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A Heretical Reading of Arendt: The Space of Thinking

> [We must] keep in view that the current, worn-down conception of thinking lives off of the historical tradition. Thus we must prepare ourselves to set out along the path the tradition has cut and which it keeps to, the path leading from the early days of the history of thinking and directed toward our present.*

Introduction

In this paper, I shall consider Hannah Arendt's analyses of the *vita contemplativa*, focusing mainly on her discussion of the mental faculty she calls thinking, which she situates in opposition to modern knowledge. Arendt claims that modern knowledge is utilitarian, configured on the model of the mentality of *homo faber*, "guided by practical needs and aims" only.[1] This discussion presupposes her early analyses of work

* Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 98.

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. One/Thinking. Two/Willing* (San Diego–New York–London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978), I. 78.

and the *homo faber*, which – for her – constitute one of the structural parts of the *vita activa*, the "three fundamental human activities: labour, work, and action."[2]

Arendt's project is fundamentally defined by her attempt to rethink the space of freedom, concomitant with the importance of action and the problematic nature of modern 'objective' knowledge.[3] She returns to the Ancient Greeks' experience of the political, as recounted by Thucydides in his description of Pericles' "Funeral Speech", to offer a different way to think about human action.[4] Like other philosophers who have turned to the Ancient Greek heritage to rethink the role and place of humans in the world,[5] she addresses the reconceptualisation of modern scientific knowledge that leads to the problem of 'objectification' of nature. During this process, as she notes, knowledge becomes defined by the certainty of truth, the truth defined by science, thereby forever changing our understanding of the world.[6] As I will conclude in this paper, given Arendt's *philosophical* project concerning her reflections on thinking, her

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[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 7.

[3] See, for example, her essays in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968).

[4] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205–206. See also Thucydides, *Selections from Thucydides* (Lewis Stiles: University of Saskatchewan, 1995), access: 6 December 2002.

[5] See Pavel Kouba, "Svět lidského společenství v díle Hanny Arendtové" ["The World of Human Community in the Work of Hanna Arendt"], in: *Filosofický časopis* 4 (1990): 547–557, and Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*.

[6] For similar claims, see, for example, Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985); Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998); Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth", in: *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1931/32, 1940]); Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I", in: *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1939]); Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984); Jan Patočka, "Negative Platonism: Reflections Concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics – and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It", in: *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1953]); Jan Patočka, *Sókratés: Přednášky z antické filosofie* (Prague: Státní Pedagogické Nakladatelství, 1991); Jan Patočka, *Aristotelés: Přednášky z antické filosofie* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1994); Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1998); Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996); Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002); Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self. The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990); Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", in: *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1994); Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001); Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject:*

position is more indebted to Immanuel Kant than to the phenomenology of Heidegger. I also suggest that her hostility towards 'professional philosophers,' especially Plato and Edmund Husserl, makes her heedless of her own reliance on the presuppositions that she tries to unravel.

The Political Realm

> One exposes oneself to the light of the public, as a person. […] in every action the person is expressed as in no other human activity. Speaking is also a form of action. That is one venture. The other is: we start something. We weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes of it we never know. We've all been taught to say: Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do. That is true of all action. Quite simply and concretely true, because one *cannot* know.[7]

Throughout her life, Arendt refused to be labelled a philosopher. According to her, philosophers are hostile to the political realm of 'sphere of action' because action is unpredictable. No acting is done in isolation; every act is the beginning of something new. Yet each act interferes with the acting of others, hence no one can predict the outcome of one's own actions, "if only because his own deed has already changed everything and made it even more unpredictable."[8] No man in the singular, but men in plural "live and move and act in this world."[9] According to Arendt, beginning with Plato, philosophers were not content with the unpredictability of action. They attempted to rework the free political space and secure it using the utilitarian mentality of *homo faber*. Instead of accepting action as the fundamental characteristic of the political space, they began to 'produce' models of political systems. Political philosophy is, Arendt claims, a redefinition of politics on the model of production, where the end is foreseeable, as when one produces a vase. In the sphere of production, there is a clear *telos* of the process, the vase itself, which the *homo faber* envisages. Following his idea of a vase, in other words, keeping in sight the end-product of his activity, *homo faber* chooses appropriate means to make it. Similarly, a tyrant, a 'producer' of the political, stands outside of the space of action. His role is to direct others to act according

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Lectures at the Collège De France 1981–82 (New York, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[7] Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains", in: *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954. Uncollected and Unpublished Works by Hannah Arendt* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994 [1964]), 23, italics in original.

[8] Hannah Arendt, *The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern*, in: *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 84.

