People of the World, Unite! Arendt's Plurality and the Environment

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People of the World, Unite! Arendt's Plurality and the Environment[1]

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I. Introduction

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words, and yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering, people are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth (NPR, 2019).

In September of 2019 at the United Nations Climate Summit, Greta Thunberg held a speech that would become viral on the internet. Through her talk, the climate activist argued that current policies and institutions were not doing enough to implement the necessary measures to fight against climate change. Mass species extinction, soil erosion, greenhouse emissions and rising sea levels have become a reality that affects the livelihood and well-being of people across the globe (Dietz et al., 2020, p. 136). As Thunberg's speech highlights, governmental and institutional engagement toward actively changing the course of the climate crisis has been lacking and insufficient.

In 1989, as the Berlin Wall fell, liberal scholars believed the new world order to be immutable. "The End of History" proclaimed that liberal democracies, prioritising individual economic and political freedoms, were the ultimate and ideal institutions (Peter, 2021, p. 13). Capitalism and democracy were seen as the foundations of modern societies. However, the emergence of various political, social and economic crises in the 21st century challenged Fukuyama's bold claim.

Since the late 1970s, environmental issues[2] have gained increasing attention, with efforts at both scholarly and policy levels to adopt more sustainable perspectives (Dietz et al., p. 144). Environmental concerns encompass, in general terms, the awareness and concern for the consequences of climate change, such as heightened temperatures, rising sea levels, and droughts (Abbass et al., 2022, p. 42540). Questions on how to incorporate environmental issues into the liberal agenda for future generations have been at the centre of debate. More interestingly, some scholars question if liberalism can adequately address environmental concerns at all (Eckersley, 2004). Examples of policies from the United Nations have been attempting to find solutions to fight against climate change. For instance, strategies such as Green Growth assert that economic expansion is compatible with ecological sustainability by investing in technology (Hickel & Wallis,

[2] The term environmental issues will be used interchangeably alongside environmental concerns all throughout this paper

2020, p. 469). Yet, in effect these policies have proven to be ineffective as research has shown that there is no evidence that environmental action can be possible alongside economic growth (p. 483). As such, Hickel and Wallis highlight the fact that climate action requires scaling down the economy. Failures such as Green Growth highlight the ineffectiveness of liberal policy, which raises several questions as to why it is failing to accommodate environmental issues. An influential strand of literature has aimed to challenge 'green' liberalism, arguing that liberalism's instrumental view of nature and its framing of environmental policies as restrictions on individual freedom render it incapable of effectively addressing the climate crisis. This leaves the question as to what alternatives exist for addressing the fate of the earth and environmental issues. Given the limitations and failures of current liberal approaches, it seems relevant to explore new insights and solutions that might provide a framework to rethink our relationship with the environment. Subsequently, this thesis sets out to answer the following question: *How can moral philosophy help us accommodate environmental concerns?*

Furthermore, in her book *The Human Condition* (1998), Hannah Arendt sets out to explore the three fundamental activities of humanity: Labour, Work and Action. As Arendt's book delves into each of these three human activities, the public space springs out as a place where men can come together and where action can take place (p. 8). Action, though speech and deeds stems from the very fact that men are together, in plurality. "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world " (p. 7) is maybe one of the most famous quotes of the book and yet it is of crucial relevance to the very debate highlighted in this paper. By acting together, Arendt says, men become free and gain the capacity to engender something new (p. 9). It will be argued in this paper, that Arendt's understanding of plurality can be used a model to rethink and redesign a new system that is more accommodating of the environment.

This paper sets out to investigate a new way of thinking about the environment drifting away from liberalism to question how we might conceive a new system, a new order to remedy and rethink our relationship with the environment. In such a light, this article sets out to explore how Hannah Arendt's conceptualisation of plurality can provide tools to accommodate environmental catastrophes. The first part will start with an overview of the existing literature regarding how and why exactly liberalism has failed to accommodate environmental concerns. The second part introduces Arendt's concept of pluralism and will be followed by part three which attempts to bridge pluralism to environmental concerns. The final part of the paper folds into a discussion of the relevance of plurality and the ways it can be used to conceive and challenge the system currently at place.

II. Literature review

This section will examine the existing literature and try to establish the ways and reasons as to why liberalism has failed to accommodate environmental issues.

While investigating why liberal policies have failed to adequately take into account environmental concerns and push for effective measures, an influential strand of green ecologists argues that one of the fundamental reasons behind liberal democracies' failure to accommodate environmental concerns is rooted in the very conceptualisation and relationship between man and nature.

