(s): ANDREA VELTMAN

Source: *Hypatia*, WINTER 2010, Vol. 25, No. 1, FEAST Special Issue (WINTER 2010), pp. 55-78

Published by: Wiley on behalf of Hypatia, Inc.

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40602640

Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt on Labor

ANDREA VELTMAN

Comparing the typologies of human activities developed by Beauvoir and Arendt, I argue that these philosophers share the same concept of labor as well as a similar insight that labor cannot provide a justification or evaluative measure for human life. But Beauvoir and Arendt think differently about work (as contrasted with labor), and Arendt alone illuminates the inability of constructive work to provide non-utilitarian value for human existence. Beauvoir, on the other hand, exceeds Arendt in examining the ethical implications of our existential need for a plurality of free peers in a public realm.

The writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt contain a strikingly similar characterization of the labor necessary to maintain or reproduce human life. In both *The Second Sex* and *The Human Condition*, reproductive labor is not only onerous, repetitive, and futile but also unable to supply a justification or non-utilitarian value for human life. As distinguished from transcendent activities, productive work, or self-expressive action, labor itself produces no great works or deeds worthy of remembrance, nor does it directly contribute to constructing the artifice of the human world that distinguishes human existence from unchanging animal life. The everyday labor necessary for turning the raw into the cooked, dirt into cleanliness, or children into developed human beings secures our individual survival and the life of the species, but the products of labor are inherently ephemeral; reproductive labor eventually evaporates into the never-ending cycle of biological life.[1]

This disparaging characterization of reproductive labor may appear to be a relic of second-wave feminism or a piece of outmoded ideology sprung from a masculinist philosophical tradition. In the past few decades, feminist ethical and social philosophers have often critiqued Beauvoir in particular and the

Hypatia vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter, 2010)

Marxist and existentialist tradition in general for failing to recognize the potential for creativity and self-expression in the forms of reproductive labor often performed by women and, more broadly, for valorizing male values as human values.[2] Even scholars sympathetic to the work of Beauvoir sometimes concede the basic force of the feminist critique of her concept of immanence: Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, for instance, writes that the primary shortcoming of Beauvoir's dichotomy between transcendence and immanence is its implication that "motherhood and domestic labor are regarded as immanence, i.e., as non-creative and non-productive, as not being projects, and thus as not creating value" (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996, 239). Other feminist theorists note that the concept of reproductive labor, as found in philosophers from Marx to Beauvoir, re-inscribes a dichotomy between nature and culture, for reproductive labor merely sustains a metabolism with nature, whereas productive work transcends nature and contributes to the historical progress of human civilizations.

Recent feminist critiques of the Marxist and existentialist concept of labor have been important in bringing to light a failure to appreciate the complexity and creative potential of human reproductive activities. Not only can life-giving activities like cooking, tending to the home, and caring for children provide outlets for self-expression (not to mention pleasure and enjoyment) but parenting as a whole also contributes beings of unique and enduring value to the world. Moreover, as parenting well requires virtues like patience, sensitivity, understanding, and good humor, characterizing child-rearing as mere reproduction of species-life undervalues its challenges and potential for accomplishment with excellence.[3] As Virginia Held has noted in using Beauvoir's own terms to undermine a Beauvoirian distinction between creative production and repetitive reproduction, "to give birth to a new human being capable of contributing to the transformation of human culture is to transcend what existed before. And the activity of mothering, as it shapes a human child into a distinctive social person, is even more clearly capable of transcendence" (Held 1989, 376).

Yet the idea that feminist social theorists should elevate or celebrate reproductive labor, in order to assert the dignity of women or create parity between masculine and feminine experiences, begs a key meta-ethical question concerning the labor of the oppressed: does the labor of maintaining life appear less valuable in Western philosophies and cultures because women and the politically marginalized perform it, or do the marginalized perform it because it is less valuable, meaningful, or fulfilling than other human activities? Meditating upon this Euthyphro-like question is helpful both in addressing feminist critiques of Beauvoir and Arendt and in positioning a feminist theory of labor on a correct conceptual foundation. Although theorists of labor have yet to explore this fundamental question, feminist theorists who celebrate feminine reproductive experience often begin with the idea that reproductive labor has been

wrongly maligned within Western philosophical traditions and cultures but is not in itself less valuable than other human activities. In *The Politics of Reproduction*, Mary O'Brien, for instance, railing against the low social value assigned to reproductive activities, writes in direct opposition to Beauvoir that "the low social and philosophical value given to reproduction and to birth is not ontological, not immanent, but socio-historical, and the sturdiest plank in the platform of male supremacy" (O'Brien 1981, 75). For O'Brien and others, a trans-valuation of the labor largely performed by women assists a broader social recognition of the worth of women ourselves.

In contrast, I would maintain that the daily labor of maintaining life does not appear lowly because women, political outsiders, and alien insiders perform it; rather, the marginalized labor at the mundane preservation of life because this labor is frequently less fulfilling (or more tedious, taxing, stupefying, draining, or disgusting) than other human activities. Subordinate or second-class social status is often borne out in practice in a relegation to chores that one would rather have someone else perform, or in toiling to maintain the lives of others. Even if the life-giving activities of pregnancy, birth, and parenting can be sources of power or self-affirmation, we should not extol the value of such labor as scrubbing toilets, laundering linens, cleaning floors, or hoeing fields in order to reclaim the moral worth of the oppressed, for the basic dignity of the oppressed transcends their labor, which fails to express or actualize their human worth. Further, if feminist theorists begin with a recognition that much reproductive labor does not lend life significance, we can better address unjust distributions of unfulfilling labor, including housework. To believe conversely that elevating labor will lend dignity to women risks re-inscribing the very patriarchal sexual divisions of labor that must be transformed and transcended in order for women to achieve genuine liberation and fulfillment.[4]

The writings of Beauvoir and Arendt provide a key resource for a feminist-philosophical shift away from celebrating reproductive labor, for both thinkers develop typologies of human activities that illuminate the inability of reproductive labor to provide an evaluative measure or justification for human life. Whereas Arendt writes that labor cannot express human freedom or reveal the unique living essence of the person, Beauvoir argues similarly that a justification for living requires transcending the maintenance of life through self-expressive creative activity or through the production of something durable. Despite working within divergent phenomenological frameworks, both develop the insight that labor is an existential tedium, essential only as a means of living. Without labor, life cannot continue. But laboring to preserve life cannot provide a reason as to *why* one lives, and labor is therein inessential within a philosophical arena of non-utilitarian value. For both Beauvoir and Arendt, meaning cannot be found in the satisfaction of the material demands of life itself.