[9] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 4.

to his vision. Standing above the action, as it were, by not being a part of the 'process,' he can 'manage' the action by carefully choosing means toward its successful execution. On this model, the end of human acting can be (supposedly) predicted. The archetypal example for Arendt is Plato, who wanted to be "forever […] solitary by reason of his excellence, able to be […] himself with himself, needing nobody else, neither acquaintance nor friend," thereby assumed to be "sufficient with himself."[10] In his old age, he went three times to "the tyrant of Syracuse" with the aim of teaching him how to become "a philosopher king."[11] According to Arendt, in his opposition to the unpredictability of political action, Plato's king-philosopher is an attempt to put a tyrant in charge of public affairs,[12] to change the unpredictability of political space into the reliable space of production.[13]

Arendt reproaches Plato of using *homo faber*'s mentality of 'means and ends' in his restructuring of the space of action. This mentality is also, she maintains, a defining characteristic of the beginning of modern science, hence, it is also characteristic of modern knowledge. Yet, as I will suggest, unexpectedly, her analysis is also framed by the methodology of modern scientific inquiry. She unwittingly accepts the scientific standpoint of an 'outside, disinterested observer,' based on the means-and-ends categories of *homo faber*; while she also affirms the modern separation between mind and body, which is a defining feature of modern knowledge. For her, the body is related to labour, one of the active characteristics of the *vita activa*, while thinking is a non-active, human characteristic of the *vita contemplativa*, an *ego* outside of time and place, namely, an *ego* in the *noumenal* realm of freedom.

Arendt's concern is "whether thinking and other invisible and soundless activities are meant to appear or whether in fact they can never find an adequate home in the world"[14] is framed as a question concerning the possibility of their appearance. In other words, thinking is for her 'homeless,' while the world is "concealed by appearances."[15] She also notes that while "Being and Appearing coincide" for us, finite

[10] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 94.

[11] Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty", in: *The New York Review of Books* 17, 6: 50–54, 1971, 53.

[12] Arendt also claims that Heidegger "once succumbed to the temptation to change his 'residence' and to get involved in the world of human affairs. As to the world, he was served somewhat worse than Plato, because the tyrant and his victims were not located beyond the sea, but in his own country" (Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty", 53).

[13] See her discussion in Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

[14] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 23.

[15] Ibidem, I, 7.

creatures,[16] thinking is of a different order. The similarity between this 'non-active' thinking and the mental activities of willing and judging – all of which make us human, distinguishing us from "other animal species" – is characterised by Arendt as "a *withdrawal* from the world as it appears and a bending back toward the self."[17] To put it differently, as Arendt also does, her inquiry is concerned with the "fitness of thought to appear," since its characteristic is to withdraw from the world by bending back to the self.[18] The question is where those mental activities – thinking, willing and judging – 'are.' Arendt notes that "all mental activities withdraw from the world of appearances, but this withdrawal is not toward an interior of either the self or the soul"; because "there are no sensations corresponding to mental activities," since sensations are bound to our "bodily organs."[19] Yet, if "the location of thought can be valid only within the realm of mental phenomena,"[20] to whom do those mental phenomena 'appear' and how do they 'appear'?

Furthermore, to speak of phenomena: what exactly 'are' they? If they are appearances, they must appear *to* someone. In other words, an appearance is defined by the genitive and dative: it always appears *as* something *to* someone, as Edmund Husserl suggested.[21] For him, phenomena are what is left after the bracketing of the world; that is, when we pay attention only to what we ourselves are aware of. It is my attention to the way anything whatsoever appears to me. A table can appear to me just as well as the memory of a conference in Rome. The first is a three-dimensional phenomenon; the latter is a mental phenomenon in time only. It is difficult to 'think' how the mental phenomena that Arendt is talking about – thinking, willing and judging – can appear at all. Yet if they cannot, how can we *think* about something.

In our modern age, phenomena are appearances and they are, defined as 'extension,' as René Descartes argued; namely, they are 'material things.' Arendt's question, then – 'Is it possible for thinking to "find an adequate home in the world"?'[22] – is, therefore, already framed in terms of the difference between *res cogitans* (a thinking thing) and *res extensa* (an extended thing). Furthermore, it is the question of a disinterested observer who considers thinking as something that one investigates, not an activity that one actually does. As noted above, her inquiry presupposes the split between thinking and the world; between mental states

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[16] Ibidem, I, 22.
[17] Ibidem, I, 22, italics in original.
[18] Ibidem, I, 23.
[19] Ibidem, I, 34.
[20] Ibidem, I, 210.
[21] Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 98.
[22] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 23.

(to use the modern terminology) and the world where we encounter things in our everyday living. She implicitly accepts the modern philosophy of subjectivity with its pendant of scientific objectivity.[23] Husserl's critique of psychologism would be important in this respect, but Arendt takes exception to Husserl.

