Ascending Beyond Atomism and Overcoming "the Paradox of Our Times": An Arendtian Argument for Moral Cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

"We are citizens of the world. The tragedy of our times is that we do not know this."
– President Woodrow Wilson

Rather than understand the inherent oneness of our world from the macro perspective, as if one were looking down on the planet from space, we, as persons of "the West", operate at a much lower altitude. On the whole, we struggle to conceptualize the world from an elevated perspective where those arbitrary, historically constructed geographic and moral boundary lines fall into oblivion. Instead, our views are confined to those entities/people closest us – our respective nations, immediate communities, streets, families and selves. This limited view is the product of a number of things; however, I suggest that this minimized perspective is largely the result of a radical individualism that has permeated life in the West. As a result of a pervasive individualism, we have failed to fully 'enlarge our thinking' (to borrow Kant's phrase) and to expand our ethical concern to reach all of humanity. In this sense, we have struggled to harbor the cosmopolitan sentiment because our individualistic ways have prevented us from expanding our moral understanding to encompass the *cosmopolis*[1].

This lack of an expanded, cosmopolitan understanding is a moral shortcoming because acting solely according to individual wants/needs is unsustainable and not in the best interest of our planet or its people. As the world rapidly continues to grow more interconnected, interdependent, globalized and cosmopolitanized[2], it is necessary to scrap those ethical understandings with radically narrow constitutions, such as the individualist ideology that have served to cultivate what David Held terms, "the paradox of our times" (Held 2010, 143). Although he does not specifically associate this phrase/problem with individualism and rather focuses particularly on the issues of global governance, I would like to enlarge Held's claim and argue that the individualist ideology is problematic because it sits at the heart of this paradox: "that the collective issues we must grapple with are

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[1] Cosmopolis refers to the Stoic notion of the universal, all-encompassing polis, a global community of all men. Cosmos, or universe, serves as the root for "cosmopolitan," and thus associating "oneself with the cosmos connotes having an affinity with all of life" (Heater 1996, 7). In the following section, I will more closely discuss this Stoic notion and delve more deeply into the political theory of cosmopolitanism that is derived from this ancient Greek understanding.

[2] As defined by the renowned sociologist Ulrich Beck, cosmopolitanization is "the nonlinear, dialectical process in which the universal and the particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities, but as interconnected and reciprocally interdependent interpenetrating principles … reality itself, i.e. social structures are becoming cosmopolitan" (Beck 2006, 72-73).

increasingly global and, yet, the means for addressing these are national and local, weak and incomplete" (143). In other words, there fails to be a stronger, collective global response to transnational issues – such as climate change, global financial crises resource depletion, the AIDS/HIV epidemic, the War on Terror, human trafficking, etc. – largely because a hegemonic individualism (especially in the West) is a pernicious ideological construct that has impeded the development of cohesive worldwide response to these deep-seated problems. In this sense, it is imperative that we realize that our actions as individuals impact all of humanity, and that we must first cultivate a moral understanding that better reflects the cosmopolitan nature of today's world before we can, as Held argues, have a viable, effective and worthy global program to overcome this paradox.

Despite the fact that individualism has received much attention from academics since the Enlightenment, I would like to re-critique individualism in an attempt to highlight how the individualist ideology atomizes and as a result impedes the development of the moral cosmopolitan sentiment by enshrining the private sphere over the public sphere.[2] Turning to Alexis de Tocqueville to help us understand the atomizing tendencies of radical individualism and relying on Hannah Arendt to comprehend the destructive nature of individualism on the public sphere, I argue that the cosmopolitan sentiment is lost because of how a radical individualism in the western tradition has valorized the individual and thereby enshrined the private sphere over the public. As a result, a rebalancing of individual, private interests and public needs must occur before a greater sense of cosmopolitanism can be cultivated in the West and "the paradox of our times" overcome.

This article is divided as follows: first, I discuss moral cosmopolitanism and stress that we can be citizens of both our nations as well as the cosmopolis; second, I delve more deeply into individualism and use the United States as an example of how the individualist ideology, when radicalized, becomes a pernicious driver of atomistic alienation (it is in this section that Tocqueville enters our discussion); and third, I use an Arendtian lens to show that individualism, in its radical form, is not a virtue, but rather a problem rooted in an improper balance of the public and private spheres. It is in the latter section that I stress the importance of the public sphere to the moral cosmopolitan sentiment by demonstrating that by glorifying the private realm, the individualist ideology has sacrificed the greater public sphere, which in turn has impeded the development of a legitimate concern for the

