

Concepts

A short but interesting discussion...

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As I present them, labour, work and play, are concepts - intellectual constructs and ideas. As such concepts are imaginary whether as abstractions or representations of the world which allow individuals to grasp the world, arguably, change it. Despite their intellectual nature, concepts are not completely unhinged from the world. Concept, like intellectual property, is variously attached or linked to the material and physical world through experience. Concepts can be concrete or abstract – concrete concepts are those which experience shows to contain reliable explanations of phenomena, while abstract concepts are more likely one sided impressions or belief about the way the world is or could be.¹ Thus, for example, property as a thing owned or a bundle of rights can be seen as an abstract concept, while property as the product of ownership, involving things, rights and owners, is more concrete. Concepts also provide the structural elements, the building blocks or, to use the theatrical metaphor, the stage props, for thinking and theorising about the world. While description and analysis may be replete with concrete concepts, the vision necessary for strategy depends on often abstract concepts or incomplete knowledge of the world. The future is always imaginary. Strategy, what to do next, is shaped by a conceptual understanding of what is and what should be, but action requires faith in one's concepts. Understanding the reasons for the action, or even the strategy, requires a understanding of the concepts which may be implicit. Suzanne Langer writes:

¹ Sayer writes: “By concrete we mean something real, but not something which is reducible to the empirical: we mean far more than just 'factual'. The concrete object is concrete not simply because it exists, but because it is a combination of many diverse forces or processes. In contrast, an abstract concept represents a one-sided or partial aspect of an object. For example, if we conceptualize an object such as a factory simply in terms of its outward appearance, the concepts will be abstract in the sense of one-sided even though it refers to something which can be empirically observed. To make this a concrete concept we would have to specify all the relationships in which the factory is involved: with its workforce, its suppliers, and buyers.... these diverse determinations are not simply listed and added up but are synthesised; that is their combination qualitatively modifies each constituent element...However, in order to understand this combination, we normally have to isolate each element in thought first, even though they do not and sometimes could not exist isolation in reality. It is important to note that whether the concrete is observable (and hence an empirical object for us), it is contingent (ie neither necessary nor impossible). The concepts 'concrete' and 'empirical are not equivalent.”: [Sayer, 1998 #424, at 123].

The formulation of experience which is contained within the intellectual horizon of an age and a society is determined, I believe, not so much by events and desires, as by the *basic concepts* at people's disposal for analyzing and describing their adventures to their own understanding. Of course, concepts arise as they are needed, to deal with political or domestic experience; but the same experience could be seen in many different lights, so the light in which they do appear depends on the genius of a people as well as on the demands of the external occasion. Different minds will take the same events in very different ways. ... Every society meets a new idea with its own concepts, its own tacit, fundamental way of seeing things, that is to say *with its own questions*, its peculiar curiosity. (emphasis in the original) [Langer, 1951 #299, at 17]

The concepts of labour, work and, in particular, play help explain the activities of the author / inventor. Creative activity conceptualised as play, rather than labour or work, provides the basis for a strategy for the author / inventor and, at the same time, reveals the contradictions involved in the production of intellectual property.

the concept of concepts

In social theory the duality suggested by the spider and her web appears in several forms, in particular in the dualism of the individual and society or of human agency and social structure. Social structures, like the spider's web, are the systems and institutions which are constituted by human practices, but at the same time provide "the very medium of this constitution": [Thrift, 1996 #157, at 69]. The problem is that a 'cause and effect' explanation does not explain how either the individual or society came to be. The individual produces society, while society produces the individual. Ian Craib suggests that no one theory can explain both individual and society as it is impossible "to develop one coherent, unified social theory": [Craib, 1997 #422, at 7]. He believes that social theory has to take account of both sides of the duality, and then give priority either to the individual (action or agency) or to society (structure or functionalism).² Regardless as to whether a unified theory is possible, a number of contemporary theorists argue that the space between the

² As used in social theory the term, "functionalism", is attributed to Emile Durkheim to describe attempts to explain the continued existence of a phenomena through reference to the function it fulfills in society as a whole. While there are various forms of functionalism, in general, in functionalist theories, society is seen as the whole of many parts, each of which function to maintain one another and the totality. Change of one part may prompt change or explain change in others. Thrift identifies the 'first order mistakes' of functionalism as including: "(i) the attributing of 'needs' to social systems; (ii) the assumption that social systems are functionally ordered and cohesive; (iii) the imputing of a teleology to social systems; (iv) the characterisation of effects and causes; and (v) the setting up of empirically unverifiable propositions via tautological statements": [Thrift, 1996 #157, at 94]

individual or society provides a metaphorical place where human practices or activities and social structures meet.³ This place, described as ‘habitus’, a third ‘dialectical’ level, or “system of concepts” consists of the mediating concepts which link the individual to society: [Thrift, 1996 #157, at 69].⁴ Concepts can be seen as attempts to describe the spider, the web and the space between them.

