

## The Dialogue With Martin Heidegger: Arendt's Ontology of *The Human Condition*

### The Meaning of Heidegger's Silence

In a letter to Karl Jaspers dated November 1, 1961, Hannah Arendt wrote,

Heidegger—yes, it is a most irritating story . . . this open hostility, which he has never really displayed before. My explanation—putting aside for the moment the possibility of some kind of gossip—is that last winter I sent him one of my books, the *Vita Activa*, for the first time. I know that he finds it intolerable that my name appears in public, that I write books, etc. All my life, I've pulled the wool over his eyes, so to speak, acted as if none of that existed and as if I couldn't count to three, unless it was in the interpretation of his own works. Then he was always very pleased when it turned out I could count to three and sometimes even to four. Then I suddenly felt this deception was becoming just too boring, and so I got a rap on the nose. I was very angry for a moment, but I am not any longer. I feel instead that I somehow deserved what I got—that is, both for having deceived him and for suddenly having put an end to it.<sup>1</sup>

To the retrospective students of their thought, the personal drama contained in these few words is fascinating and irritating at the same time. The story of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt fascinates, because the lives and personal relationship of these two powerful thinkers is like a parable of the twentieth century. We are fascinated by the story of a young German Jewess student of philosophy in Marburg during 1924–1925 who falls in love and has an affair with the brilliant young *dozent* of philosophy. We are fascinated that in 1933, as a refugee in Paris, she is working with a Zionist organization to settle children in Palestine, while he, for however brief a moment, becomes the rector of the University of Freiburg, in charge of bringing the university “in line” with the demands of the National Socialist Party. We are fascinated by the equanimity and magnanimity with which Arendt forgave Heidegger his “mistake,” and by her continuing tortured attempts at a metaphysical justification of Heidegger's political error.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt also irritates. Despite her profound independence of mind and her unwavering pride, Hannah Arendt humbled herself in Heidegger's presence.<sup>3</sup> She even effaced herself as an intellectual in his eyes, feeding, in fact, a profoundly narcissistic male ego with her all-too-female erasure of her own intellectual power—until the day, that is, when she sent him a copy of the German translation of the *Human Condition*, which in German appeared as *Vita Activa*. “The active life” or “the life of action” is a better title for this work: as Arendt herself observed, she had meant to distinguish between the active life and the life of the mind; so the volume misleadingly called *The Human Condition* represents only one aspect of that condition, namely, the life of action as opposed to the life of the mind.<sup>4</sup>

How are we to interpret Heidegger's chilling silence in view of Arendt's philosophical work? Psychological explanations such as male narcissism, pettiness of character, envy, and jealousy may all be true, and unfortunately, they are borne out by historical accounts of Heidegger's personality.<sup>5</sup> But they do not explain the *philosophical significance* of Heidegger's silence. With her work *The Human Condition*, Arendt found her own philosophical voice.<sup>6</sup> As she expresses it in the letter to Jaspers cited above, she was no longer simply the *interpreter* of Heidegger's work, “count[ing] to three and sometimes even to four” in his arithmetic. Arendt now had her own equations to formulate and to solve. Heidegger, in my

opinion, remained silent because he recognized how his former student had subverted the premises that were fundamental to his ontology; and she had done this within a framework that still bore the profound marks of his thought. This, I think, was unbearable to him and drove him to silence.

### Plurality, the World, and the Solipsism of Heidegger's Ontology

I have discussed above (see the third section, "The Concept of the 'World' in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*," in Chapter 2) Arendt's claim that "it is almost impossible to render a clear account of Heidegger's political thoughts that may be of political relevance without an elaborate report on his concept and analysis of 'world.'" <sup>7</sup> Although Heidegger, through his analysis of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world as a form of *Mitsein*, of "being-with," made human plurality constitutive of the human condition, the fundamental categories of his existential analytic, rather than illuminating human plurality, denigrated human togetherness to a form of being with the *das Man*, the "they." In her 1946 essay "What Is Existenz Philosophy?" Arendt suggests that the absence in Heidegger's philosophy of plurality, or being-with, as a constitutive dimension, is the reason that this philosophy can allow a "mechanical reconciliation" of "atomized selves" in an "Over-self" that carries them into action. <sup>8</sup> Certainly, the absence of a philosophical theorem of intersubjectivity, or of the co-constitution of subjects, is not enough to lead a thinker to espouse National Socialism. One can think of many counterexamples: most members of the Vienna school, including Rudolf Carnap, Alfred Tarski, and Maurice Schlick, were methodological individualists, as was Karl Popper. If anything, in the case of Popper, he established a deductive link—fallaciously, I believe—between thoughts of community and intersubjectivity and the espousal of National Socialism. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, what Arendt means is not that Heidegger's fundamental ontology led him to espouse National Socialism; rather, she suggests that Heidegger's inability to articulate the human condition of plurality led him to develop a conception of radically isolated selfhood from the standpoint of which an equally radical disso-

lution in a "whole," in a mass political movement, would appear plausible. <sup>10</sup> Applying one of the lessons of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism, we can say that the radical isolation of the individual makes this individual susceptible to being sucked in by collectivities that falsely promise solidarity and companionship. His inability to articulate the condition of plurality made Heidegger susceptible to promises of false solidarity in an authoritarian movement.