[3] I use the term, "private" and "public" in the Arendtian sense. According to Arendt, the private realm is the space away from the public sphere where one is devoted to the most essential needs to sustain life. It is the sphere where one was "primarily concerned with one's own life and survival" (Arendt 1958, 36). Conversely, Arendt understands the public realm to be "a common space of disclosure not only for those who act or actively move within it but for everyone who perceives it … the reality of the world is its 'being common,' its being between, literally its interest (inter esse) for all those who, through their common sense, hold it in common" (Kohn 2000, 125).

concentric circles of humanity that lie outside those closest to the self. It is only by relearning to care for the public realm that we can truly begin conceptualizing the world in the macro – as if orbiting Earth from the International Space Station – and even begin to consider harboring a truly cosmopolitan understanding that is needed to foster the necessary collective response to our world's many problems.

Moral Cosmopolitanism: Caring for Concentric Circles of Humanity

Before continuing, it is important that we more closely discuss cosmopolitanism and differentiate the two primary strands of cosmopolitan theory – political cosmopolitanism and moral cosmopolitanism. With a primary focus on moral cosmopolitanism, I have chosen to rescue Stoicism's notion of the **cosmopolis** from antiquity in order to demonstrate that being a citizen of a given polity does not prevent one from harboring a greater concern for all of humanity. However, assuming one's role as a **kosmou politês** ("citizen of the universe") requires a much better balance of the private and the public realms whereby both spheres are properly cared for.

Cosmopolitanism, at its core, is the theoretical understanding that "maintains that there are moral obligations owed to all human beings based solely on their humanity alone, without reference to race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, political affiliation, state citizenship or other particularities" (Brown & Held 2010, 1). Cosmopolitanism is a normative idea that takes the individual to be the ultimate unit of concern, and it is "traditionally associated with three different sorts of claims. First, it claims that all humans share a common moral identity. Second, it maintains that there are universal (cosmopolitan) standards of normative judgment. And third, it asserts that there should be a cosmopolitan political order" (Hutchings 1999, 35). Cosmopolitan commentators and critics generally accept these claims; however, they also break cosmopolitanism down further into two strands – political cosmopolitanism and moral cosmopolitanism. Political cosmopolitanism is concerned with the third claim, and it is the branch of cosmopolitan theory dedicated to the formation and implementation of global systems of governance. It is affiliated with the framework, procedures, institutions and organizations that represent a world state of some sort" (Tan 2004, 10). On the other hand, moral cosmopolitanism is concerned with the first two claims and it is the strand of theory devoted to respecting the **dignity of man and the universality** of moral norms. These two strands of cosmopolitan theory, although different, are complimentary, and in many ways they are tightly intertwined – especially when one is concerned with political cosmopolitanism. In other words, the belief in global governance

(political cosmopolitanism) oftentimes relies on the moral notion that all humans – no matter their nationality, religion, economic situation, culture, ethnicity or social circumstance – are the ultimate units of concern (moral cosmopolitanism). In this sense, moral cosmopolitanism is generally the foundation upon which arguments for political cosmopolitanism rest.

Since this discussion is not directly concerned with global systems of governance, I will set political cosmopolitanism aside and focus solely upon moral cosmopolitanism. The remainder of this section is devoted to cosmopolitanism as a normative, ethical idea, and Stoicism's support of it.

Moral cosmopolitanism is the form of theory that is "characterized not with institution building, but with assessing the justice of institutions in the existing global system accord-ing to how individuals fare in relation to them" (Cabrera 2008, 86). As alluded to above, it is devoted to the first two claims of cosmopolitanism: (1) that all humans share a common moral identity, and (2) that there are universal (cosmopolitan) standards of normative judgment. In other words, moral cosmopolitanism upholds the liberal notions of the *dignity of man, egalitarianism and universalism*. The *dignity of man* is the ethical understanding that the individual is the methodological starting point, and it is the normative principle that upholds Immanuel Kant's notion of the 'categorical imperative,' which is the moral understanding that asserts that we "should never act in such a way that we treat humanity, whether in ourselves or in others, as means only but always as an end in itself" (Johnson 2012). This Kantian understanding is inherently *egalitarian*, for it means that no matter one's religious, cultural, social, economic or political circumstance, one is of equal moral worth as anyone else. And finally, moral cosmopolitanism is *universal* in that the theory is unbounded, and it applies to all people globally without regard for arbitrary factors acquired at birth.

