Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)

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Arendt, Hannah (1906–1975)

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Life and Work

Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) was born in Hannover, Germany, into a secular Jewish family. During her studies in philosophy and theology with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, she became familiar with ancient philosophy, the work of Augustine and Kant, and phenomenology. Heidegger, in particular, whose work she later criticized, had a lasting influence on her own work. Initially hardly interested in politics, this suddenly changed in the early 1930s. She grew increasingly disappointed with academic philosophers who overwhelmingly refrained from opposing emerging National Socialism or who, like Heidegger, even openly flirted with it. Her famous refusal to be classified as a political philosopher (preferring to be called a political theorist) stems from this experience. Her flight from Nazi Germany in 1933 was followed by years of wandering as a stateless refugee through France, among other places, where she worked for several years for various Jewish and Zionist organizations. She would always remain (moderately) critical of Zionism, due to the predominantly nationalist character of this movement.

Arendt fled to the United States in 1941, a country she admired for its revolution and constitution, and was granted American citizenship in 1951. During and right after WWII, she conceived the work that made her world-famous overnight, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), an unorthodox account of the elements of European history that contingently crystallized into the totalitarian terror and ideology of National Socialism. In the famous chapter nine of this monograph, she observed that the masses of stateless people in Europe between the wars, deprived of citizenship rights, suffered from lacking a "right to have rights" altogether—a diagnosis that many readers feel expresses the condition of groups of disenfranchised people globally up to now. Among phenomenologists, Arendt's next monograph, *The Human Condition* (1958a), is usually considered her philosophical masterpiece. In this book, Arendt sought to allocate citizens' public, political life (the *vita activa*) an irreducible place within philosophy and coined the key concept running through her work: plurality. After attending the trial of SS official Adolf Eichmann—her reports for *The New Yorker* were collected in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963)—Arendt focused on the problem of moral and political judgment. Diagnosing Eichmann's acts as resulting from "thoughtlessness," she queried whether thinking and judging may have prevented him from evildoing, and if so, how it is that these mental faculties would have this power. She intended to put the philosophical crown on her work with *The Life*

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of the Mind, a philosophical investigation into the connection of the human mental faculties—thinking, willing, and judging—with the public, plural world, set against metaphysical prejudices about these faculties. This work remained unfinished, with posthumous publications of the edited typescripts on *Thinking* and *Willing* (1977–1978) and edited lecture notes on judgment (*Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* 1982).

Arendt was a highly versatile political thinker. In addition to the aforementioned (political) philosophical works and historiography, she wrote a biography of the Jewish-German salon host Rahel Varnhagen (1997) and philosophical portraits of (near) contemporaries such as Walter Benjamin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Bertolt Brecht (1968b). Furthermore, she actively participated in the public debate with journalistic work, including her report on the Eichmann trial and op-ed pieces on Zionism and the foundation of the state of Israel (collected in Arendt 2005). Finally, Arendt published many essays on political phenomena, such as revolution, authority, power, violence, and freedom (1968a; 1963; 1972). She was clearly in her element with the essay because this form best fits her phenomenological principle that thinking must be nourished by lived experience. She also demonstrates this in her non-systematic, narrative style: her books and essays are not closed treatises but "exercises in understanding" that invite the reader to think along with her.

Arendt and/in Phenomenology

Arendt was an independent thinker whose work does not fit neatly within existing schools of either philosophical or political thought despite her ongoing and thorough engagements with the traditions of metaphysics, practical philosophy, and political theory. With a few notable early exceptions in European scholarship—particularly the work of Ernst Vollrath (1977, 1979), Paul Ricoeur (1983), and Jacques Taminiaux (1997)—it took some decades after her death for its phenomenological inspiration to be fully appreciated (for the early reception of Arendt's work as *Existenzphilosophie*, see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 1991). The relationship between Heidegger and Arendt, both personal and intellectual, had received attention before, mostly to Arendt's detriment. Leaving the use of *argumentum ad odium* aside, much of the scholarship in the English-speaking world in the 1990s did not delve into Heidegger's phenomenology and the extent to which it impacted Arendt's thought (Villa 1996), or if they did, such as Seyla Benhabib, it was to point out the flaws of Arendt's approach: the alleged "tensions" between "modernist" and "anti-modernist" currents in her thought (1996, 102–122) and her "phenomenological essentialism" (123–126).