According to Arendt, Husserl's "positive philosophy"[24] is based on "the anti-historical and anti-metaphysical implications of the slogan '*Zu den Sachen selbst*' [back to things themselves]."[25] His attempt is to console us regarding a situation in which no consolation is possible, "namely, that man is forced to affirm a Being that he did not create and that is alien to his very nature."[26] According to Arendt, Husserl's claim concerning our participation in the positing of meaning regarding the things that we encounter amounts to a claim of a 'creation' of meaning about something that is not in us, that is opposite us, so to speak; which we did not create and which is not a mental creation, but the world outside of us. Hence, it is alien to our nature. As she writes, modern human experience is homeless, because it is defined by objectivity of knowledge and subjectivity of mental processes. In other words, it is the outcome of the Cartesian split between the world and thinking.

In 1936, a Czech phenomenologist, Jan Patočka writes that modern humans have "no unified worldview." Human lives unfold "in a double world, at once in [their] own naturally given environment and in a world created for [them] by modern natural science, based on the principle of mathematical laws governing nature." He continues: this "disunion that has thus pervaded the whole of human life is the true source of our present spiritual crisis."[27] The disunity between scientific nature and the world of our living has practical repercussions for an understanding of the world, others and ourselves. We cannot reduce the life-world to the model of natural science.[28] Similarly, for Arendt, this disunity is the outcome of humans' "twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self."[29] When God ceases to be the creator

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[23] For a similar claim, see Heller, Hannah Arendt on the "Vita Contemplativa", in: *Hannah Arendt: Thinking, Judging, Freedom* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), and Kouba, "Svět lidského společenství", Part III.

[24] Hannah Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?", in: *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954. Uncollected and Unpublished Works by Hannah Arendt* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994 [1948]), 166.

[25] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 9.

[26] Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?", 166.

[27] Jan Patočka, *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 3

[28] See Patočka's discussion in Patočka, "2.1. 'Subjektivní Východisko' a Objektivní Biologie Člověka", in: *Přirozený Svět a Pohyb Lidské Existence* (Prague: Samizdat, 1980).

[29] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 6.

of the world and the guarantor of knowledge, the ground of knowledge is banished to the realm of consciousness. Consciousness supposedly affirms and grounds the existence of what is outside of it, namely, extended things in the world. In other words, the objectivity of the world that stands against us is 'produced' by the subjectivity of thinking that is enclosed in our consciousness. However, Husserl acknowledges the split between our living in the world and its scientific presentation, whereby science obscures the life-world, where we live, with a garb of ideas that we take as the only world.[30] Yet, according to Arendt, Husserl's naïve philosophy wants to affirm "what man cannot be: the creator of the world and of himself." She insists that in his "arrogant modesty," Husserl's concept of consciousness takes the place of "God: in the role of the 'lord of Being'."[31] Yet, despite her critique of Husserl, in her last book, *The Life of the Mind*, she herself accepts the space of the ego, where she places the faculty of thinking.

Patočka's rethinking of the modern philosophy of subjectivity might be helpful in this regard. In his book, *Body, Community, Language, World*, he explains the difference between Greek philosophy and its modern counterpart, inaugurated by the Cartesian doubter. For the Ancients, "*psychē* is never understood as a subject (in our sense of the words 'soul' or 'mind'), but always in the third person, impersonally, as a vital function."[32] Patočka notes: "Ancient philosophy is a philosophy of the thing," overlooking the structure of 'I-you-it,' not noticing that our experience is always personal.[33] Descartes discovers what we today call consciousness – *ego cogito*, the certainty of our own thinking. Regardless of this important discovery, he leaves the *ego* behind, concentrating on the certainty of *res extensa* that *cogito* assures. Modern science continues in this Cartesian spirit: science looks at the objects of its investigations – *res extensa* – from the third-person perspective, stripped of all personal attributes.[34] Whereas the Ancient Greeks *overlooked* the personal, as Patočka notes, the modern scientific method *deliberately excludes* the per-

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[30] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1970), §9h, 51–52.

[31] "[…] to place man where Schelling, in a typical misunderstanding of his own thinking, placed God: in the role of the 'lord of Being'" (Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?", 167).

[32] Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 8.

[33] As he writes: "we can speak only within a personal situation, defined by the structure I-thou-it" (Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 9–10).

[34] See Jan Patočka, "Galileo Galilei a Konec Starověkého Kosmu", in: *Vesmír* 33, 1: 27–29, 1954, 28; Edwin Arthur Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. [Bibliolife], 1925), 92–93; Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 11. See also Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 20.

sonal as subjective, supposedly unreliable, lacking an objective attitude. An inquiry is scientific only when it can be replicated by other researchers. The underlying assumption is that everybody will achieve the same result under the same conditions.

To return to Arendt's inquiry: her question, "What are we 'doing' when we do nothing but think?"[35] is meaningful only if we realise that the matter to be 'investigated' is 'thinking.' Thinking ceases to be the thinking of a person, you or me, and becomes thinking as such. Arendt eliminates the personal situation. What she calls the faculty of thinking is not a forgetting of the personal dimension of 'I-you-it,' as in ancient philosophy, but is the point of view of an observer, considering this 'thing' from the outside.