In this comparative analysis of Beauvoir and Arendt, I endeavor to demonstrate not only that the two share the same concept of labor and a similar insight that labor cannot imbue life with value; I also argue that the broader phenomenological typologies of human activities within which these discussions of labor are embedded—action, work, and labor for Arendt and transcendence and immanence for Beauvoir—also bear salient similarities. Both Arendtian action and Beauvoirian transcendence lend justification to the toil of labor by opening new possibilities to humankind, laying a foundation for a new future, or engaging the self-expressive individual in a public world among a plurality of other free beings. Beauvoirian transcendence also overlaps the Arendtian category of work, for Beauvoir also characterizes transcendence as activity that produces durable world-structures and artifacts, in contrast to activities that merely maintain life in perpetuity. Moreover, both Beauvoir and Arendt are keenly concerned with the human aspiration to achieve freedom from labor via social structures in which some individuals labor to meet the daily biological needs of others. Whereas Beauvoir designates this phenomenon as oppression, Arendt appears to see it as written into the human condition, inherent in the nature of labor itself.

Yet there are also significant differences in the typologies of human activities developed by Beauvoir and Arendt: most notably, Beauvoir operates with a basic duality between labor and activity that breaks beyond the mere reproduction of life, with the result that she locates the human *raison d'être* in constructive activity and attends to the potential for self-realization and liberation within productive work more so than does Arendt. Arendt, by contrast, emphasizes the instrumentality inherent in the activity of working and argues that the purpose of human existence must be sought beyond the utilitarian activities of productive work and world-building, lest the human beings confront a predicament of ultimate meaninglessness. In this respect, Beauvoir and Arendt think differently about work, but share a basic normative contrast between the labor necessary to sustain life and human activity that is constructive, productive, inventive, or self-revelatory.

As I will also be at pains to demonstrate, the striking similarities between Arendt and Beauvoir on the topic of labor should not be explained away with reference to a simple common indebtedness to Karl Marx. Such a reduction glosses over the subtle, critical analyses and creative appropriations that both make of Marx, and, moreover, neither of the relevant distinctions in Beauvoir and Arendt collapses into Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labor (or production and reproduction), even if both are partly informed by Marx and by an older, Aristotelian distinction between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity. On the one hand, Arendt suggests that Marx collapses a fundamental distinction between labor and work and eschews his ideal of communist revolution that would emancipate the laboring classes;

on the other hand, Beauvoir retains his ideal of self-realization through creative work but develops a dichotomy between transcendence and immanence that is more multifaceted than Marx's concepts of productive and unproductive labor.

Labor and Human Existence in *The Second Sex*

The Second Sex does not contain a straightforward analysis of labor in the manner that *The Human Condition* lays bare the nature of labor alongside other phenomenological categories of human activity. Indeed, I would suggest that the lack of comparative scholarship on Arendt and Beauvoir on this topic stems from the fact that Beauvoir's analysis of labor is largely buried within her discussions of marriage and motherhood, her analysis of nomadic history, and her use of the Hegelian dichotomy of transcendence and immanence. The dichotomy between transcendence and immanence is traditionally understood as a metaphysical construct rather than as a typology of human activities, but, as I have argued elsewhere, over the course of her early ethical treatises and *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir develops the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence in a less metaphysical direction, emphasizing that transcendence takes place in constructive and productive activity, whereas immanence mires the oppressed in the everyday labor necessary to sustain life (Veltman 2006 and 2008).

In *The Second Sex*, transcendence and immanence are contrasted not only in terms of their relation to time—transcendence expands present horizons into the future, whereas immanence perpetuates the present—but also in terms of what the two accomplish. Achieved "in work and action" (Beauvoir 1952, 505 and 186), transcendence engages the individual in the world and situates her among other free beings in laying a foundation for a new future, creating an enduring artifact, enabling individual self-expression, transforming or annexing the world, or in some other fashion contributing positively to the constructive endeavors of the human race. Immanence, on the other hand, produces nothing durable through which we move beyond ourselves but merely perpetuates life or maintains the status quo. Activities of immanence include not only the everyday labors that sustain and repair the body and mind, like cooking, cleaning, and, presumably, television watching, but also bureaucratic paper-pushing and biological functions such as giving birth. Beauvoir occasionally characterizes immanence as repetitive and uncreative (66–69 and 474–78), although activities of immanence are quintessentially futile—immanence consumes time and labor but accomplishes nothing—and it is the combination of necessity and futility involved in maintenance labor that, in turn, makes some forms of immanence necessarily repetitive.

Furthermore, since labors of immanence merely sustain life and achieve nothing more than its continuation, they cannot themselves serve as the justifying ground for living. "Life," Beauvoir writes, "does not carry within itself

its reasons for being" (Beauvoir 1952, 68). As life is not self-justifying, and one needs a reason to labor to maintain life in the first place, human beings must transcend merely living through an enduring accomplishment, lest we persist in toil of maintaining life absurdly. Putting the matter in terms of the reproduction of our species-life, Beauvoir writes:

> On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. . . . [I]n serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future. (Beauvoir 1952, 68)

> Life is occupied in both perpetuating itself and in surpassing itself; if all it does is maintain itself, then living is only not dying, and human existence becomes indistinguishable from an absurd vegetation. (Beauvoir 1948, 83)

Transcending the repetition of biological life, man historically has represented transcendence given his participation in the activities that set up the world over and against nature: he remodels the earth, creates new values, takes risks, fights, progresses, conquers—in short, he accomplishes what surpasses the maintenance of life itself. Woman, on the other hand, originally has represented immanence, given her bondage to the natural functions of childbirth and child-rearing (Beauvoir 1952, 65–69).

Beauvoir's development of the transcendence/immanence dualism as a typology of human activities becomes particularly prominent in her critique of marriage and housewifery in the latter portions of *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir 1952, 447ff.). In an analysis of household labor that is at once Hegelian and Arendtian, Beauvoir writes that the labor of maintaining life in the home dooms housewives to the purely general and the inessential, and that "the worst of it all is that this labor does not even tend toward the creation of anything *durable*" (478, emphasis added). The products of housework are consumed and turned into nothing when cleanliness reverts into dust, dirt, and decay, and when prepared meals and states of satiety turn again into hunger and thirst, such that "few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day" (474; see also Veltman 2004). Although continually preparing food and maintaining a home are necessary elements of human life, they "are only means, not true ends" (Beauvoir 1952, 477); they cannot imbue existence with significance. Consequently, since a justification for maintaining life can be achieved only in transcendence, and since housewives are mired in immanence, housewifery becomes a kind of existential leechery upon the lives of loved ones.