Concepts provide the structural elements needed for a strategy. They serve as “aphoristic guidelines” for further action or thought: [Thrift, 1996 #157, at 30]. As part of the methodology used in my research, strategy takes shape both as the objective and the conclusion of the process of description, analysis and vision. Description refers to the observed experience and analysis to the attempt to go beyond the description through reflection on the nature of “the conditions which must prevail if experience of that kind is to be possible”: [Sayer, 1979 #316, at 109]. Both description and analysis involve constructing and reflecting on concepts – until they feel concrete or, in other words, serve as reliable explanations for events. In contrast, vision involves imagining what could or should be and this requires intelligent guesses and thus abstract or incomplete concepts about what may happen. Strategy thus proceeds from a synthesis of description and analysis to an appreciation of what can or should be done. And while the development of the strategy offers a momentary sense of closure, the process is never complete as one phase of the investigation leads to another. Still, the present can be sufficiently explained to allow for a sense that future is predictable. Strategy implies a shift from thinking to doing, but both the thinking and doing are shaped by concepts.

Concepts are also part of description and analysis: [Arendt, 1958 #323, at 293]. But they may not provide the best starting point for the development of strategy. Marx, for example, did not begin his investigation of capitalism with a concept of

³ Thrift, quoting Bhaskar notes: “... it is clear that the mediating system we need is that of *positions* (places, functions, rules, tasks, duties, rights, etc.) occupied (filled, assumed, enacted, etc.) by individuals, and of the *practices* (activities, etc.) in which in virtue of their occupancy of these positions (and vice versa) they engage.” [Thrift, 1996 #157, at 70]

⁴ Thrift writes that Bourdieu describes the dialectical third level, which mediates between human practices and social structure as a semi structure or *habitus*. He wrote Bourdieu’s *habitus* consists of “... of cognitive, motivating (‘reason-giving’) structures that confer certain objective conditions and predefined dispositions on actors based on the objective life-changes which are incorporated into the strategies involved in particular interactions, these interactions being improvisations regulated by the *habitus*.” [Thrift, 1996 #157, at 70]

capitalism, but rather with the concrete form of experience as it presented itself.⁵ Marx wanted his critique of capitalism to be empirically grounded; for example, he attempted to ensure that the transhistorical categories he identified were not *a priori* constructs but were “‘sifted out by comparison’ over long centuries”: [Sayer, 1979 #316, at 113]. The process was not deductive, despite appearances, because there were no transhistorical ‘covering laws’ from which essential relations might be deduced. At the same time the process was not strictly inductive, from the particular observed experience to the general rule of practice, as phenomenal forms were interpreted. Sayer explains:

Marx saw such empirical correlations as needing to be explained, and for him to explain meant above all to unearth the *mechanisms* through which they are brought about, and behind them their *conditions*. Explanation thus ultimately proceeds from the properties of these latter entities and, unlike in the Humean tradition, causal propositions are understood as referring to these properties. ... This means that the ‘logic’ of Marx’s analytic is essentially a logic of hypothesis formation, for what he basically does is to *posit* mechanisms and conditions which would, if they existed, respectively explain how and why the phenomena come to assume the forms they do.” [Sayer, 1979 #316, at 115].

Concepts like individual and society are imagined. They are abstractions, but not necessarily abstract. Although the material ground for the conditions and mechanisms which make the individual and society possible are not phenomenally visible, it is possible to develop a concept of both the individual and society which is grounded in experience. For example, Marx’s conception of abstract labour did not reflect actual experience, but offered an convincing image for labour’s social form. When a phenomena is as sufficiently interesting to prompt an investigation, concepts often in the guise of ‘intelligent guesses’ need to be developed in order to make sense of the experience. Of course, not any guess will do.⁶ At a basic level the guessing criteria is that of reason – the hypothesis needs to be coherent and consistent. At another level there may be criteria which guesses must meet before it will be accepted as offering a reasonable explanation of the phenomena. Sayer describes the criteria used by Marx

⁵ He began with the commodity and moved from the commodity to concrete labour and use-value and from there to a determination of the quality which distinguished labour as a social form and thus to exchange-value.