If, however, Heidegger had developed a concept of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world that revolutionized the modern epistemological tradition, why could he not have taken the step that led from "being-in-the-world-with" to human plurality? The answer lies with the absence of a concept of action as interaction in Heidegger's thought. The fundamental categories of the existential analytic in *Being and Time* deal with activities primarily referring to the manipulation of objects, to the bringing about of states of affairs in the world. Being-ready-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*) and being-ready-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*) each deal with modalities through which an individual brings about a state of affairs in the world, like building a house, planting a garden, or cooking a meal; or one makes something, for example, a pot or a table. Heidegger is concerned to analyze the way in which this world of things and objects, as well as the entire background of presuppositions and references that accompany them, make themselves present to *Dasein*. There are no categories in this framework for thinking of actions demonstrating generosity or cupidity, friendship or treachery, love or hostility.

Concerned being-with-others in the world—*Fürsorge*—is in its most authentic form a caring for others as they are unto-death, as they are finite creatures, caught in temporality. Guilt, resoluteness, being-unto-death are "Existentialia"—existential conditions—which remind *Dasein* of the fundamentals of its condition, namely, a temporality of finitude. *Dasein* is "thrown into" a world of facticity, of human circumstances, networks, and contexts that precede it and in which it is submerged. Only the step of pulling oneself back out of the facticity of everydayness to a condition of resolute coming-to-one's-senses (*Besinnung*), getting hold of one's existence, can enable *Dasein* to reach authenticity. This getting hold of one's senses does and must entail the possibility of being-unto-death, of choosing through an act of resoluteness one's own being-unto-death. "Does being-in-the-world have a higher instance for its potentiality-for-Being

than its own death?" (*Hat das In-der-Welt-sein eine höhe Instanz seines Seinkönnens als seinen Tod?*)<sup>11</sup>

These passages on the ontology of death as the most authentic form of Dasein's being reveal the presence in Heidegger's work of sensibilities from different cultural and intellectual traditions. As Thomas Rentsch has written in his insightful introduction to the life and work of Heidegger, Heidegger develops "a godless theology."<sup>12</sup> The theological motifs of Christianity, the fallenness of men into an inauthentic world, the creature-like finitude of human existence destined to a life of "care"—*Sorge*—and finally the thought of one's fundamental finitude are vividly present. When we are confronted with death, we realize, in St. Augustine's sense, that we are not the ground of our being. Because Heidegger's theology is "godless," however, this realization does not lead to a further act of humbling. There is also in Heidegger's thought the existentialist ethos of transforming the knowledge of the groundlessness of one's being into an act of defiant courage by choosing one's own destiny, by giving oneself over to forces that call to one. The godless theology of Martin Heidegger now becomes the ideology of the male warrior. As Rentsch explains, at the time of the publication of *Being and Time* (1927),

the World War . . . had just been over for a few years: don't phrases like "running into death" and "the most extreme possibility of self-sacrifice," remind one of the heroic picture of the soldier's existence. . . . Is this not the ideal of the front-fighter who is not afraid of death . . . the existential ideal of the masculine resolve of an officer . . . ?<sup>13</sup>

The philosophical categories of activity that dominate in *Being and Time* are either those of instrumental activity that concern forms of making or bringing about something in the world or the categories that reveal an existentialism of death, guilt, resoluteness, and fallenness. The most remarkable aspect of the latter is their complete methodological solipsism: they relate to none other than oneself. It is not those who mourn me and those whom I leave behind that matter, but that I, this single individual, must die. This is certainly and undeniably true; but even death is a social act and a social fact. My death concerns many more in addition to myself; it is mourned, remembered, lamented, or rejoiced over; met with sorrow or with glee—as the case may be. Think also of the social identities

that may be affected: this death may mean the end of a dynasty or of a family; it may mean the death of one's only child and heir; it may mean the beginning of a new political era, as the death of a dictator usually signifies. One can multiply these descriptions of the pertinent human situations and relations that would characterize ad infinitum one's death as a social fact. For Heidegger, though, categories such as being-unto-death, guilt, resoluteness, as "existentials," are forms of "relating-oneself-to-oneself." Not only the existential but also the methodological solipsism of *Being and Time* prevents an intersubjective account of action as interaction, as acting-with, in Arendt's terms. From Heidegger's perspective, the human condition of plurality, of being-in-the-world-with-others in the manner of speech and action, is a condition of facticity into which one is thrown and in which one loses oneself.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt resuscitates everyday-being-in-the-world with others as the basic condition of being human. Even a brief consideration of the fundamental categories of this work such as natality, plurality, and action reveal how profoundly they are opposed to those of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Being-unto-death is displaced by natality; the isolated Dasein is replaced by a condition of plurality; and instead of instrumental action, a new category of human activity, action, understood as speech and doing, emerges. Everyday being-in-the-world, rather than being the condition of inauthenticity into which Dasein is thrown, now becomes that "space of appearance" into which we are inserted as acting and speaking beings and within which we reveal who we are and what we are capable of. Ironically, the full significance of Arendt's transformation of Heidegger's ontology requires a more detailed examination of Heidegger's reading of Aristotle in the period from 1923 to 1925. Arendt, as opposed to Heidegger, found in Aristotle's concept of *praxis* the key to a new reevaluation of human action as interaction unfolding within a space of appearances.

