

Ágnes Heller and Hannah Arendt

Ágnes Heller and Hannah Arendt:

A Dialogue

Edited by

Ángel Prior and Ángel Rivero

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To Ferenc Fehér with gratitude

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INTRODUCTION

ÁNGEL PRIOR AND ÁNGEL RIVERO

Ágnes Heller and Hannah Arendt are two of the greatest intellectual figures of Modernity. Belonging to different generations, they share common concerns and biographies. Ágnes Heller was born on the 12th of May 1929 in Budapest, Hungary, into a Jewish family, and from very early on experienced racial discrimination and the tragedy of the Holocaust. This was to be followed later by harassment under Communism. Hannah Arendt was born on the 14th October 1906 in Hannover, Germany. She also came from a Jewish family. Nazi persecution compelled her to exile in the United States. There she developed a distinguished academic career until her death in 1975.

Arendt's work as a political philosopher was focused on the study of Totalitarianism, the ideological plague that triggered unprecedented mass killings on European soil during the first half of the twentieth century. To her, the central task of political philosophy was to find an answer to the question how this nightmare holocaust was possible. Thus, her great works can be seen as responses to the unprecedented malaises of the century. While *The Human Condition* deals with the predicament of human beings in Modernity, *On Revolution* is focused on human freedom and the dangers of misunderstanding the social question, and finally *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is a genealogy that uncovers the roots of ideological evil in our time.

Ágnes Heller, twenty years younger, belongs to another generation. But she also experienced the evils of our time, although in a different mood. She shares with Arendt that the aim of philosophy is practical in its orientation: philosophy should deal with the real problems of men and women. Like Arendt, Heller also experienced persecution. Her father was killed in Auschwitz when she was a child. But as a thinker, as a reflexive adult, her determinant experience was the life experience of Communism in Eastern Europe. To her, Communism was an experiment aimed to overcome the problems of Modernity. But the deployment of the experiment didn't lead to a reconciled humanity living in peace. On the contrary, the social experiment of going beyond class society led to a dead

end where the lack of freedom and pervasive misery were its main attributes.

The experiment of Socialism was justified, almost from its inception, as a human response against barbarism, first of Capitalism and later of Nazism. Briefly, communism was seen as the proper response to fulfil the promises of Modernity avoiding its dark face. However, the realities of Communism render this promise void. When Ágnes Heller was young, as a pupil of Georg Lukács, she shared with him the *dictum* that the worst socialism was better than the best capitalism. At the School of Budapest, the group of young scholars gathered around Lukács oriented their works to the goal of democratizing socialism. But this task was simply beyond their reach and was finally abandoned.

Both learned one thing from the guardians of Communism: real socialism can't be reformed in a democratic way. This was experienced in Hungary 1956, in Czechoslovakia 1968, and in many other places. Ágnes Heller learned this lesson: that the social question should be addressed from politics and not the other way around. She learned the priority of democracy to social justice as the proper response to the problems of Modernity.

And, given that Heller was committed as a philosopher with the problems of reality, she embarked herself in the understanding of Communism as a system of domination: the dictatorship over needs. She paid her deed researching the system that she had defended in the past. And this produced a striking phenomenon. Prior to her analysis of the structural character of socialism, Heller was seen by her colleges in the West as a representative of the New Left beyond the Iron Curtain. But her independence, her freedom in judgment when dealing with the tough reality of the Communist world was seen as treason by radical intellectuals of the western world. She became isolated, like Arendt.

Thus, in this book we want to address a dialogue between two great thinkers that were able to face the challenges of their time irrespective of the consequences for their careers and at the cost of misunderstanding and marginalization. Both shared this demanding intellectual ethic, and both share in many ways similar biographies: family origins, persecution by totalitarian regimes, and the same academic refuge—The New School for Social Research in New York, where today Heller is emeritus professor (for many years she occupied the Hannah Arendt Chair in Philosophy).

This work is divided into three parts. The first one consists of texts that deal with the new practical philosophies implemented by Heller or by Arendt. This section begins with a text by Heller and is followed by chapters by Patricio Peñalver, Fina Birulés, Neus Campillo, Antonio

Rivera and José Luis Villacañas.

The second part of this work concentrates on Heller and Arendt's political philosophy. It consists of chapters by Antonio Campillo, María Pía Lara, Cristina Sánchez, María José Guerra and Ángel Rivero.

Finally, the third part of the volume deals with ethics and moral philosophy. This part gathers the contributions made by Ángel Prior, Wolfgang Heuer and Andrea Vestrucci.

The book opens with a beautiful text by Heller, "Open letter to Hannah Arendt on Thinking," where the Hungarian philosopher reflects on thinking in connection with the legacy of her predecessor at the New School. Heller agrees mainly with Arendt's division of thinking in three aspects, but in a qualified way. First, on the tripartite structure of the faculties that sustain the life of the spirit; secondly, in the radical distinction between thinking and knowing, which Heller challenges; and thirdly, on the connection between thinking and the real world, where she disagrees again.

Patricio Peñalver suggests that the new way of dealing with responsibility developed by Heller should be understood in connection with her proposal of a transformation of philosophy: her presentation of philosophical concepts as characters and the practical implications of philosophy, as can be seen in *An Ethics of Personality*, or in the book on Shakespeare. Peñalver focuses his analysis on the concept of "enormous responsibility" and stresses the connections of Heller's position with Derrida and Levinas.