⁶ A more formal process refers to the process of making intelligent guesses as abduction. Abduction offers, arguably, a reasonable explanation of how scientific hypothesis are developed.

as exhaustiveness, independence and consistency: [Sayer, 1979 #316, at 117]. A reasonable hypothesis is one which explains the all the noted phenomena (ie it does not require exceptions), one which does not rely on the phenomena which it seeks to explain to explain (ie it is not a circular argument), and it is an explanation which can be used to explain similar phenomena. Once tested, the guess or hypothesis appears as theory or explanation for the concept. Thus Marx's concepts, though imagined, were also reasonably grounded. But they remained abstractions and served as categories of thought.

The intelligent guess provides much of the vision required for a strategy. However, the vision is also shaped by aspiration or hope which also takes form in concepts. Craib writes:

Once we have the idea of 'society', there is the possibility of asking what sorts of changes are possible, or desirable, and questioning the range of control that we have over the world we live in ... Even if it is difficult to imagine the socialist revolution in the way that Marx and Lenin imagined it, we should not lose the sight of the possibility that there are other ways of living and other ways of organizing ourselves. [Craib, 1997 #422, at 271]⁷

The concept of the ideal, or simply something better, is reflected in the vision as it informs strategy and individual action. For example, David Harvey argues that individuals need to imagine themselves as "insurgent architects" with power and ability to change the world in which they find themselves: [Harvey, 2000 #473, at 233]. As insurgent architects individuals would understand themselves and their world and have the courage necessary to act – to take "a speculative leap into the unknown and unknowable". Inaction does not avoid the risks related to action. He writes:

The lesson is clear: until we insurgent architects know the courage of our minds and are prepared to take an equally speculative plunge

⁷ Of course there is the danger which Hegel notes that the understanding comes late, perhaps too late: "One more word about giving instruction as to what the world ought to be. Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. As the thought of the world, it appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed. The teaching of the concept, which is also history's inescapable lesson, is that it is only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal apprehends this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey on grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." [Hegel, 1952 #487, at 13].

into some unknown, we too will continue to be the subjects of historical geography (like worker bees) rather than active subjects, consciously pushing human possibilities to their limits. What Marx called ‘the real movement’ that will abolish the “existing state of things’ is always there for the making and for the taking. That is what gaining the courage of our minds is all about. [Harvey, 2000 #473, at 255]

Intellectual courage is needed if worthy visions are to be imagined. Such visions can be variously expressed – as utopic dreams of an ideal society, in the expression of fundamental (universal) values and principles, or, more modestly, in the proposal for social reform.⁸ All, however, are built with concepts. Visions, images of a possible future, are ideas about what might be, but they are also grounded in what has been. Through an exploration of concepts, individuals can come to understand the world and appreciate the potential for change. Courage is needed to apprehend and transform the web. Arachne’s fate contains a warning about challenging the way things are. However, the power of the myth also lies with a sense of its enduring truth - that individuals through their actions produce the conditions in which they live which at the same time limit the possibilities for action. The myth provides the metaphor for the concepts which, once appreciated as ideas, provide the basis for change.

Arendt’s ‘hidden treasures’...

Concepts contain, according to Hannah Arendt, ‘hidden treasure’. Concepts provide clues as to the reasons why things are the way they are and ideas about the way things might or even should be. By exploring concepts, Arendt believed, individuals could learn about themselves, the world, and, perhaps most importantly, how to act. Arendt believed that events, not ideas, change the world, and what was important was to act: [Arendt, 1958 #323, at 273]. But it was also terribly important that one reflected on one’s actions. It was necessary to think and this thought required concepts. Commentators noted that Arendt sometimes referred to her enterprise as a conceptual analysis: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 275]. Arendt’s stated objective was simply to encourage people to think about what they were doing – their actions. For Arendt “thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent

⁸ In *Space of Hope* Harvey offers both – a description of his utopic vision and a discussion of Chapter 5 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. [Harvey, 2000 #473]

repetition of “truths” which have become trivial and empty” was the outstanding and negative characteristic of the modern age: [Arendt, 1958 #323, at 5]. Without right action, human life was meaningless. In order to remedy this failure and to recover human potential to act, it was, however, necessary to re-think, re-conceptualise, human activity.