These moral precepts are not new, but rather they are rooted in antiquity with the Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome. The Stoics maintained that people are in the "first instance, human beings living in a world of human beings and only incidentally as members of polities" (Barry 1999, 41). The Stoics were the earliest philosophers of the western tradition to assert that the "individual belongs to the wider world of humanity and that moral worth cannot be specified by the yardstick of a single political community" (Held 2010, 41). The Stoics believed that the *cosmopolis*, the global community that includes all of humanity, exists as a result of man's ability to think and reason – that is, the "basis for human community is the worth of reason in each and every human being ... male or female, slave or free, king or peasant, all are of boundless moral value, and the dignity of reason is worthy of respect wherever it is found (Nussbaum 2010, 30). Although he was a Stoic

philosopher of the school's later years, Marcus Aurelius provides a simple and logical summary of Stoicism's reasoning for the existence of a universal community of men. In his *Meditations* (Book IV:4), Marcus Aurelius wrote:

> If mind is common to us all, then we have reason also in common – that which makes us rational beings. If so, then common too is the reason which dictates what we should and should not do. If so, then law too is common to us all. If so, then we are citizens. If so, we share in a constitution. If so, the universe is a kind of community (Aurelius 2006, 24).

Identifying the mind, and thus reason, as the entity that brings all men together in the *cosmopolis*, Marcus Aurelius established that global citizenship is inherent to the human condition and that it precedes one's obligations to one's specific local, regional or national community. By positing that the existence of reason renders all men equal before the law of nature, Aurelius, like the Stoics that came before him, established that everyone must be rated as citizens in the global community, or *kosmou politês* (Heater 1996).

By establishing the existence of a global community of men who are all held common by their power to reason, the Stoics determined that man is inherently a *kosmou politês*. However, they also established that man could, and should, be a citizen of both the *polis* and the universe. Seneca, the famous Stoic philosopher of the Roman Imperial Era, claimed that men, as *kosmou politês*, were citizens of the universe as well as their local polis. According to Seneca:

> *Let us grasp the fact that there are two republics, one vast and truly 'public,' which contains alike gods and men, in which we do not take account of this or that nook of land, but make the boundaries of our state reach as far as the rays of the sun: and another to which we have been assigned by the accident of birth (Seneca, 1900, IV)*

Clearly, the Stoics understood that man had a duty in both contexts and that neither the local nor the global were mutually exclusive. Seneca recognized that the affiliations that one inherits at birth are compatible with the great community of the cosmos.

In her book, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Martha Nussbaum builds upon this notion, and she highlights that the Stoics, although thinking globally, greatly valued the local. According to Nussbaum:

> *To be a citizen of the world, one does not, the Stoics stressed, need to give up local affiliations, which can frequently be a source of great richness in life. They suggest that we think of ourselves as surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then, in order, one's neighbors or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers formed on the basis of ethnic, religious, linguistic, historical, professional, and gender identities. Beyond all these circles is the largest one, that of humanity as a whole … we need not give up our special affections and identifications, whether national or ethnic or religious; but we should work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern, showing respect for the human wherever it occurs, and allowing that respect to constrain our national or local politics (Nussbaum 1997, 60).*

Nussbaum's emphasis on Stoicism's conception of humanity's concentric circles is a useful conceptual tool that helps us visualize that the individual, as the smallest unit, is merely a member of many larger circles that all exist within the cosmopolis. Recognizing that the *cosmopolis* is all encompassing and that the circle of one's nation is but one level within another, is an understanding that permits one to be, as Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests, a "cosmopolitan patriot" whose "loyalty to humankind – so vast, so abstract, a unity – does **not** deprive [one] of the capacity to care for lives nearer by" (Appiah 1997, 622). In this sense, national boundary lines do not have to inhibit a greater concern for humanity, for "man is capable, however unequally, of serving both [their state and humanity] because he has a variegated nature capable of manifold interests and activities. Qua citizen he serves the [state]; qua human being he serves the *cosmopolis*" (Heater 1996, 23). Rather than take one's national obligations as the endpoint of one's moral concern, one must establish a balance between acting locally (acting in the smallest spheres of humanity) with those of the *cosmopolis*.

The idea that man is capable of being a "cosmopolitan patriot" is an encouraging thought that allows cosmopolitan theory to function in conjunction with the sovereign state system. However, this notion implies that man has the understanding or desire to take responsibility or harbor a concern for something greater than himself. In other words, the cosmopolitan argument is moot if people remain isolated in themselves, confined to the private sphere where they neglect the greater spaces, especially the public realm, that exist

beyond their individual horizon of responsibility. Thus, the process of turning inwards to the smallest concentric circle of the self – which I largely associate with the individualist ideology – has caused the individual to disregard those circles that lie beyond him. Consequently, we must recognize that cosmopolitanism, as a normative idea, requires a concern for the public sphere, and it demands that the individual does not remain alienated and isolated in his own small world. When one gets too locked in a radical individualist mindset, one cannot properly care for the public realm. In the following section, I discuss individualism, demonstrate how the individualist ideology has created a destructive atomization that has destroyed the public sphere and assert that the dissolution of the public at the hands of the private has prevented us from assuming our roles as *kosmou politês*.