For Arendt, the "objectivizing thought" – in other words, the search for knowledge – is *not* thinking. She alleges that, in the modern age, thinking becomes "the hand-maiden of science, of organized knowledge" because the fundamental premise of this age is that "I can know only what I myself make."[36] In order to rehabilitate thinking, she posits a complete, non-negotiable disjunction between knowledge and thinking. Rather than questioning the modern status of knowledge, she accepts it. Knowledge deals with things present and aims at truth. Thinking is occupied with something that is not present; for example, as when thinking about the colour of a rose that is not here.[37] Thinking deals with invisibles and aims at meaning. As Arendt writes to Martin Heidegger in a letter, the "redness of the rose" is neither in the garden, nor near the rose.[38] Yet, we think it. Husserl would say that our intuition is categorial. We simply see the red rose in its fullness, so to speak.[39] We do not see a plant that we categorise as a 'rose,' adding to it the 'redness.' Husserl recognised this mistake of categorisation, derived from the empiricist view that sensations influence our mind, creating ideas; Immanuel Kant had already addressed this problematic.

In the passage from which Arendt initially draws this example of a rose, Heidegger points out:

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[35] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 8.

[36] Ibidem, I, 7.

[37] Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975: Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 2004), Letter 128, 20 March 1971, 174.

[38] Arendt and Heidegger, "Letter 128", 20 March 1971, 174.

[39] See, for example, Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations (Vol 1)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), §66B, 151ff; Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1973), §10, 44; Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), §34, 100. See also Heidegger's acknowledgment of the importance of Husserl's categorial intuition, in: Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 27.

> Our everyday experience of things […] is neither objectifying nor a placing-over-against. When […] we sit in the garden and take delight in a blossoming rose, we do not make an object of the rose, do not even make it something standing-over-against, i.e. something represented thematically. When […] we are enthralled with the lucid red of the rose and muse on the redness of the rose, then this redness is neither an object, nor a thing, nor a standing-over-against like the blossoming rose. The rose stands in the garden, sways perhaps to and fro in the wind. But the redness of the rose neither stands in the garden, nor it sways to and fro in the wind. All the same we think it and say of it by naming it. There is accordingly a thinking and saying that in no manner objectifies or places-over-against.[40]

In opposition to Heidegger's 'interpretation' of the meaning that we constitute by being there in the garden, Arendt – using Kant's distinction between reason and understanding, or as she claims, reason and intellect – separates meaning and knowledge.[41] For Arendt, "*The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same*."[42] So, according to her reading, the need of reason is not related to experience; while knowledge must be, because it searches for truth. As Karl Jaspers asks, paraphrasing Kant: "How is agreement possible between our intellectual representations, which are based on inner activity, and objects we have not produced by our inner activity?"[43]. Similarly, Arendt asks, "even thinking cannot manage without experience; it needs the garden and the roses, but perceives something else in them. How strange that we have to see in order to perceive what we cannot see."[44] Outlining the old metaphysical problems that Kant grappled with, Jaspers writes, Kant "inquired *first*: How is it possible, through the concepts of thought, to gain access to something wholly different, the sensible world? And *second*: How is it possible that concepts we produce should relate and apply to being as such?"[45] The answer given by Jaspers is that for Kant, sensibility "is our witness to reality."[46] So, Arendt asks Heidegger in the same letter, written on 20March 1971:

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[40] Martin Heidegger, "The Theological Discussion of 'The Problem of a Non-Objectifying Thinking and Speaking in Today's Theology' – Some Pointers to Its Major Aspects", in: *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger*, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976), 26–27.

[41] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 13.

[42] Ibidem, I, 15, italics in original.

[43] Karl Jaspers, *Kant* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book, A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace & Co, 1962), 16.

[44] Arendt and Heidegger, "Letter 28", 120 March 1971, 174.

[45] Jaspers, *Kant*, 14, italics in original.

[46] Ibidem, 20.

"What is experience, really, and its Janus face?"[47]. The issue of thinking becomes a problem of the relation between thinking and experience that for Kant constitutes our finite knowledge.

In her last book, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt takes two different approaches to thinking and its relation to experience, rendering her separation of thinking and knowledge problematic.[48] One route is defined by the Socratic 'two-in-one': a dialogue of 'me with myself,' where the 'internal' unity and harmony of thinking are important. In other words, it is a dialogue between me and my consciousness. In her other approach, she considers thinking in its relation to appearances; her discussion of thinking necessarily becomes one about 'knowing,' without Arendt being aware of this slip. Despite her best intentions, she overlooks that to think about invisibles, as she defines thinking, means to take into account experience in this double aspect; to think this 'Janus face' of experience. To think about appearances means to recall experience that is no more, yet once was: it is not pure Kantian reason. In this instance, meaning and knowledge cannot be easily separated, if they can be separated at all. To recall Kant, "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind."[49]