Labor and Work in *The Human Condition*

Whereas *The Second Sex* characterizes immanence in large part as activity necessary to perpetuate life, Arendt defines labor likewise as activity necessary for the upkeep of the biological processes of life.[5] Like all animals, human beings are living beings enveloped in a metabolism with nature and must, before we can do anything else, serve the inexorable needs of the body in seeking food, preparing it, devouring it, cleaning, bathing, exercising, resting, bearing children, feeding them, and so forth. Moreover, as our metabolism with nature requires that we eat, clean, bathe, and rest not just once but over and over as long as life persists, the activity of labor is never completed but is perpetually in need of doing. As Locke notes in *The Second Treatise of Government*, the things we produce for our subsistence are, however useful for life, generally of short duration: once absorbed in the life processes of the human animal, the labor required to sustain and replenish the body will disappear from the world, either through absorption into the rhythms of the human body or through decay (Arendt 1958, 96–101; see also Locke 1924, 139).

The ephemeral character of the products of labor, combined with the necessity of them for living, subjects the human being to an inevitable and endless cycle of futile labor. The futility of labor lies not in uselessness, for labor is an indispensable condition of life, but in its ever-recurring ending in nothing of worldly permanence:

> It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent. And yet this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends upon it. (Arendt 1958, 87)

Since labor produces nothing that endures, those who labor exclusively at the maintenance of life are, as Adam Smith noted in *The Wealth of Nations*, like idle houseguests who "leave nothing behind them in return for their consumption," except for the freedom or potential productivity of those whose lives they labor to maintain (86). Despite its futility, however, labor is a conduit to the experience of joy; through labor, we experience "the sheer bliss of being alive which we share with all living creatures" and move contentedly through predictable, if purposeless, cycles of nature (106).

Although Arendt develops a comparatively richer account of labor than Beauvoir, exploring manifold historical and modern understandings of labor and examining labor in the context of biological life, fertility, privacy, wealth, consumption, and enslavement, Arendt curiously does not address the gendered subtext of her categories of labor, work, and action. As Mary Dietz and

others have noted, Arendt never explicitly acknowledges that labor is deeply invested in the female body—borne out in childbearing, child-rearing, and daily caretaking performed by women—or that the purest form of labor, housework, has structured womanhood throughout history. Nor does she comment upon the fundamental injustice involved in women's relegation to the lowliest category of human activity (Dietz 2002, 111). This lack of comment may reflect Arendt's desire to distance herself from women's liberation movements, or perhaps her determination to separate social and economic issues from politics, on the presupposition that questions of economic justice destroy genuinely political dialogue. Regardless of why Arendt remains conspicuously silent on questions pertaining to women in *The Human Condition*, her phenomenological analysis of labor invites examination of women's reproductive experiences in the context of female subordination.[6] Quite clearly, Beauvoir, in contrast, develops her distinction between constructive, transcendent activity and labor that merely sustains life with an eye toward using this basic contrast to illuminate the oppression of women in *The Second Sex*.

As contrasted with labor, work in the Arendtian sense is not simply activity opposed to play or to leisure; work produces durable artifacts and shapes a world-structure. Work represents a basic condition under which life becomes possible for humanity, for without a relatively permanent world, a human stage that precedes each of us and endures beyond us, human life could not be distinguished from the unchanging lives of other animals: "there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other animal species" (Arendt 1958, 97). The world is set up over and against nature through fabricating things—tables, buildings, books, recordings, monuments, other works of art, and so forth—that are intended to exist well beyond their own production processes. Work thereby transcends the perpetual consumptive processes of natural life, producing objects that, in their durability, constitute a stable home for the passing existence of mortal beings.

In the modern era, work also produces machines that structure labor and that condition our existence, such that the movement of machines now guides the labor of our bodies, rather than the body guiding the movement of working implements (Arendt 1958, 147). Mechanized systems of automation have also facilitated an abundance of consumer goods, like rows of cereal boxes in supermarkets, and have eroded an objective difference between use and consumption. This modern subversion threatens to devour the artisan ideals of durability and craftsmanship by transforming all worldly goods into disposable consumer goods: in the context of a consumer society, "we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the 'good things' of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into the never-ending cycle of man's metabolism with nature" (126).

Unlike the laborer, the Arendtian worker does not serve the endless natural cycles required to sustain biological life but creates an object for use in accordance with a model *à la* Marx (Arendt 1958, 136ff.).[7] Contrasting labor and work in terms of their end products, Arendt writes that labor produces for the end of consumption, but work is a means to the production of a determinate, enduring object that will be used rather than quickly destroyed in consumptive life sustenance:

> The process of making is itself entirely determined by the categories of means and end. The fabricated thing is an end product in the twofold sense that the production process comes to an end in it ("the process disappears in the product," as Marx said) and that it is only a means to produce this end. . . . Labor, caught in the cyclical movement of the body's life process, has neither a beginning nor an end. (Arendt 1958, 143–44)

An inherently goal-directed activity, the process of working is guided by a purposive end, such that a standard of utility inheres in both producing an object and in the general perspective that the human being *qua* worker (*homo faber*) takes upon the world. In contrast with the process of working, the products of work often—but not always—become means for further ends in other contexts, as when a chair, for instance, is created for the purpose of sitting, comfortable living, or exchange within a marketplace. As long as the products of work remain objects for use, they are judged by the same standards of means and ends that dominate the process of working itself (Arendt 1958, 153). Works of art, however, are emblematic products of work and stand out as the most worldly of all fabricated goods, but the proper intercourse with a work of art is not "use," Arendt notes, nor does an artist necessarily create a work of art in the manner that a craftsman creates an object following a conceived plan (167–74). Works of art therefore escape the purely instrumental value characteristic of other products of work but share outstanding permanence and durability, precisely because they stand removed from the domain of everyday use objects (167).

In characterizing work as an activity determined by the categories of means and ends and in emphasizing the instrumentality of fabrication, Arendt attends to the utilitarian dimension of work more so than does Beauvoir. In contrasting labor with transcendence, and in characterizing labor as a mere means to living (Beauvoir 1952, 477), Beauvoir emphasizes the potential for self-realization and liberation within work, at least in contexts in which working is not pervaded with exploitation (e.g., 713–14). But for Arendt, not only is the production process of fabrication "only a means" to produce an object (Arendt 1958, 143), but *homo faber* is also dominated by a world-view in which the end of one production process serves immediately as a means within another

context (153–54). Yet in spite of this divergence, Arendt and Beauvoir share a basic distinction between the repetitious and consumptive processes involved in sustaining biological life and the creation of something durable over and apart from these natural processes. As Beauvoir writes in discussing nomadic history and mythology early in *The Second Sex*, transcendence is achieved in the activities of "*homo faber*, [who] has from the beginning of time been an inventor" who builds, conquers, creates, and annexes the world (Beauvoir 1952, 67). In these world-building activities, man bursts out of the present, opens up a future for humanity, and achieves "self-realization as an existent"; woman, on the other hand, incarnates immanence in that "she guarantees the recurrence of meals, of sleep; she restores whatever has been destroyed or worn out by activity, preparing food for the weary worker, caring for him when he is sick, mending, washing" (186–87).

