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HANNAH ARENDT: PHENOMENOLOGY OF THINKING AND THOUGHTLESSNESS*

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Hannah Arendt bases her account of thinking on the phenomenological claim that genuine thinking arises out of the actuality of the existential experiences and should preserve a vital connection with «the world of appearances», with the «plurality» of human beings which is, in her opinion, one of the fundamental human conditions. Arendt's phenomenology of thinking is impossible to conceive without her phenomenology of thoughtlessness — her reflections on the inner connection between thoughtlessness and the phenomenon of evil.

Key words: philosophy of Hanna Arendt; human being; phenomenology of thinking; phenomenology of thoughtlessness; evil.

Writings of Hannah Arendt are so richly unexpected that they often resist our natural tendency to classify them as part of a larger tradition or tendency of thought. In her 1964 letter to Gershom Scholem, Arendt remarked, however, that «If I can be said to “have come from anywhere”, it is from the tradition of German philosophy» [2], where «German philosophy» means not only Kant and Hegel but also the tradition of phenomenology associated with Husserl, Heidegger and Jaspers. Hinchman and Hinchman persuasively argue that, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt develops the *phenomenology* of human activities — labour, work and action — since she treats them not as «empirical generalizations of what people do» but as «articulations of Being» [9, p. 197] which, I would add, are, in fact, Heideggerian «existentials». In this paper, I would argue that in her essays and especially in her uncompleted and posthumously published manuscript *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt provides for the phenomenological account of the activity of thinking.

Arendt describes thinking in untraditional, anti-metaphysical terms, treating it as a human ex-

perience, a meaning constituting activity. She starts her thinking about thinking by distinguishing it from knowing. In the tension between these two activities thinking appears to be «a quest for meaning», endless, open-ended and self-destructive process which is comparable only with the life activity itself [5, p. 123]. Knowing, on the contrary, is inspired by the quest for scientific, tangible knowledge or metaphysical truth.

According to Arendt and in contrast to the metaphysical tradition, «the quest for knowledge» has little to do with the genuine thinking since it makes the activity of thinking a mere instrument for the construction of either a larger scientific, technological order or a solid metaphysical system which, however, is always doomed to «metaphysical fallacies» [5, p. 12, 15].

What is then the essence of thinking as Arendt sees it? If there is a way to answer this question, I would suggest starting with remarks of Arendt on the Husserl's *epoché*. She argues that it is not «a special method to be taught and learned», as Husserl puts it himself, but the most characteristic attitude of any thinking [5, p. 53]. Husserl's «phe-

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nomenological» *epoche* can be defined as a procedure of suspending our «natural attitude», «bracketing», «excluding the positing of the world» or as the deliberate move «from the factual to the eidetic» without passing judgment on the reality of the world [10, p. 146–147]. What Husserl means under the «phenomenological» *epoche* as a methodological principal captures the essence of any activity of thinking as understood by Arendt. Indeed, she argues that thinking «de-senses» the phenomena as they are immediately and «objectively» given to our sense experiences so that the mind can handle them. As a result, thinking produces «distillations» or «invisible essences», by «suspending», similar to Husserl's *epoche*, «the feeling of realness» of the world [5, p. 53, 77].

The outcome of this process of «de-sensing» is twofold. On the one hand, thinking «prepares the mind for willing and judging», supplying them with the raw materials [5, p. 77, 199]. At the same time, «de-sensing» performed by thinking is accompanied by the withdrawal from «the world of appearances» [5, p. 75]. This, in the opinion of Arendt, makes thinking dangerous. For in the metaphysical tradition this element of withdrawal of the «thinking ego» inherent in the activity of thinking was pushed to extremes. Arendt often reminds us that as early as in Plato's Cave the philosopher has to leave the realm of human affairs in order to «think», that is, to contemplate the «higher» essences in the otherworldly, suprasensory realm. In contrast to this «two-world theory», presenting thinking as the «alienation» from the realm of human affairs, Arendt attempts to preserve a salutary connection the activity of thinking — and more broadly the life of the mind — has with what she calls «the world of appearances».