In *The Human Condition* Arendt offers a conceptual analysis of human activity. She argues that human activity, doing as opposed to thinking, is comprised of three fundamental activities - labour, work and action. In this book her objective was to re-examine the concepts involved in activity, to write about doing rather than thinking, in order to offer a vision for right action. For her, the tragedy for modern society was that it was becoming a society dominated by labour at a time when labour was becoming redundant. Arendt believed that with advances in science and technology, with automation, there was a realistic possibility that humanity could be freed from labour. Humanity was “to be liberated from the fetters of labor” and left with nothing to do: [Arendt, 1958 #323, at 5].⁹ In order to for this liberation to be effective, there needed to be some vision or image of what a society of without labour might look like. While Arendt’s hopes for technology have not yet been unfulfilled, her fears that human activity would be reduced to labour seems justified. It remains difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a society in which no one had to work for a living. Arendt Certainly did not attempt to describe such a society, but she did offer an analysis of several of the concepts necessary for the construction of such a vision. And the concepts of labour, work and action were important, not simply because they provided clues to the what was going on, but because they also provided the necessary building blocks or ingredients for a theory and strategy for action.¹⁰

⁹ She writes: “... The modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society. The fulfilment of the wish, therefore, like the fulfilment of wishes in fairy tales, comes at a moment when it can only be self-defeating. It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those higher and more meaningful activities for the same of which this freedom would deserve to be won. Within this society, which is egalitarian because that is labor's way of making men live together, there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew. Even presidents, kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary of the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.”

¹⁰ Arendt writes: “The concepts themselves remain the same no matter where they are placed in the various systemic orders. Once Plato had succeeded in making these structural elements and concepts

In order to understand Arendt's concern for modern society and thus her concern for action, it is helpful to understand her impression to that society. It was, to say the least, very negative. In *The Human Condition* Arendt depicts society as a blob, "a living, autonomous agent determined to dominate human beings, absorb them and render them helpless": [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 3]. Pitkin writes:

There is, first off, Arendt's puzzling hypostasization of the adjective "social" into a noun, almost as if she were readying the word to serve as this monster's proper name. She does something comparable with what she regards as the contrasting adjective, "political." And she hypostasizes "social" even though there is a perfectly good noun, "society," already available, which she continues to use alongside, and more or less synonymously with, her neologism. Even more telling is how often and how powerfully her imagery personifies and even demonizes this entity. [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 3]¹¹

The spider's web as a metaphor for society fits the Arendtian image of the social as an extra territorial monster or apocalyptic fantasy. This vision, however, reflects Arendt's own experience and a deep concern for humanity. She was a Jew forced to flee Germany in 1933; the horror of the social was a lived experience. Also Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* in the 1950's in the United States, a time of certain social or popular concern, if not hysteria, about communism. Other commentators have also pointed out that at this time, there were also numerous popular science fiction movies about large-scale disasters fomented by monsters often from outer space. Typically the movie opened with scenes of ordinary people doing ordinary things "in ways so profoundly banal, conventional and boring that one welcomes the horror when it arrives": [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 5]. The monster was the only

reversible, reversals within the course of intellectual history no longer needed more than purely intellectual experience, an experience within the framework of conceptual thinking itself. These reversals already began with the philosophical schools of late antiquity and have remained part of the Western tradition. It is still the same tradition, the same intellectual game with paired antithesis that rules, to an extent, the famous reversals of spiritual hierarchies, such as Marx's turning of the Hegelian dialectic upside down or Nietzsche's revaluation of the sensual and natural as against the supersensual and supernatural." [Arendt, 1958 #323, at 292 - 93]