According to Arendt, the distinction between labor and work has been noted in scattered remarks of Western political philosophers and economic theorists but, until *The Human Condition*, has not been adequately appreciated or developed.[8] Despite reversing the value of labor in the classic hierarchy of human activities and elevating the *animal laborans* to the position held by the *animal rationale* for the Greeks, the modern age did not produce a system of social thought that clearly distinguishes labor from work. The distinction between productive and unproductive labor developed by Smith and Marx approximates the distinction between labor and work (Arendt 1958, 85–87) and occupies much of Arendt's attention, more so than does Marx and Engels's distinction between productive and reproductive labor. According to Arendt, Marx collapses the distinction between labor and work by characterizing labor as a metabolism with nature through which the human species changes itself by changing its environment:

> The modern age and Karl Marx in particular had an almost irresistible tendency to look upon all labor as work and to speak of the *animal laborans* in terms much more fitting for *homo faber*, hoping all the time that only one more step was needed to eliminate labor and necessity altogether. (Arendt 1958, 87)

The aspiration voiced by Marx that a communist revolution will not only emancipate the laboring classes but also emancipate humankind from the necessity of laboring, Arendt thinks, indicates a deep contradiction in Marx's attitude toward labor that runs from his early works to the third volume of *Das Kapital* (104–05). At the same time that Marx thinks labor distinguishes the human being from other animals and provides an avenue for individual self-realization, he writes that "the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things [freedom] lies beyond the sphere of actual

material production" (Marx 1971, 820). For Arendt, it is labor that arises from necessity and represents our metabolism with nature; work in contrast represents the mechanism of changing the natural environment into a home through the creation of durable objects.

Although Arendt emphasizes in the spirit of Marx that work alters material given by nature to conform to human uses, she further diverges from Marx in defining work primarily as the creation of enduring artifacts and world-structures. In writing about productive and unproductive labor in Volume I of *Das Capital*, Marx eschews Adam Smith's earlier account of productive labor as adding to the value of a subject,[9] characterizing productive labor as labor that creates surplus-value:

> *That labourer alone is productive, who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, and thus works for self-expansion of capital.* [T]he notion of a productive worker implies not merely a relation between work and useful effect, between labor and a product of labor, but also a specific, social relation of production, a relation that . . . stamps the labourer as the direct means of creating surplus value. (Marx 1975a, 509)[10]

Here it is necessary neither that a "productive laborer" produce something of durable use, nor that he manually work at all, but rather that he produce profit for a capitalist (Marx 1975a, 508–09 and 1975b, 158). Unproductive labor, by contrast, is consumed by concrete need, whether social or biological, rather than turned into a profit. Indeed, the same laboring activity can be either productive or unproductive, depending on whether the labor produces a commodity that becomes sold for a profit.[11] Arendt, by contrast, identifies a propensity within labor to produce a surplus of sustenance for more than one person but clarifies that, "unlike the productivity of work, which adds new objects to the human artifice," the productivity of *labor* never results in anything but more potential life sustenance (Arendt 1958, 88).

Whereas Arendt extensively reworks Marx's concept of labor, Beauvoir shares his view of creative work as a prerequisite for self-realization and his ideal of a socialist revolution that would liberate men and women from mechanical, soul-deadening labor (Beauvoir 1948, 87–88; 1952, 55–63).[12] In contrast to Arendt, Beauvoir engages more with the underdeveloped contrast between productive and reproductive labor that Marx and Engels present briefly in *The German Ideology* (1979) and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1972). "Production" and "reproduction" carry multiple meanings in these treatises,[13] including an association of "production" with the creation of an object and of "reproduction" with the creation of human beings (Marx and Engels 1979, 49–50; Engels 1972, 71–72). This association informs the concepts of Beauvoirian transcendence and Arendtian work, both of which

include activities that create an enduring object or transform or annex the world. Yet Beauvoirian transcendence is clearly more multifaceted than productive labor; performative dance and political action, for instance, are Beauvoirian transcendent endeavors but not productive work in Marxist terms. Beauvoirian immanence also stretches beyond Marx and Engels's concept of reproductive labor to encompass several inauthentic modes of existence, including enveloping oneself within what is inessential, subjecting oneself to given conditions, and existing passively and remaining in the moment rather than surging toward the future. Throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir characterizes immanence as an easy existence in which one submits to biological fate or to the will of others—while also charging those who choose to live in immanence with complicity in wrongs against themselves and metaphysical dependency upon the lives of others.

In Beauvoirian rather than Marxist terms, careers of maintenance labor enable some to live parasitically upon the thwarted transcendence of others. Those who bear the toil of maintaining others' lives lead working lives that become a sea of negative and inconsequential moments; their own potential for transcendence becomes lost in the continual reperformance of futile labor. If directed at divisions of labor in the public realm, this critique of careers of maintenance labor has as much plausibility as Marx's vision of a society without work specializations or divisions between manual and mental laborers. When directed at divisions of labor in the private realm, however, this critique becomes a more striking and plausible application of Marxist and existentialist social philosophy to the situation of the housewife: it prioritizes the need to establish a direct relation to the world through work over rhetoric about female "choice" to devote oneself to a home and family, at the same time as it provides ground for working toward equitable divisions of maintenance labor in the private realm. I shall return to Beauvoir's critical analysis of exploitative divisions of labor in the final section of the paper.

Arendtian Action and Non-Utilitarian Value

Whereas Marx characterizes labor as activity that springs from necessity but gives realization to human freedom, Arendt maintains an Aristotelian separation between the necessity characteristic of labor and the freedom realized in action. Notoriously difficult to define, Arendtian action represents the human ability to begin anew, to change the status quo, or to step forward into the light of the public realm and to speak and do things that have the "character of startling unexpectedness inherent in all beginnings and in all origins" (Arendt 1958, 178). In addition to giving realization to the human capacity for initiative, action permits the expression of individuality in the context of speech and deeds:

> In acting and speaking men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world. . . . Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character. (179–80)

To express views about ultimate ends or desirable courses of action in a political forum, for instance, accomplishes more than communication about politics with one's fellows: it is in speaking and acting that men and women distinguish themselves from one another, insert themselves into the world, and disclose their unique personas to an audience of onlookers. Unlike work and labor, action reveals "a living essence of the person," a curiously intangible, distinct nature of every individual that sets the individual apart from his or her fellows (181). Even if work often displays the individuality of an artist or artisan, the living essence of the person—*who* someone is, as opposed to what he or she can produce or accomplish—resists definitive expression in his or her work. Pieces of work can communicate that there is or was someone capable of creating such an artifact; they do not completely communicate who the artist is or was as a person.