Luke Peter (2021, p. 93) argues that the emergence of political, economic, and environmental crises in contemporary societies today stems from the very conception of nature as an extractable resource. Furthermore, language and ideas hold significant influence in shaping both social structures and material realities. Concepts do not only offer abstract ideas; they also contribute to constructing the symbolic fabric of our world. Therefore, critically examining the emergence of contemporary notions of nature is crucial to understanding how they impact current policies and, more specifically, the way humans interact with the environment and their relationship with it.

Taking their origins in scientific revolutions and the Enlightenment, the prominent ideas and conceptualisations of thinkers such as Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke have played a significant role in shaping and influencing how human societies ought to be organised (Peter, 2021, p. 94). According to Descartes, the concepts of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* divided human consciousness from objective material reality. This meant that the realm of life and freedom was perceived to be accessible only to the spirit, while the material world was subject to universal laws of nature. In this system, the laws of nature left no room for subjectivity or freedom, and individuals were only truly free within the realm of the mind. This resulted in a dualism where the sphere of freedom was limited to the mind while material reality remained unfree and determined. Thus, the mind was both subject to and above nature and could or should attempt to control it. This led to a relationship with nature where the imperative was to subdue and exploit the natural world to fulfil one's needs and desires. Moreover, for men to survive in such an environment, they had to make sure to maximise their gains and make use of nature. This resulted in the perception of nature as a resource to be exploited for individual benefit and ultimately led to the environment being viewed as a hindrance to personal freedom (p. 95). Under such assumptions, nature was seen as a resource to be exploited for individual benefit, resulting in the perception of the environment as a hindrance to personal

freedom. According to Peter, this view gave rise to a hierarchical and exploitative relationship between humans and nature, through which human behaviour and social structures operate under the assumption that individuals are solely motivated by self-interest (p. 89). Furthermore, the belief that human beings exist in a state of competition stemming from Western liberal thought underlies the prevailing conception of society and nature as a power dynamic where humanity must dominate and control nature (p. 95). The symbolic classification of nature and humans reproduces and perpetrates a particular arrangement of the natural world. Social institutions and beliefs revolve around the assumption that individuals are self-interested and egotistical (pp. 94-95). Thus, emphasis was put on personal well-being at the expense of the environment and the well-being of the ecosystem.

Conversely, Peter (2021, p. 97) argues that nature is crucial and omnipresent in our interactions; it is present in everything we say or do as we, quite literally, live in it. While criticising this conceptualisation of nature, Peter asserts that humans are not separate from it; they actively shape and contribute to it. Therefore, he argues, there is a need to rethink current perceptions of the relationship between humans and nature, which tend to be binary and hierarchical. Instead, there is a need to transition from a reductionist view of nature to an ecocentric model that recognises the interdependence and creativity of all-natural components, including humans. By expanding our understanding of nature, we can transform social institutions and advocate for greater direct involvement in environmental concerns (p. 98). Moreover, Peter argues that individuals can only thrive if the entire ecosystem is healthy, just as the ecosystem depends on the health of its individual parts (p. 114). This relationship creates a horizontal and interdependent bond between humans and nature, where one cannot exist without the other (p. 115). Thus, he argues that by embracing an ecocentric perspective, we can ultimately break away from a relationship of domination and exploitation.

Despite attempts made by some liberals to account for environmental concerns, efforts often fall short of being effective. Marcel Wissenburg’s principle of restraint seeks to ensure a fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among co-existing generations (Eckersley, 1999, p. 262). This principle advocates for the right to restrict scarce goods to ensure their preservation, allowing humans to use them without abusing or destroying them. However, Wissenburg's conceptualisation of private property, while relatively innovative, still treats the environment and the non-human world as instrumental tools and fails to truly accommodate the environment.

Robyn Eckersley (2004, p. 93) argues that green liberal efforts have proven unsuccessful because liberal democracies are inherently tied to the growth and development of capitalism. This

has resulted in liberal democracies being founded on the principles enabling and safeguarding individual consumption and economic preferences - democracies had to adjust to liberalism and not the latter. Representative democracy inadequately represent the interests and preferences of less influential negotiators, individuals or communities whose priorities do not align with those of more powerful individuals (p. 107).

In a 2014 study conducted by Gilens and Benjamin I. in the United States, it was found that economic elites and organised groups have a significant and influential reach in policy decisions related to electoral democracy (p. 565). This finding raises important questions regarding the core principles upon which contemporary democracies are built and the broader societal framework in which society operates.