#### Action, Narrative, and the Web of Stories

Without Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's condition as one of being-in-the-world-with-others, some of the fundamental categories of Hannah

Arendt's own political philosophy, such as natality, plurality, worldliness, and the public realm, could not have been formulated, because more often than not they were thought "in opposition" to Heidegger; yet it is also the case that Arendt undertook a fundamental transformation of Heidegger's ontology. Let us recall some of the key elements of her discussion in *The Human Condition*. Labor, work, and action each correspond "to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man" (*HC*, p. 7). Labor is an activity necessitated by the biological rhythm of the human body itself: life must be renewed, sustained, nurtured; labor is activity geared to maintaining, under whichever social conditions, the constant care of the body and of the environment in which this body is situated. Procuring daily nourishment, cleaning and grooming the body and the space that humans inhabit, tending to the wear and tear of the everyday things around one, of the world of objects that humans need, all belong under the category of labor.

Work corresponds to the "unnaturalness of human existence" (*HC*, p. 7); work is the activity that creates a second nature of things—edifices, structures, buildings, monuments, cultural artifacts. Work is the activity that creates the *world* in the Heideggerian sense of the term. Through work, a world of more or less permanent objects emerges within which human life unfolds. This world of objects orients humans in their daily activities; at the same time, objects provide a certain durability and permanence that run across generations; they are, we may say, a material repository of memory. An example may clarify Arendt's meaning: when we visit ancient buildings, monuments, and cities, we try to immerse ourselves in the world of those who have lived in these buildings, who have carried out their activities in them. The presence of these things across time, their more or less contingent durability, allows us to establish a continuity with bygone generations.<sup>14</sup> To understand the world these past generations have inhabited means learning the referential contexts, the patterns of everyday use, the what and wherefor of their activities. Why did they build the spires of this castle so high? Why were the living chambers separated from the eating quarters in this way? Why were the ceilings so low? Is this object an instrument or a decorative piece? In what context of activity does it belong? By getting to know this world of things, artifacts, buildings, and, of course, cultural creations, we get to know each other across worlds.

The objectivity of the world—its object- or thing-character—and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence. (*HC*, p. 9)

Action is the only activity that goes on directly between humans, and it corresponds to the human condition of plurality. Plurality entails both equality and distinction. If humans were not equal, they could not understand each other; if they were not distinct, they would need neither speech nor action to distinguish them from each other (*HC*, p. 175). Through speech and action, humans distinguish themselves from one another; they become the authors of "words and deeds." Through words and deeds, humans "appear" to one another, or reveal themselves to each other.

This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human. This is true of no other activity in the *vita activa*. Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it. . . . A life without speech and action, on the other hand—and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word—is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men. (*HC*, p. 176)

Action corresponds to the human condition of "natality"—that we are born or, in Heidegger's terms, "thrown" into a world that precedes our existence and within which alone we become who we are. Action is like a second birth (*HC*, p. 176); "its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative" (*HC*, p. 177). The birth of the human infant has a biological as well as a psychic-social dimension. The human infant becomes a self by learning speech and action in the human community into which it is born. Through this process, the infant also becomes an individual, that is, the unique initiator of these words and deeds, the carrier of this life story. This condition is a social universal: no human community, as opposed to a merely accidental gathering of primates, can exist over time without teaching its young the language and

actions characteristic of its way of life. The crucial point here is that in learning speech and action, every human child also becomes the initiator of new deeds and of new words. To learn a language is to master the capacity for formulating an infinite number of well-formed sentences in that language; to know how to act as a Hopi Indian, as an Ancient Greek, as a modern American is also to know—more or less—how to initiate both what is expected of one by the community and what is new, distinctive to this individual. Socialization and individuation are two sides of the same coin.

“In acting and speaking,” writes Arendt,

men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world. . . . This disclosure of “who” in contradistinction to “what” somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (*HC*, p. 179)

Through speech and action, words and deeds, humans insert themselves “into a world of appearances.” To be human is to appear in the world to others, to be present to them, to be perceived by them, to be in communication with them. For humans, being and appearance are one; there is no human essence hidden behind or beyond the appearances. Human life is life that unfolds within the human world of appearances. This means that all two-world metaphysics that seek to understand the human condition in the light of a principle that precedes, grounds, or antedates the world as appearance miss the essential human condition of action. To be alive as a human being, as opposed to being a mere body, is to act and speak with others in space and time. Being is being present, it is to appear; it is to manifest itself. As Sergio Belardinelli notes, Arendt’s teaching of the space of appearances is unmistakably indebted to Heidegger’s doctrine of *Erschlossenheit*, of being as disclosure. “With Heidegger’s terminology we can say, that the existential-ontological structure of humans is such that, ‘that Dasein is in the mode of being there.’”<sup>15</sup>

Yet precisely those passages in which Heidegger discusses Dasein’s thrownness into the world, or fallenness within it, also reveal the fundamentally different accent that he and Arendt place on this phenomenon. Heidegger writes,

Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the “world.” “Fallenness” into the world means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, insofar as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. (*Being and Time*, p. 220/176)

This experience of absorbed being-in-the-world corresponds to “inauthenticity.” Heidegger remarks that inauthenticity here does not signify a negation of Dasein’s being, but it refers “to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world—the kind which is completely fascinated by the ‘world’ and by the Dasein-with of Others in the ‘they’ [*das Man*]” (*Being and Time*, p. 220).

