

The retelling of an intellectual relationship

Paulina Sosnowska: *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger. Philosophy, Modernity and Education*, Lanham/Boulder/New York: Lexington Books 2019, 223 p., e-book 38\$, Hardcover 105\$.

It is a common topos that the relationship between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger was a special one; studies about their connection fill entire shelves as an object of scholarly and biographical research. So, what is the reason for retelling this story of intellectual influence, which, as we know, was highly one-sided? First and foremost, because new questions are constantly being raised and this affair has neither been concluded nor discussed in its entirety.

Paulina Sosnowska, an Assistant Professor at the University of Warsaw, has taken up this challenge in her book *Arendt i Heidegger. Pedagogiczna obietnica filozofii*. The English translation is now available, and the book has several strengths. Firstly, it largely refrains from German umbrella terms for the basic concepts of Heideggerian philosophy, instead attempting to translate them into fluent and, above all, readable English. Although this is not always entirely accurate and some variations in meaning are lost in translation, it basically reads “naturally” in the sense of a successful translation. Secondly, there is a consistently comprehensible structure, which has a few gaps (more on this later), but is nevertheless convincing overall. Thirdly, the author repeatedly engages critically but engages in a critical and well-founded way on the intellectual relationship between Arendt and Heidegger. She thus offers a comprehensive and contextualised debate. Even though not all respective contributions are taken into account, this is understandable considering the size of the book.

The approach Paulina Sosnowska takes is academically convincing: It is less a matter of showing *how* Heidegger influenced Arendt, both as her teacher and later as a figure in the background, but rather of showing which consequences for Hannah Arendt’s thinking arose as a result of their intellectual relationship. The author tries neither to portray Arendt as a mere epigone of Heidegger nor to create breaks and fractions where there are none. She gets to the heart of it in her summary when she points out that Arendt’s thinking would never have taken place as we know it without Heidegger, but also explains that, at the same time, Arendt’s own, specific thinking did not just consist in following certain well-trodden paths of the Freiburg philosopher (“*Arendt did not outgrow Heidegger: but not because she was unable to exceed his level. She simply went another way [...]*”, p. 212). This statement is anything but trivial. While for a long time the prevailing opinion in research was that Arendt’s philosophy or her political theory was an *ex negative turn* of Heidegger’s philosophy (natality vs. death, plurality vs. loneliness) (p. viii, 137), Sosnowska makes it clear that the intellectual confrontation remained ambivalent. Arendt did, however, follow Heidegger in some matters such as her

discussion of technology or the historical perspective on the fundamentals of modernity, but even here she did not do so without distance and independence.

It should be critically noted that, despite otherwise announced in the outline, Heidegger's philosophy takes up a considerably larger amount of content in Sosnowska's work than Arendt's. Particularly in the first chapters, Heidegger's views on education (especially the writings on Plato), to the university (up to the infamous *Rektorsrede*) and to "*authenticity*" is illuminated in a very exegetically detailed manner based on individual writings. Arendt's way of thinking on these questions is partly taken up very late, especially in Chapter 7, but is only dealt with marginally in the respective thematic chapters. The question arises as to whether the attempt to present Arendt as an independent thinker in her ambivalent relationship to Heidegger still stands in the light of this imbalance.

Such a judgement cannot be upheld when considering the work as a whole because Paulina Sosnowska, especially in the last part of her three-part book, once again clearly emphasises the basic pillars of Arendt's thought. It is not clear why Foucault and Agamben, who make similar but nevertheless different statements when it comes to content, are placed at her side. Of course, these two philosophers also come from an intensive engagement with Heidegger's thought and direct their philosophy towards practical action. But the connections seem too loose and too vague to fully justify bringing them into the final chapter. Of course, one can place Agamben and Foucault alongside Hannah Arendt, especially in the case of practical action. But there are two major problems here: First, neither thinker is mentioned or introduced in the previous chapters. While the similarities in political thought are described, the function of this thinking remains unmentioned. Second, Sosnowska points out that Foucault is an "unknown ally" (p. 168). That is in fact correct but does not make the inner context of political thinking any clearer. It would have been desirable to clarify more clearly, why Agamben and Foucault appear in this chapter and why it is significant for the question. Arendt shows that the thread of tradition has been broken, and it is necessary to find a new relationship and here, there are indeed connections to Foucault, but precisely also to Derrida, Camus and Sartre, to name but a few.

It remains the great merit of the work to highlight and clearly demonstrate the fundamental reorganisation of political thought that (also) began with Hannah Arendt. The attempt of philosophy since Plato to strengthen the *vita contemplativa* against the *vita activa*, to deprive philosophical thought as a whole of a worldliness, has clearly ended with Arendt. The redemption of the political thought as part of a philosophical reflection will remain connected with the name of Hannah Arendt and hence the educational function of philosophy does not remain in an unworldly vacuum of ideas but proves to be to turn towards the world.

In her critical examination of the debate to date, Paulina Sosnowska has therefore succeeded in producing an extraordinarily readable summary of the intellectual relationship between Heidegger and Arendt, which largely dispenses with all biographical

details, emancipates itself from the banal view of a master-student relationship and is thus able to present what is in each case unique about the thinking of these two intellectually interwoven philosophers.

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