Moreover, Eckersley (2004, p. 93) asserts that the exploitation relationship between humans and nature is deeply rooted in liberal thought. Liberalism prioritises the fulfilment of each individual's needs and desires, viewing nature as a means to achieve them. At the very core of liberalism are the principles of freedom and equality, which form the foundation of Western democracies (p. 28). It bases itself on the assumption that people should be free to pursue their own individual economic interests and preferences with limited interference from the state. Yet, as Eckersley and others point out, the liberal democratic state is not partial in the way it prioritises certain freedoms over others (p. 98). This means that formal rather than substantive freedoms are ensured. While, in theory, all citizens have legal rights and protections granted by the state, they might not all enjoy equal freedom to exercise them. For instance, environmental protections often conflict with direct, short-term public interests, as taxes on carbon emissions, water controls, and other regulations may impede individuals from fully pursuing their interests. As wealthier actors hold more bargaining power in decision-making procedures, it often results in the promotion of some interests over others. Consequently, more powerful players usually receive preferential treatment, leading to the regular trade-off of environmental concerns against competing interests. Overall, this results in an unequal approach to freedom. While civil, political, and economic freedoms are held as fundamental, environmental concerns are often viewed as negotiable and put on the back burner (p. 100). This creates a clear conflict between individual preferences and the environment, with the latter often being perceived as an obstacle to personal freedom.

Building on Eckersley, Val Plumwood (1995, p. 137) contends that liberal democracies are fundamentally ill-equipped to address environmental concerns because of structural inequality. The structural inequality stemming from the privileged groups' influence in decision-making procedures has come at the expense of humans and the environment. She argues that as social movements have

sought to raise awareness and fight for the environment and social causes, their efforts have been undermined and ecological progress has been hindered (p. 142). The dominance of liberalism and the relentless pursuit of individual interests at the expense of communal ones prevent humans and non-humans from effectively responding to environmental threats (p. 147). The tradition of democracy is based on acknowledging the importance of upholding and perpetuating institutions through social practices, as its strength stems from its capacity for adaptation and correction (Peter, 2021, p. 89; Plumwood, 1995, p. 137). Yet, as Plumwood (1995, p. 137) and Eckersley (2004, p. 217) argue, ecological crises result in part from liberal democracies' failure to take into account multiple and diverse perspectives, underlying the need for a more adequate participatory system that treats its citizens equally and accommodates the environment.

To truly realise ecological thinking, accommodate environmental concerns, and move past liberalism's failures, James Tully (2008, p. 4) argues that a form of government must be established that relies on participation. To do so, democracy and freedom can be seen as cooperative practices that involve working together in a space of governance. As individuals establish relationships with others, they can coordinate their interactions and act together to protect the environment (p. 73). In this sense, to be truly free is to engage in practices of political participation not just as a right but as a continuous act (p. 81). Participation shapes our interactions and relationships with others and forms our institutions. It is only so that men can create a harmonious environment that accommodates everyone, including nature. Such an argument regarding the crucial dimension of participation to accommodate environmental issues leads us to question how exactly this is achievable. As liberalism's intrinsic pursuit of individual economic freedoms fails to accommodate environmental concerns, Tully's civic democratic theory centres around taking into account the opinions and voices of citizens to discuss and reach consensus over environmental issues and reveals a need to fundamentally reconsider the foundations upon which our institutions are built.

Yet, his conceptualisation of space for governance is still conceptualised as an inherent part of the capitalist system (Tully, 2008, p. 89). While his argument about civic participation brings forth a new way to conceptualise politics, it does so within the very system that allowed for environmental issues and systemic inequalities to rise. Tully's conception of a participatory system fails to account for the detrimental effects that capitalism can have on the environment as well as political structures (Eckersley, 2004, p. 93). Ultimately, it raises questions as to whether the institutions and infrastructure that he envisions would not be undermined by capitalism itself. This highlights the need to re-conceptualise the space for politics to not

just accommodate the system to fit in participatory politics but for a more radical and fundamental rethinking of what it would entail to live together and to care for nature. In The Human Condition (1998), Hannah Arendt draws a fervent critique against capitalism and consumerist societies, advocating instead for a participatory democratic system where individuals can come together as equals. Arendt's concept of plurality could potentially serve as a way to not only re-conceive the system but also the world itself. In this context, it seems relevant to investigate whether Arendt's pluralism can encompass environmental considerations in its conceptualization of democracy and politics. Therefore, this thesis and the remainder of this paper seek to address the following question: "*How can Arendt's conceptualisation and notion of pluralism help accommodate environmental concerns?* »

III. Body

"Initium ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit″ by Augustine (Arendt, 1998, p. 177).