Fina Birules approaches the Arendtian concept of *storytelling* while connecting it with her understanding of contingency, particularity, and individuality in human affairs. To her, not only the reality of these concepts should be accepted, especially in times of crisis, but also the narration of them. In this sense, Birulés stresses the relevance of Isak Dinesen's theory of narration and the use that Arendt made of it.

In her chapter, Neus Campillo presents first the Arendtian analysis of masses and totalitarianism, as developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, emphasizing the study of the masses by Ortega y Gasset. Secondly, she deals with the distinction that Arendt makes in *Crisis of the Culture* between mass culture, oriented to entertainment, and critical culture, understood as the humanist vision of culture, and where they are connected with art, politics, and the choice of company.

Antonio Rivera's chapter is focused on the use of the word "home" by Heller. To carry forward his argument, Rivera underscores Heller's "home" as an "absolute metaphor" in H. Blumenberg's sense and contrasts it with the Hellerian theory of radical needs and with her understanding of liberal democracy as "our home." Rivera detects and exposes some

paradoxes and contradictions between unity and plurality, consensus and dissent, and warns us of the evils of today's politics.

The last chapter of this first part is a genealogy of Weber in Heller's work by José Luis Villacañas. In his view, the abandonment of the Lukasian-Marxian paradigm of her youth is accompanied by an approach to Max Weber and, specifically, to his vision of separate spheres and the acceptance of liberalism in Modernity. Villacañas discusses the Hellerian interpretation of Weber's distinction between an Ethics of convictions and an Ethics of responsibility by pointing to the instance of the Treaty of Versailles in relation to the defeated Germany. The theory of Modernity is seen in this chapter as it frames where the positions, of Lukács and Weber, can be confronted, and also Kirkegaard's. Villacañas explores Heller's understanding of Modernity (her pendulum theory, her two pillars of Modernity metaphor) in connection with her analysis of everyday life, the moral choice, and the "common ethos." Villacañas concludes that Heller always takes the Weberian stance: the position best fitted to the possibilities of action and reflection in the modern world. By behaving this way, Heller avoids the excesses of hubris that may lead to the "naked tragic conflict of Weber."

The second part of the volume, on political philosophy, begins with Antonio Campillo's chapter, where he presents and criticizes some concepts coined by Heller, Fehér, Agamben, Negri, and Espósito: "Biopolitics," "Totalitarianism," and "Globalization." Campillo concludes by suggesting a new understanding of these concepts by making room for Foucault and Arendt.

María Pía Lara's chapter, "The Truth of Politics," is aimed at a renewal of the concept of authority of Heidegger's pupil by highlighting how Roman religious categories are instrumental for her in relation to liberty and action (against Plato's understanding of authority as truth and power). But Lara wants to go beyond Arendt's position in "Truth and Politics" by betting for justice in modern politics.

Cristina Sánchez's chapter deals with the issue of how democracy can be deepened, exercising political responsibility. In order to conduct this task, she focuses on Arendt's work and concludes by defending civic republicanism and a "horizontal" social contract, much in line with Arendt but also with Habermas.

María José Guerra's chapter gives us an account on how contemporary feminism understood Arendt's work. First, she was seen as an enemy of feminism because she neglected the women question and the social question; she didn't put into question the public-private divide; and she had a low valuation of labor. But, in striking contrast to this early

interpretation, many political philosophers, and feminists, today like Benhabib, Honig, Collin, Kristeva, and Zerilli are rendering available a new and positive understanding of Arendt that, according to Guerra, is valuable but limited.

In his chapter, Ángel Rivero contrasts Arendt's and Heller's understanding of the concepts Freedom and Liberty. To Rivero, Arendt and Heller's different views can be explained by their own specific or particular experiences of Freedom/Liberty. While, for Arendt, Freedom was mainly the public exercise of action, Liberties are diminished as mere conditions for the exercise of Freedom. What is more important, Arendt equated Freedom with politics. Yet the predicament of modern society is depoliticization. Heller, by contrast, in a more positive way considered modern liberties as the precondition of political liberty but also as personal self-determination. Modernity cannot be equated with the totalitarian experiments of Fascism and Communism; Modernity is, above all, the openness that permits us to experience freedom in all domains of life. In this sense, Rivero states that the legacy of Heller is much more appropriate to deal with the predicaments of the modern world than the critique of Modernity deployed by Arendt.

The third part, on the Ethics of personality and the good life, begins with a chapter by Ángel Prior. He aims to remain between ethics and political philosophy, in order to make a reconstruction of the dialogue between Ágnes Heller and Hannah Arendt. In Prior's view, Heller's addressing of such important issues in Arendt's work such as political freedom; the "social question," and the related debate on the political and the social; decision and decisionism in early 20th century political philosophy; and so on, should be understood as a real dialogue between the two philosophers. But beyond dialogue there is also disagreement. Prior highlights the differences between them on seminal topics, as the moral foundation of philosophy; the radical divide between thinking and knowledge-truth, in connection with the problem of truths of fact; the link between thinking and moral personality; and the quarrel in a deep sense on the notion of will. Differences aside, there is, states Prior, a theory of morality in Arendt that resembles Heller's understanding of responsibility very much.

Wofgang Heuer's chapter provides an enlightening understanding of the Ethics of personality developed by Heller. By focusing on the concepts of authenticity, personality, and judgment in Heller, he develops a comparative analysis of both authors. To him, Heller's understanding of the subject is liberal democratic, whereas Arendt has a more radical, democratic concept of inter-subjectivity. Thus, the model subject for the

former is “the good person” and for the latter “the good citizen.”