The slow recognition of Arendt's work as belonging to the phenomenological tradition may be caused by its foremost reception in Anglo-American political theory. Additionally, even if we ignore her own refusal to be called a philosopher, she was not interested in explicating her particular brand of philosophy. Either way, her method does not fit into the orthodoxy of Husserl's phenomenology. However, the last two decades have seen a gradual but steady canonization of the "phenomenological Arendt" with short handbook entries (Bernasconi 2002), journal articles and book chapters (Mensch 2009; Marder 2013; Borren 2013b; Vasterling 2007), and monographs (Cavarero 2020; Birmingham 2006; Topolski 2015) exploring diverse phenomenological dimensions of her oeuvre to varying degrees of explicit phenomenological substantiation. The inclusion of a full entry on Arendt's work in the *Routledge Companion to Phenomenology* (Vasterling 2011) and the publication of the first book-length systematic treatment of Arendt's phenomenology (Loidolt 2018) marked the definitive entry of Arendt's work in the phenomenological canon. Today, it is commonplace to call Arendt a phenomenologist. An entry on Arendt is now considered obvious and indispensable in any handbook, companion, or encyclopedia of phenomenology generally (Luft and Overgaard 2011; Erhard and Keiling 2020; De Santis et al. 2022; De Vaujany et al. 2023; Landweer and Szanto 2023; Aho et al. 2024; special issue on Arendt of *Research in Phenomenology* 2020), as well as of political phenomenology specifically

(Bedorf and Herrmann 2020; Herrmann et al. 2024). Additionally, Arendt's work is widely—both affirmatively and critically—discussed within feminist phenomenology, in particular in relation to gendered embodiment (Hull 2002; Des Portes 2021), feminist politics (Robaszkiewicz 2024), judgment and representative thinking (Young 1997; Schües 2018; Kruks 2018), and the condition of natality (Oksala 2004; O'Byrne 2010; Schües 2016/2017). More recently, it has been taken up in the burgeoning field of critical phenomenology (Cavarero 2020; Magrì and McQueen 2022; Robaszkiewicz 2024). Conversely, general volumes dedicated to Arendt's work now usually contain contributions on phenomenology (Brennan and La Caze 2022; Gratton and Sari 2021), and scholarship on the Arendt-Heidegger connection has become more sensitive to existential and hermeneutic phenomenological concerns (Gaffney 2018; Maslin 2020). Apart from these more or less technical phenomenological engagements with Arendt's work, "phenomenology" is often applied to her work in a rather loose, non-technical sense, on phenomena such as forgiveness (Highlen 2023), human rights (Parekh 2008), violence (Gines 2014), and revolution (Fine 2014) (also see several contributions of the special issue on Arendt of the journal *Research in Phenomenology* (2020)).

The growing maturity of phenomenological scholarship in Arendt studies is also evident from the emergence of readings of Arendt's work from different families within phenomenology itself, such as the enactive (Loidolt 2018; McMahon 2022), the existential (Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 1991), the hermeneutic (Vasterling 2007, 2011; Borren 2013b), the genetic, the generative, and the generational (Oksala 2004; O'Byrne 2010; Schües 2016/2017). Rather than being incompatible, these readings mostly focus on different dimensions and implications of her work.

Arendt's work shares several motifs and assumptions with other phenomenologists yet stands out at the same time for bringing those to bear on *political* phenomena, events, and experiences, such as public space, revolution and civil disobedience, freedom, violence, power, authority, rule, the law, human rights, etc. It would be a mistake, however, to restrict her original contribution to simply an addition of its subject matter. Through *plurality*, the "core phenomenon" (Loidolt 2018, 2) in her thought, Arendt politicized both the *subject matter* and the *method* of phenomenology. While plurality is often taken as sociocultural diversity, for Arendt it carries ontological salience—the ontological root of political life (including political action, power, and freedom) and political judgment (1958a, 7, 175–176; 2002, 93; Cavarero 2020, 15–29). Plurality is one of the conditions of human existence that she distinguishes, and even the key condition of political life. On Arendt's account, plurality refers to the paradox of difference and equality. Singularity and alterity, or distinctness and otherness, only acquire meaning and become "real," as Arendt puts it, when we appear to others (in the plural), from our embodied uniqueness at the moment of birth, to our biographies that take shape in the course of our lifetimes (once-only by definition), to the particular perspectives under which the world appears to us (*doxa*). Distinctness can only be enacted in and through speech and action "in the presence of others," that is, in public space, or what Arendt calls the "space of appearances" (1958a, 199). Here, others are *equal to* and irreducibly *different from* us at the same time. Consequently, difference is not opposed to equality; the two mutually presuppose each other.