The Gap in Time

> I have a feeling of futility in everything I do. Compared to what is at stake, everything looks frivolous. I know this feeling disappears when I let myself fall into the gap between past and future, which is the proper temporal locus of thought.[50]

In *The Life of the Mind*, reflecting on where we are when we think, Arendt suggests that a consideration of thinking is "valid only within the realm of mental phenomena." Thinking forms the "small non-time space in the heart of time."[51] This thinking time is *nunc stans*, "the clash of past and

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[47] Arendt and Heidegger, "Letter 128", 120 March 1971, 1174. In the same letter, she continues: "It is at least possible that a book I am working on – a kind of second volume of the vita activa – will still work out after all. On non-active human activities: thinking, wanting, judging. […] But if it does work out – may I dedicate it to you?" (Arendt and Heidegger, "Letter 128", 20 March 1971, 175).

[48] See also Kouba, "Svět lidského společenství", Part III.

[49] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996 [1781]), A51, B75.

[50] Arendt to McCarthy, 9 February 1968, cited in Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 421, italics in original.

[51] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 210.

future,"[52] where "the activity of thinking gathers the absent tenses, the not-yet and the no-more, together into its own presence."[53] But if we accept this description of thinking, where are those mental phenomena that she considers? According to tradition, phenomena are appearances that we encounter; they are what we can experience. Arendt's question is how we can experience mental phenomena that cannot appear in the world; and how we can consider them unless we rely on the model of psychologism, which takes thoughts to influence each other on the model of causality that is valid only in the space of the physical world.

In 1946, Arendt thinks of a different gap. She reflects on the span of time between "the fateful year of 1914 onwards, until the death factories of Europe," when the "chain" of tradition of "two thousand years is broken" creating a gap "between a past which we have irretrievably lost and the future which is not yet at hand." For her, this collapse of tradition opens "an abyss of empty space and time," revealing "a kind of historical no-man's land […] which can be described only in terms of 'no longer and not yet'."[54] Arendt returns to this gap in our tradition in 1961,[55] when she identifies this gap with "an experience in thinking" and uses Kafka's parable, "He," to explain it.[56] Kafka's 'He' stands between "the clashing waves of past and future," trying to win his present by jumping out of the fighting line to become an umpire of these two *forces* that have been crushing him from both sides.[57] 'He' wants to jump out of time to some imagined place, outside of the movement that is human life.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Kafka's 'He' is a metaphor for "the activity of thinking." The fight of Kafka's protagonist against *his* past and *his* future – the times of no-more and not-yet – stands for "a fight against time."[58] Arendt interprets the time of the protagonist as "the stream" where 'He,' a fighter against time, stands, defending "his own presence."[59]

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[52] Ibidem, I, 210.

[53] Ibidem, I, 211.

[54] Hannah Arendt, "No Longer and Not Yet", in: *The Nation*: 300–302, 1946, 300–301.

[55] "When the thread of tradition finally broke, the gap between past and future ceased to be a condition peculiar only to the activity of thought and restricted as an experience to those few who made thinking their primary business. It became a tangible reality and perplexity for all; that is, it became a fact of political relevance" (Hannah Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future", in: *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 14).

[56] She presents this story also in her "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future", in: *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, as well as in *The Life of the Mind*. See Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future", 14; Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 202ff.

[57] Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future", 14.

[58] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 206.

[59] Ibidem, I, 207.

Thinking is this "battleground"; "an extended Now on which he spends his life."[60] In other words, time must be linear in its flow, since the forces of the protagonist 'He' – his past and future – clash against each other at the point of now, where 'He' stands. Arendt configures the forces of the past and the future using the modern physicalist model of the parallelogram of forces.[61] She defines now – "this present which is timeless" – as a diagonal created by the clash of the forces of a bellicose past and future that are ambushing 'He.'[62] This diagonal is the quiet space of thinking, to which the protagonist can withdraw if he wins his fight against the malicious forces of past and future.[63] According to Arendt, "time is the thinking ego's" biggest adversary, not only because the past and the future are crushing 'He' from both sides, but also because the thinking *ego* is incarnated in the physical body, and the body always disrupts the *ego*'s thinking quietude.[64] For Arendt, then, to think the past and the future can never be a harmonious dialogue between me and myself; it is where thinking confronts its own impossibility to know and becomes a fight in which thinking thinks in and of the gap between the past and the future.

To imagine this clash between past and future, Arendt makes use of the scientific knowledge that she questions. She appropriates the physicalist notion of forces that are measurable as posited entities. As Erwin Schrödinger warns, light waves (or in this example, the forces of past and future) "do not really exist, they are only waves of knowledge."[65] The key word here is, of course, 'knowledge'; which Arendt conflates with thinking. These two notions – thinking and knowledge – cannot be separated that easily.

The Space of Thinking

> Truth is what we are compelled to admit by the nature either of our senses or of our brain. The proposition that everybody who is "was meant to be" can easily be refuted; but the certainty of the I "was meant to be" will

[60] Ibidem, I, 205.