¹¹ In *The Human Condition* "society is variously said to "absorb", "embrace" and "devour" people or other entities; to "emerge", "rise", "grow", and "let loose" growth; to "enter," to "intrude" on, and "conquer" realms or spheres; to "constitute" and "control," "transform" and "pervert"; to "impose" rules on people, "demand" certain conduct from them, "exclude" or "refuse to admit" other conduct or people; and to "try to cheat" people. The social, then is very lively indeed." [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 4]

interesting character as the stereotyped human characters were “in a sense already dead before the catastrophe occurs”.¹²

Arendt’s objective in articulating her bleak concept of the social was not, however, to warn or even to scare readers, but rather to “instill a commitment to ‘act’ in the face of the consequences of not acting”: [Leonard, 1997 #548, at 323]. Her concept of the social, with her concepts of action, politics and freedom, were intended to provoke thinking in ways conducive to a free citizenship: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 278]. Action, as Arendt used the term, was a specific term, interrelated and almost synonymous with politics and freedom. For her all three terms referred to “the human capacity for initiative, spontaneity, innovation, doing the unexpected, launching an unprecedented and worthy undertaking”: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 1]. In acting, Arendt believed that individuals created and invented the world. Pitkin writes:

... Human beings, [Arendt] stressed, have the capacity to interrupt the causal chain of events and processes, to intervene in history and begin something new that may then be taken up and carried forward by others. She called this the capacity for action, and thought that we mostly deny and hide from it, both because of the profound instability it seems to threaten and because of the enormous responsibility it implies. [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 1 – 2]

Arendt also felt that the words such as action (and politics and freedom), while commonly used, were lost as concepts because individuals lacked the experiences which gave the words meaning. In a way people lost the ability to act creatively, because they had never creatively acted. The meaning could still be found in the concept through accounts of the experiences from which the present words sprang and of the activities to which they historically referred. Such experiences and activities were thus extremely valuable, the key to the lost treasure, as once remembered they could inform and revitalize actually existing society. Thus Arendt sought to restore “access to the full significance of these words so that we might also recover the corresponding forms of life.” [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 1 – 2].

¹² Pitkin writes: “At least the monster is alive; at least it makes people feel something’ at least it makes manifest the hidden horror that had previously been experienced only as boring routine. We are already monstrous: dead, numb, paralyzed, identical robots, insects, slime, without individuality, or boundaries, dissolving into jellied mass.” [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 5]

Arendt's treasure of lost concepts included both positive and negative concepts. Each positive concept had its "negative, evil counterpart"; freedom was contrasted with necessity; action with behaviour, and politics with society. A mapping of these concepts, both in their presence and negative absence, revealed the modern tendency to associate creativity with the material things of the world, rather than with the things of the mind and the web of relationships necessary for freedom, action and politics – "the institutions, norms, customs, standards, practices, rituals and ideas that make up our civilization" [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 2]. In Arendt's view not only do individuals underestimate the extent to which they create and sustain the patterns and situations in which they find ourselves, but they fail to acknowledge that there is much they can do when acting with others, to change what is. This, she noted could be found in the tendency to value poiesis over praxis and the related tendency to privatize and personalize human potential. Individuals in forgetting the potential for collective power were able to ignore shared responsibility for the way things are. For Arendt, real freedom required politics and public action – bringing the human capacity for action to bear "on whatever was wrong with our shared arrangements": [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 2].

Arendt's recovery of the lost treasure found in concepts involved techniques which she called storytelling and pearl diving – versions of narration and etymology. Telling stories allowed for the particular and concrete life or deeds of individuals to appear as part of history and thus the actor or agent in history. Stories were intended to stand in contrast to the empty abstractness of philosophy or social science as a story "invites the listener or reader to identify with the hero and thus to share vicariously in an agent's experience instead of adopting "the standpoint of the spectator"": [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 276] quoting Arendt *On Revolution*. Arendt also believed as that stories could allow for the experiences of individual action to be "generalized without being falsified": [Arendt, 1958 #323, at 278]. Storytelling, in the context of social theory, gave priority to the individual. Pearl diving, however, focussed on the system or structure from which the individual sought to be freed.