The philosophical significance attributed to the world of appearances by Arendt and Heidegger could not be more different. Heidegger’s language denigrates this realm. Despite all disclaimers, terms such as *fallenness*, *thrownness*, *inauthenticity*, *idle talk*, the “they” carry the unmistakable connotations of a Christian theology that views the world as the domain of fallen sinners who are condemned to live in finitude, contingency, accident, and death. We also recall Plato’s allegory of the cave: those who are caught in the worldly appearance of objects and human affairs are like those who watch the shadows on the wall of the cave, without being able to ascend to the source of true light. The world, the space of appearance in which being discloses itself, is fundamentally ambivalent for Heidegger. The Platonic-Christian denigration and devaluation of this world is betrayed by his terminology, even if at times it contradicts his philosophical intentions.

Matters stand otherwise with Arendt. She clearly noted the profound affinity Heidegger shared with Plato in this respect; and her sensibilities on the worldliness of the world are more Homeric and Nietzschean than Christian. Arendt revalues what Heidegger devalues, because she has disclosed *the deep structure of human action as interaction*. The space of appearances is ontologically reevaluated by her, precisely because human beings can act and speak only with others, and insofar as they appear to others. One can live in solitude, one can think in solitude, but one cannot be generous or miserly, courageous or cowardly, kind or hurtful without the presence of others. Such actions can be identified as courageous, cowardly, miserly, and so on only insofar as we and others interpret them as “being-such-and-such,” and not “so-and-so.” The philosophical thesis

here is that actions can only be identified through a narrative that is disclosed to others and to ourselves. The "whatness" of an action requires at the very least the identification of its doer, of his or her intentions, of the quality of the act, of the context within which it is engaged. These features of action, however, can only be identified narratively, by the stories we tell, by the narratives we construct of the who, the what, the why, the how, and the what for. Action is disclosure in speech.

One of Arendt's fundamental contributions to the history of twentieth-century philosophy is the thesis that the human space of appearances is constituted by "the web of relationships and the enacted stories." Action and speech go on between human beings, and "most action and speech is concerned with this in-between" (*HC*, p. 182). This in-betweenness, however, in addition to including the world of things, also includes an intangible dimension,

since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results and end products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the "web" of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality. (*HC*, p. 183)

The metaphor of the "web" indicates the invisible, gossamerlike ties, networks, and contexts of human relationships that constitute the "horizon" of human affairs. The term *horizon* in phenomenology suggests the ever-present but never quite fully transparent presuppositions, contexts, and referential networks that we must always also take for granted when we are in the world. The horizon is ever present, and it recedes into infinity; at any point in time, it is only some aspect of it, some part of it on which we focus our attention, and this then becomes present to us and reveals itself to us.

For Hannah Arendt, the "web" of human relationships and enacted stories constitutes the horizon, in the phenomenological sense, of human affairs. Every speaking and acting human person finds such a horizon as the always already present background within which its life unfolds. An example may help here: think of how, even before a child is born, members of its family construct a "web" of stories and relationships into which it will be inserted. The mother may want a son who will become the great

pianist she missed becoming because she started raising a family, or because she was not talented or disciplined enough. The father may want a daughter who will care for him in his old age; the sibling in the house may wish that a new child would never appear. We all begin life inserted into narratives, stories, and webs that were spun before us, and that will accompany us, and against which more often than not we will have to struggle.

This interminable and inexhaustibly intricate horizon of human affairs yields certain consequences: first, in acting there is always a necessary disjunction between intention and consequence. Not only are our actions always open to the reading and misreading of others, but also "because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions . . . action almost never achieves its purpose" (*HC*, p. 184). Second, action is immersed in this medium through the stories it "produces," "as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things" (*HC*, p. 184). Actions are identified by their doers as well as by the spectators and those who suffer their consequences through various narrative tellings, and in this way they become part of the "web" of human affairs. "I thought I was being generous," I say, "whereas you thought I was being overbearing and protective." "This is treason," some say: "no, this is true patriotism," others respond. Such is the web of narratives within which human affairs unfold. Although we are all actors, none of us is the author or producer of his or her own life story. "In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author" (*HC*, p. 184).

In the fragility, unpredictability, and complexity of human affairs Arendt saw the sources of the philosopher's contempt for this realm and ultimately the reason why the philosophical tradition repeatedly, from Plato to Marx, substituted "making" for "doing." In a passage that holds equally well for Heidegger, Arendt wrote,

It is for this reason that Plato thought that human affairs (*ta ton anthropon pragmata*), the outcome of action (*praxis*) should not be treated with great seriousness; the actions of men appear like the gestures of puppets led by an invisible hand behind the scene, so that man seems to be a kind of plaything of a god. (*HC*, p. 185)

## Aristotle, Arendt, and Heidegger

As opposed to Plato's contempt and ultimate turning away from the world of human affairs, Arendt saw in Aristotle's distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*, between making and doing, the philosophical articulation of the concept of action as deeds and words. A principal manner in which Aristotle distinguishes between "making" and "acting" is through the analysis of the *telos* of each form of activity. "In the variable are included both things made and things done; making and acting are different . . . ; so that the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make."<sup>16</sup> Whereas the end/purpose, *telos*, of making is in the thing produced, in the case of *praxis*, the doing itself, the quality of the deed, is the end of the activity. The doing cannot be separated from the doer in the way in which the thing made can be from the maker; for the doer and the deed are one; the doing is the revealing of who one is. The ultimate purpose of action is the doing of fine and noble deeds, as these come to constitute the unity of a lifetime. In Aristotle's words,

Since every one who makes makes for an end, and that which is made is not an end in the unqualified sense (but only an end in a particular relation, and the end of a particular operation)—only that which is *done* is that; for good action is an end, and desire aims at this. (emphasis in the original)<sup>17</sup>