The closing chapter of this volume is by Andrea Vestrucci. He stresses the connections between Heller and Arendt in three main areas. First, on the notion of human condition: Arendt’s view of human condition is presented through the ontology of active life and politics. In Heller, human condition refers to the moral dimension of humanity and to the basic moral problem of the existential choice (“what means to be conditioned?”). The second area of intercourse is defined by the discussion of actor, spectator, and judgment. To deal with this topic, Vestrucci focus on Arendt’s political philosophy and on Heller’s moral aesthetic: the beautiful person. Finally, the third area of dialogue is happiness. In this case, Arendt is Heller’s instance of good life. Arendt was able to combine the two elements that make a person happy: intercourse with others and self-development. These two features are the effect of two existential choices: on others, and on ourselves. Good life in this sense is a synthesis of *Beruf* and goodwill under the condition of human finitude.

We hope that the texts here presented provide readers with a stimulating dialogue on the perennial topics of the human condition under the circumstances of Modernity. The first versions of the papers gathered in this book were discussed with Ágnes Heller at the International Congress on *Ágnes Heller's Philosophy and her Dialogue with Hannah Arendt*, celebrated at the University of Murcia, October 13-15, 2009. We thank Columbia University Press for allowing us to publish chapter 8, "The Truth of Politics," which is an earlier version of the final chapter of the book *The Disclosure of Politics* (2013) written by María Pía Lara with the title "Hannah Arendt's Model of the Autonomy of Politics: Semantic Innovation Through Religious Disclosure."

PART I:
PHILOSOPHY AND ITS CATEGORIES

CHAPTER ONE

OPEN LETTER TO HANNAH ARENDT
ON THINKING

ÁGNES HELLER¹

Dear Hannah Arendt,

Two decades ago, I wrote an essay about your work on *The Life of the Mind*. Having been invited once again to a conference discussing your work, I re-read the books to refresh my memory. After a second reading, I decided, this time, to speak only about the first volume, “On Thinking,” since this is the book you were still able to put in a proper shape but did not have much time for corrections.

As always, I was immediately carried away by your brilliant rhetoric. After some thinking, however, I could not help but notice the few theoretical flaws of your position.

In this letter, I want to speak about both my impressions. Since you like provocation and debate, you will very probably be more pleased with my critical remarks than with my eulogy. But since this is an open letter also written for others to read, you must endure some praise.

One also needs to keep an elementary order in a letter. Thus, I will first talk about the rhetoric of your book and only afterwards about your theoretical interpretation of the topic, thinking.

On rhetoric, first.

You put your interpretations of our chief mental practice that we normally call “thinking” to a practical purpose, namely in the service of cultural criticism, which on its part carries a political message.

As far as the message of your rhetoric is concerned, I would describe your volume on “Thinking” as your most Heideggerian book. You echo Heidegger’s polemical formulation that “science does not think.” Yet you radicalize Heidegger on many counts, for example when you reject

¹ New School for Social Research, New York.

Heidegger's wording that it is Being that calls for thinking. Contrary to Heidegger, you also insist that pure thinking is not "thinking about," since we are not called to think "about" anything at all, we are just thinking. At the same time, you suggest together with Heidegger that our age is the age of forgetfulness of thinking. Heidegger's position is, as you know far better than me, more complex, but complexities need to be certainly avoided in rhetoric.

Thus, only the elementary message of your wording is here close to Heidegger, hence your rhetoric itself has nothing to do with his. In fact, the style and the pathos of your book follow the tracks of your practice in political philosophy or rather political thinking from *The Human Condition* onward, through *On Revolution*, *The Crisis of the Republic*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and others. Good rhetoric works wonders in political thinking. It makes the reader or the audience aware that "something is going wrong" thus it makes them think about what has to be done in order to make things better. It also changes the stakes of the political discourse and ushers in new discourses. It mobilizes emotions and commitment. Your rhetoric reminds me of Cicero's rhetoric, in fact also one of your models, to whom you frequently refer. Although, unlike Cato, Cicero, or Seneca, you never had the opportunity, nor the wish, to become a player in the political theater, you made yourself a player in and through your writing. You belonged to those intellectuals who did not boo politics, quite the opposite, since you assigned political action the highest place in active life.

Although your project has far more to do with Roman republicanism, you follow a German tradition, in referring rather to the Greeks. You go even further, highly talking about a spoiled, narrow minded, and sulking infantile adult, called Achilles, whose only distinguished skill was killing. In fact, (you) remained a modern republican, who played the role of a female Cicero in America, the representative republic of the 20th century. Your rhetoric focused on the same matters as Cicero. The Republic is in crisis, you warned us, the danger of despotism looms large, blackmail, luxury, and indifference makes us forget the ancient republican virtues. If we are unable to maintain or rather renovate our republican institutions the republican spirit will be gone, and our Republic will become just a skeleton. The possible rejuvenation of the republic, the new beginning is also at the center of Cicero's thinking. You have your own Scipio's dream. In referring to Augustine, you always speak about him as the greatest Roman philosopher. And as we know, Augustine, the Roman, has, among others, also practiced rhetoric.

Cicero has mobilized the philosophical heritage for his practical/political purpose even when he tried to make a case for the withdrawal into

solitude. He mixed Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, even Aristotle, and others. This mixture has always served as a political pointer.

You have done something very similar, beginning with your interpretation of totalitarianism and finishing up with your interpretation of thinking. Your eloquence preserves the freshness of your books. In a world where political theory became an academic business, where the so-called facts, reports, and interpretations cease to offer any more surprises, astonishment, novelty, and offered very poor fodder for thinking, you did something with your eloquence no one could do, or did, in your time. You were a newcomer, an outsider, and a woman, just as Cicero was a new man, an outsider in Rome. Outsiders, who always come late to the dish of the Republic, are still the best at pushing for new beginnings.