Recent environmental catastrophes, rising temperatures, and droughts clearly reveal the irreversible effects of human exploitation of nature. As current systems have failed to adequately address the dangers posed by climate change and environmental degradation, which threatens the well-being of current and future populations, there is a pressing need for an alternative system that can rectify the shortcomings of liberalism. This thesis argues that plurality can serve as a model to re-conceptualise and rethink a world that prioritises the environment. Such as system could lead to significant changes that effectively address liberalism's failures.

To understand how pluralism can exactly help us accommodate environmental issues, the first part of the body will start by conceptualising what plurality is. The second part will attempt to bridge plurality to the environment to answer the research question.

I. Pluralism

The following sections will aim to provide a conceptualisation of pluralism as Hannah Arendt describes it in The Human Condition (1998). Establishing a clear understanding of the concept will allow us to clearly understand how pluralism can serve as a framework to accommodate environmental issues.

Pluralism lies at the core of the fundamental condition of human activity, that is, action. It enables the emergence and sustainability of the public realm, where action, through speech and

deeds, as well as politics, can take place (Arendt, 1998, p. 8). Pluralism is where individuals come together as equals, as *qua* men (p. 176). In entering the public space, individuals achieve equality and freedom: "To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or the command of another and not to be in command oneself" (Arendt, 1998, p. 32). Thus, when men enter the public space, they leave behind their worries and necessities to move into a space where no one can rule or be ruled; they are among peers (p. 33). The presence of others as equals, along with their views and perspectives, forms the fundamental aspect of action (p. 58). In this public space, individuals have the opportunity to reveal their true selves and showcase their distinctive qualities. The public space allows them to reveal who they are rather than what they are. While in labor and life, all men are the same in their basic needs, pluralism enables individuals to demonstrate and disclose their identity and uniqueness through speech and actions (p. 176). "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (p. 8).

Furthermore, plurality offers a space for individuality and distinctiveness (Arendt, 1998, p. 176). As men enter the public realm, they become free. By speaking and acting, they create and engage with one another. Through the disclosure of their identities, opinions, and perceptions, individuals come together to discuss and debate, engendering new beginnings. When individuals present their ideas to others in the public realm, they bring something new and unique into the world (p. 177). Once the action is revealed to others and the outcome of a deed or speech is unknown, the action will lead to a reaction and, as such, create a new process: "Every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of a new process" (p. 190). Each reaction then becomes a new action that influences others, perpetuating a never-ending cycle of new actions coming to life. Boundlessness, as a specific productivity, is intrinsic to this process. Boundaries, often imposed by institutions or political bodies, provide some protection against the unpredictability of action. However, these boundaries cannot completely mitigate the unpredictability or reveal the full meaning of actions until they have evolved (p. 192). Therefore, it is impossible to predict what the subsequent story will tell.

As humans come together to engage in speech and action, the space created by plurality is fundamental to the public realm. For individuals to take part in action, they need space where they can come together. Arendt (1998, p. 26) conceptualises this space as the polis. The polis is the 'shell' or, otherwise, the walls that delimit the space; it is a spatial reference for where people meet and are. The crucial point Arendt makes is that the polis is not so much about a specific material place or a specifically chosen territory for conducting politics. Rather, the polis is a space where people

come together. Much of her conceptualisation of the polis derives from ancient Athens, and she makes clear that it was the Athenians that comprised the polis, not the *Pnyx* and its marble columns (p. 195). The polis serves as a reference to contain plurality and anchor it to a space. It transforms an ordinary occurrence of everyday life into something extraordinary, as it is a place where people can distinguish themselves and break away from the 'indistinctness' of life (p. 205).

Furthermore, the polis serves as a permanent place for extraordinary occurrences and anchors action and speech (Arendt, 1998, p. 205). It is regulated and enacted by institutions that protect a space for disclosure, allowing the 'who' to be established and revealed and for good and bad deeds to be remembered (p. 206). Through the structure of the polis, the reification of deeds becomes permanent, serving as a means to organise people and bring them together to act and speak (p. 198). It is a space that rises between people living together: "Wherever you go, you will be a polis" (p. 198). As action and speech create a space for participants, it allows them to make appearances explicit and anchored in the reality of a space. "To be deprived of a polis is to be deprived of a reality, where all men are represented" (p. 199).