More important, though, than this teleological analysis is the view of *praxis* as a distinctive form of human actuality, of *energeia*, in fact, as the highest form of activity for humans qua human. Arendt cites Aristotle:

To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; "for what appears to all, this we call being," and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality. (*HC*, p. 199)

"For what appears to all, this we call being." Heidegger appropriated and interpreted Aristotle's concept of being through his own doctrine of truth as disclosure—*aletheia*—what is must manifest itself, must reveal itself. Being, he claimed, was a form of revealing presence, or of a specific kind of actuality, of motility, which he called *Bewegtheit*. A manuscript

of Heidegger's from the year 1922, and first published in 1989, is titled "*Phänomenologische Interpretation zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)*" (Phenomenological Interpretation of Aristotle: Definition of the Hermeneutical Situation). Named by Hans-Georg Gadamer "Heidegger's 'Theological' Early Writing,"<sup>18</sup> this text clarifies in a very compact space the reappropriation of Aristotle that Heidegger was undertaking at that time, and that left its indelible mark not only upon Hannah Arendt but upon Herbert Marcuse<sup>19</sup> as well as Leo Strauss and others.<sup>20</sup>

Heidegger is fully conscious in this manuscript of the novelty and radicalness of his approach to the history of philosophy:

To understand in radical fashion what a past form of philosophical inquiry defined its own situation to be and how it identified its fundamental concern [*Grundbekümmern*]; understanding (*Verstehen*), this does not mean simply to ascertain certain things to be the case, rather it means repeating what has been understood in ordinary fashion and in the context of one's own situation.<sup>21</sup>

Heidegger follows these methodological insights with a series of propositions that clearly reveal him to be on the way to *Being and Time*. "The object of philosophical inquiry is human Dasein as it questions its own mode of Being" (p. 238). "Factual life has the character of being that bears its own self with difficulty" (*Ibid.*). "The fundamental meaning of the factual form of motility (*Bewegtheit*) characteristic of life is *Sorgen* (curare)" (p. 240, emphasis in the original). "The world is articulated according to the different directions of forms of care, and as the case may be, as the world around one (*Umwelt*), the world with others (*Mitwelt*), and the world of the self (*Selbstwelt*)." The doctrines of the fallenness of Dasein into ordinary life (p. 242), the leveling and obscuring quality of the ordinary concerns of everyday life (p. 243), the contempt for the "they" (*das Man*) (p. 243) are all present in this early manuscript.

It is hard to see how or why these fascinating phenomenological excursions require that "Aristotle be the theme of the inquiry" (p. 248). Heidegger himself answers the question that he poses with the following:

At the same time, however, in his *Physics* Aristotle reaches a fundamentally new premise, out of which his ontology and logic will unfold. . . . The

central phenomenon, whose explication is the topic of the *Physics*, becomes being in the manner of its form of motility (*Bewegtseins*). (p. 251)

Heidegger subsequently undertakes close readings of three passages from Aristotle's works: Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; *Metaphysics* alpha; and *Physics* alpha and beta.

An extremely detailed reading of Book VI of the *Ethics* is also at the center of Heidegger's lectures on Plato's dialogue the *Sophist*, which were given in the winter semester of 1924–1925 at the University of Marburg, and which Hannah Arendt attended.<sup>22</sup> In this section of the *Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the different modes of knowing as these correspond to different forms of being. He distinguishes scientific knowledge (*episteme*) from practical wisdom (*phronesis*), from knowledge involved in making (*techne*), from philosophical wisdom (*sophia*), and from intuitive knowledge (*nous*). There is little doubt that for Hannah Arendt the philosophical significance of the distinction between *praxis* (acting) and *poiesis* (making), between *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *techne* (the knowledge involved in making), as the dianoetic virtues corresponding to these, became clear through Heidegger's lectures.

What is missing in these texts on Aristotle, however, which Gadamer notes as well,<sup>23</sup> is any special emphasis upon, or a detailed examination of, the Aristotelian practical philosophy, of the doctrine of virtue as the life of *praxis* that can be undertaken only in the political community of equals and friends. To as sharp a reader of Aristotle as Heidegger was, this intimate connection between the ethical doctrine of the good life and the political doctrine of the *politeia* as that form of regime that allowed humans the most ample opportunities for engaging in *praxis*, could not have gone unnoticed. Heidegger did not focus on the doctrine of the just city and the good life; instead, he focused on the *Sophist*, and on the characteristic Platonic distinction between the life of untruth, as lived by the sophists in the political community, and the search for truth by the philosopher, which leads away from the city. Heidegger ignored the fundamental doctrines of Aristotle's ethics and politics, as well as the centrality of *praxis*, as the doing of just and noble deeds, in human life.