In your *Life of the Mind*, however, you turned away from political philosophy, even if you never lost sight of politics. Your eloquence, which worked well, and sometimes even splendidly in political thinking, does not work well here. At least, I believe so and I will try to show it. On this field, rhetoric rather covers up unwanted theoretical inconsistencies. The occasional philosophical mixture of Socrates, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, and Heidegger does not serve a fruitful purpose here. In a purely theoretical pursuit, one can surely arrive at antinomies or paradoxes, yet one needs to be aware that they are antinomies or paradoxes. If you remain unaware of this, they are just unintended inconsistencies and the mixture will remain undrinkable.

Let me start from the beginning. What is thinking?

You do not care to answer the question or, alternatively, tell us that it cannot be answered. You do not replace the question with the one of "the essence of thinking" as Heidegger does. You just make the statement that thinking is an end in itself.

You insist that this move is Kantian. In one aspect it is. Philosophy is, according to Kant, thinking with the concepts of Reason ("Vernunftbegriffe") and those ideas or concepts are pure, they are a priori. In the other respect, however, your position is entirely unKantian. You dismiss namely the Kantian identification of "pure" with "a priori," for this gambit has no function in your critical rhetoric. The Aristotelian, and even the Hegelian, understanding of "thinking that thinks itself" seems to be closer to your conception, yet Hegel is by definition excluded from the mixture.

You invite us then to think thinking, not in order to try and answer the question what thinking is, but to answer the question what thinking does. This is a great step. Yet, your rhetoric suggests that if one answers the question what thinking does or does not do, one has already answered the question what thinking is or is not. The identification of both questions

offers the opportunity to give not just a rhetorical answer in the form of a judgment: what thinking does or should do is not done, or rather undone, in the present age.

You refer to the political occasion that motivated you to explore the concept of thinking. This happened while you were listening to Eichmann on the dock. This was the moment when you first came to realize, that evil, or at least one kind of evil, results from acting unthinkingly.

I agree, although, I must add, that some good deeds, supererogatory acts, also result from acting unthinkingly. Yet I do not want to follow up this line, for a polemic with your Eichmann book would need another, and longer, letter.

Thus, let us think about thinking,

First, let me survey your practical suggestions.

You suggest, while quoting the text of an evergreen melody, that one must “stop and think.” Before embarking on an action, making a decision, or passing judgment, one should “stop and think.” One needs to think over whether it is right, good. What one is about to do, one has to think over “what” one is in fact doing. You, Hannah, further suggest that one should suspend one’s everyday knowledge at least in non-trivial matters. One has to step back to take the position of the spectator before making a decision. Here you are, indeed, the faithful follower of your favorite Kant, the Kant of *Critique of Judgment*, of paragraph 41 to which you so frequently refer especially in your lectures on judgment. The maxims of common understanding, “Think with your own mind, think in the place of others, think consistently,” offer us, indeed, good advice.

Your second practical suggestion is less simple and less obvious, for it has broader ramifications. I mean, your polemics against problem-solving thinking. I do not want to touch upon the theoretical message of your position, not yet, for I still keep to the question of practical suggestions. The rhetoric of this polemics is intimately related to the maxim of “stop and think.”

You point at a very important matter here. It is highly problematic that we normally believe that information is the sole source of knowledge. For example, your Socrates, who is also my Socrates, received the information in Delphos that he was the wisest man of Athens. But the source of his self-knowledge was not this information, but his interpretation of the information. It is indeed the shortcoming of the learned stratum of our times that they believe that information serves as the landmark for problem-solving rather than as a text for interpretation.

But is problem-solving in opposition to thinking?

Whatever Heidegger named “enframing” may be put into the category of problem-solving. After all, technological thinking is problem-solving thinking. There are, however, two major differences between his suggestion and yours. He says that science does not think, and it is good for us that it does not. For science is cumulative but thinking not. Whereas you say that scientists do not think while solving problems. No two propositions can be that different. If you think with Heidegger, then those who address themselves to problems, in this case scientists are indeed also thinking, only that their thinking does not accumulate, although their knowledge does. For no thinking is cumulative. Everyone starts afresh. Only knowledge accumulates.

Moreover, for Heidegger, the question of truth is, and remains the essential issue. It goes about the essential difference between correspondence theory of truth and revelatory “presence” of truth in poetry. You, however, are not concerned with truth at all. This is a non-issue for you. The center of your presentation is missing, it is void. In political philosophy, as far as “vita activa” is concerned, this void is not just possible, or sometimes even desirable since truth as such is not a main player in politics. Moreover, all ideologies present themselves as the sole embodiments of “truth.” This way of thinking ends up in fundamentalism and can have dangerous political consequences. You rightly insist upon speaking in terms of clashes of opinions and discourses of opinions instead of true-untrue. This is a good move in support of “plurality” in practical philosophy. But if it is about the life of the mind, the question concerning truth cannot be avoided.

To the unasked question what thinking is, you give at least three, but rather four, entirely different, moreover, incompatible answers.

The title of your planned trilogy *The Life of the Mind* is a jackpot, not just because the life of our mind is intensive, but because our mind, indeed, also lives a life of its own. A great part of its life is an undiscovered territory for us, as for philosophy and for brain sciences, and some of them will also remain so. I could even agree with you that the life of the mind is identical to thinking, and thinking is identical to human life as such. The dead brain of a person is not alive in a human sense, even if he is still breathing, fed, and his heart is beating.