In order to comprehend what Arendt precisely means when in her phenomenology of thinking she refers to «the world of appearances», I would refer to her debt to Heidegger. It is well known that Arendt shares with Heidegger an interest in ancient ontology as it is understood by pre-Socratic Greeks. This ontology is deemed to provide a clue to «raw» human experiences often left outside the Western tradition of thought. In this context, I would quote from Heidegger where he talks about the central element of the ancient ontology — «standing-there», «standing-in-the-light» [8, p. 107(77)]. «To glorify, to attribute regard to, and disclose regard means in Greek: to place in the

light and thus endow with permanence, Being. For the Greeks glory was not something additional which one might or might not obtain; it was the mode of the highest being» [8, p. 108(78)]. Hence in order for something or someone to fully and authentically *be*, it or s/he should *come to the light* or *appear* in its full glory. «Being means appearing <...> Being essentially unfolds *as* appearing», Heidegger claims [8, p. 107(77)].

Arendt agrees with this thesis: as she states in *The Life of the Mind*, «Being and Appearing coincide» [5, p. 19]. This coincidence is characteristic of both the «physical» world and more specifically — of the realm of human affairs. In the physical, «natural» world, all non-human creatures which are «endowed with sensory capacities of varying kinds» have to «self-display» in order to individuate themselves, to appear and hence to be [5, p. 29]. For human beings, Arendt argues, «appearing» acquires the political dimension: to fully and authentically *be*, they need not simply to *appear* but to *appear* among «men in plural», that is, to act and speak politically in the public realm [4, p. 4, 198–199]. Without this «appearing» the human world ceases to be human.

Arendt's glorification of the appearances makes it clear why her phenomenology of thinking is oriented towards the search for the reconciliation between thinking and the realm of human affairs, between philosophy and politics. As she asserts many times, the genuine thinking «arises out of the actuality of political incidents», «out of living experience and must remain bound to them» [3, p. 14]. If this connection is lost — as, for example, in «the two-world theory», affirming the abyss between the «higher» realm of philosophical thinking and the «lower» realm of human affairs, — then thinking, which may be as intensive as «the sensation of being alive», paradoxically becomes close to the experience of being dead to «the living world» [5, p. 78–79].

Moreover, the loss of the connection of the activity of thinking with «the world of appearances» has important moral implications. In her report on the trial of the Nazi war criminal, «the desk murderer» Eichmann [1], Arendt for the first time puts forth the claim about «the banality of evil» — the claim which she later frames as «the inner connection between the inability to think and the problem of evil» [6, p. 166]. Arendt emphasizes that neither wickedness nor psychological perversion nor stu-

pidity made Eichmann commission outrageous deeds. This was his «banal» inability to think, that is, thoughtfully respond to life events and existential experiences and independently generate meaning which resulted in the unprecedented evil he committed.

However, not only the Nazi criminals but all of us are vulnerable to thoughtlessness. As Arendt emphasizes, since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been the general «growth of meaninglessness»: we have lost both our traditional tools of understanding and «the very quest for meaning and need for understanding» [7, p. 316–317]. At the same time, Arendt deeply believes that every human being could find the way out of the crisis of thoughtlessness due to the human condition of *natality*. Quoting Augustine from his *Civitas Dei* (Book XII, ch. 20): «That there might be a beginning, man was created before whom nobody was», she argues that «man not only has the capacity of beginning, but is this beginning himself». [7, p. 321] Therefore, every human being possesses enough of «origin within himself» [7, p. 321] to re-new the endless quest for meaning, to start imagining and understanding without preconceived notions, that is, to start thinking again.

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ХАННА АРЕНДТ: ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЯ МЫШЛЕНИЯ И «НЕДОМЫСЛИЯ» *Валерия Михайловна Пащикова*

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Ханна Арентд основывает свои рассуждения о мышлении (thinking) на феноменологическом посыле, что подлинное мышление возникает из действительности экзистенциального опыта и должно сохранять непосредственную связь с «миром явлений», с «множественностью» людей, которое, по ее мнению, является одним из основных условий бытия человека. Феноменологию мышления, которую предлагает Арентд, необходимо рассматривать в контексте ее размышлений о внутренней связи между «недомыслием», отсутствием подлинного мышления (thoughtlessness) и феноменом зла.

Ключевые слова: философия Анны Арентд; человеческое бытие; феноменология мышления; феноменология недомыслия; зло.