Additionally, as the polis establishes a space and place for men to come together and disclose their identities, another fundamental aspect of plurality is power. Power represents the capacity for action and the ability to bring about change (Arendt, 1998, p. 204). It is the very thing that holds people together: "Without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed or the living world" (p. 204). Power and plurality are mutually constitutive; without power, there is no plurality, and vice versa. They are mutually constitutive. Power is conceptualised as the capacity for change that results in new beginnings. In such a way, power is conceptualised as the capacity for change that results in new beginnings (p. 204).

First, power is generated through the words and deeds men engage in with one another (Arendt 1998, p. 204). This power, in turn, strengthens and maintains the bond among individuals beyond the 'initial' act, deed, or discourse. It not only sustains action but also preserves power itself (p. 199). Power persists through the efforts of individuals, like an electric current in a closed circuit; if the circuit is open and men disperse, the power vanishes.

Secondly, power is fundamental not only for holding people together and enabling action but also because it grows through performances (Arendt, 1998, p. 205). As men act, they do not strive for victory but for greatness. This idea of greatness pushes individuals within the polis to strive for the extraordinary and act anew (p. 206). In other words, power seeks, through performance, to inspire individuals within the polis to strive for greatness. The pursuit of greatness motivates people

to engage and interact with one another, subsequently leading to the generation of more power and the emergence of new ideas and actions. Thus, the performances of acts generate even more power, which can eventually serve as catalysts for change as they drive men to engage with each other.

However, pluralism comes with some reservations. Arendt (1998, p. 236) warns us that the potentialities of action can also be its predicaments: unpredictability and irreversibility. As actions lead to a chain reaction, no one can know what these actions might result in or what might happen. The irreversibility of action implies that one cannot undo a past action or correct a wrong they could not have foreseen (p. 237). Meanwhile, the unpredictability leads to an underlying uncertainty about the world and the future. No one can know what each individual may do or where an action might lead. To check and account for the unpredictability and irreversibility of action, Arendt argues that promises and forgiveness can help remedy its shortcomings and consequences. To address the irreversibility of actions, forgiveness serves to undo the deeds of the past and to act anew. As she notes, "without being foreigner, we could not really act and would remain victims to the consequences for ever." (p. 240). Forgiveness is essential to making it possible for life to go on and to relate what was done knowingly. As everyone remains bound to the process of a chain reaction, forgiving allows men to act anew (p. 241). Similarly, unpredictability can be mitigated through promises. Promises bind and set up a sense of security amidst the insecurity generated by not knowing the outcomes of an action (Arendt, 1998, p. 237). Without making promises to each other, people would not be able to keep their identities, and they would have no direction. Promises hold a binding power as they keep people together and give them direction (p. 245). Arendt states that promises and forgiveness can only happen in plurality, as a promise to oneself holds no meaning or value if it is not professed in front of others, just as forgiveness does. It is through promises made to each other that individuals can remedy the unpredictability that might result from deeds. And it is by forgiving that we can move forward.

II. Linking pluralism with the environment

Now that the concept of plurality has been defined, its link and potential for accommodating environmental concerns can be established.

Because current systems fail to adequately address environmental issues, there is a need to explore alternative methods and rethink the system. This thesis argues that, in light of such needs, Arendt's concept of plurality can be used as a model and theoretical foundation to rethink a system that is more accommodating of the environment. Plurality fosters a space where individuals gather

as a community to discuss and establish common institutions. Space is what makes plurality particularly suitable for addressing environmental issues, as the environment is intrinsically linked with the use of space, such as the earth, lands, and waters that form the foundation of human life. As plurality is not bound to a specific demarcated space, it relies on it for meaningful interactions. It is so that it provides a suitable model for taking on environmental concerns.

This argument unfolds in three parts. First, it argues that plurality is relevant as it establishes a common word through thought and judgment that takes into account the environment. Secondly, plurality is set in motion by power, and finally, it is consolidated by promises that sustain environmental measures.

Generation of new ideas

Plurality, by bringing people together, allows them to meaningfully exchange ideas and reveal their identities (Arendt, 1998, p. 58). It is only through and because of this space that men can engage in politics. A crucial aspect of plurality is the constant interchange and clash of diverse perceptions and ideas. Arendt's conception of space as a place where people meet face-to-face to host debates and exchange ideas leads to the emergence and birth of new thoughts (p. 177). This dynamic interaction is fundamental to action as an action generates a reaction, and evolves taking on new shapes. When an individual discloses their thoughts, they may clash with others' ideas. The confrontation resulting from the clash of ideas in the public realm sparks an internal dialogue. Presenting original ideas to peers may lead to criticism or debate, offering alternative views not previously considered. As such the individual might retreat into the private realm for reflection as reflecting on these perspectives can deepen and expand the original idea (Loidolt, 2018, pp. 215-216). After self-reflection, the revised view can be reintroduced into the public realm, initiating further debate. This process, and the stimulation from others' views, enables people to reach judgments (p. 217).