Human thinking implies perceiving, feeling, imagining, speaking. Just because human life is thinking and vice versa, one would have expected you to offer us a philosophical insight into thinking as such. Just as Wittgenstein did in his remarks on philosophical psychology where he refers to “Denkphaenomene,” and says, among others, that thinking is an imaginary activity, an invisible stream that connects quite different,

heterogeneous activities. But you rather subscribe to the Kantian “soul-sack” (Hegel’s expression), that is, to the division of the “life of the mind” into the activity of three different faculties, such as thinking, willing, judging.

Since you accept the theory of mental faculties, you cannot say that thinking is identical to the life of the mind, only that it is one of its manifestations. But you vacillate. Sometimes you reconfirm that thinking is human life. Some other times, you want to establish the “*differentia specifica*” of thinking against the two other Kantian faculties. Some other times again, you identify thinking with one kind of thinking activity, distinguishing it from other “*Denkphaenomene*,” which you do not regard as phenomena of thinking.

As I already mentioned, you frequently affirm that we do not think “about,” we do not think “about something,” that is, thinking is objectless. You fail to notice, that this philosophical bravado runs against one of your basic theses, exactly the one that has inspired you to write a book on thinking. I have in mind Eichmann on the deck and your interpretation of the source of evil. Let us assume then that Eichmann acted unthinkingly. But he did not fail in thinking “without an object,” “thinking as such,” but he failed in thinking about something, namely about the very thing he became involved in, Nazism, the extermination of Jews, and so on. In fact, conscious thinking is always thinking about something, I dare to guess that this is the case also with unconscious thinking. Let me refer again to Wittgenstein. Whatever one is “thinking about” is thinking. From this perspective, it is entirely indifferent what I am thinking about. Whether I ponder the motivations of the betrayal of my friend, whether I want to solve a scientific problem, whether I contemplate a painting, whether I try to answer the question concerning the meaning of my life, whether I turn to the Almighty with a prayer, or even whenever I ruminate which dress to buy or what to cook tomorrow, whether I am daydreaming about my future or the future of the world, I am always “thinking about.” Thinking, allow me, is not an epistemological category. It becomes an epistemological category, at least, according to Wittgenstein, if I SAY, “I think.”

You narrow down the content of the concept (your original concept) of thinking twice: first, in reducing it to one among the three faculties of the mind, second, in transforming it into an epistemological category. This happens already when you contrast thinking with knowledge. Not in the way Heidegger does it, which makes a lot of sense to me (knowledge is cumulative whereas thinking is not), not just for showing that our information-rich age falls short of thinking.

I promise to refer to Wittgenstein for the last time in this letter. He also notices a difference (but not a contrast, let alone enmity!) between thinking and knowledge in the use of those words, in language games. In case of knowledge, the language game does not distinguish between first and third person, in case of thinking it does. If I say, "I think," I speak about a personal experience, if I say, "he thinks," it is about an information. Yet when I say, "I can play chess, he can play chess," this does not depend either on information or on personal experience. We just sit down and play. If the student says that he knows the history of the civil war, you can answer, no, you do not know it, for what you said just now was false. Yet if the student says, "I was thinking about the civil war," you cannot answer, no, you did not, at most you can say that you have not thought it over.

You could retort, that you were not at all interested in "language games," and you have right to ask different questions. True, you also asked different questions, yet you made us believe that you have answered thereby the question "concerning the essential difference between knowing and thinking." But you did not.

Let me summarize first a few of your basic theoretical statements, hypotheses, and allusions. I call all of them "thoughts," for that's what they are. Thoughts are preliminary results of the thinking process. These "preliminary results of thinking" can last throughout one's whole life, yet they still remain "preliminary" for they can always be replaced by other thinking processes.

Yet can I speak of your thoughts or the thoughts of anyone? For you have stated (page 62) that "the activity of thinking does not leave anything behind." Where do our thoughts, ideas, concerns, problems result from, if not from the conscious or unconscious activity of thinking? They were just "left behind." Yet I see your point. I believe it to be a fruitful proposal, as compared to the constant stream of thinking; the mental activities resulting in thoughts are but few. Those few fruits, are, however, also trampolines for further thinking processes, which they, on their part, "leave behind." Otherwise, how could we talk about experience at all? Emotional experiences included? But even if I forgot about thoughts, I could hardly accept your provocation that thinking does not leave anything behind. For it leaves behind, above all, something of utmost importance, namely the psychological, moral, and intellectual character of a person. Of a person who was thinking consciously or unconsciously about this or that, with such and such frequency, with such and such emotional involvement. All these inhere in the personality as much as what he knows and how he knows it, what he considers to be true and false, what he believes in, what

his convictions are.

I feel already extremely troubled, at this point one of your strongest claims that thinking has nothing to do with knowing, neither with truth, and that thinking is the process of meaning-rendering not be mixed up with, or mistaken for, the quest of truth.

But let me talk first about you, about the fruits of your thinking, or your thoughts.

You have already thought them over. They are the results of your thinking. That “rendering meaning” has nothing to do with the “quest for truth,” this is your thought. You strongly emphasize it, you frequently repeat it, and you communicate it, because you believe it to be true. You do not propose your thought as certainty, as non-refutable, you do not think that it compels, yet you are still convinced that this proposition of yours is true. To consider something as true (“Fürwahrhalten,” says Kant) means to take responsibility for a thought, judgment, idea. You thus take responsibility for your thought and you propose us to accept it. Rendering meaning unless this meaning is simultaneously proposed as true meaning does not imply responsibility.