We can speculate about what Heidegger was up to. No doubt in 1924–1925, Heidegger saw no signs of authentic political *praxis* anywhere; he insisted that philosophical truth lay beyond the life of human action in the city. Perhaps it was more fitting with his quasi-theological temperament

to turn away from the chaos of the Weimar Republic toward Plato's *Sophist*, and to seek philosophical wisdom in those acts of withdrawal from the "fallen" world, in those moments of coming to one's senses about the contingency, futility, and frailty of human affairs. Had Heidegger exercised the turning away from the political that seemed to characterize his reading of Aristotle in this period several years later, in 1933 as well, the course of much of twentieth-century philosophy might have been different. Without a doubt, and however one interprets it, Heidegger's neglect of crucial features of Aristotle's teaching of ethics and politics was a meaningful omission, and one that did not escape the notice of his best students such as Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse, who, each in his or her own way, went on to revive the missing concept of "praxis." Whereas Arendt reread Aristotle so as to reveal the ontological features of ethical and political action, thus gaining access to the notion of a "web" of human affairs, Marcuse read Aristotle's concept of *praxis* in Marxian terms as world-constitutive and historical laboring activity.<sup>24</sup> If one way to judge a philosophical doctrine or interpretation in retrospect is the depth of readings and creative misreadings it can give rise to, then there is little question that Heidegger's phenomenological appropriation of Aristotle remains one of the most significant chapters in the history of twentieth-century philosophy.

\* \* \*

The preceding chapters of this work have been concerned to analyze the existential roots of Arendt's thought and to document the formative intellectual currents of her philosophy, namely, the search for a political homeland for the Jewish people as well as German "Existenz philosophy" of the 1920s, in particular the thought of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's reading of Plato and Aristotle in his lectures of 1924 and 1925 left indelible marks upon Arendt's thinking, which she was all too ready to acknowledge. She wrote to Heidegger with reference to *The Human Condition*:

You will see that the book has no dedication. If things had ever worked out properly between us . . . then I would have asked you if I could have dedicated the book to you. It grew right out of the first days in Marburg and so is in all respects indebted to you.<sup>25</sup>

The great tensions in Arendt's systematic reflections on politics and society, and the unresolved contradictions in some of her formulations, can be traced back to this twofold spiritual-intellectual legacy. Expressed in somewhat stylized form, while Hannah Arendt, the stateless and persecuted Jew is the philosophical and political modernist, Arendt, the student of Martin Heidegger, is the antimodernist Grecophile theorist of the polis and of an originary experience of praxis.

Corresponding to this duality of intellectual orientations are systematic ambiguities that run right through her key concepts such as action and the public sphere. Identifying such tensions and contradictions in a thinker's work can be both profoundly illuminating and deeply dissatisfying. Arendt herself no longer thought it either desirable or even possible to fit the world into a coherent "philosophical *Weltanschauung*." For her, political philosophy became a method of narration to "cull meaning from the past," an exercise in establishing distinctions that would enable us to think the meaning of our times and our actions, to "think what we are doing."<sup>26</sup> Certainly, for Arendt a thinking process that does not exhibit tensions and contradictions would be superficial as well as inadequate to grapple with the tasks at hand. Nonetheless, from the standpoint of the reader and the interpreter, identifying such dualisms is always accompanied by the urge to find principles such as to reconcile these dualisms via a yet more comprehensive interpretation or a fuller account of the corpus as a whole. At least, it is a guiding principle of any interpretive task to ask if such tensions and dualisms cannot be contained yet in a larger whole or reconciled via a different interpretive strategy than the one pursued hitherto.

My thesis is that the greatness of Hannah Arendt's political philosophy and its continuing contemporary import lie precisely in the controversial distinctions that she creates and the tensions that she identifies in the Western tradition of political thought. Some of the dualisms of her thought derive from the dualisms of the tradition within which she situates herself; the space of thinking is "between past and future"; it is located in the present. Some are her own creations. My goal in the remainder of this work will be to examine the dualisms and distinctions of Arendtian political thought, not to flatten them out by subsuming them under a more comprehensive interpretive umbrella, but to question, challenge, and contest them for the sake of illuminating the political phenomena at hand.

## Notes

1. *Arendt-Jaspers Correspondence*, Letter 297, p. 457.

2. The relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics, his involvement with the National Socialist Party and movement, his actions as rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933, the circumstances surrounding his resignation, the actions of the Denazification commission against him after the war, have been masterfully documented by Hugo Ott, in *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, translated from the German by Allan Blunden (New York: Basic Books, 1993). Ott's masterful study was preceded by Victor Farias's *Heidegger et le Nazisme: Morale et politique* (Paris: Lagrasse, 1987); English translation, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Paul Burrell; ed. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Thomas Sheehan's "Heidegger and the Nazis," *New York Review of Books* 15 (June 1988): 38-47, remains one of the best renditions of the complex issues involved. On the general relation between philosophy and politics in the thought of Heidegger, see also Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), and Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); see also Otto Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (Neske: Pfullingen, 1963), reissue: trans. Daniel Mgrushah and Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1987), and Alexander Schwan, *Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1965). Richard Wolin's *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) includes some of the seminal texts and articles around the so-called Heidegger controversy.

For Heidegger's inability to acknowledge his "mistake," and to issue a public apology to his former Jewish students and colleagues, see Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 138 ff., 168 ff. See also Jürgen Habermas, "Work and *Weltanschauung*: The Heidegger Controversy From a German Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Winter 1989): 431-456, and Habermas's comment: "With the help of an operation we might call 'abstraction via essentialization,' the history of Being is thus disconnected from political and historical events. . . . Heidegger dealt with the theme of humanism at a time when the images of the horror that the arriving Allies encountered in Auschwitz and elsewhere had made their way into the smallest German village. If his talk of an 'essential happening' had any meaning at all, the singular event of the attempted annihilation of the Jews would have drawn the philosopher's attention (if not already that of the concerned contemporary). But Heidegger dwells, as always, in the Universal. His concern is to show that man is the 'neighbor of Being'—not the neighbor of man" (p. 449).