Arendt's second device or technique for restoring the ideas of agency and politics to activity was what she called "pearl diving". Pitkin comments that Arendt's description of the technique was somewhat ambiguous, but has been interpreted as a form of etymology – seeking the original meaning of words. However, Pitkin

comments that it would unfair to suggest that Arendt in attempting to restore the ancient meaning of words was also seeking to encourage deference to the past or a form of social conservatism. What Arendt was attempting was the recovery of the “original spirit” of the word which also included the “spirit of origins, the creative capacity of speakers” which appears in the subsequent extension of its meaning: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 275]. Pearl diving thus involved a “conceptual analysis” of historical and contemporary understandings both of which could elaborate the meaning of the concepts and shape a re-thinking. The technique involved “dredging up from the depths of the past lost meaning of some crucial term” which could provide the missing elements of meaning in everyday experience, but the analysis was situated in contemporary usage of the word. Once recovered and restored, the word could again serve right action. Pitkin writes:

... As the term, which had become a cliché, is restored to lively, actionable meaning, it is like a precious gem, refracting light on contemporary realities we had missed. [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 275].

Arendt commented that neither storytelling nor pearl diving were intended to produce theory. Both techniques were, she believed, “within the capabilities of any thoughtful person” and were intended primarily to facilitate action. However, as used by Arendt both storytelling and pearl diving resulted in the development of theory, or perhaps more accurately, of strategy. As Pitkin notes, Arendt’s main device “for restoring access to the lost treasure was neither etymology or narration but, quite simply, explicit theorizing about that treasure, its nature and the reasons for its loss.” She continues:

... Arendt believed that explicit theorizing was needed, particularly in our time, when “the concrete and the general ... have parted company.” More of the concrete by itself is not enough, not even stories of concrete action. What we need is a rejoining of concrete and general, local and large scale, commitment and prediction. The problem is reconciling these logically incompatible perspectives into a single, realistic understanding of oneself in the world, oneself in relation to other people. [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 278]

This theory was, however, a strategy – a way of rejoining “the concrete and general, local and large-scale, commitment and prediction.” Storytelling and pearl diving were activities which for use in countering the “formidable array of conditions

conducive to the social”: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 279]. In *The Human Condition* Arendt retrieves the concepts of labour, work and action in order that individuals might better resist the tendency of the social to reduce all of their activity to that of labour.

The problem, however, of the social remains unless one takes right action. Even once armed with Arendt’s concept of action, juxtaposed against that of labour and work, it is still difficult to know what should be done. Furthermore as Pitkin notes, even storytelling and pearl diving may not relieve “the depressing sense of hopelessness that results from examining the array of conditions in our lives”: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 280]. Many of the problems with the world, whether political or ecological, seem to originate with human activity – the relentless doing – which in turn seem to trap the individual in a vicious cycle. If collective, responsible and co-ordinated human activity is thought to provide the basis for a solution to the world’s problems, it is easy to see how a benevolent dictatorship, a contemporary form of Plato’s Republic, might be seen as attractive. But such a form of government would be antithetical to Arendt’s concept of action which, she insists, has no cause. “The agent is by definition an unmoved mover”: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 281]. Action cannot be commanded, but must be volunteered and there may indeed be no reason for it at all. Arendt’s conceptual analysis, like her techniques of storytelling and pearl diving, seem to end with ideas about acting rather than ideas about what to do.

Pitkin suggests that this is unfair to end with analysis and that Arendt’s work also contained the “existential impetus” intended to propel the individual “across the conceptual gap between the spectator’s outlook and that of the engaged citizen”; this Pitkin describes as an exhortation to “Just Do It!”: [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 280]. While there may be no cause or reason for action, in acting an individual may further the cause of freedom as “any step in the right direction ... can have further widening effects, enlarging the space for freedom.” : [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 283]. And this begs the question as to what the right direction might be. Pitkin writes:

If politics is concerted action, then, the kind of “taking charge” it involves will be very different from *homo faber’s* efficient technical mastery of materials. The basic political question remains, “What shall we do?” and both the “do” and the “we” are always

problematic, contestable, continually being (re) constituted. [Pitkin, 1998 #510, at 281]

In “Just Doing It!” the problems associated with “we” and “it” are not forgotten, they become part of, rather than a limit to, action. The slogan also hints at what I believe offers the key to understanding what might be the right direction for action. And that is play. Play is both an attitude and an activity with the potential to constitute both individual freedom and the public and shared world which comprises the social. With the addition of play to Arendt’s trilogy of fundamental human activities, the social seems more fun and individual action more explicable. This addition, however, requires the concept of play to be included in the conceptual analysis of the human condition. Athene in condemning Arachne to weave also ended the game.