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(overhead 1)

1. Arendt's radical pluralism

Kymlicka (1995:94) asks 'How should liberals respond to illiberal cultures?' He answers that, though liberals should not prevent 'illiberal' peoples from maintaining their 'societal culture', nonetheless their liberalisation should be promoted. It could therefore be said that liberals like Kymlicka, prefer 'traditional' or 'other cultures' to move up the ladder of 'progress' and disappear.

Communitarians are committed to a slightly different position. They aim to establish that the basic entities of intrinsic worth are communities or traditions which exemplify their own transcendent conception of 'the good.' Unfortunately at a higher level of abstraction, communitarians become strong - or really strong - multiculturalists (affirming 'blood' and the deep ethnicities of the darker side of the soul); at a lower level, revealing themselves as 'boutique multiculturalists' (Fish 1997).

In contrast, Arendt's radical pluralism rejects all norms of liberalism and communitarianism based on religious, ethnic, or racial identity.¹ She does not conceive the use of 'sociality' or 'politics' as a means to satisfy individual preferences (as liberals do), nor as a way to give form to a politics of recognition (as communitarians do). Rather, her notions are based on active, efficacious participation in public life, on the value and importance of civic engagement, and on unconstrained collective deliberation about issues affecting the community - or, as she prefers to call it, 'the public world.'

Arendt argues that no direct appeal can be made to traditional values: the past is to be preserved *only by re-appropriating it by new thoughts*. Only then can it shed light on present conditions. The current philosophical task is to re-establish contact with the world, albeit a messy, 'globalised' world in which a congeries of money, commerce, conquest, conversion, migration, and the set of Euro-colonial worlds have established the scene for a permanent traffic in people-hoods, self-hoods and identities.

For Arendt, *praxis* (unfinished action), linked to freedom and plurality, is connected to speech and remembrance, and opens the domain of the possible to what is not yet thought or said.

Praxis establishes relations by reciprocating words and deeds in processes of collective deliberation, contestation and fragile accommodation. Based on an equality in the political realm (for we are

¹ 'Arendt explicitly rejects the demand that public reason produces singular agreement or impartial consent ... The assumption that there is *one* public standpoint is not pluralist enough...' Bohman

all born **unequal**), it is 'solidarity' (or togetherness) which has the potential, through action, to stand against technocracised and elitist forms of political representation and narrative.

Arendt's project questions the tradition that endorses the isolation of the individual and their solitary thought (Villa 1998).² Through Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, she sees a sustained attempt to conceal the *bios politikos* in favour of the *bios theoretikos*. She reinstates the *bios politikos* through a re-consideration of how 'action' in the broadened sense of 'praxis' (activity engaged in by free men), engenders the public space of the *polis*. Public equality is a necessary condition for action and speech; that is, politics can only take place when human beings confront and debate with each other as equals.

(overhead 2)

2. Arendt and Heidegger

In response to Heidegger's *Dasein*,³ Arendt (1958) impugns it for favouring isolation and withdrawal, thereby neglecting any political reflection and the dimensions of human existence.

1996:62).

² Though Arendt is accused of getting the nature of the *polis* wrong (anachronistically positing a rigid divide between the realm of freedom or public space and the necessity of the household), such objections presume what they need to show: that Arendt's 'ideal type' was intended as a historical representation. (Villa 1998:168n.7)

³ 'In *Being and Time* Heidegger relates this priority of the world as a coherent structure existing before any encounter with isolated individuals or singular objects to the common accessibility and openness of the everyday world, characterised ... by its continuity and its permanence; it is the everyday structure of the world that, as a way of being of *Dasein* exists for everyone at all times.' Barash 1996:253).

Indeed, Arendt's understanding of politics, action and plurality is a response to Heidegger's failure to emphasise public life (Bernstein 1997:159).

Arendt's project is to question the tradition that endorses both liberal and Heideggerian isolation and singularity. Withdrawing from the public world brings the danger that solitary individuals unite in a single opinion. Then men, says Arendt (1968), in their infinite plurality, would give way to Man-in-the-singular⁴ - one species, and its' exemplars. If this were to happen, says Arendt, the Public World, which only exists in the 'interspaces' between acting and speaking human-beings, would disappear.⁵

Heidegger defines the modern scientific tradition in terms of temporal permanence and the universal validity of the criteria of truth; for Arendt however, his concept of 'Truth' is the source of

the depreciation of the political realm. In her work of (1973) she criticises Heidegger's 'melancholy-hubris' by claiming that, far from having universal validity, it accurately sums up Heidegger's *own* 'existing conditions.'