Individualism: An "Iconoclastic" Attitude

Individualism tends to be an overly used buzzword in the Humanities, and as a result, Max Weber was correct to describe this concept as "including the most heterogeneous things imaginable (Weber 1950, 222). In short, there are numerous ways of approaching the topic of individualism. Here, however, I have chosen to conceptualize the individualist ideology by referring to C.B. MacPherson's notion of 'possessive individualism.' In his book, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, MacPherson argues, "that the difficulties of modern liberal-democratic theory lie … in its possessive quality. Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them" (Macpherson 1962, 3). According to possessive individualism, "the individual is seen neither as a moral whole nor as a part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself … the individual … is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession."[4] Stated simply, possessive individualism posits that man, as his own possessor, is free.

In conjunction to MacPherson, I would also like to flag up Daniel Shanahan's book, *Toward a Genealogy of Individualism*, in order to further stress how possessive individualism is an inherently 'iconoclastic' attitude. Individualism, according to Shanahan, is the means by which:

> The individual is freed from the constraints of tradition, as a moral attitude, it based itself, not just on the self-interest of the individual, but on

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4 Ibid.

> *the vital link that it affirmed between the individual, his or her unique-*
> *ness, and the moral structure of the universe … it allowed the individual*
> *to abandon attachments to external signs and ceremonies and to feel*
> *justifiably at home with whatever truth he or she discovers through his*
> *senses (Shanahan 1992, 19).*

Thus, individualism means that no third party institution, group or person has supreme moral authority over the individual, and that the individual is the 'final arbiter of truth.' It celebrates the individual's uniqueness by placing his individuality [5] at the center of the moral universe. By allowing the individual to have a unique and independent moral, political, religious and economic voice, individualism makes one's individuality the tool for identifying truth and achieving moral worth (21).

Building upon MacPherson and Shanahan's positions, individualism, for our purposes then, is an iconoclastic belief system that endows the individual with moral, political, religious, economic and epistemological authority. As a result, the individual is free from the constraints of arbitrary tradition and obligation, and thus, he views himself (and others) as an autonomous being whose individuality permits him to be an independent moral, politi-cal, religious, economic and epistemological agent with the power to control his own fate.

The United States: A Nation Rooted in Individualism

Working from the definition that individualism is an iconoclastic ideology that breaks the individual free of moral, political, social, religious, economic and epistemological entanglements, I would like to turn our gaze to the United States in order to highlight how the individualist ideology, when radicalized, becomes a destructive and alienating force that inhibits the moral cosmopolitan sentiment from taking root. Here, Tocqueville provides us with a powerful commentary on the atomizing effects of individualism. After emphasizing individualism's proclivity towards alienation, I will turn to the work of Arendt to demonstrate how this atomization, by destroying the public sphere, prevents us from harboring a truly cosmopolitan ethical understanding. Although discussing individualism in the United States might compel students of philosophy and political theory to think of a

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5 "Individuality" is not synonymous with "individualism," but rather it is the quality of being original, unique or different. Rousseau captured the essence of individuality perfectly in The Confessions when he wrote, "I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality" (Rousseau 2001, 9).

wide variety of figures throughout American history (for example, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Dewey, Ayn Rand and George Kateb), I have chosen to carry out a general, if not simplistic, discussion of individualism in the US in order to first describe the process whereby individualism became "the" ideological support structure in the US and second demonstrate how the individualist ideology, as a radicalized entity, cultivates atomization.

Claiming that the United States was founded on a support structure of individualism is a self-conscious generalization that I am willing to make, for the overt subscription to natural rights and contractarian theories that sit at the very core of the United States demonstrate that the American Founding Fathers intentionally built their nation on the individualistic ideas of the Enlightenment. In other words, the individualist ideology in America is a direct result of the intellectual, political, religious, moral, epistemological and methodological changes that took place in the wake of the Reformation and throughout the course of the Enlightenment. By applying John Locke's theories of natural rights, the American founders recast the individual as the 'final arbiter of truth' and freed him of arbitrary constraints of tradition. [6] Within the greater vein of Enlightenment thought, American individualism "emerged out of the struggle against monarchical and aristocratic authority that (now) seemed arbitrary and oppressive" (Bellah et al. 1985, 142). Consequently, the American system broke old anatomies of power by positing that the individual was both the starting and end point of moral and political concern.