To explain how Arendt is both inspired by phenomenology and extends it into a more political direction, the following two sections take the general phenomenological claim of human "being in the world" as a starting point for discussing Arendt's phenomenological ontology of the human conditions in the section "Arendt's World-Centered Ontology of the Human Condition," while its implications for her phenomenological method are unpacked in the section "Arendt's Phenomenological Method." Phenomenologists, however different otherwise, have a relational or interactive ontology in common. A key assumption of phenomenology is that there is no watertight separation between self, others, and the world. They are fundamentally related on account of the self's *intentionality*: our consciousness is always consciousness *of* something, which means that it is not something inside us that is separate from an external world. Husserl's initial focus on consciousness was broadened in his work on the lifeworld and elaborated further by later generations of existential and hermeneutic phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, and, indeed, Arendt, who concentrate on humans' *practical* and *embodied* being in the world. Taking human "being in the world" seriously has implications, both for the ontological question of what it means to be a human being per se and for the methodological question of what it means for scientists, scholars, or any other sentient being to grasp the world, including oneself. Reworked through plurality, Arendt politicized phenomenology on both levels.

Arendt's Phenomenological Method

For phenomenologists in general, the perceiver—including but not limited to the scientist and the scholar—is not opposed to or separate from that which she perceives because of the principle of intentionality. So-called "objects" are always things, events, etc. that show themselves to a perceiver and somehow make sense to her, so that she never approximates the self-enclosed "subject" of metaphysics and positivist conceptions of the sciences. Instead of objects and subjects, phenomenologists therefore prefer to speak of "phenomena" or "appearances." The *perspective* the perceiver takes upon things is central to the phenomenologist's attention. Thus, phenomenologists challenge theoretical and empirical-scientific discourses in which the perceiver is seen as a disengaged observer that takes a third-person position over and against the perceived, namely, the world. Phenomenologists instead acknowledge that the third-person position is always enabled by a prior first- and second-person perspective. In addition to most other phenomenologists, Arendt emphasizes the *plurality* of perspectives that those who perceive—spectators—take upon the phenomenal world. She stresses that appearance implies the "presence of others" (1958a, 50, 95, 188, 199), i.e., of a plurality of spectators, as a matter of course. Appearance is always an appearance *to others*. The human "sense of reality" (1958a, 208) is guaranteed "by the presence of others, by its appearing to all" (1958a,199; cf. 1958a, 50–51, 95, 208; 1978, 19). Thus, Arendt infuses the basic phenomenological notion of intentionality with *multi*-perspectivism (1978, 45–46; cf. Fielding 2011; Bonner 2017).

Distinct from both empirical political science and conventional political theory, Arendt's phenomenological conception of political philosophy is committed to careful and open-ended descriptive analysis of lived pre-reflective experiences of the plural world of human affairs, consistent with her conception of the thinking process as a non-theoretical interminable "quest for meaning" (1978, 15). Arendt's method is to approach political events through the shared, intersubjective, and worldly experience of these phenomena. These experiences constitute "the true, the only reliable teachers of political scientists [and historians], as they are the most trustworthy source of information for those engaged in politics" (1958b, 482). Research "arises out of" the experience of events and should "remain bound to them; as the circle remains bound to its focus" (Arendt 1962, 2; 1968a, Preface). Being faithful to appearances and then describing them as accurately as possible implies that one should bracket especially theoretical preconceived ideas, or "pre-understandings" (*Vorverständnisse*). Defending an *epoché* of sorts, she wished to examine human affairs without, especially, theoretical or metaphysical prejudice. As she put it in an interview, her aim was "to look at politics (. . .) with eyes unclouded by philosophy" (1994, 2).

Similar to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Arendt often takes a via *negativa*, or negative approach, to the phenomena and experiences she investigates. These phenomenologists are interested in humans' everyday being in the world and the concrete and practical structures of worldly experience, but to elucidate daily experience, they, each in their own way, attend to the non-everyday: limit cases, pathologies, or, less dramatically, the breakdown of ordinary routines. In Arendt's case, the phenomena of statelessness and totalitarianism constitute such "unprecedented" experiences. While some phenomenologists challenge the often-advanced view in empirical-political readings of Arendt that these “ontic” events simply set Arendt’s phenomenology into motion (Loidolt 2018), others argue that it is a truly original feature of Arendt’s political phenomenology that analyses of concrete political events and a radical phenomenological ontology work together (Borren 2023).