An assembly might be composed of people from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic stations, each affected differently by environmental issues. Countries in the Global South are disproportionately affected by environmental disasters compared to those in the Global North (UN, 2019). The experiences of an islander from Micronesia or a Brazilian affected by floods differ significantly from those of Northern Europeans, who are less impacted by global warming and thus have different considerations. Yet, through exposure to multiple perspectives, people are confronted with others' realities, challenging and enriching their views. Ultimately, this process and the simulation of other people's views and opinions spark and allow for the elaboration of judgements

(Loidolt, 2018, p. 217). The actualisation of plurality through the formation of judgements leads to the establishment and creation of a common sense, of a world we *should* have (p. 218).

Common sense, or *sensus communis*, is a common understanding of the world formed by every acting citizen (Arendt, 1998, pp. 208-209). It is a fundamental tenet of the world and is co-original to it, meaning the world created by human artifice relies on and evolves around the notion of common sense. This shared understanding is based on lived experiences -how we, as human beings, live our lives, engage in processes, and interact with each other. Common sense integrates individual perceptions and experiences into a shared reality. It emerges through the gathering of men and the collective creation of a common reality. Thus, common sense facilitates objectivity, as it takes into account multiple perspectives and experiences. It is a product of human plurality and collective judgment. Consequently, if environmental considerations were brought forward into the public realm and became a common concern, caring for the protection and well-being of the environment could become a central feature of men's world, of common sense.

Furthermore, the need for the establishment of a common sense is of crucial importance, as perceptions of reality play a crucial role in our commitment to the common world (Arendt, 1998, p. 209). Arendt notes in the last section of *The Human Condition* that modern society has eroded the notion of common sense (p. 280). Through Cartesian rational thought, man has turned inward, relying on internal certainty rather than external, shared visions. "Man, in other words, carries his certainty, the certainty of his existence, within himself" (p. 280). As such, Arendt argues that men have lost a common understanding of reality and only share the structure of their minds. Individuals all think differently yet in fundamentally similar ways, centring themselves as individuals in their conception of life and the world (p. 283). "What men now have in common is not the world but the structure of their minds, and this they cannot have in common, strictly speaking; their faculty of reasoning can only happen to be the same in everybody" (p. 283). As Arendt describes the erosion of common sense, she asserts that men have lost objective conceptions of the world, and this phenomenon led to the "dissolution of objective reality into subjective states of mind or, rather, into subjective mental processes" (p. 282). Furthermore, she emphasises the need to move away from individualism (man himself), as it alienates them from the world. Arendt warns us against what she calls common-sense reasoning: "Deprived of the sense through which man's five animal senses are fitted into a world common to all men, human beings are indeed no more than animals who are able to reason, 'to reckon with consequences'" (p. 284). To address this, she asserts the need to re-establish a common world among individuals and move beyond individualism. By rethinking societal structures and the world, encouraging gatherings, and reconceptualising modern

life, we can achieve a reconciliation between the man-made world and nature. This process can re-establish common sense and an objective view of the world, with a core consideration for the environment. Consequently, plurality offers us tools and ways to conceive of a common world and reality.

Ultimately, judgements, ideas, and actions can lead to the rebirth of a more inclusive system based on collective action and empowerment. By finding a common way to view the world and gathering together, environmental concerns can become central aspects of this new collective reality. This renewed common sense could adopt an ecocentric perspective, conceiving a fundamentally different and sustainable system.

Catalyst for change

As power is the glue that holds people together, it represents the capacity for action and the ability to do something in concert with others: "Without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed or the living world" (Arendt, 1998, p. 204).

Furthermore, power is 'simply' the capacity for change that results in new beginnings (Arendt, 1998, p. 204). Power helps bring in a new beginning, which each man is capable of within the public realm. Thus, power is fundamental not only for uniting people and enabling action but also for growing through performance (p. 206). Performances by acts generate even more power, which can eventually become catalysts for change. As power is generated by the ‘simple' act of people acting together, this collective power is fundamental to the creation of new thoughts. The potential to generate thoughts can be extended and applied to environmental action. When people gather around an issue such as the environment based on common sense and a shared perception of the world, their gathering itself produces the power to think about solutions and measures. In turn, this creative thinking enables the implementation of reforms and concrete actions to safeguard the environment. Therefore, the generated power can be used to drive meaningful change. However, change can only occur if people act together; otherwise, the potential power is lost. As Arendt states:

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and ends are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (Arendt, 1998, p. 200).