This ethico-political re-conception of the individual permitted the construction of America's governing systems in contractarian terms. Locke's ideas gave rise to the social contract theories that posited that the "legitimate authority of government must derive from the consent of the governed, where the form and content of this consent derives from the idea of contract or mutual agreement" (Cudd 2008). Unlike monarchical systems with a centralized and vertical power structure, social contract theories dispersed political authority downwards and outwards so that "the body politic [was] formed by a voluntary association of individuals: it is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with

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6 Locke was "at the fountain-head of English liberalism," but it is important to recognize that individualism, as a "political and theoretical position, starts as far back as Hobbes" (Macpherson 1962, 262 and 1). Consequently, individualism is the product of the ideas and interplay between Locke's work and many other English thinkers, including Thomas Hobbes and Samuel von Pufendorf. However, one can most clearly recognize Locke's influence on the American founders, and the Declaration of Independence draws upon, almost word for word, from Two Treatises on Government. The Declaration of Independence (1776) states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This line echoes, almost verbatim, Locke's statement, "the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions" (Locke, 2005: 8).

each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good" (*Constitution or Form of Government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts -1780* 1909, 1889). From the contractarian perspective, individuals became the locus of political power, and the people no longer existed to serve the government; but rather, the government existed to serve the people. In short, the theories of natural rights and contractarianism planted the seeds of democracy in America by supplying the American Founding Fathers with the political concepts that transformed the individual into an autonomous and free agent capable of independent political choice.

Having built its government on the principles of freedom and democratic equality, US founders had "followed the political philosophy of John Locke in a peculiar way. They aimed to approximate as far as possible the civil state to the state of nature" (Arieli 1964, 83). This served to transform Locke's political philosophy into a national "ideology whose heart and center were political individualism: individual man – his life, liberty and pursuit of happiness - became the central concern of the whole political order" (Nelson 1965, 1011). In short, the American ideology valorized individualism and endowed the individual with tremendous authority.

Although this valorization of the individual in the United States became a driver of a democratic government that many political theorists, practitioners and laypersons have loudly lauded for nearly 240 years, it is important that we also recognize the dangers that the individualist ideology can potentially create. That is, we must acknowledge and accept how individualism runs the risk of cultivating a pernicious atomization. Because his text, *Democracy in America* (V1 in 1835 and V2 in 1845), was the original and remains one of the most powerful commentaries on American individualism, Alexis de Tocqueville is the theorist I would like to engage with here.[7] By warning us that democratic equality can cultivate a dangerous state whereby "equality places man side be side without a common bond to hold them together" (Tocqueville 2004, 591). Tocqueville avers that without any common bonds man tends to withdraw into himself. A lack of bonds to tie men together isolates individuals so that they are "virtually stranger[s] to the fate of all others. For him, his children and personal friends comprise the entire human race. As for the remainder of his fellow citizens, he lives alongside them but does not see them. He touches them but does not feel them. He exists only in himself and for himself" (818). Tocqueville's commentary on individualism is particularly important and powerful in the context of this discussion

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7 Although I have chosen to engage aspects of Tocqueville's work, I would like to acknowledge that I do not agree with his conservative, classist position on the whole. Furthermore, I recognize that Tocqueville, is not a cosmopolitan theorist, and that I rely on him here specifically for his work on radical individualism in America.

because it strongly highlights the individualist ideology's tendency toward a pernicious atomization (what Tocqueville refers to as 'egoism') that ultimately harms the interests of the greater sociopolitical whole. According to Tocqueville, a radical individualism "disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men and to withdraw into the circle of family and friends" (585). Further developing his position on individualism in his other well-known text, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1856), Tocqueville writes:

> *For in a community in which the ties of family, of caste, of class, and craft fraternities no longer exist, people are far too much disposed to think exclusively of their own interests, to become self-seekers practicing a narrow individualism and caring nothing for the public good … depriving the governed of any sense of solidarity and interdependence, of good-neighborly feelings and a desire to further the welfare of the community at large, [individualism] immures them, so to speak, each in his private life and, taking advantage of the tendency they already have to keep apart, it estranges them still more (xiii).*

Rather than praise individualism for its ability to elevate the individual above society, Tocqueville associates it with atomization, the process that fragments and ultimately destroys civil society. In this sense, democratically equal nations, such as the United States, are not held together by hierarchical power structures or social classes, but rather men are free to do as they please (as they are not institutionally chained to anyone else or fitted into any sociopolitical class at birth). Tocqueville recognized that this type of situation could lead to atomization, which he feared because "it results in a generalized retreat from the public realm and the self-assertion necessary to self-government (Villa 2008, 75). Like Tocqueville, I contend that the American individualist ideology has contributed to a harmful atomization that has caused men to turn inward and act entirely in their own interest.