In revealing the unique and irreplaceable nature of individual human beings, action bestows significance upon the life of the individual while also realizing the *raison d'être* of social and political life and all spaces of appearance. The Greek estimation of the polis, Arendt writes, captures the idea that it is the common "sharing of words and deeds"[14] and the multiplication of opportunities for individual distinction therein, that makes it worthwhile for men to live in common (Arendt 1958, 196–99 and 207–08). Arendt terms the condition necessary for individual distinction in the public realm "human plurality," the state of living as a unique individual among equals. If citizens who appear in public speech and action were not plural, or distinct from one another as individuals, occasions for speech and action would not arise; yet if citizens were not equals or approximate equals, it would not be possible for them to understand one another (175–76). It is our distinctiveness as similar creatures that makes it both possible and necessary to form spaces in which we appear to others and distinguish ourselves among them.

The highest activity in the hierarchy of the *vita activa*, action bestows meaning upon the utilitarian human artifice but is not without its own calamities. Action is inherently unpredictable, irreversible, and, without the remembrance of a permanent world, subject to the same frailty as the labor necessary to sustain life. One of the primary functions of the Greek city-state as a space for public appearance among equals was indeed to offer a remedy for the frailty of human action by providing the possibility that deeds deserving of fame and remembrance would not be lost (Arendt 1958, 192–99). When the story unfolding in human action is made real with organized remembrance and

recorded with the aid of poets, historiographers, monument-builders, and writers, the passing existence of the moral actor can be partly saved from obscurity, confusion, or oblivion (188–99). To survive the fleeting moments in which action occurs, speech and deeds require the assistance of *homo faber*, who fabricates the mechanisms of posterity and the world itself (173).

Each of the activities of labor, work, and action is therefore required to create a world in which human existence has significance, but it is action rather than work that provides non-utilitarian value for human civilization:

> In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced. *We need not . . . decide whether man or a god should be the measure of all things; what is certain is that the measure can be neither the driving force of necessity of biological life and labor nor the utilitarian instrumentalism of fabrication and usage.* (Arendt 1958, 173–74, italics added)

Neither labor nor work can provide an evaluative measure for the world, for both represent material conditions of human life rather than activity for the sake of which human beings construct a world. Labor is an imprisonment in the ever-recurring cycle of biological life, whereas work does not generate any standard for the world except utility.

If the activity of fabrication and its values of instrumentality and usage are ultimate measures for human life and the world, a predicament of ultimate meaninglessness ensues, for a multiplicity of fabricated artifacts, like a chain of useful means and ends, cannot achieve justification without a standard that transcends instrumentality (Arendt 1958, 153–57). The fundamental predicament of *homo faber*—meaninglessness brought on by the establishment of utility as an ultimate value—cannot be resolved by adopting an anthropocentrism in which man becomes the ultimate end for all things, for such an anthropocentrism degrades nature as "worthless material" upon which to work and reduces the world to a means with no intrinsic value (155). This predicament of meaninglessness can be resolved only by the human capacity for action, which serves no further utilitarian end (236–37).

Like Arendtian action, exemplars of Beauvoirian transcendence enable individual self-expression, situate and engage an individual within a public realm, and provide a reason for human life to persist. Both Arendtian action and Beauvoirian transcendence represent the realization of freedom and our ability to break from the present and to act in concert with others in establishing a

new world. In a strikingly Arendtian vein, Beauvoir also emphasizes that a precondition of meaningful action within the world is a plurality of other free beings. In moving away from a Sartrean sense of transcendence in her early ethical treatise *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir writes that "my essential need is to be faced with free men" (Beauvoir 2004, 129) who are peers, or approximate peers, in order that I can speak and act in front of others who apprehend the meaning and significance of my actions.[15] If the men and women around us are un-free, our projects fall upon deaf ears, and we have no one to hear us or to accompany us in our transcendence. Our work will also not be taken up in future work unless other free individuals link their work with our own and carry it forward.[16] In later works, Beauvoir continues to argue that the future secures a justification for the present and that, since action unfolds in the direction of the future, the future is "the meaning and substance of all action" (Beauvoir 1948, 127).

But in distinguishing action from work and in arguing that work has no non-utilitarian justification, Arendt develops an analysis of work that illuminates its limitations as an evaluative measure for human civilization, whereas Beauvoir does not acknowledge the limitations of constructive activity in supplying a *raison d'être* for human existence. In laying emphasis upon the utilitarian nature of work, Arendt highlights the fact that the construction of an enduring world through work produces, ultimately, only structures and artifacts for various human *uses*. Even if work should prove pleasurable, rewarding, or self-expressive, for Arendt work is an instrumental activity, directed at producing things that will, in turn, serve a purpose for other useful purposes. The human being *qua* worker therefore evaluates the world with reference to the usefulness of its manufactured things; *homo faber* "is just as incapable of understanding meaning as the *animal laborans* is incapable of understanding instrumentality" (Arendt 1958, 155). An evaluative measure for human existence must be sought beyond the activity of fabrication and the utilitarian perspective of the worker.

Beauvoir, in contrast, suggests that engagement in constructive activity, or work, does provide a justification for existence, in associating the *raison d'être* achieved through transcendence with constructive work throughout her ethical and political writings. Operating with a duality between transcendence and immanence—rather than a contrast between work and self-expressive activity *à la* Arendt—Beauvoir fundamentally contrasts activity directed toward building a future with the absurd perpetuation of life without reason, with the implication that human beings must transcend the perpetuation of life in order to escape the absurdity of an existence bereft of reason for being. As a character in *Who Shall Die* remarks in explaining the significance of building a bell-tower in the midst of pervasive poverty and war, "without this impulse which throws us forwards, we would be no more than a layer of mildew upon the earth" (Beauvoir 1983, 38).