3. Given that the Martin Heidegger-Hannah Arendt correspondence is still inaccessible to the scholarly public, much of what can be said on the *personal* relationship of these individuals will have to remain tentative at this stage. The heirs of Martin Heidegger are refusing to make Arendt's letters to him accessible; some of Heidegger's letters to Hannah Arendt are in the possession of the Arendt Literary Trust, administered by Dr. Lotte Köhler of New York City. In her book, Elzbieta Ettinger draws upon the material in the Arendt Literary Trust, see *Hannah Arendt-Martin Heidegger: Eine Geschichte* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1995), vol. 1904; and Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland: Heidegger und seine Zeit* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1994). The article by Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, "Der aufgehobene Zweifel: Hannah Arendt und Martin Heidegger,"

excerpted from forthcoming material from Elzbieta Ettinger's book in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Bilder und Zeiten" section (Saturday, February 6, 1993), no. 31.

It is widely reported that Martin Heidegger called Hannah Arendt "the passion of his life" (cited by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, from a letter by Arendt to Hilde Fraenkel, February 10, 1950, and contained in Arendt's papers in the Library of Congress; Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 247), and that their affair began in Marburg in February 1925. He was then 35 years old, she 18; she was a student of philosophy, and he was a married man with two children. After one year, their relationship appeared too risky to him, and perhaps desperate to her; she moved to Heidelberg to study philosophy with Karl Jaspers. But this was not the end of the story. After obtaining her address from a fellow student of hers, Heidegger wrote to her, and occasionally arranged meetings, the where and when of which he alone decided. In 1928, Heidegger obtained the professorship in Freiburg; in 1927, *Sein und Zeit* appeared. Hannah Arendt writes the following letter to Martin Heidegger on August 22, 1928: "The way which you have shown for me is longer and harder than I had thought. It requires a whole life. . . . I would have lost my right to live, if I would have lost my love to you." According to Seebacher-Brandt, who in turn quotes from Ettinger, the letter ends without a complimentary close; instead, Arendt writes, "And if there is a God, I will love you better after death." Arendt sought Heidegger out after the war, and they continued to see each other in her periodic trips to Europe. By then, Frau Heidegger as well as Arendt's husband, Heinrich Bluecher, were drawn into the picture. The terms of the relationship appeared to have been transformed into a friendship, and Arendt remained "true" to Heidegger until the very end, even upon those occasions, as when he received her copy of *The Human Condition*, when his behavior was less than friendly and magnanimous.

4. See Hannah Arendt, introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 6.

5. The most compelling testimony into Heidegger's character is given by his comportment in his friendship with Husserl. Husserl took Heidegger under his wing from 1917 onward, promoted him in university circles, saw to it that Heidegger got the Chair in Philosophy at the University of Freiburg. Heidegger in turn dedicated *Being and Time* to "Edmund Husserl in respect and friendship" on April 8, 1926. (See the English translation, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, New York: Harper & Row, 1962.) Yet on April 7, 1933, the Reich law on the "reestablishment of a permanent civil service" came into effect, whereby all civil servants of non-Aryan origin, irrespective of religious denomination, were to be suspended from office—including those who, like Husserl, were living in retirement and who had converted to Protestantism. Heidegger joined the NSDAP on May 1, 1933, despite the fact that he knew of this law; the decree was rescinded in some form on April 28, 1933, but Husserl's son, Gerhart Husserl, lost his position at the Law Faculty of the University of Kiel and was not reinstated. Martin Heidegger's wife, Elfriede Heidegger, wrote to Malvine Husserl on May 2, 1933, indicating how she had been shocked to read that their son had been suspended and expressing the hope that it was just a temporary measure, the work of some overzealous bureaucrat. "After all," Hugo Ott summarizes this letter, "the Husserl family had been staunch patriots during the First World War." As cited by Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 175.

When the Reich citizenship law appeared in its fourth edition, after being approved at the Nuremberg Party Conference, on September 13, 1935, Husserl became a nonperson in the University of Freiburg; from 1936 onward, Husserl's name was not included among the university's faculty, and there was no commemoration of his death in April 1938. Heidegger, during these years, dissociated himself from Husserl; he did not write to Malvine Husserl

after her husband's death, and in general exhibited great ingratitude and pettiness toward one who had helped him a great deal.

Right after the war, Hannah Arendt's knowledge of all these events was incomplete and inaccurate, as was that of many others. In her *Partisan Review* article of 1946, "What Is Existenz Philosophy?" she repeats the rumor that Heidegger had forbidden his friend and mentor to set foot in the Faculty in Freiburg because he was a Jew. See Hannah Arendt, "What Is Existenz Philosophy?" *Partisan Review* 8, no. 1 (1946), p. 46. Karl Jaspers corrected Arendt's claim after receiving the copy of the article she sent him, in his letter to her of June 9, 1946. "The facts in the note on Heidegger are not exactly correct. In regard to Husserl, I assume that you're referring to the letter that every rector had to write to those excluded by the government. . . . What you report is of course in substance true. However, the description of the actual process strikes me as not quite exact." *Arendt-Jaspers Correspondence*, p. 43. See also Ott's quite detailed presentation of the relation between Heidegger and Husserl in *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 172 ff.