In the process of dis-embedding and turning inward to the private, the individual is driven to maximize or pursue the objects of his own desire without a true regard for others. In many respects, the individual comes to love no one but himself. Tocqueville maintained that this state of radical self-concern is known as 'egoism,' or the "passionate and exaggerated love of self that impels man to relate everything solely to himself and to prefer himself to everything else" (Tocqueville 2004, 585). Although he clearly delineates the difference between individualism and egoism, Tocqueville stresses that the former slowly evolves into the latter. For him, "egoism shrivels the seed of all the virtues; individualism at first dries up only the source of public virtues, but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and in the end it will be subsumed in egoism" (585). Having become an egoist, the

individual is completely trapped in his atomized state, and his concern is limited to only those circles that encompass himself and those closest to him. He acts entirely in self-interest, "endlessly hastening after petty and vulgar pleasures with which to fill [his] soul" (818). The egoist is unconcerned with others, and he is "solely preoccupied with the need to make [his own] fortune" (630). He is driven by self-interest and those private pursuits that allow him and his family to survive, prosper and be happy. In short, the egoist lives a private life, not a public one, and he cares for no one but himself and those closest him.

Individualism: Virtue or Global Problem?

Now, the question becomes, what does Tocqueville's commentary on individualism mean for us in today's world – a world in which "modern communities have become societies of laborers and jobholders?" (Arendt 1958, 46) What does viewing individualism as a harmful, atomizing ideology mean for the modern man, an individual whose life has come to revolve around his daily activity as a laborer, an *animal laborans* as coined by Arendt in her book, *The Human Condition?* With this question in mind and with the intent of demonstrating how individualism impedes the development of the moral cosmopolitan sentiment, this section builds upon Tocqueville's notion of egoistic atomization and uses the work of Hannah Arendt in order to demonstrate how a radical individualism, when coupled with the notion of man as an animal laborans, results in a truly debilitating state of alienation. As an egoistic, atomized *animal laborans*, man becomes trapped in the smallest concentric circle of humanity, that of himself and his family. In this state of alienation, he is further inclined to act selfishly and in accordance to self-interest, which in turn causes the public sphere to atrophy and the hope of a greater sense of moral cosmopolitanism to fade.

Despite the fact that much of life in today's West has and is continuing to become more and more 'post-industrial' and 'service-oriented,' the average adult still spends their day working in order to survive – i.e. they work in order to put food on the table, pay the bills and keep a roof over their head. Even a cursory social evaluation of life in the West demonstrates that the majority of adults are working men and women whose lives revolve around their daily activities as laborers. In this sense, the every-day adult is a "laborer who lives only as long as he finds work and who works only so long as his labor increases [the] capital [of his employer]" (Marx and Engels 2003, 21). That is, the individual's survival, as well as his family's, is chained to his activities of labor, and thus, the (atomized) individual must work so that he may earn the wages necessary to perpetuate his very existence. Since it is in his best interest to work and provide for his family, the "free laborer," says Karl Marx, "sells himself, and, indeed, sells himself piecemeal. He sells at auction eight, ten, twelve, fifteen hours of life, day after day, to the highest bidder, to the owner of the raw materials, instruments of labor and

means of subsistence" (Marx 1978, 205). The modern man, an *animal laborans* who labors and works every day merely to survive, has no choice but to act individualistically, for he, and his family, rely on selfish actions in order to survive. For the *animal laborans*, pursuing one's self-interest is synonymous with survival, and "his life-activity is for him only a means to enable him to exist. He works in order to live" (205). Thus, he has no choice but to act as an atomized and self-concerned individual.

Arendt asserts that the rise of *animal laborans* in the modern era has established the understanding that the pursuit of one's private interests – those primary, biologic needs that must be fulfilled in order to sustain life – takes precedence over the public sphere. *Animal laborans*, by placing their individual private interests before those of the public, have caused harm to the world because they have become focused on the activities and pursuits that were "formerly restricted to the private sphere of the household and having to do with the necessities of life. [Arendt's] claim is that, with tremendous expansion of the economy from the eighteenth century, all such activities had overtaken the public realm and transformed it into a sphere for the satisfaction of our material needs. Society has thus invaded and conquered the public realm, turning it into a function of what previously were private needs and concerns, and has thereby destroyed the boundary separating the public and private" (d'Entreves 2008). Arendt believed that the modern world and the rise of mass society signified that the "realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength … society has conquered the public realm" (Arendt 1958, 46). This tragic shift is a problem that both Arendt and I believe the modern world must overcome.

