

Open Letter to Hannah Arendt on Thinking

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RESUMEN

Agnes Heller se ocupa en este artículo de la primera parte de la última obra de Hannah Arendt, "Pensar", de *La vida del espíritu*, con el ánimo de establecer una discusión sobre el valor de esta actividad en la vida humana. Heller subraya su acuerdo general con la gran filósofa alemana-americana. Pero también critica su retórica y las debilidades teóricas de su argumento. Para Arendt, si queremos actuar políticamente tenemos que pararnos a pensar; para Heller, la vida humana es pensar.

Palabras clave: Arendt/La vida del espíritu/Heidegger/pensar/mal/Kant/Wittgenstein

ABSTRACT

In this article, Agnes Heller deals with Arendt's "On thinking", the first part of her work *The Life of the Spirit* in order to open a discussion on its value to life. Heller stresses her agreement with the great German American philosopher. But also points to her rhetoric's and pose some critical remarks on its theoretical flaws. To Arendt, in order to act politically, one has to stop and think; to Heller, human life is thinking.

Key Words: Arendt/ The Life of the Mind/ Heidegger/ Thinking/ Evil/Kant/Wittgenstein

Dear Hannah Arendt,

Two decades ago I have already written an essay about your work on *The Life of the Mind*. Having been invited once again to a conference discussing also your work, I re-read the books in order to refresh my memory. After the second reading have I decided to speak this time only about the first volume, "On Thinking", since this is the book you were still able to put in a proper shape, although no more to correct.

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

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

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

Thus, first about rhetoric.

You put your interpretations of our chief mental practice 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 also radicalize Heidegger on many counts, for example insofar as you reject Heidegger' 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

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think “about” anything at all, we are just thinking. You suggest at the same time also 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 exactly complexities need to be avoided in rhetoric.

Thus, in my view, only the elementary message of your wording is close here to that of Heidegger, hence your rhetoric itself has nothing to do with him. In fact the style and the pathos of your book follows 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 on the rhetoric of Cicero, in fact also one of your models, to whom you frequently refer. Although, unlike Cato, Cicero or Seneca, you never had the opportunity, neither 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, rather the opposite, since you assigned political action the highest place of the 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 that far to speak highly about a spoiled, narrow minded and sulking infantile adult, called Achilles, whose only distinguished skill was to kill. In fact, (you) remained a modern republican, who played the role of a female Cicero in America, the representative republic of the 20 century. Your rhetoric centered about the same matters that the rhetoric of 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 be 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 about 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 case for the withdrawal into solitude. He mixed Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, even Aristotle and else. This mixture has always served a political pointer.

You have done something very similar beginning with your interpretation of totalitarianism up to 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 anymore 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 a Cicero was a new man, an outsider in Rome of his age. Outsiders, who come always 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 let the political intent from sight. Your eloquence, which worked well, and sometimes even splendidly in political thinking, does not work well here. At least, so I believe and a try to show it. On this field rhetoric rather covers up not wanted theoretical inconsistencies. The occasional philosophical mixture of Socrates, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant and Heidegger does not serve here a fruitful purpose. In a purely theoretical pursuit one can surely arrive at antinomies or paradoxes, yet one need to be aware of it that they are

antinomies or -paradoxes. If you remain unaware of it, they are just unintended inconsistencies and the mixture will remain undrinkable.

Let me start at 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 by 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 un/Kantian. You dismiss namely the Kantian identification of "pure" with "a priori", for this gambit has no function in your critical rhetorics. The Aristotelian and even the Hegelian understanding of "thinking that thinks itself" seem 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 answering the question what thinking is, rather to answering the question what thinking does. This is a fine 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 the two 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 in 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 it over whether it is right, good. What one is about to do, one has to think it over "what" one is in fact doing. You, Hannah, suggest further on 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 is 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" maybe 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 "presencing" 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, yet 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 rather in terms of clash 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 with thinking, and thinking is identical with human life as such. The brain dead 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 from 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 which 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 with 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 thesis, exactly the one which has inspired you to write a book on thinking. I have in mind Eichmann in 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, 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”, 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 I 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 asked also 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 they are thoughts. Thoughts are preliminary results of the process of thinking. These “preliminary results of thinking” can last throughout ones 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 such 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 an 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 extremely problematic already at this point one of your strongest claim 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, 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 more true, 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 further 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 in order 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 which 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 the 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 with 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 are 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 with 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, further on that thinking as 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 order of their historical 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 a 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 has 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 to disregard 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 and their manifestations. The hierarchy, if there is one, depends on the perspective of the thinker 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 an 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 proceeds step by step in logical moves, they demonstrate, and at the end they must reach their goal, the solution of a problem, that 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, then 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 to philosophy, which engages in thinking, not in pure thinking, thinking, yet in a kind of thinking which 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 to 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 with 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 concern still the relation of 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. Philogenetically 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 what 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 know 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 mind 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 no 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 minor one, yet no 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 leads 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 Tharcian maid. Socrates, standing as an immovable log for several minutes, deeply immersed in himself in a kind of uncommunicable 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 full ear in listening to music. The last two cases, specially that 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 Heracleitos) 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 and 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, still 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?