As you already know, I do not accept your proposal as true, for I think that something else is true, or truer, and I take responsibility for this—alternative—truth before you and my readers or listeners alike. I do not think that what I am going to propose is non-refutable. I do not offer certainties. I do not pretend that you are compelled to accept my proposition. You are free to reject it.

Dear Hannah, you identify truth with compulsion, certainty and else, with the traditional metaphysical and the non-traditional positivist understanding of the concept of truth. You accept their meaning of truth, and after having accepted their meaning of truth you engage in shadow-boxing against this interpretation of truth as if it were the only possible one. Why are you not engaged rather in rendering a post-metaphysical and post-positivist meaning to the concept of truth itself, practicing meaning-rendering instead of replacing truth with meaning-rendering as such?

Let me briefly repeat your main theses to make it clear which of them I feel persuasive and which of them not.

1. You distinguish among three faculties or three activities of the mind, such as thinking, willing, judging. According to you, the second faculty has developed later than the first, the third later than the second.
2. You distinguish sharply between thinking, the *par excellence* meaning-rendering activity of the mind on the one hand, and the

problem-solving activity of the mind aiming at knowledge, on the other hand. At the same time, you identify “thinking” roughly with the Kantian reason or the Aristotelian *nous*, and the other mental activity of the first kind that is not thinking with “logos,” “epistheme,” the so-called scientific problem-solving. Thinking is a free activity, whereas the scientific quest for knowledge acts under constraints. You repeat the already quoted Heidegger-sentence that “Wissenschaft denkt nicht,” science does not think, but in a different context and meaning.

3. According to you, while we are thinking we are distancing ourselves from the world of appearances, we close ourselves into ourselves. We are not there where we are, and we are in the absolute present. Thinking moves in another world, the world of the universals. It is homeless.

I try to address these questions one by one.

Take first the three faculties or capacities of the mind. According to you, all three of them are autonomous faculties or capacities. You interpret both the term “autonomy” and that of “faculty” in several different ways. Yet in the main, what you call autonomy is identical to the “a priori” of the philosophical tradition. This cannot be my misreading, for you tell us repeatedly that these capacities are “pure.” You speak, for example, repeatedly about “pure thinking” employing a category we are familiar with from the metaphysical tradition. Pure is also tantamount to autonomous. As a result, you ought to identify these capacities with independent mental faculties whether you aware of this or not. Thinking, willing, and judging are thus independent a priori faculties, similar to the faculties of the mind in Kant, although not entirely identical to them.

Why not entirely identical?

First, because in Kant understanding as the faculty of knowing is also a priori and to accept this would run against your basic conviction. Surely, you could conscript for your support the Kantian thought that pure understanding is in itself empty, whereas pure reason contains ideas; the activity of theoretical reason does not result in knowledge. Yet Kant does not follow from all this that understanding does not think. Let me refer again to your favorite quotation from the Third Critique. The three maxims of thinking are the three maxims of common understanding (*Verstand*) not of reason.

Second, you criticize Kant for his disregard of “Willing” as an independent autonomous faculty, for identifying “Willing with Reason” in its practical employment. Allow me, dear Hannah, if you accept the soul

sack, better subscribe to the Kantian. Hegel's ironical and well-placed remark about the soul sack packed with unrelated and independent capacities, hits you even more than Kant. Contrary to Kant, on your map of the mind the three autonomous faculties do not connect at all.

Third, you propose to discuss those three faculties in their historical order of appearance. If, however, those three faculties are autonomous and unconnected faculties of the mind, what can this "historical sequence" mean? For the a priori faculties of the mind, which constitute the life of the mind as such, are but "the" human faculties, the faculties of the *homo sapiens*. There cannot be a sequence of their appearance, as there is no such sequence in Kant. If you insist all the same on the order of their appearance, you spell out a secret. What is your secret? That you do not speak about the appearance of the three autonomous faculties, but about the order of appearance of three philosophical categories. Already, Aristotle ruminated about "pure *thinking*," whereas "pure willing" was discovered by Augustine, and finally "pure judgment" by Kant. Your secret does not remain finally a secret, for you yourself emphasize the historical character of the discovery of those faculties.

Yet can we speak here about "discovery?" Since at one point in your book you speak of philosophical categories as metaphors, you can hardly stick to the suggestion that, for example, "Willing" was "there" before Augustine had discovered it? After all, "Willing" does not resemble Australia, to wait patiently for its discovery.

If you asked my opinion about your three faculties, I would answer that in my mind there are no faculties at all, but different manifestations and activities of thinking, and that there are not only three of them. Moreover, I suggest disregarding the distinction between pure and impure, which results from an old metaphysical/epistemological suspicion. All the manifestations of the mind can be directly or indirectly connected or non-connected. I do not accept either the standing hierarchy between our mental capacities or their manifestations. The hierarchy, if there is one, depends on the thinker's perspective or the question under scrutiny. Philosophies operate normally in this manner. They let the faculties appear in different character masks to play their constantly changing yet always allotted role on the stage of the world theater.

Let me turn to the second question.

Thinking, the first of the three faculties, is, as you say, an end in itself. Man thinks of thinking, he thinks for thinking's sake. Thinking moves in the world of universals, in the nowhere, among essences.