In a system built to enshrine the private over the public, i.e. a capitalistic and consumer-based society, the atomized *animal laborans* spends his days pursuing those things that directly contribute to the survival of himself and his family while largely ignoring anything or anyone that does not lie within his small, concentric circle. This is the predicament of the modern world: society is comprised of a population of atomized *animal laborans* who are serving their best interests by dedicating themselves to their work, and thus, they have not the time, energy, desire or ability to be concerned with the concentric circles of humanity that are not directly related to their own, most especially the public sphere. The modern individual has become, by and large, concerned with providing for himself and those closest him, and he is indifferent to any and all those people, entities and activities that do not directly contribute to the success of his immediate circle.

Arendt was a theorist devoted to the public realm, and "as a motto, 'the recovery of the public sphere' captures, more or less, the primary goal of her political philosophy" (Villa 1992, 712). Since her mission as a philosopher is to "recover the idea of political action in a culture which she thought had lost the practice of it" (Kateb 1977, 143), it is not difficult to see how her work is valuable when discussing the dangers of an individualist society comprised of atomized *animal laborans*. She contends that "while we have become excellent in the laboring we perform in public, our capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private" (Arendt 1958, 49). Because we are egoistic *animal laborans*, we have remained trapped in our own small worlds, and as a result the public sphere, where political speech and action occurs, has been effectively eliminated.

In conjunction with the individualist ideology, the rise of the social has led to the development of a society of men that do not have the capacity for acting in public – that is, people, such as Americans, by being egoistic *animal laborans*, have contributed to the 'loss of the world' because they do not act, speak or exist in the political realm. According to Arendt, worldliness (the opposite of worldlessness, or the "loss of the world") is only possible in the "political realm, which is the public sphere in which everybody can appear and show himself in. To assert one's own opinion belonged to being able to show oneself, to be seen and heard by others" (Arendt 2004, 433). Arendt summarizes her understanding of the " public sphere" in the following excerpt from *The Human Condition*:

> It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance constitutes reality … the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves … second, it signifies the world itself, insofar as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it … It is related, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inherit the man-made world together … to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in between, relates and separates men at all times (Arendt 1958, 52).

Worldliness requires this common political space, for the "disclosure not only for those who act or actively move within it but for everyone who perceives it because the reality of the world is its 'being common,' its being between, literally its **interest (inter esse)** for all those who hold it common" (Kohn 2000, 125). In this sense, egoistic **animal laborans** contribute

to worldlessness because they have eliminated the public sphere where men hold action and speech in common. In an egoistic society of **animal laborans**, the phenomena of political action and speech does not occur in the public realm because individual parties remain isolated and atomized in their own worlds; thus, there is no "**inter-est,** which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (Arendt 1958, 182). People simply do not come to the table, and they have instead devoted their attention and energy inwards to the private sphere. In today's world where laboring is central to daily life, worldlessness is inevitable because "man has abdicated from the world by contenting, as most do in the modern age, with the activities of consumption (which are natural and under necessity, no matter how artificial or refined). In the modern age, the many consume or aspire to consumption, and they are prisoners" (Kateb 1977, 146) in a state of worldlessness where they have proven to be unwilling to enter, unable to function or simply unconcerned with the greater, public sphere.

By closely assessing the negative consequences of modern individualism in conjunction with the "worldlessness" that occurs with the rise of the social, one can better see how a world that has become overly individualistic, such as in the US, easily risks getting the balance of private and public wrong. As a result of grossly favoring the private sphere, we have reached a point where we are not only apolitical but also largely unconcerned with our fellow man. As Arendt demonstrates, this is a consequence of a society where atomization has unbalanced the private/public dichotomy in such a way as to negatively valorize the smallest concentric circles of humanity. Arendt "saw a new, more egalitarian social order in which medieval hierarchy and corporatism had given way to a society of increasingly equal and isolated individuals (or family units), each devoted to the pursuit of well-being … Arendt spoke of it as the rise of 'society.'" (Jacobitti 1991, 587). For Arendt, atomization, as a result of a "privatized culture, sunk under the weight of a mind-numbing and enervating consumerism, is one possible road to despotism" (Villa 2008, 107).