[61] Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future", 11–13. See also Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 208–209.

[62] For a different reading, see Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 17–19.

[63] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 210.

[64] Ibidem, I, 206.

[65] Erwin Schrödinger, "Causality and Wave Mechanics", in: *The World of Mathematics* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000 [1956]), 1065.

> survive refutation intact because it is inherent in every thinking reflection on the I-am.[66]

In *The Life of the Mind*, returning to the modern age and the conviction that "I can know only what I myself make,"[67] which is, according to Arendt, a cognition derived from the mentality of *homo faber*, she proposes to address thinking, willing and judging.

For Arendt, thinking, willing and judging constitute *vita contemplativa*, bringing the "complete quietness" that overwhelms us "with this stillness."[68] The problem, then, is: where do the desire to know and "the power of logical reasoning"[69] belong?

As noted, thinking and cognition are different human abilities, and they are not compatible. In addition, logical reasoning is "a sort of brain power" which Arendt equates with "the labor power [that] the human animal develops in its metabolism with nature." She insists that we can measure the "mental processes which feed on brain power we usually call intelligence," in the same way that we can measure "bodily strength." For Arendt, the laws of logic and the laws of nature are the same and they are "ultimately rooted in the structure of the human brain." Our brain structure forces us to agree that 2 + 2 = 4.[70] Modern science is an outcome of mathematics, "the only non-empirical science par excellence." In mathematics, "the mind appears to play only with itself […] delivering the key to those laws of nature and the universe that are concealed by appearances."[71] She claims that "this type of intelligence" is "a mere function of the life process itself, or, as Hume put it, a mere 'slave of passions.'"[72] For Arendt, "this brain power and the compelling logical processes it generates are not capable of erecting a world," because they are "as wordless as the compulsory processes of life, labor, and consumption."[73] Following her argument in *The Human Condition*, logical reasoning is equated with labour, that is, with biological life.

In distinguishing between thinking and cognition as two different human abilities,[74] Arendt holds that cognition, or intellect, corresponds

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[66] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 61.

[67] Ibidem, I, 7.

[68] Ibidem.

[69] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 171.

[70] Ibidem, 171. See Arendt's repeated claim on "brain power" in *The Life of the Mind*, I, 61. See also Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 52.

[71] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 7.

[72] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 172. Reprinted in: Arendt, "The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art", in: *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 176.

[73] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 172.

[74] Ibidem, 170.

to the category of making, thereby it is derived from the mentality of *homo faber*. It seems, then, that the last category, thinking, or Kantian reason, should have its roots in action. Yet, I suggest that this match is problematic and Arendt offers no explanation. On the one hand, action presupposes men acting together in the space of the multitude; on the other hand, the thinking of the timeless *ego* resides in the gap between the past and the future. There is no possibility of interdependence between action and thinking. Yet, this is what she wants to establish.[75]

There is, however, a different possibility for interpreting Arendt: it might be argued that her model for thinking is *praxis*, and for cognition, *poiesis*, while 'logical reasoning' is a biological function. So, the brain functions biologically in the same way as human beings function when securing the means of sustenance; while "the cognitive process," as *poiesis*, always strives for some final result and after reaching the end, after a solution is found, ceases to be. By contrast, thinking, as *praxis*, "has neither an end nor an aim outside itself, and it does not even produce results."[76] Thinking curls up upon itself in the gap in time: 'no longer and not yet.'

For Arendt, there is no link between the world of our senses and thinking; because thinking "subjects everything it gets hold of to doubt," so it does not have a "natural, matter-of-fact relation to reality."[77] Thinking engages with what is no more and not yet. When a thinker enters the world and engages with others, she stops thinking. Here is the problematic tension between these two different modes of thinking: either thinking is a two-in-one dialogue, or thinking thinks about appearances (which cease to be in real time), perceiving 'something else in them.' Yet, in both cases, thinking is framed by Arendt as 'a thinker alone with herself.' But what is the connection between thinking about invisibles and thinking as a two-in-one dialogue, *dialegesthai*: travelling through words?[78] If thinking is this dialogue of the two-in-one, a dialogue of questions and answers, it cannot be timeless. Kant says something similar, when he notes that "thinking contains reflecting, which occurs only in time."[79] Yet, for Arendt, thinking is in no time. It proceeds, so to speak, in *nunc stans*. Thinking thinks in this "abiding now," in "the instant that knows no temporal articulation," and – using Hans Loewald's

[75] She writes: "thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths' which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5).

[76] Ibidem, 170.

[77] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 52.

[78] Ibidem, I, 185.