What you suggest is perhaps true of metaphysical thinking of a kind, yet you in fact do not regard metaphysical thinking as pure thinking at all,

since it is about something, for it relates to former thoughts and is also a quest for "Truth." The sole philosopher whose thinking you consider pure is, of course, Socrates. This is why you must reject Heidegger's saying that Socrates stood in the draught of Being.

Briefly, in your opinion, understanding, logos, uses thinking as a means to the end of knowing. Thinking is no more autonomous, it is put into the service of sciences. This can be made plausible. You repeat Heidegger's saying that science does not think, and I repeat what I already said, that this does not mean that scientists do not think. You tell us that only autonomous thinking deserves the name "thinking." Scientists, however, proceed step-by-step in logical moves, they demonstrate, and at the end they must reach their goal, the solution of a problem, which yields true knowledge. Dear Hannah, you must know that no scientist could have ever made a discovery while thinking in this fashion! Your model fits better the case of an ape who tries to find the banana in the maze than the way the mind of scientist works. Worse even, you add that thinking cannot yield intuition. Why not? How not? Because an intuition is the solution of a problem? And what if it offers an insight into meaning?

Contrary to you, I believe that the different manifestations of thinking do not exclude one another. Since we are living, we are thinking. It makes a difference if we are daydreaming, or just thinking of something hidden in our memory, if we are thinking about something, or thinking in order to know, to discover, to find out the truth about something. You are right, in the case of mere problem-solving or riddle-solving we use thinking as means to an end, means to achieve knowledge, knowledge that may cumulate. Yes, thinking as thinking is really, so to speak, contaminated if used as a means to achieve and to cumulate knowledge. Yet even in your presentation one does not think for thinking's sake, although thinking is enjoyable, but it is enjoyable if it is about something, about that what you call "meaning." This is how we think about a sentence of a poem.

You make a case for philosophy, which engages in thinking, not in pure thinking, thinking, yet in a kind of thinking that is, in the Platonist understanding, the second best. Philosophy's job is, after all, meaning-rendering and not exactly problem-solving. But philosophy renders meaning, more often than not, full of problems. For the typical philosophical question "what is?" refers to problems. "What is time, what is language, what is meaning?" Questions are problems." "Why is there something rather than nothing?" "What is the cause of evil?" "What is the essence of existence?" They are the insoluble problems, the unanswerable questions, we philosophers keep answering. We are not pure thinkers. You might interrupt me and tell me that this is exactly what you had in mind, pure

thinking is just a regulative idea.

Perhaps we can arrive at a quasi-Kantian solution. Thinking should not be used in human life only as a means but also as an end in itself. Yet what you call "pure thinking" is either identical to mental life as such, or it is just a chimera.

Arriving at this point, I discover a few additional questions about your text, and I invite you or rather your spirit to join me on this adventure. The questions still concern the relation between thinking, knowing, and truth.

You identify knowledge-oriented thinking with problem-solving thinking, the quest for knowledge with the quest for truth, the quest for truth with the quest of true knowledge, the quest for true knowledge with the quest of certainty, the quest for certainty with truth that compels. I do not subscribe to any of those propositions.

Let me begin with the beginning. True, we do not think about things we already know. If something is the case beyond doubt, if we take something for granted, we stop thinking "about" it, for if we did not, we could not proceed further either in thinking or in knowledge. Phylogenetically, knowledge is only sometimes cumulative, yet ontogenetically it is mostly so. Otherwise we could not speak about experience at all.

We could not proceed further either in thinking or in knowing if we were never thinking about things we know. Both critical thinking and scientific thinking calls into question precisely taken-for-granted knowledge. This is the case especially in post-enlightenment times, also in political thinking. And I do not need to tell you that modern scientific knowledge is scientific precisely because it is falsifiable. Only knowledge can be falsifiable by further thinking, only knowledge or belief, which is a kind of knowledge, can be subjected to doubt.

Yet even if we do not think "about" something that we already know, we use our knowledge also as means to further thinking. Zero knowledge equals zero thinking. We need to know one custom at least in order to ponder the meaning of customs, we need to know that there are seasons in order to contemplate them, we need to know a Bartok quartet in order to interpret it. You say that thinking is subversive. But it has to subvert "something" already there in order to be subversive. The interlocutors of Socrates had to believe that they knew the answers to his questions already for Socrates to proceed and to subvert their self-indulgent certitude. Your interesting Socrates renders meaning and thinks, particularly within himself, yet he knows nothing, makes no statements whatsoever and does not aim at truth. You take Socrates' irony seriously. But apart from this, even if I agreed that Socrates never makes a statement, I could still point out that he calls into question the statements of his interlocutors, and even

if he does not aim a truth, he still proves with arguments that the truths in the minds of his interlocutors are not truths at all.

I told you earlier at some point that even thinking as an end itself, as a conscious or unconscious stream of thinking, leaves behind something in the psychological, moral, and intellectual personality of the thinker. I agree with you that neither the half-conscious nor the unconscious stream of thinking aims normally at knowledge. But this does not mean that they cannot yield knowledge. Recognition is also knowledge, and so is intuitive discovery. We can recognize something, discover something also in our dreams.

We think about ourselves mainly to get to know ourselves a little better at least. Self-knowledge (“Gnoti szeauton!”) is a very important Socratic knowledge, but problem-solving it is not. You may say that this is not knowledge but “rendering meaning,” but our dear Socrates would not know the difference, and even in our terms self-knowledge is either meaning-rendering or it is not. There is a moment in our childhood when we become aware mostly, suddenly of our mortality. This is knowledge, and not a minor one, yet not problem-solving. We try rendering meaning to this true knowledge if we can. We are thinking about it. This is a typical case of thinking about something we know for certain.

