UV9409 - Hannah Arendt: Worldliness, Plurality, and Education

It is not without difficulties to bring Arendt to the educational discourse since she wrote little that formally addresses education (Mackler). However, encapsulated in Arendt’s notion of a world, in her terms of action, natality and plurality as well as in her understanding of thinking and judging we find thoughts that can have a place in education.

Is education a matter of preparing students for life? Or should education contribute to make us human and to enable us to share the world with others? In turning to Hannah Arendt we meet a political thinker whose approaches are helpful to think through educational tasks and challenges of our own time. Political life seeks to “make it bearable for us to live together with other people, strangers forever, in the same world, and make it possible for them to bear with us” (Hannah Arendt). According to Arendt, life and world are interrelated phenomena, therefore education is not only about “life” itself (how to make a living) but also about the “world” (our practices of world-building).

If we think of the educators’ responsibility to gradually introduce the child to the world, to foster an understanding of the world as it is, then Our children are the hope for the future, and Arendt turns our attention towards the double task of the educator: to protect the child and to counter world-alienation; the teacher’s task, then, would be to gradually introduce the child to the world, then turning to Arendt is particularly relevant, because worldliness (“a mode of engagement”), natality (“the miracle of beginning”), and plurality (“the basic condition of both action and speech”) at the core of her thinking.

However, in times when education has lost authority, in Arendt’s view this loss reflects a more generalized symptom, the “break in tradition”, educators are facing a particular challenge: they have to prepare children and young people, “newcomers” in an old world, a) to be able to live a human life in a common world (“togetherness-in-plurality”) and b) to foster an attitude of caring for the world – since the world, to maintain it, from time to time, has to be “set right”. To enable young people to take responsibility for the world they need to exercise their ability to think and to judge.

Arendt was convinced that when we judge we experience the world as common to all of us because the prerequisite of judging is imagination and imagination helps to develop representative thinking or, in Kant’s language, “erweiterte Denkungsart”. Story-telling nourishes our faculty of imagination; from Arendt we can pick up the “idea of visiting”, bridging time and space, thereby exercising our ability to view from a position different from our own. Thus stories will not only expand our own view, they will also nourish our need of feeling at home in the world, thereby counteracting the threat of world-alienation.

Content of the course:

- The course is divided into 4 parts, each of them contains a) an introductory lecture, b) a following debate.
- It is organized thematically. The proposed themes are important in Arendt’s thinking, and will shed light on the interrelation between worldliness, plurality, and education. We will read Arendt’s essay “The Crisis in Education” (1958) in the context of The Human Condition (1958), and therefore start with some of the key terms she develops in The Human Condition.
- The course contains 4 main themes:
1. **Hannah Arendt’s concept of world**: the distinction between private and public and her understanding of the political:

- the terms *natality* and *plurality* since they enable the world to exist
- human beings’ capability to act since action both destroys and creates the world – as well as Arendt’s understanding of politics, based on the fact of human plurality and natality, as well as Arendt’s new understanding of a key term in political philosophy: power

  ➢ Plurality (HC, 7; HC, 176) [is the condition of action and speech]

  “Human plurality, […] has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. […] Human distinctness is not the same as otherness. […] In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.”

- Modes of activity or the three main terms of *vita activa*: labor, work, and action (HC: 7; HC: 8; HC: 93; HC: 143)

  ➢ The two tools to cope with the unpredicatability and irreversibility of action: our abilities to forgive and to promise; “forgiveness allows freedom” (Edgoose), [example: Nelson Mandela]

- What does the public realm as the common world require? How are the public, the private and the social realm related?
- How do labor, work and action contribute “to our humanity and individual flourishing”?
- The public realm (HC: 198-199)
- The distinction between the private, the social and the political realm
- “What does Hannah Arendt’s diagnosis of worldlessness has to say to educational concerns”?

**Text:**


**Secondary literature:**


2. **Hannah Arendt: education and renewing our common world or: her claim that teachers should introduce young people to “the world” as it is and “the promise of re-birth”** (Edgoose)

- The teacher’s double protective role
- The school as a “sheltering, mediating place”
• To introduce young people to the world as it is cannot avoid to take serious the phenomenon of world-alienation

• Arendt’s view on authority in education or: Why does she defend authority in education, yet not in politics?

• The key notion: natality
  Unpredictability, the sensitivity to the unexpected miracle” (Edgoose)

Text:


Secondary literature:


3. Hannah Arendt: Thinking and Judging – our instruments of orientation in the world

(or: why education as imparting knowledge is not enough)

Crisis and judgment belong together. When we judge we experience the world we share as one we have in common. Arendt said: “Insofar as judgment allows us to live in and share a common world with others, opportunity to cultivate this faculty seems vital”. What is a judgment? Are judging and worldliness (shared reality) related?

• The interrelatedness between thinking and judging will lead us a) to another faculty: imagination and b) to Immanuel Kant’s concept of reflective judgment as well as his notion of thinking with an ‘enlarged mentality’.

• Solitary thinking and its ethical implications (the exemplary story of what can happen if one doesn’t think is, in Arendt’s view, Adolf Eichmann)

Text:


Secondary literature:


4. Hannah Arendt and Democracy

In both Europe and other parts of the world, we are witnessing a political crisis, which makes it necessary to redefine the political. That’s why we make institutions or laws, to protect and to limit, to guarantee equal rights, to preserve a “stable existence and identity of human beings in
human affairs” (Fred Dewey). However, it seems as if politics has become mere technical administration, and that citizens have turned into mere spectators. Faced with this situation of crisis, turning to Arendt allows becoming deeply aware that institutions cannot protect what is at the core of politics: freedom. What matters, then, are relationships and our responses to the world.

- The birth of *democratic* political freedom: the historical examples of late eighteenth century revolutions; foundation: the new beginning in politics
- Political freedom and the spirit of the revolution
  - the formation of public opinion & the space for dissent
- Arendt: a severe critic of representative democracy
- What is needed to “keep the citizens participators in public affairs” (Elisabeth Young-Bruehl)? → vital publics (Arendt, Dewey), i.e. “what Jefferson called wards – little republics”
  → the principle of federation as separation and entanglement of powers within a state and between states (federalism, cosmopolitanism)
- The importance of communication
- How does Arendt think the political possibility of participation in mass societies? And what does this mean for education?

**Text:**


**Secondary literature:**