In the preface to *Between Past and Future*, Arendt writes that her work consists of “essays” or “exercises in understanding” (1968a, 14) that feature two dimensions: critique and experiment. It has the critical dimension of destruction (“dismantling,” 1978, 212) and the experimental dimension of storytelling. Critique is directed toward the past, the given order; experiment toward the future: the new and unexpected that defies what is given. Still, the critical and experimental moments of understanding are connected for Arendt. Critique also always has an experimental dimension, and meaningful experiments, on the other hand, never create something “altogether new.” Critique without experiment results in cynicism (“debunking”: 1968a, 14), whereas experiment without critique all too easily leads to utopianism (1968a, 15; Arendt 1962, 3).

Arendt’s deconstructive method concerns, first, a genealogical investigation of the way the history of political experiences and phenomena are sedimented in language; that is, either revealed or concealed. Theoretical reflection (in which the mind is oriented to itself as a principle) can never equal the insight that paying close attention to discourse (which is oriented to the world) generates (1958a, 94). Like Heidegger, Arendt therefore typically starts her phenomenological investigations with an analysis of concepts because they provide a privileged access to political experiences and phenomena, “not because [they] reveal the phenomenon in any straightforward way, but because [they] carry the record of past perceptions, true or untrue, revelatory or distorting” (Young-Bruehl 1982, 405). The aim of such a genealogical project is to disclose the experiences, the “spirit” and meanings, and the “phenomenal reality” underlying these political concepts in order to achieve a better understanding of the phenomena they refer to (1968a, 15).

Subsequently, Arendt offers a phenomenological description of their relevance to specific—often conflicting—experiences one has when engaging in active life or in mental activities. Most of the time, Arendt argues, concepts either express generalizations of particular experiences of the political, amalgamations of divergent experiences, or reductions, for instance, work and action, sovereignty and freedom, or violence and power. After making manifest those generalizations, amalgamations, or reductions, she criticizes them and subsequently introduces phenomenal distinctions to retrieve the experiences covered up by them (Taminiaux 1997, 199). Arendt therefore criticizes the historians and political scientists of her day for their “growing incapacity for making distinctions,” for example, between nationalism, totalitarianism, imperialism, democracy, and populism (1994, 407). This practice of discriminating—between the various activities within the *vita activa*, the private and the public spheres, political and social issues, power and violence, etc.—is an important, but no doubt highly controversial, feature of Arendt’s thought. Critics claim that it would lead her to essentialism, the attribution of a static or given substantial content to, for example, the private realm of the body and the public realm of political action. Some blame this alleged essentialism specifically on Arendt’s phenomenological background (Benhabib 1996), while others argue the opposite: Arendt’s distinctions aim at phenomenological clarification, which enables one to distinguish between, for example, natural and political (i.e., worldly) dimensions of one and the same issue (Borren 2013a; Loidolt 2018).

The experimental dimension of understanding is expressed in Arendt’s narrative interpretation of phenomena and events (1958a, 184–187; 1968b, 3–32, 95–110, 153–206; 1968a, Preface; cf. Vasterling 2007; Vollrath 1977). Storytelling is experimental because it always and necessarily transcends facts or testimonials and turns them into meaningful accounts while remaining true to the facts. For Arendt, a story explicates the meanings implicit in our understanding of reality, rather than making up a fictitious storyline and imposing it upon reality. Through stories, Arendt aims to retrieve forgotten experiences or “lost treasures” (1968a, 4); not just, as is often thought, the political experiences of the ancient polis but also the modern experiences of revolutions and civic councils.