For Arendt, as for Foucault, the public world is a historically specific system of norm-governed practices, defining and producing each

⁴ 'Man,' appears when totalitarianism appears.

⁵ '... whereas Heidegger ... defines the (classical) tradition in relation to its claim to the temporal permanence and universal validity of the criteria of truth, Arendt's radically different interpretation of this tradition proceeds from a theme specific to her own manner of investigation: for her, the concept of truth since Plato and Aristotle gives testimony above all to the philosopher's hostility to

epoch's or era's distinctive forms of knowledge and power. Overcoming absolute metaphysical truth – the appeal to atemporal, invariant standards and truths - means re-evaluating and reclaiming it as *doxastic* (as Wittgenstein's life-world did), but which Plato devalued, in favour of *episteme* (universal grounding). The everyday structure of the world, which expresses 'worldhood', constitutes a field of action that Heidegger terms the 'public world'. However, Heidegger defines this actual public world in terms of the inauthentic temporal permanence of a 'they' who obscure truth. For Arendt, as for Foucault, the public world is a historically specific system of norm-governed practices defining and producing each epoch's or era's distinctive forms of knowledge and power. Heidegger in contrast, retreats from the radical implications of Worldhood, which to him is 'idle talk' in the public world. He thus depreciates the political realm.

(overhead 3)

3. The Public World – The Interspace

Arendt's opposition to Heidegger's solitude and isolation – which links him both to liberalism and liberal communitarianism - is manifest in what she terms 'the interspace' or 'public world.' This interspace is an original plurality whose 'essence' *cannot* be reduced to a subject, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or customary or traditional ways - nor to the perduring truth of a set of universals established once and for all. Speech and action both require initiative (Bernstein 1997:163), an 'opening up' or 'gift' that cannot always await reciprocation. To begin, to take an initiative, is politically identical with 'freedom', she

the *polis*, which has traditionally predominated in the West and has given rise to a depreciation of the

claims; it is equivalent to a second birth, or 'natality'. The speech of people newly entering the public world, or peoples united by a common concern, is the actualization of the human condition of plurality.

These 'New' peoples - aboriginals, gays, lesbians, the homeless, the unemployed, refugees, immigrants and women - peoples who have been excluded from enfranchisements of one sort or another - may set in motion a performative contradiction, by claiming *to be included* in just those enfranchisements.⁶ Arendt sees speech as the central activity of this 'interspace.' In speech, a field of action is opened which endows itself with a persistence that goes beyond mortal being. The foundation of cohesion and continuity in the public world, constituted by speech and action, is the 'fragile web of human relationships'. This web overlays all objects of the public world with a multiplicity of interpretations arising from different agents. With these objects, 'the web' constitutes what Arendt calls the 'reality' of this world. Opening to this world depends on the convergence of a multiplicity of perspectives identifying the same objects of interest. This convergence is founded on what Arendt calls 'common-sense, and common interest which *pre-exists* singularities.'⁷

political realm in comparison to pure thought' (Barash 1996:258).

⁶ For example in Art and Sculpture.

⁷By 'common sense' (*Gemeinsinn*), Arendt does not mean the unreflective prudence that every sane adult exercises continuously (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) but, rather as Kant put it, 'a sense *common to all* .. a faculty of judgment which, in its reflection, takes account ... of the mode of representation of all other men.' *Kant Critique of Judgment*, 40 ...' (Baer 2000:p. 22 note 11).

(overhead 4)

4. *The Excluded*

In the liberal political realm, 'radical plurality' or an 'ethics of welcome,' a 'Be my friend' - *does not exist*. The public world is not publicly assented to; instead it is delineated by thin abstractions. The historical effect of this shrunken public-world is to treat those who fall outside it as 'pariah peoples.' Eg. aborigines and Native North Americans.

Paradoxically it is among pariah peoples that the interspace may emerge most intensely - albeit briefly. According to Arendt it is a 'brotherhood' that manifests itself in 'dark times' - a 'fraternity' which is the 'great privilege of pariah peoples.' But the privilege is dearly bought. It comes at the cost of a radical loss of 'being in the world, starting with the loss of 'common-sense,' so that at the point of *deepest* darkness, it is possible to speak of 'worldlessness'. Such 'worldlessness', when the fragile web of relationships is most threatened, is, according to Arendt, the 'barbarism of deepest darkness.'⁸To repeat, in the abstract-liberal-realm, the radical plurality of *the polis* - reciprocities, an ethic of welcome, a contestatory nature and an enlarging potential - *does not exist*. Rather its inner dynamic is geared towards setting up exclusionary boundaries and hierarchies within and between, public worlds.

