

Wolfgang R. Heuer, *Cosmos and Republic. Arendtian Explorations of the Loss and Recovery of Politics*

Book Review: Wolfgang R. Heuer, *Cosmos and Republic. Arendtian Explorations of the Loss and Recovery of Politics*, Bielefeld: transcript 2023. 340 pp., € 45,00.

Wolfgang Heuer is a renowned specialist of Hannah Arendt, who authored numerous articles about her work, published an extensive biography of the famous theorist and even curated an exhibition on Arendt in Berlin in 2006. This time, in a collection of twenty essays, reminiscent in some way of the form used on many occasions by Arendt herself (*Between Past and Future*, *Men in Dark Times* and *Crisis of the Republic*), Heuer offers a series of original contributions, articles and chapters from books and journals and translations of texts previously published in German or Spanish, from the last twenty years, that together form an enlightening discussion on the current crises under the light of Arendt's philosophy.

From the outset, in two introductory texts, Heuer aims to a (re)politicize certain concepts from a "citizen's perspective", "beyond the academic and intellectual worlds", therefore acknowledging the limits of the intellectual world. This is a respond to numerous critics of Arendt, but also appears as a way to follow her process and understanding of the importance of the person/personality in the world. This understanding of Arendt's contribution becomes particularly salient when Heuer tackles contemporary, even topical issues, such as the Utøya massacre in 2011 or the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Throughout the essays, we find a selection of Arendtian themes of that are known interests of the author: the need for politicization, a certain critique of liberalism, the ideal of republican responsibility, the significance of the notion of personality, an attachment to the federal idea and the fundamental importance of plurality and cosmopolitanism. These themes are also what organizes the twenty essays in five different sections.

In the first section, "When Politics Vanishes", Heuer examines the implications of modernity for the public sphere, as politics is diminished or even eliminated, leading to the loss of freedom. This disappearance of politics leads to increased solitude and can give rise to violent phenomena (what Heuer calls "border-crossing, from hooligans and military snipers to Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik) or the "post-truth era".

The second section, "The Call of Responsibility", continues part of the discussion on truth, but above all explores the notion of responsibility, especially through the lens of classical republicanism and its values of courage and virtue (for example, by analyzing the figure of Willy Brandt in this light). This section also discusses the need for power outside the sole realm of rationality, taking as an example a new economy of sustainability.

In the third section, "Images and Emotions", Heuer focuses on the question of war, in particular through a dialogue between Arendt and Jürgen Habermas on the current



conflict in Ukraine, and between Arendt and Tadeusz Borowski and George Tabori on how to grasp “worldlessness”, senselessness and understanding beyond what can be “simply” put into words.

The fourth section, “Federations”, features what I consider two of the book’s most important essays. The first identifies federalism as a “hidden treasure”, in the same way that council politics might be understood for Arendt’s readers. Heuer is careful to specify that he is talking here not about an intergovernmental “technocratic tool”, but about an integral form of federalism, a true philosophy of reality, “[...] that combines the political-institutional form of power-sharing with the principle of existential, intersubjective relations and builds federalism from the communities, the local citizenry” (Heuer, 2023: 198). The second outstanding essay, “Bridge and Border - Queering Europe”, is highly original: following the work of Cynthia Weber in international relations, Heuer proposes that only a queer thinking of the “and/or” rather than the “either/or” can do justice to Arendt’s idea of a future federal plurality, allowing the preservation of the complexity of the federalist ideal while reversing the emptiness and invisibility of this complexity and mitigating the structural contradiction of nation and federation.

The fifth and final section, “From Plurality to Cosmos”, addresses these central notions of Arendtian political ontology, and tries to define “cosmos”, “cosmopolitanism”, “nature” and “plurality”. The section concludes on an essay that proposes an encounter between Arendt’s republicanism and the exploration of nature by Alexander von Humboldt. This contribution succeeds at pointing a way of thinking elevating sustainability to a “decisive criterion” in its relationship with nature, based on “worldwide unity of man and nature” and opens up a potential new area of research on “republican-biocentric perspective”.

Overall, this collection of essays demonstrates with panache the relevance of Arendtian thought to the analysis and development of political reflections, including on the major crises our times. Heuer’s use of Arendt’s philosophy, far from being distorting or opportunistic, continues the Arendtian contribution to thinking about the world, and allow him to create spaces for dialogue with contemporary thinkers and phenomena. Overall, the ideas and concepts put forward by Heuer are a successful exercise at bringing Hannah Arendt to the 21st century.

The compelling writing of Wolfgang Heuer, strong on both style and substance, makes *Cosmos and Republic. Arendtian Explorations of the Loss and Recovery of Politics* not only a pleasant read for Arendt’s enthusiasts, but a valuable contribution to the literature and scholarship on many current relevant debates in political philosophy.

Milan Bernard

Université de Montréal