Arendt’s World-Centered Ontology of the Human Condition

Arendt’s radical phenomenological ontology (Cavarero 2005, 191), or “philosophical anthropology” (Vasterling 2011)—her answer to the question: what makes humans human? Or: what does it mean for human beings to be human?—is captured in her analysis of the human conditions, starting from *The Human Condition* and carried further in *The Life of the Mind*. Like other phenomenologists, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir, Arendt challenges metaphysical and scientific definitions of human nature, that is, of an essence that is supposed to be universally shared by all human beings (1958a, 10–11, 193). Instead of defining human nature, Arendt inquires how the different human activities of labor, work, and action each, in their own way, contribute to the establishment of a shared human world and what the conditions are for these contributions. These conditions—the earth, life itself, worldliness, natality, and plurality—are, not unlike Heidegger’s *Existentialia*, “ontological structures” (O’Byrne 2021, 336), features of the common human situation, the coordinates within which human existence and co-existence unfold. A condition may or may not be realized, depending on other conditions and circumstances. Human conditions, unlike essential characteristics, never cease to be in need of *enactment* through activities (labor, work, action, and speech) or the exercise of reflective judgment. And unlike an essential characteristic, a condition is not a causal mechanism. Conditionality is as much opposed to absolute or one-way *external* determination as it is to *self*-determination. Human conditions in the Arendtian sense are both constants of human experience and existence and historically variable in their particular constellations and combinations: “In different historical periods, the terms are differently connected, and the concepts men have of the terms vary with the different connections” (Young-Bruehl 1982, 319–320).

Arendt foregrounds the mutual conditionality (or dialectic) of human subjectivity and the common world of things and meanings. We are situated in the world, which means that we are both shaping and shaped by the world, which is public, visible, and common to all. This way, she radicalizes and exteriorizes the phenomenological first-person perspective into the idea of “being-*of*-the-world” (Loidolt 2018, 63–64).

Put in the most general sense, the world for Arendt is the typically *human* world, the *Umwelt* in which human existence takes place, our common habitat or house (1958a, 134) that precedes and outlives any individual life. Arendt regards the world as a dwelling place for human beings on earth and, as such, both the content and context of human existence. Conversely, what makes humans human is that they are worldly beings. Human beings are worldly creatures not only because they need the artificial habitat of a world to survive but also because the world enables them to lead a meaningful life. To contribute in word and deed to the world is what makes life meaningful and truly human in Arendt’s view.

Arendt’s use of “world” encompasses two broad and closely related dimensions: the world of “things” and the discursive (or symbolic) world of meanings (1958a, 52). Both dimensions of the world refer to *practices*—of respectively world-building and world-disclosing—as well as to their *results*—respectively human-made things (including material artifacts and institutions) and shared meanings and stories. She relates the world first of all to *work*, the human activity of making or producing things. The world in this capacity consists of human-made things (1958a, 52; cf. 1968a, 209). While producing, we are more or less in control, but as soon as the fabrication process achieves its end and the product is finished, things start to feed back into the realm of human beings who produced them and start to serve as a human condition in turn. Artifacts are, of course, made by human beings, yet they gain a certain autonomy vis-a-vis their makers, users, and human beings in general. As soon as they present themselves to us, artifacts are no longer completely human and acquire an "objective quality" (1958a, 89). The thing world is thus both *made* and *given*.

This process of reification is a feature of human conditionality: whatever we make starts to condition human existence and co-existence—for better or worse (1958a, 95). The things human beings make may boomerang back on them (Arendt's example is the Cold War due to the development of nuclear arms; we may think of climate change because of technological advancement and market-driven economic development based on fossil fuel). The emphasis in *The Human Condition* is, however, on things' constructive contribution to human existence and co-existence. They provide for the relative durability and stability that we need, given the continuous threat of unlivable impermanence and transience from two sides, the human condition of life itself and of plurality, respectively. On the one hand, as beings that are embodied and embedded in nature, we, as *animal laborans*, are subject to endless, repetitive, and perpetual change: the relentless struggle for life and self-preservation (1958a, 96–97). On the other hand, indeterminacy, unpredictability, and irreversibility are inherent in human existence, for as "acting" beings (that is, as citizens), we live our lives among many others. Public things provide the relative stability that is needed considering the fragility of human life and co-existence. Most of all, public things create a space in-between people, an *inter-esse*, and hence facilitate and maintain plurality (1958a, 52).

To recap, the world includes the practices of world-building by human beings in their capacity as producers (*homo faber*) and their results, the artifact. However, it also consists of the meanings that are generated by human beings in their capacity as citizens, that is, as acting and speaking beings who are both equal to and different from their fellow citizens. Human "words and deeds" encompass interactions and relationships between people and the exchanged interpretations of events, things, and states of affairs. These typically take the form of narratives, opinions, judgments (including prejudices), and the debates and fights ensuing from them (1958a, 183). The world in this sense is also an archive of events, as far as they are recorded in history.