It is interesting how you try to avoid your self-created pitfalls (thinking is not based on knowing and does never yield knowledge) when you return to the Eichmann case. You write that the end—the goal—of thinking is not knowledge but the ability to discriminate between good and evil. Dear Hannah, the distinction between “know what” and “know how” does not help you here. One cannot tell apart good from evil without knowing that there is good and evil, and knowing the situation of choice. And such choice produces knowledge, since recognizing evil is also knowledge. “This is it” is knowledge, identification is knowledge. Eichmann did not know evil.

And I have not even mentioned mystic experiences, which lead to recognition, discovery, of knowledge, and to Truth. In mystic experience, meaning-rendering, Truth, recognition, and intuitive discovery coalesce.

Truth, as certitude, is certainly never the yield of problem-solving anyhow. It is either a trivial experience or the yield of mystical illumination, or revelatory experience. The second is mostly the kind of Truth a modern man desires yet does not want to possess, just as Lessing formulated it in his famous parable, quoted both by Kierkegaard and by Wittgenstein. “If God turned to me,” said Lessing, “with the following words: ‘I have in my right hand eternal Truth, in my left hand the never ceasing quest for Truth, which one would you choose?’ I answered him

‘Dear God, I choose your left hand, for Eternal Truth is for You alone.’”

But let me turn now briefly to the third group of questions.

While we are thinking, so you say, we leave behind the world of phenomena, we are alone, we are not there where we are, we are homeless. Thinking is like dying, dying to the world.

You are the expert of Heidegger’s philosophy but at this point I must rectify you. Heidegger says that thinking is not provided with the power of direct acting, that is, no action follows from it. This is true beyond doubt, moreover a kind of triviality. You, however, leave out the word “direct” (“unmittelbar”) and replace the “not follow” with “never can follow:” that is, according to your interpretation, no action can result from thinking at all. This interpretation, however, refutes your whole argument in the Eichmann case. For if no action can follow from thinking at all, then none can follow from not thinking either.

I share your observation that while becoming immersed in thinking we move far away from the world of phenomena. Thinking philosophically leads the thinker into “another world.” We all know the Thales anecdote, told by Plato, and we are aware of the laughter of the Thracian maid. Socrates, standing as an immovable log for several minutes, deeply immersed in himself in a kind of incommunicable mystical contemplation is another Platonian presentation of the worldlessness of philosophers—I am sorry, however, to add, that worldless contemplation, self-isolation, moving away from the world of phenomena can also lead to action, even direct action. Moses on Mount Sinai stood in the other world, isolated, far from appearances, yet he returned to the world of appearances and acted in accordance of his otherworldly experience. This is also, in fact, what Plato asks the philosophers to do in his elaboration of the cave simile. You who have dwelled in the world of ideas must come down and act.

Yet there is worse to come.

Significant natural scientists go through very similar experiences. They concentrate on the issue—call it “problem”—immersed in thinking. They dwell no more among us. They neither hear nor speak. Yet (“horribile dictu!”) they are immersed in thinking because they want to know something. Or even worse, at least for your position, they are internally compelled to solve a mathematical problem.

Very similar is the experience of a person in the state of intensive daydreaming, or of someone who is concentrating on listening to music. The last two cases, especially of permanent daydreaming, may fit your description perhaps the best. But, as far as I know you, you do not sympathize with a permanent daydreamer, precisely because she cuts herself off from action since no act follows from her dreams. And you

disapprove of her perhaps also because she stays no longer with us in our shared life of appearances, but moves into another, a solitary world of appearances.

The difference between the daydreamer and the philosopher is obvious. The philosopher moves away from the life of the appearances altogether, but she is not alone. In the world of universals and essences, it gathers together a good company. She meets other philosophers, she creates her predecessor (as Plato and Heidegger created their own Parmenides and Hegel his Heraclitus) and she polemizes with everyone else. For the time being, I am sitting entirely alone in a deserted house immersed in this paper, I am thinking about thinking, knowledge, and truth. Yet I am not lonely, not even in the state of solitude. I am with you, and you are a wonderful company.

Dear Hanna Arendt, I am certain, if one can be certain at all in any a case, that you like philosophy as an agonistic genre and are delighted in polemics while bored stiff by academic praises and the constant reciting of your books' contents. If I know you, and perhaps I do, what you have always wanted most was to inspire others, to provoke polemics, contradictions, and thereby make a difference in your world. You were constantly grateful to have received the wonderful opportunity to spend a few decades on earth and you used your time well.

In your last book, you organically continued to do what you have done all your life. You offered inspiration, provocation; you made an impact on the world not through direct action, but through thinking. Yet it happened for the first time in your lectures on thinking that you spoke directly of your philosophical life as the greatest passion. You were never an Achilles, thanks God, and not even a Disraeli or a Rosa Luxemburg, whom you loved and respected. You were a thinker. That is, you are a thinker and will be a thinker. Thinkers do not need historians, bards to immortalize their names. And let me quote Juliet, "what is in a name?"

Human life is thinking. The yields of thinking are thoughts and the personality. A personality, who dies, continues to live in the memory of few. You have the privilege to live also in and through your thoughts; you worked hard for this privilege. You became entitled to sell your daydreams because they can also be ours. Your personality continues to live in your thoughts, in our daydreams. Your thoughts continue to provoke and make an impact. We still want to be inspired by you, to be provoked by you, to be angry at you, to contradict you. Our age is not a desert, after all. Do you see it?