Thus, power within plurality holds the potential to create and push for a new system where environmental concerns, are fundamental principles, rooted in an ecocentric worldview.

Promises

As the argument presented has assessed, plurality enables us to fundamentally reconcile the world and men's relationship, to incorporate an ecocentric view that might be more accommodating towards environmental concerns, and that power serves as the catalyst and effective means to implement such a world. The question remains on how to effectively ensure continuity and avoid the same fate as liberalism. Despite pluralism being completely opposed to liberalism, how do we ensure to keep an objective understanding of the world and uphold our views on the importance of environmental issues? This can be achieved through promises and forgiveness.

Plurality's potentialities simultaneously come with their own predicaments: the irreversibility and unpredictability of action. Yet, promises and forgiveness can help mitigate such predicaments, as the presence of others allows us to take hold of reality (Arendt, 1998, p. 237).

First, forgiveness is an essential element for enabling action. Without the act of forgiveness, individuals would be bound to the consequences of their words or deeds indefinitely (Arendt, 1998, p. 240). Once actions are released and presented to others, their consequences are irreversible. If individuals failed to forgive each other, they would find themselves trapped and unable to escape their deeds. Therefore, forgiveness is a means to undo past wrongs and implement change.

In the context of environmental change, forgiveness allows individuals to initiate meaningful change, yet they must first acknowledge and forgive their mistakes about past events regarding the handling of nature. Accordingly, individuals need to accept and move beyond their errors to be able to move forward. The same process of forgiveness must be applied to future actions as well. Failure to forgive and move past setbacks hinders progress and stifles any potential for real change. Thus, forgiveness serves as a crucial catalyst in creating a relationship with nature, by offering hope for the possibility of building a better world in alignment with the natural environment. "It needs forgiving, dismissing to make it possible for life to go on, and realising men from what they have done unknowingly" (p. 240).

Secondly, promises are crucial for addressing the uncertainty of the future. As our actions might yield unpredictable outcomes, individuals must rely on the promises they make to one another to establish a sense of certainty and direction (Arendt, 1998, p. 237). Without promises, individuals can have a hard time navigating uncertainty, as having no clear idea of what to do in

light of a situation or how to react can be daunting. Therefore, promises help establish a path for individuals to follow.

Furthermore, promises serve as moral codes that dictate how individuals should act and what they should strive for (Arendt, 1998, p. 238). Mutual agreements and contracts help foster cohesion among individuals as they draw on their shared experiences and perspectives (p. 245). Such agreements are essential for generating accountability towards the implementation of climate regulations and actions, as promises made among individuals hold them accountable towards one another. This is what can lead to the successful implementation of climate regulations and actions. The fundamental promises men make to each other to keep going forward hold them accountable to each other. Thus, by making promises to each other, men uphold their engagement with nature. These promises signify a commitment to continue protecting the environment and the natural world, binding individuals together in their shared responsibility towards the earth.

Additionally, a final consideration needs to be addressed. If individuals were to try and solve environmental issues, they would have to align with and follow an agreed-upon convention or course of action. This prompts the question of the extent to which this unified thought respects and embraces the diverse array of perspectives that define plurality. Would this 'unified' resolution risk succumbing to a conformist, single behaviour that resembles a universal will? In essence, does the pursuit of a singular agenda negate the multiplicity of viewpoints, undermining the very essence of pluralism? It is argued in this paper that it would not. Diverse individuals can be unified by sharing a common world and a set of external institutions (Canovan, 1983, p. 295). This means that despite their multiple perspectives, opinions, and identities, men can come together with a mutual commitment to institutions. The crucial aspect of plurality is that it allows for divergent ideas and debates while, most importantly, enabling compromises. Political compromises can be seen as individuals acting together to create something new -new regulations, a new system more accommodating of environmental concerns grounded in a common perception of the world (i.e., *sensus communis*) (p. 297). While points of view may differ, common interests can be held, allowing individuals to remain loyal to their ideas and perspectives while engaging in environmental concerns and being committed to achieving their goals when differences arise.