Arendt and Beauvoir on Labor Exploitation and Oppression

Although Beauvoir does not develop as deep an analysis of labor and work as Arendt presents in *The Human Condition*, she does exceed Arendt in examining the salient ethical implications of our existential need for a plurality of free and equal human beings in a public realm. Our need for the freedom of others provides a normative foundation for working toward equitable social and economic structures by demonstrating, essentially, that the social and material condition of others' lives affects our freedom and is therefore something that concerns us.[17] I need others to attain my level of freedom so that I can carry out and give meaning to my projects, and from this need arises a moral obligation to support social arrangements that secure the conditions of transcendence for other women and men.[18] As Beauvoir writes in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, "I must . . . endeavor to create for all men situations which will enable them to accompany and surpass my transcendence. I need their freedom to be available to make use of me, to preserve me in surpassing me. I require for men health, knowledge, well being, leisure, so that their freedom does not consume itself in fighting sickness, ignorance, misery" (Beauvoir 2004, 137).

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir indeed develops an existentialist account of oppression on the insight that the interdependence of human freedoms creates a moral foundation for social equality and for a world in which creative and intellectual endeavors are not limited to a small class of people. Oppression thwarts the freedom and transcendence of "those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order to merely support the collectivity; [whose] life is a pure repetition of mechanical gestures"; the transcendence of the oppressed becomes consumed by those who feed themselves off their labor and who are, in effect, responsible for changing an oppressed person into a thing-like being (Beauvoir 1948, 82–83). In carrying this account of oppression into *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir continues to argue that miring a human being in immanence rests upon "a moral fault," regardless of whether the oppressed "consent" to the situation (Beauvoir 1952, lix).

Arendt also acknowledges that some human beings are able to free themselves from the Sisyphean torture of labor by effectively redoubling this labor onto the shoulders of others, but her discussion of this phenomenon lacks the normative and critical lens of Beauvoir. Labor in its essence is fecund or fertile, and "through violent oppression in a slave society or exploitation in the capitalist society of Marx's own time, [labor power] can be channeled in such a way that the labor of some suffices for the life of all" (Arendt 1958, 88). The fecundity of labor turns into a foundation for divisions of labor that benefit the dominant particularly when combined with an eternal "innate repugnance to

futility in the human animal."[19] Repugnance at the futility of laboring arises out of the human impulse to strive for freedom from necessity and is the chief reason for the possession of slaves in antiquity:

> The opinion that labor and work were despised in antiquity because only slaves were engaged in them is a prejudice of modern historians. The ancients reasoned the other way around and felt it necessary to possess slaves because of the slavish nature of all occupations that served the needs for the maintenance of life. (83; cf. 81)

The institution of slavery and the employment of servants have been, in this light, not primarily devices for cheap labor or instruments of exploitation but rather have been attempts to exclude labor from the conditions of human life (84; 119).

Arendt herein distinguishes the violent oppression of slavery from the mere exploitation present in capitalist societies and regards neither as a natural inevitability,[20] but in marked contrast to Beauvoir, she further suggests that it is the basic character of *animal laborans* to consume rather than produce, create, or think. Marx's hope that a communist emancipation of laborers would create sufficient free time for a society of self-actualized citizens, Arendt maintains, rests on the fallacious reasoning that labor power, if not consumed in the maintenance of life, will nourish higher activities:

> A hundred years after Marx we know the fallacy of this reasoning: the spare time of the *animal laborans* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. . . . That these appetites become more sophisticated . . . harbors the grave danger that eventually no object of the world becomes safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption. (Arendt 1958, 133)

The danger of freeing *animal laborans* from the toil of necessity—a voracious increase in the devouring character of consumer society and a resulting annihilation of the artisan character of the world—is, for Arendt, reason to reject the Marxist vision of a world in which real artistic and intellectual activity is concretely possible for all people. Imbedded in this rejection of Marx's vision is not only a Platonic pessimism about the capabilities of *animal laborans* but also an emphasis upon the essential fecundity of labor, which allows the labor power of some to be channeled toward the biological needs of others. In a prominent passage in her discussion of labor, Arendt writes further of the po-

tential social "advantages" of the fertility of labor and the resulting ability of some to live off the labor of others:

> Unfortunately, it seems to be in the nature of the conditions of life as it has been given to man that the only possible advantage of the fertility of human labor power lies in its ability to procure the necessities of life for more than one man or family. (Arendt 1958, 118; cf. 88)

The human tendency to offload the drudgery of maintaining life onto others, however "unfortunate" for those forced into the darkness of biological necessity, appears written into the nature of labor itself for Arendt. The need for servants or slaves to eliminate the burdens of maintenance labor arises simultaneously out of the weight of biological necessity and out of the limitations of tools and technology to ease these burdens: "the limitations of instruments in the easing of life's labor—the simple fact that the services of one servant can never be fully replaced by a hundred gadgets in the kitchen or a half a dozen robots in the cellar—are of a fundamental nature" (122).[21]

Here we see a final and fundamental difference between Beauvoir and Arendt. In identifying the root of labor exploitation in the weight of biological necessity, the immutable characteristics of labor, the innate repugnance to futility in humanity, and the general vulgarity of *animal laborans*, Arendt retains an Aristotelian and Marxist association among reproductive labor, fundamental biological necessity, and apolitical activity. For Arendt, labor *belongs* in the household, the trans-historical private scene for the maintenance of life. Her conceptualization of reproductive labor as immutably fertile and apolitical not only obscures possibilities for a more egalitarian social re-organization of reproductive activities but renders asymmetrical distributions of labor an inappropriate topic for public discourse.[22] Beauvoir, in contrast, creates a real possibility for an ethics and politics of reproduction and for a social transformation of the reproductive mode of life, particularly within the home, by undermining the notion repeated by the mature Marx that sexual divisions of labor within the family are "natural" (Marx 1975a; Marx and Engels 1979, 51–52). If reproductive labor were naturally or essentially feminine, indeed the human condition may contain an inherent invitation to redouble maintenance labor onto the backs of women. But for Beauvoir, the very suggestion that exploitative arrangements are natural, inevitable, or written into the human condition would be an ideological mystification, an attempt to camouflage oppression "behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature" (Beauvoir 1948, 83).

Despite working with the same concept of labor and the same basic contrast between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity, Beauvoir and Arendt appear divided by fundamentally different ambitions concerning the typologies

of human activities developed in their writings. In discussing the terms and conditions under which life has been given to humanity in *The Human Condition*, Arendt shows little inclination to critique the exclusion of segments of humanity from meaningful human activities, or to sketch normative implications of the human need for a plurality of free peers in a public realm; instead, her starting assumption is that appreciating the nature and proper place of activities that bear upon politics provides an important prolegomena to future political philosophy (cf. Arendt 1958 viii–ix). Beauvoir brings a more sharply critical and feminist lens to the relegation of some people—particularly women—to the repetitious and futile gestures necessary to sustain life; transcendence and immanence are not simply basic modes of existence in her corpus but also normative categories intended to illuminate the oppression of women. Her normative and feminist lens also leads Beauvoir to attend to gendered divisions between transcendence and immanence throughout *The Second Sex*, whereas Arendt neglects the obviously gendered subtext of her categories despite developing a more comprehensive examination of labor than does Beauvoir.