Arendt uses a variety of concepts to describe the discursive dimension of the world, each emphasizing different although related aspects. First, the discursive world is a "space of appearances" (1958a, 199): a public space to show oneself in deed and words to one's fellow-citizens—to be seen and heard by them, and vice versa, and in the process achieve equality and distinctness. The "*res publica*" serves to displace the political from a relation between "subjects" (citizens, the people, or the *demos*) to their shared relation to "objects": public things (1958a, 56; cf. Honig 2017, 11). The "web of relations" stresses the network character of the human world, the fact that it strictly comes about between a plurality of acting and speaking people (1958a, 88, 183). In addition, it is meant to underline its relative vulnerability if compared to the material world. It is telling that Arendt uses the image of the web, instead of a closely-knit fabric. It is a strictly *political* community. The political significance of keeping a distance is also key to a final image, the "in between" (*inter-esse*) (1958a, 7–8; 1963, 86). The world, as the whole of shared meanings and human-made things, lies *outside of* human beings. It constitutes a third between self and others that binds them into a community, whether or not by contestation of this third, illuminating that things and discourse are closely related for Arendt (1958a, 204).

Like the "thing" dimension of the world, the discursive dimension is practice-based or performative: it comes about through *world disclosing*. Heidegger demonstrates that phenomena appear against a background of concealment by carrying some things into the light from darkness, which fits in with the figure/ground (horizon) topos in Husserl's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological accounts of the structure of perception. In sharp contrast to Heidegger, as has often been noted, Arendt points at the indispensability of narrating, interpreting, judging, sharing, and discussing our opinions and evaluations *with others*, thus radicalizing the Heideggerian notion of *Mitsein* (or *Mitdasein*) (Taminiaux 1997; Gaffney 2018; Maslin 2020; Loidolt 2018). By "talking about" (1958a, 183) things and events, we make them meaningful or disclose their meanings.

Arendt's world-centered ontology decenters the self without deconstructing it altogether. Both world disclosing and world building allow for developing selfhood (a "who," with a biography) and individual agency. In stabilizing the world, the things we make simultaneously stabilize who *we* are, our selves as relative permanence, by providing a point of reference that remains constant through time and that is shared with other people. Likewise, in the process of world disclosure, those who act and speak also disclose or reveal *themselves*. The "disclosure of the agent in speech and action" (1958a, §28) is not the intended purpose of action and speech; it is a kind of epiphenomenon of action yet should not be confused with a facade. Only by acting in the world do people individuate, according to Arendt (1958a, 97, 175; 1994, 23).

The world-centered ontology of *The Human Condition* is developed further in *The Life of the Mind I*, where Arendt insists on the coincidence of Being and Appearance—that is, appearance to many others—which translates into the ontological dignity (perhaps even primacy) of the world.

Conclusion

By stressing plurality and arguing that appearing is always an appearing-of-someone-or-something-to-different-others, Arendt has, more than any other phenomenologist of her generation, analyzed the intersubjective nature of our being in the world. The relevance of the "phenomenological Arendt" does not stop at its politicization of phenomenology, though, but also discloses important ontological and methodological issues that would otherwise go unnoticed by those working within the prevailing empirical, historical, and theoretical schools in Arendt scholarship.

Arendt's political phenomenology is as distinct from empirical political science as it is from political theory. Even if it is informed by historical, empirical accounts of, for instance, totalitarianism, statelessness, civil disobedience, and revolution, it is committed to exploring the ontological questions underlying those events.

Also, Arendt's work displays a particular kind of "realism," a philosophical habitus of "unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be," (1972, viii), which is also reflected in a keen attentiveness to distinctions, the paradoxes and perplexities typical of the human condition that come into view once we give serious consideration to its plural appearance in the world. This habitus is consistent with the phenomenological disposition of full commitment to the *res*, the matter or issue, that one examines—the "things themselves"—and of being faithful to reality as it appears in the world and so is visible and common to everyone. This commitment to reality made Arendt stay clear of normative political theory, such as ideal theory and normative value theory. In her view, political thinking is not about designing alternative, i.e., better, more just, political orders, nor is it about justification or prescription. The normative question of how to act and judge morally or politically is not a theoretical issue (which could, in principle, be determined by a single solitary and disengaged individual from a third-person perspective, least of all the philosopher) but a practical one (intrinsic to praxis) that is enacted by a plurality of actors and spectators themselves the moment they start to act together or judge.

Cross-References

- ▶ Action
- ▶ Being-in-the-World
- ▶ Critical Phenomenology
- ▶ Deconstruction
- ▶ Political Philosophy and Phenomenology
- ▶ World

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