In sum, Arendt's concept of plurality offers a foundation for developing a system that better accommodates environmental concerns. By fostering collective spaces where individuals can unite and act together, men can reclaim a common sense grounded in shared experiences and mutual understandings. Through common thinking and judgements, common sense establishes objective realities and can lead to efforts towards environmental action. Power serves as a catalyst to set

changes in motion and to push for effective change. Finally, individuals can ensure accountability by making promises to one another and, thus, upholding their engagement with the environment.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

Liberal democracies' failure to accommodate environmental issues threatens the well-being of current and future generations. As this thesis has argued, a system based on plurality which makes use of the ordinary citizen's participation offers a viable solution to address liberalism's shortcomings. While using plurality as a model ensures that different voices and perspectives are taken into account, it can also generate a sense of collective engagement towards safeguarding the environment and nature.

Arendt's plurality can be used as a model to re-conceptualise our system and address some of liberalism's failures, particularly regarding democracy.

Eckersley (2004, p. 98) argued that liberal democracies fail to represent the interests and preferences of less influential groups adequately. Because of the structure of representative democracies, environmental needs and long-term ecological measures are often overweighed against individual preferences and interests. A pluralistic model argues for an alternative conception of democracy by proposing face-to-face politics. Direct democratic institutions could remedy the issues that arise with short-term electoral cycles in liberal democracies, allowing for the implementation of environmentally sustainable measures and solutions. This approach is more effective as it involves citizens at decision-making levels and would ensure that concerns for the environment are made a priority as in such a system, individuals can voice their concerns and interact as equals.

Furthermore, many scholars support the need for participatory democracy to effectively address environmental issues. Freya Matthews (1995, p. 9) argues that re-imagining society requires a radical re-conception of governing institutions. This transformation demands new strategies that necessitate participative structures in which citizens creatively rethink the world together. As such, Matthews advocates for the establishment of small-scale communities as a means to achieve this goal.

In this context, Arendt's concept of plurality could serve as a theoretical basis for rethinking and redesigning a political system that would be more accommodating of the environment. Pluralism emphasises the importance of a space where individuals can meet and participate in politics and establish, together, common institutions. Eco-anarchist communities can serve as ways

to think about institutions and direct governing structures as eco-anarchism strives to create free ecological societies where humans thrive alongside nature (Smessaert & Feola, 2023, p. 768). For instance, Murray Bookchin's (2000, p. 2) concept of libertarian communalism advocates for democratic, anti-statist politics with democratic assemblies. Such communities are directly managed by citizens through face-to-face institutions, encouraging citizen's engagement and reviving the public sphere to, ultimately, transform it into a political realm. Bookchin's small eco-communities are embedded into larger networks of confederated communities, allowing them to retain their freedom and identity while being part of a broader network (Biehl, 1998, p. 64). In turn, this confederated structure enables the emergence of large-scale responses to climate crises.

Bookchin's conception of the communities provides a practical example of how plurality can help us create environmentally conscious systems. What is relevant about eco-anarchist communities regards the space they allocate to politics, where people can come together, interact with one another and engage in democratic processes.

Bookchin's idea of the commune falls along the lines of Arendt's plurality as it underlines the importance of a space for political action while simultaneously empowering citizens and accommodating the environment. Thus, as Bookchin's commune uses a pluralistic framework, it grounds Arendt's concept and provides a more tangible way of considering plurality for creating sustainable communities.

In conclusion, Hannah Arendt's conceptualisation of pluralism goes a long way in identifying and pointing out the importance and necessity for men to unite and act together. Greta Thunberg's angry exclamation at the Climate Summit reflects the inadequacy of liberalism in addressing environmental issues given its focus on the pursuit of individual freedoms over the ones of the community. It has become clear that alternatives need to be sought out. Arendt's pluralism calls for a radical rethinking of politics and the overall way our society functions. It highlights the capacity and potential of men to come together, revitalise public engagements and find solutions for contemporary challenges such as climate change. In such a light, this thesis has aimed to shed light on how the concept of plurality offers a valuable framework through which men can create a space and find solutions for climate action. It is by uniting that men can perform a miracle: the creation of a new beginning (Arendt, 1998, p. 246). Through speech and deeds, men can reinvent themselves and the world they live in. In such a way, Arendt's concept could be used as a theoretical tool to reimagine a community, a society and a world in which men can live together alongside nature. It is by taking into account the diversity of perspectives, realities and opinions that citizens can be empowered to change the world. As Bookchin's communities ground plurality's theoretical model

into a more tangible representation of what this kind of plurality might look like. Valid questions arise regarding the feasibility of such an endeavour and whether fiction and ideals could, potentially, become a reality.

Yet, change has to start somewhere. It is by mobilising and organising themselves, as a united whole, that men can start working towards building institutions that will accommodate the environment. Large-scale, revolutions always start small and eventually evolve into significant, meaningful change.

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