These broadly divergent aims of *The Second Sex* and *The Human Condition* belie remarkable similarities between Beauvoir and Arendt on labor. As I hope I have demonstrated, the cyclical, ephemeral, and ultimately futile labor necessary to reproduce the material conditions of life cannot, for either woman philosopher, provide a reason for life to persist; humanity must find a justification or evaluative measure for living and laboring in activities that give realization to human freedom and facilitate the expression of the self within the world. Herein, Beauvoir and Arendt share a basic contrast between labor, on the one hand, and action or transcendence on the other hand; furthermore, both contrast labor with activity that produces something enduring or that builds the human world. As opposed to immanence, transcendence is achieved, as Beauvoir herself writes, "in work and in action" (Beauvoir 1952, 186; 505). But in collapsing the Arendtian activities of work and action under the rubric of "transcendence," and in following Marx in emphasizing the potential for self-realization and liberation within productive work, Beauvoir does not appear to appreciate the limitations of work as a self-expressive activity that can justify human existence. Arendt, by contrast, perceives that finer distinctions in human activities are needed, that work cannot reveal "the living essence of the person," and that the ultimate value of living must be sought beyond work in action, that is, in activity for the sake of which human beings work to build the world.

Notes

I would like to thank the participants in the 2007 Association for Feminist Ethics and Social Theory Conference who attended my paper session and provided helpful suggestions for further reflection. I also owe a special debt to Nancy Bauer, who

suggested several years ago that I pursue a comparative analysis between the Beauvoirian concepts of immanence and transcendence and the Arendtian concepts of labor, work, and action. Her encouragement was a primary catalyst for my work on this topic. Finally, I would like to thank Diana Meyers, Claudia Card, and the anonymous *Hypatia* referees for excellent suggestions that helped me to improve an earlier draft of this paper.

1. In this paper, I occasionally use the term "reproductive labor" to designate the kind of labor that is of interest to Beauvoir and Arendt, for in the writings of both thinkers all labor is reproductive in the sense that labor reproduces the material conditions (like cooked food and cleanliness) necessary to perpetuate life on a daily basis. However, neither thinker herself relies upon the term "reproductive labor."

2. See, for example, O'Brien 1981; Jaggar and McBride 1985; and Held 1989. Sabine Gurtler also joins feminist critics of the Marxist concept of reproductive labor in arguing for an ethical concept of work in which work pertains to the needs of others and to a common good, but she does not address the work of Beauvoir (Gurtler 2005).

3. As Jaggar and McBride argue (1985, 186–87). Although I agree with Jaggar and McBride concerning the potential for creativity and complexity in world-preserving activities like pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing, I clearly disagree with their broader claim that a normative distinction between production and reproduction is invidious, male-biased, and a liability for women. Jaggar and McBride believe that a consequence of normatively differentiating production from reproduction is that women's work appears less than fully human, less historically important, and therein rightly relegated from the public to the private realms, such that "men thus have a pretext for refusing to take seriously women's demands for a reorganization of procreation and daily nurturing" (194). On the contrary, I would maintain that if production and reproduction are perceived as equally valuable human activities, then men have a pretext for feeling no guilt about perpetuating sexual divisions of labor that do in fact serve their interests. Acknowledging that much of the repetitive daily grind of reproduction is less fulfilling than other activities serves as a normative foundation for sharing reproductive chores and for systemic reorganization of procreation and nurturing.

4. Mary Dietz makes this compelling point that feminist theorists who celebrate feminine reproductive experiences risk re-inscribing patriarchal sexual divisions of labor (Dietz 2002, 114).

5. For a helpful discussion of the purpose and context of Arendt's categories of labor, work and action, see Canovan 1992, 101–02 and 124–25. For a defense of Arendt against a standard objection that human activity is often more complex than her categories, see Benhabib 2003, 130–32.

6. Contemporary feminist political theorists interested in Arendt have not been of one mind regarding the feminist potential of the conceptual resources of *The Human Condition*. For an excellent discussion of this literature, see "The Woman Question in Arendt" and "The Arendt Question in Feminism" in Dietz 2002, 101–38.

7. Although Arendt distinguishes her concept of work from Marx's concept of productive labor, she does agree with Marx that in working, one follows a model that guides the creation of an object. "This model can be an image beheld by the eye of the mind or a blueprint in which the image has already found a tentative materialization

through work. In either case, what guides the work of fabrication is outside the fabricator and precedes the actual work process in much the same way as the urgencies of the life process within the laborer precede the actual labor process" (Arendt 1958, 141).

8. The ancient Greeks distinguished between the craftsman and those who minister to the necessities of life with the labor of their bodies, but this distinction was entirely secondary for the Greeks to the more primary political distinction between the freedom of the public realm and the necessity of the household. Slaves, women, and animals serve human necessity, whereas the craftsman produces what is useful rather than strictly necessary; all alike, however, serve what is pre-political. Thus, in his *Ethics*, Aristotle characterizes the craftsman as living in a condition of limited slavery and fails to even mention the life of the craftsman when enumerating ways of life that men might choose in freedom. Since both slaves and craftsmen are servants to our needs and desires, neither kind of life possesses sufficient dignity to constitute an authentically human life (Arendt 1958, 12–13 and 79–84). For Aristotle's discussion of ways of life chosen in freedom, see the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.5 and the *Eudemian Ethics* 1215a35ff. For his opposition between freedom and necessity and the assumption that the life of the craftsman is un-free, see the *Politics* 1254b25, 1258b35ff., 1332b2, and 1337b5, all in Aristotle (1941).

9. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith writes, "there is one sort of labour which adds to the value of the subject . . . [this labor] may be called productive. . . . Thus the labour of a manufacturer adds, generally, to the materials which he works upon . . . and of his master's profit. The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing" (Smith 1937, 314–15).

10. In Volume I of *Capital*, Marx illustrates his definition of productive labor with "an example from outside the sphere of production of material objects: a schoolmaster is a productive labourer when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, does not alter the relation [between productive labor and surplus-value]" (Marx 1975a, 509).

11. Peter Meiksins highlights the following example given by Marx in Volume I of *Theories of Surplus Value* (1975b, 165): if a capitalist pays a cook to prepare a meal, which he subsequently sells for a profit, the labor of the cook is productive within the framework of a capitalist mode of production. But if a capitalist pays a cook to prepare a meal that he himself consumes, the labor of the cook is unproductive. In the latter case, "the cook is paid from revenue the capitalist obtained elsewhere and which is neither reproduced nor augmented through his production of a meal. . . . The actual labor performed is identical in each case; but the *relationship* within which it occurs is quite different" (Meiksins 1981, 35).