[79] Immanuel Kant, "The End of All Things", in: *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1794]), 8:334 [227]), italics in original.

description – where "distinctions between now, earlier and later have fallen away or have not arisen."[80] Thinking swirls in this gap between past and future.[81]

It seems that Arendt, despite her objections (and in opposition to Heidegger) agrees with Husserl's conception of the "immortality of the transcendental ego,"[82] when she writes that the "ego is sheer activity and therefore ageless, sexless, without qualities, and without a life story." For her, "the thinking ego is not the self."[83] Yet, if the thinking *ego* is not the self and is without a life story, how can the *ego* unravel yesterday's thinking and what would the dialogue of the two-in-one be about? How can the harmony and consistency of thinking be maintained if there is no 'life story'?

Another problem is how to reconcile this thinking *ego* without a life story, and Arendt's stress on plurality of action? If thinking curls up upon itself in the gap, which is not only timeless, but outside of time, how can 'thinking' (and putting it in the third person does not solve the problem) undo what thinking thought yesterday?[84] How can thinking unravel beliefs passed on by tradition, if timelessness is the law of the thinking *ego*? After all, tradition calls this curling of thinking upon itself reflection, and one can only reflect on something that is no more but that at some time in the past was. To unravel old beliefs must be 'in time,' although not in chronological time.

Time

At the heart of Arendt's project is the problem of time: the time of thinking as well as the historical time of her analysis of the human condition.

According to Arendt, thinking thinks outside of time, in this 'abiding now,' in the *nunc stans*. However, as Aristotle says, "if there were no time, there would be no 'now,' and vice versa."[85] Therefore, to speak of 'time' and 'now' is already to make a human judgment from the position of human finite time, limited by birth and death. 'Now' nullifies timelessness as well as the cyclical movement of nature – the perpetual

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[80] Hans Loewald, "Comments on Religious Experience", in: *Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 65.

[81] Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future", 13.

[82] Edmund Husserl, "The Apodicticity of Recollection", in: *Husserl Studies* 2: 3–32, 1985, §10, 24.

[83] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 43.

[84] As she writes: "the business of thinking is like Penelope's web; it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before" (Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 88).

[85] Aristotle, *Physics*, in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), IV, 220a–221.

swinging of day and night, of seasons, of growth and decay.[86] 'Now' is part of a rectilinear movement, which human life is – as Arendt also points out – cutting across cyclical time; a rectilinear movement between birth and death.[87]

Moreover, to say that 'now' is outside of time chronologically measured by calendars or clocks does not mean that 'now' is in no time at all. If we unravel yesterday's thinking, as Penelope did in unravelling her work each morning, then we are talking in terms of time.[88]

Perhaps Husserl's discussion of internal time consciousness might help. The 'now' of thinking is not informed by the past, present and future that are measured by mechanical clocks or based on the causal models. Time is, as Husserl puts it, "the head attached to the comet's tail of retentions relating to the earlier now-points of the motion."[89] This ephemeral now always retains the past in the present, while anticipating the future. To put it differently, 'now' is an amalgam of retention and protension. Our thinking – even if it deals with 'invisibles' – is still structured by (what Husserl calls) the consciousness of internal time. The best (and the simplest) example is melody. We simply do not hear 'now,' namely, one tone. We do not hear single tones succeeding each other; rather, we hear a melody. Our thinking synthesises what went before and what we anticipate. In other words, thinking is not outside of time.

Husserl's critiques of psychologism, anthropologism, and naturalism can help also with Arendt's equation of logical reasoning and brain processes. Although for Arendt, writing in 1948, Husserl lacks "any sense of history,"[90] his critique of psychologism should give us pause in reducing logical reasoning to brainpower. According to Patočka, already in the *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, Husserl suggests that "the characteristic trait of mathematical formations" is "that they…must be freely

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[86] See Arendt's claim concerning 'birth' and 'death': "Nature and the cyclical movement into which she forces all living things know neither birth nor death as we understand them. The birth and death of human beings are not simple natural occurrences, but are related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable entities, appear and from which they depart. Birth and death presuppose a world which is not in constant movement, but whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible, which existed before any one individual appeared into it and will survive his eventual departure. Without a world into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other animal species" (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 96–97).

[87] Ibidem, 19.

[88] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 88.

[89] Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), §11, 32.

[90] Arendt, What is Existential Philosophy?, 166.

constituted by a spontaneous activity,"[91] which means that the thought 'operation' of 2+2=4 cannot be "physically located in the brain," as Arendt claims.[92]

Conclusion

> Time is nothing but the form of inner sense, i.e., of the intuiting we do of ourselves and of our inner state. For time cannot be a determination of outer appearances, [because] it does not belong to any shape or position, etc., but rather determines the relation of presentations in our inner state. And precisely because this inner intuition gives us no shape, do we try to make up for this deficiency by means of analogies. We present time sequence by a line progressing *ad infinitum*, a line in which the manifold constitutes a series of only one dimension. And from the properties of that line we infer all the properties of time, except for the one difference that the parts of the line are simultaneous whereas the parts of time are always sequential.[93]

In conclusion, I suggest that the tension between timeless thinking and human action is a result of the difficulty of reconciling Arendt's commitment to rethink political theory – which, according to her, has come to an end[94] – and her need to rethink ideas passed on by tradition. Arendt's answer to this problem cannot be easily identified, since she never finished her last volume on the human ability to judge. The tension between timeless thinking and human action might also reside – as I suggest

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[91] Jan Patočka, *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1996), 25, italics in original.