6. The most extensive and philosophically most perspicacious analysis of Arendt and Heidegger to date has been provided by Jacques Taminiaux, in *La Fille de Thrace et le penseur professionnel: Arendt et Heidegger* (Paris: Éditions Payot, 1992). I am in agreement with Taminiaux about the transformation of Heideggerian ontology that Arendt undertook in *The Human Condition*. The only significant difference in our evaluations of this transformation is my emphasis on the "narrative structure of human action," as opposed to his more pronounced focus on the issue of plurality. See *La Fille de Thrace*, pp. 56 ff.

7. Arendt, "Concern With Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Arendt: Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1994), p. 446.

8. Arendt, "What Is Existenz Philosophy?" p. 51.

9. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, 5th ed., revised (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971).

10. Karl Jaspers pondered the relation between philosophy and politics in Heidegger's thought as early as 1949. He writes, "Did Heidegger's passionate conversion to National Socialism have a philosophical meaning or not?"

"Is it a mere mistake, a weakness, being seduced by the opportunities offered by power and influence?"

"or is it an indication of a symptom with deeper sources? an objective aspect of this philosophy? On this question: 1. The fundamental attitude of the dictatorial, the prophetic (*Verkündenden*)—without demanding dogma yet requiring obedience—intolerance; 2. the blindness toward the real . . . 3. absolutistic formulations deriving from a philosophy of history . . . 4. the denial of the N.S. since 1934 (due to his failure in the eyes of the NS and being shoved to the side—still in 1937 demanding the Hitler greeting from students—first decidedly, and again towards the end of the War. . . . The continuing ambivalence—the lack of openness, the lack of straight answers (*Unaufrichtigkeit*)—does it lie in the whole philosophy?" Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Martin Heidegger*, ed. Hans Saner (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1989), pp. 53-54.

11. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 361 (English ed.), sec. 63.

12. Thomas Rentsch, *Martin Heidegger: Das Sein und der Tod* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1989), p. 149.

13. Rentsch, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 144.

14. The most beautiful illustration of this Arendtian point is P. B. Shelley's poem, "Ozymandias": "I met a traveller from an antique land/Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs

of stone/Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand/Half sunk, a shattered visage lies,  
whose frown,/And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,/Tell that its sculptor well those  
passions read/Which yet survive stamped on these lifeless things,/The hand that mocked  
them, and the heart that fed:/And on the pedestal these words appear:/My name is Ozy-  
mandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'/Nothing beside remains.  
Round the decay/Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare/The lone and level sands stretch  
far away." *The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley*, ed., with textual notes by, Thomas  
Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), p. 605.

15. See Sergio Belardinelli, "Martin Heidegger und Hannah Arendts Begriff von 'Welt' und 'Praxis,'" in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1990), p. 132.

16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 6, chap. 3, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed., with an introduction by, Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1966), 1140a 1-5, p. 1025.

17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139b 1-4, p. 1024.

18. The Heidegger text and Hans-Georg Gadamer's introduction to it were published in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, ed. Frithjof Rodi, vol. 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989), pp. 228-269.

19. See my introduction to Herbert Marcuse's *Habilitationsschrift* called *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, translated from the German by Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. ix-xlii.

20. "This interpretation had such momentum (*Schwung*), that a listener of the Freiburg lectures, namely, Leo Strauss, was completely overwhelmed, and told everyone that not only Werner Jaeger, who certainly was a great Aristotle scholar, but even Max Weber, who no doubt displayed the strongest scientific temperament among German full professors of the period, would have to be considered a mere orphaned 'youth' (*Waisenknaben*) by comparison." Gadamer, "Heidegger's 'theologische' Jugendschrift," p. 232.

21. Martin Heidegger, "Phänomenologische Interpretation zu Aristoteles," p. 239. See also Ott's discussion of the academic expectations surrounding the Aristotle manuscript in the philosophical circles of Marburg and Freiburg in Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 123 ff.

22. These lectures are edited in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 19, II, *Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1919-1944* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 1992), pp. 8 ff.

23. Gadamer writes, "What particularly called my attention in the whole interpretation was the predominance of the ontological interest, which is even apparent in the whole analysis of phronesis [practical wisdom]; the concept of 'ethos' is mentioned nowhere in this programmatic piece. Ethos is, however, precisely what is not disclosure or illumination [*Erhellung*], but rather custom and usage [*Gewohnung*]." Gadamer, "Heidegger's 'theologische Jugendschrift,'" p. 233.

24. The work that documents Marcuse's indebtedness to Heidegger is *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, trans. Benhabib; see my introduction to this work, pp. ix-xlii, for further discussion of the Marcusean concept of praxis.

25. Ettinger, *Arendt-Heidegger: Eine Geschichte*, p. 114.

26. See Arendt, "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian, 1961), p. 13.

# 5

## The Art of Making and Subverting Distinctions: With Arendt, Contra Arendt

### The Ontological and Institutional Dimensions of the Public Sphere

Although Hannah Arendt considered the art of making distinctions to be central to the vocation of the political theorist in this century, many subsequent commentators, even those most sympathetic to her work, such as Hanna Pitkin, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Bernstein, have sought to show that her art of making distinctions often obscured rather than illuminated the phenomena at hand.<sup>1</sup> Consider some of Arendt's crucial distinctions, such as those between labor, work, and action; force, power, and violence; the social, the political, and the intimate. They have all been criticized, contested, and debated by other scholars.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I would like to suggest that much of what has been irritating to commentators about the Arendtian art of making distinctions has its sources in a more basic dimension of her philosophical methodology, namely, her "phenomenological essentialism." This is Arendt's