According to Arendt, the disappearance of the radical plurality of *the polis* -does not mean that human-beings disappear, but that one species, universal 'Man,' starts to appear, appealing to legitimation by

⁸ Before the deepest point is reached, brotherhood is clearly discernible as a 'warmth' of pariah peoples. It is a weird irreality that human relations assume wherever they develop in worldlessness, in which effort is needed to preserve a minimum existence in a world grown inhuman. But, warns Arendt (1968), should darkness be liberated, and become visible, the warmth of fraternity dissolves

means of such bionorms as blood, race, culture, territory, ethnicity, nation, and tradition. The justification for such appeals is the furtherance of autonomy and freedom. However, that autonomy and freedom is *always* bought at the historical expense of those who fall outside its boundaries.

The pariah's cheerfulness cannot be shared by those professional sharers and levellers, experts in blended horizons - social workers, anthropologists, therapists - who create an illusory interspace, which shields them from the bizarreness of their encounters and furthers their own prejudices. Carrying on their backs their own public world, in which class, nation, and race are normalized and made 'ordinary,' they underlabour and underwrite the abstractions of human nature.

Professional sharers inescapably record the unfamiliar public worlds of their encounters *against the base-line or common measure or comparability of their own public world*. The relation is irreducibly and irreversibly asymmetrical.

The 'Other' is a parodic version of the Anthropologist (or therapist) herself.⁹ For despite talk of mutual respect, recognition and understanding by 'opening up' to 'the Other,' the Anthropologist cannot exchange perspectives with those in a state of 'worldlessness;' every speech-act of the Anthropologist, in which there is an implicit offer to

into nothingness. The humanness of the insulted and injured survives not one moment in the world of light. Cf contemporary Aborigines and Indians.

⁹ The 'Other' of the anthropologist or therapist is a parody of Levinas' Other, the face-to-face of the ethical relation which precedes all ontology. See Levinas (1979).

make good on its meaning, is accompanied by instrumental and utilitarian intents to be cashed out in her own public world.¹⁰

The Public World can be maintained only if the plurality of perspectives that constitute it, is preserved. It is a creative product of perspectives admitting natality, the split sites of enunciation,¹¹ and the difficult practice of negotiating various languages in acts of translation. Cf Benjamin (1973).

For Arendt, the whole notion of getting individuals to ‘act as one,’ is a dangerous illusion; she stresses the inescapable plurality of ‘men,’ not just in the early stages of discussion, but in action. ‘Men’ however, may act together, but not out of anything as stable as a ‘common will’ based on rational consensus. Human plurality means that action is always a fragile web¹² of intersecting actions with no common goal. It is always messy and unpredictable, making ‘free politics’ difficult and fragile, when it exists, at all.¹³

(overhead 5)5. *Conclusion*

¹⁰ In an extraordinary recapitulation of colonial history, the acceptance of the offer to ‘make good’ on the meaning of that speech act, involves the acceptor, the informant, the aboriginal or the pariah, in an asymmetrical relation, conducted on the terms and temporalities of the Anthropologist herself

¹¹ For example ‘women.’

¹² ‘... Arendt refers to the foundation of cohesion and continuity in the public interspace constituted by the ‘fragile web of human relationships.’’ *Men in Dark Times*

¹³ Habermas in contrast, though recognising that perfect communication is a counterfactual ideal, and people are unlikely to arrive at common convictions, nonetheless holds out the prospect of rational agreement on political questions as a matter of direct practical relevance (Canovan 1983). He holds that in discourse on morals and politics, conclusions can be reached within a manageable length of time, and he speaks of the possibility of ‘forming the public will’. He criticizes Arendt for failing to realize that discourse settles practical questions. See too Young (1997).

Arendt's radical plurality should at least raise doubts about the exhaustiveness of multicultural claims, if not about the ultimate viability of the project. If the only response to the deep challenge of 'pariah peoples' is to redefine issues solely in liberal or communitarian terms, as in perplexities about 'illiberal peoples' (as Kymlicka calls them), then there is no room for optimism. Rather, there is ground for anticipating the emergence of *Das Man*, as distinct from men, the abolition of the public realm, and the disappearance of plurality.

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