[92] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, I, 52.

[93] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 33, B 49–50.

[94] See Arendt, "Remarks on the Crisis Character of Modern Society. Highlights of the Afternoon Session", in: *Christianity and Crisis* 26, 9: 112–114, 1966; Arendt, "Truth and Politics"; Arendt, "The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern"; Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future"; Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics. Civil Disobedience. On Violence. Thoughts on Politics and Revolution* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest/HBJ Book; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1972); Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution. A Commentary", in: *Crises of the Republic* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest/HBJ Book; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1972); Hannah Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin", in: *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954. Uncollected and Unpublished Works by Hannah Arendt* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994 [1953]); Hannah Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought", in: *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954. Uncollected and Unpublished Works by Hannah Arendt* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994 [1954]); Hannah Arendt, "Introduction *Into* Politics", in: *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005); Arendt, "Socrates"; Arendt, "The Tradition of Political Thought".

in this paper – in Arendt's problematic acceptance of the epistemic split between thinking and the world, and her dual conception of thinking.

Perhaps Arendt's unfinished volume would have offered a way to deal with the double aspect of thinking and experience mentioned above. After all, freedom is the human ability to think what is no more and not yet. As Patočka notes, humans are free in regard to what is given to them because they stand "on the boundary between what is and what cannot be described as existent"; what is and what is no more. Humans can think what is no more because they relate to the past, present and future by standing among things, which are different than they are.[95] Humans are not *partes extra partes*. Humans are free.

To end my diachronic dialogue with Arendt, I have to admit that I am still unclear what she means by *thinking*. Time and thinking are related; one is impossible without the other. To *think* through the ideas of past thinkers, a dialogue must be synchronic and diachronic at the same time. The timeless *ego*, in a dialogue with 'itself,' would not be able to unravel what others have thought and relate these thoughts to the time of its own thinking, to the gap in tradition. To unravel ideas presupposes an engagement with thinkers in *their* time as well as in ours. Only then are we able – perhaps – to *understand* why they thought what they did. To engage with earlier thinking can reveal – if we are open to the ideas of the past – why certain questions were important then and have ceased to be now. To engage with thinking means to think the past that for us is shrouded in darkness.

Or, possibly, this critique of Arendt misses the most important aspect of her thinking, her Kantianism, as I have also suggested. In this paper, I have gestured towards a recognition of Arendt's conceptual apparatus to be more in alignment with Kant and Jaspers, than with the phenomenology of Heidegger. As Arendt acknowledges, Jaspers "has a conception of freedom linked to reason which was completely foreign to me when I came to Heidelberg. I knew nothing about it, although I had read Kant. I saw this reason in action, so to speak" and "I was educated by it."[96] Perhaps, Kant's insight that "[t]ime is nothing but the form of inner sense, i.e., of the intuiting we do of ourselves and of our inner state," might help us to think with Arendt the aspect of thinking 'outside' of chronological time. As Kant notes, "[f]or time cannot be a de-

[95] "Svoboda je však zároveň prostor pro myšlení, t.j. pochopení, že svoboda není věc mezi věcmi, že svobodná bytost stojí na mezi mezi tím, co jest, a tím, co nelze nazvat jsoucím, poněvadž to právě člověka ze souvislosti věcí vylamuje, aby je mohl chápat a stavět se tak mimo ně, rozuměl jim a svému postavení mezi nimi" (Patočka, Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar, in *Tři studie o Masarykovi* (Prague: Mladá Fronta, 1991 [1977]), 22).

[96] Arendt, "Language Remains", 22.

termination of outer appearances, [because] it does not belong to any shape or position, etc., but rather determines the relation of presentations in our inner state."[97] We should take seriously her insistence that she is not a phenomenologist,[98] and reconsider her thinking as being a disciple of Jaspers and Kant.

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[97] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 33, B 49–50.
[98] Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 405.

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Summary

Hannah Arendt's project is defined by her attempt to rethink the space of freedom, concomitant with the importance of action and the problematic nature of modern 'objective' knowledge. In this paper, I consider Arendt's analyses of the *vita contemplativa*, focusing mainly on her discussion of the mental faculty she calls thinking, which she situates in opposition to modern knowledge. I conclude that her reflections on thinking depend on Immanuel Kant's philosophy and that we should reconsider Arendt, via this thinking, as a disciple of Jaspers and Kant.

Keywords: Arendt, Heidegger, Husserl, Kant, Plato, Patočka, thinking