It is in this state of despotism that the cosmopolitan sentiment is lost. Unlike the forms of despotism as found under a tyrant, modern despotism is much more subtle, and it "does not break men's wills but softens, bends and guides them … rather than tyrannize, it inhibits, represses, saps, stifles and stultifies, and in the end it reduces each nation to nothing but a flock of timid and industrious animals, with the government as its shepherd" (Tocqueville 2004, 819). In a society where each citizen selfishly pushes and pulls his own way, man is not manipulated by a central authority, but rather his isolation from his fellow man allows for an all powerful, invisible and undirected force to coerce him. Today, man has no ability to challenge the despotic state because there is no single source of power nor is there an 'in between' space, an inter esse, where political speech and action take place. Rather, there is worldlessness where man contents himself in his own world and devotes himself to the

private sphere, caring not for anyone else. The modern man is enmeshed in a society where the political, public realm is secondary to one's private needs. As a result, the greater good of humanity is easily ignored or forgotten and the paradox that inhibits a greater sense of global action is maintained.

Because the cosmopolitan sentiment requires people to have an enlarged ethical understanding that extends to all of the *cosmopolis*, one cannot be entirely dedicated to the individualist ideology, for it isolates, atomizes, and thereby alienates the individual in his own world where he cannot truly care about the concentric circles of humanity that are two, three, four and five steps removed from himself. In this sense, the egoistic *animal laborans* is dedicated to the smallest circle of all, the self (and his family), and his moral concern falls short of the *cosmopolis*. With such a confined and limited ethical scope, the atomized *animal laborans* sits in opposition to the cosmopolitan sentiment by positioning the self as the endpoint of moral concern. Individualism, rather than being an ethically correct doctrine, is "the sort of social philosophy that demoralizes us, robs us of our sense of community and destroys our generosity, charity and fellow feeling" (Machan 2000, 229). The individualist ideology, as a radicalized system of beliefs, destroys man's ability to harbor an enlarged ethical understanding; thus, the "individualistic culture devours its own moral capital" (Gray 1993, 44). Consequently, thinkers such as Arendt (although not a cosmopolitan thinker outright) hoped "to change our way of thinking about politics so that individuals will think of themselves as responsible citizens with a stake in preserving a common world" (Jacobitti 1991, 603). Like Arendt, I believe there must be a much greater emphasis on the public, and that we must learn to overcome the aspects of individualism that break the bonds between humans. It is only when we revive our concern for the public that we will have the capacity to be "cosmopolitan patriots" who not only love our respective nations but also harbor a concern for *cosmopolis* in its entirety. Without the ability to exist in public for the greater good and not simply in private for one's self, it is impossible to have a moral understanding that extends to those countless people that go unseen but whom are greatly affected by ones' actions. A concern for the public is central to cosmopolitanism because an enlarged ethical understanding requires that one not be merely concerned with one's self and one's private life. In sum, we must balance the public and private so that they are more capable of thinking beyond their own small worlds.

Conclusion

Working to cultivate humanity and counteract the negative aspects of individualization is not something that will occur overnight, but rather, renewing our ethical understanding is something that will take time. Counter-balancing the individualist ideology with a reinvigorated public sphere will require developing a world of "cosmopolitan patriots" through sustained sacrifice, flexibility, the continued evolution of our communal psyche, and the more full development of a cosmopolitan educational framework. Cultivating the cosmopolitan sentiment is challenging, for it is "hard to live by the Stoic code [of cosmopolitanism] because it involves subordination of personal self-seeking to the common interests of the universe including one's fellow-man and the serene acceptance of one's lot in the universal order" (Heater 1996, 20). Strenuous as it may be, we must grow beyond our egoistic ways, and expand our concern for all the people of the world. Although someone may have been born in Timbuktu, Siberia or Kansas, we must accept the fact that "the accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation … we must recognize humanity wherever it occurs and give that community our first allegiance" (Nussbaum 1997, 58-59). People are foremost members of the global community of humanity, and acting accordingly is the only way to live peacefully in a cosmopolitanized world where one's actions have global, cosmopolitan effects.

Living individualistically and as *animal laborans* is inhibiting us from assuming our roles as *kosmou politês*. Instead, a radical individualism has merely served to perpetuate a morally corrupt way of life. One hundred years ago, Woodrow Wilson correctly asserted that "we are citizens of the world; the tragedy of our times is that we don't know this." Sadly this statement remains accurate and the paradox of our times continues to reign supreme. Paradoxically, humanity needs a collaborative effort on a global level, yet, on the whole, the people of the world mindlessly subscribe to and endorse a pernicious individualism that usurps the power of the public sphere; and thus, we have failed to comprehend and embrace our individual places in the *cosmopolis*. We continue to live individualistic, atomized lives that forsake the great community of humanity, and on the whole, we have failed to accept Earth's true "oneness." Instead, we see the world as if our space shuttle remains grounded, perpetually awaiting takeoff; thus, our views remain limited to those things closest us.

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