12. Eva Lundgren-Gothlin notes that the scholarly literature on Beauvoir has paid little attention to the relationship between Marx and Beauvoir, in part because Beauvoir does not directly engage with Marx in *The Second Sex* and in part because her critique of Engels conceals her debts to Marxism. Beauvoir occasionally writes in sympathy with Marx (for example, Beauvoir 1948, 88) but maintains that an adequate socialist ethics must draw upon a more complex account of female oppression than the Marxist feminism articulated by Engels (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996, 85–86).

13. Beyond referring to activities that create objects, "productive labor" also refers to activity that meets the material conditions of human existence, including needs for food, clothing, shelter, and tools. "Reproductive" refers not only to labor of creating human beings but also to the maintenance of social relations of production and to the realm of education, culture, and ideology that generate capitalist social relations.

14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1126b12.

15. As Beauvoir writes, in order that my actions not become "lost in the void, there must be men ready to hear me . . ., and these men must be my peers" (Beauvoir 2004, 137).

16. Even the scholar or the artist who works primarily in private requires the transcendent projects of others, for their work takes its departure from what others are doing and calls out to others to serve as a basis for new work. "The writer does not want simply to be read; he wants to have influence; he wants to be imitated and pondered. The inventor asks that the tool he invented be used" (Beauvoir 2004, 132). Indeed, if our projects fail to play a role in the work of others and are taken nowhere, our projects "fall back upon themselves," rather than serving as a mode of transcendence, and become like inert and useless objects (135).

17. For this explanation of Beauvoir's account of the social interdependence of human freedoms, I am indebted to Sonya Kruks's excellent explication of *Pyrrhus and Cineas* (Kruks 1998, 47–51).

18. The arguments summarized here for a moral obligation to support the freedom of others represent only part of Beauvoir's thought on this topic. See Veltman 2008 for four distinct arguments that Beauvoir provides throughout *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* for an existentialist moral imperative to support the freedom of others.

19. Arendt takes this phrase from Thorstein Veblen (1899/1971).

20. In clarifying that the violent injustices of slavery are man-made, Arendt writes, "the price for the elimination of life's burden from the shoulders of all citizens was enormous and by no means consists only in the violent injustice of forcing one part of humanity into the darkness of pain and necessity. Since this darkness is natural, inherent in the human condition—only the act of violence, when one group of men tries to rid itself of the shackles binding all of us to pain and necessity is man-made—the price for absolute freedom from necessity is, in a sense, life itself" (Arendt 1958, 119–20).

21. Arendt's lack of evaluative critique of systemic labor injustices has been a site of critique and re-interpretation for many commentators on *The Human Condition*. While carefully clarifying that the lowliness of labor and work is not a contemptuous denigration of women or the working class, Deitz acknowledges that Arendt conspicuously "withholds any direct comment about the justice or injustice of . . . arrangements in which some living beings are kept in darkness, deprived of or denied the only conditions (politics, plurality, power) that, by Arendt's own lights, render them fully human and free" (Dietz 2002, 107).

22. Arendt's idea that labor is not a proper subject of politics is notorious in the literature on her work. Hanna Pitkin comments on Arendt's refusal to allow economic and labor injustices into the legitimate domain of political discourse, "Can it be that

Arendt held so contemptible a doctrine—one that denies the possibility of freedom, a truly human life . . . to all but a handful of males who dominate all others and exclude them by violence from privilege? And when the excluded and miserable do enter history, can it be that Arendt condemns them for their rage, their failure to respect the 'impartiality of justice and laws'? Impartiality! Justice! Where were these principles when that immense majority was relegated to shame and misery?" (Pitkin 1981, 336).

References

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle. 1941. *Nicomachean ethics*, *Eudemian ethics*, and *politics*. In *The basic works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random House.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1948. *The ethics of ambiguity*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Citadel Press.

———. 1952/1993. *The second sex*. Trans. and ed. Howard Madison Parshley. New York: Random House/Knopf.

———. 1983. *Who shall die?* Trans. Claude Francis and Frenande Gontier. Florissant, Mo.: River Press.

———. 2004. *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. Trans. Marybeth Timmermann. In *Simone de Beauvoir: philosophical writings*, ed. Margaret Simons and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 77–150.

Benhabib, Seyla. 2003. *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield.

Canovan, Margaret. 1992. *Hannah Arendt: A reinterpretation of her political thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dietz, Mary. 2002. *Turning operations: Feminism, Arendt, and politics*. New York: Routledge.

Engels, Friedrich. 1972. *The origin of the family, private property and the state*. New York: International Publishers.

Gurtler, Sabine. 2005. The ethical dimension of work: A feminist perspective. Trans. Andrew Smith. *Hypatia* 20 (2): 119–34.

Held, Virginia. 1989. Birth and death. *Ethics* 99 (2): 362–88.

Jaggar, Alison, and William McBride. 1985. 'Reproduction' as male ideology. *Women's Studies International Forum* 8 (3): 185–96.

Kruks, Sonia. 1998. Beauvoir: The weight of situation. In *Simone de Beauvoir: A critical reader*, ed. Elizabeth Fallaize. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 45–71.

Locke, John. 1924. Second treatise of government. In *Two treatises of government*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.

Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva. 1996. *Sex and existence: Simone de Beauvoir's the second sex*. Trans. Linda Schenck. London: Athlone Press.

Marx, Karl. 1971. *Capital*, Vol. 3. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

———. 1975a. *Capital*, Vol. 1. New York: International Publishers.

———. 1975b. *Theories of surplus value*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 1979. *The German ideology*. New York: International Publishers.

Meiksins, Peter. 1981. Productive and unproductive labor and Marx's theory of class. *Review of Radical Political Economics* 13 (3): 32–42.
O'Brien, Mary. 1981. *The politics of reproduction*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Pitkin, Hanna. 1981. Justice: On relating private and public. *Political Theory* 9 (3): 327–52.
Smith, Adam. 1937. *The wealth of nations*. New York: Modern Library.
Veblen, Thorstein. 1899/1971. *A theory of the leisure class*. New York: A. M. Kelley.
Veltman, Andrea. 2004. The Sisyphean torture of housework. *Hypatia* 19 (3): 121–43.
———. 2006. Transcendence and immanence in the ethics of Simone de Beauvoir. In *Simone de Beauvoir: Critical essays*, ed. Margaret Simons. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 113–31.
———. 2008. The concept of transcendence in Beauvoir and Sartre. In *Beauvoir and Sartre: The riddle of influence*, ed. Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 222–40.