Verbum et Ecclesia
ISSN: (Online) 2074-7705, (Print) 1609-9982

On thinking

Author:
Dirkie Smit[1,2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Religion and Theology, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

[2]Reformed Theology and Public Life, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, United States of America

Corresponding author:
Dirkie Smit,
djs1@sun.ac.za

Dates:
Received: 02 June 2021
Accepted: 21 June 2021
Published: 05 Aug. 2021

How to cite this article:
Smit, D., 2021, 'On thinking', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(2), a2311. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i2.2311

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The paper engages Wentzel van Huyssteen's lifelong fascination and occupation with thinking, for him particularly thinking as problem-solving. Responding to Van Huyssteen's own invitation, it brings Hannah Arendt's thinking on thinking in conversation with his own thinking by considering five crucial characteristics of the ways in which she both described and practised thinking over decades. These characteristics include: her thinking as responsibility, thinking in dark times, thinking without banister, thinking in public and thinking as thanksgiving. In the process the paper revisits all her well-known books and essays on these themes, whilst also pointing to some of the roots of her thinking in the similarly classic thinking on thinking of her mentor Martin Heidegger. It concludes by pointing to the major conflict between philosophical traditions concerned with rational problem-solving and unravelling puzzles, respectively, exemplified by the reputedly shocking 'poker' encounter between Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and expresses hope for ongoing conversation about this seeming conflict over thinking with Van Huyssteen and his work.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Thinking about thinking, the essay addresses methodological questions in public theology, in interdisciplinary conversation with philosophy and political theory. Distinguishing faculties of the mind – thinking, willing, judging – it challenges which kinds of questions belong to public theology, with particular implications for doctrinal theology, theological ethics and political theology.

Keywords: thinking; Hannah Arendt; Wentzel van Huyssteen; Martin Heidegger; Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Thinking about thinking

Wentzel van Huyssteen spent his career thinking about thinking. This was true during all phases of his thinking – initially focussing on critical realism as model of rationality, then arguing for interdisciplinarity shaping postmodern rationality, and finally pursuing the evolutionary origins of human rationality, including morality (Gregersen 2017; Reynhout 2006).

He regarded thinking as 'problem-solving' – and again this was true during all these phases. Already his master's thesis on Merleau-Ponty was about 'the problem' of relativism (Van Huyssteen 1966) and developing his Pannenberg dissertation (Van Huyssteen 1970) in his ground-breaking *Theology and the Justification of Faith*, he argued that Pannenberg's theology was 'science about God' and the object of his theology was 'God as problem' (Van Huyssteen 1986).

Engaging colleagues honouring him at his Retirement Symposium as James McCord Professor of Theology and Science at Princeton Theological Seminary, he once again defended his lifelong project as an attempt to do 'philosophical theology that has conceptual problem-solving at the very heart of its own academic integrity' (Van Huyssteen 2015:206). In a Memorial Lecture for Johan Heyns, he looked back on his own career as response to a question by Heyns during his own study years, namely 'how is theology to be understood as a science?' This 'very question became the most basic research question for his own academic career' and helped him 'to put into words what would eventually become the defining character of his own theology', searching for 'solutions' and 'problem-solving' within post-foundationalist thinking (Van Huyssteen 2017e).

Still, his contribution to honour me, asking whether theology should take evolutionary ethics seriously, was an invitation to 'a conversation with Hannah Arendt' (Van Huyssteen 2011) and since his stay as Research Fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS) in 2010, he intended further conversation with her, not yet published (Van Huyssteen 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e).

Note: Special Collection: Festschrift for Wentzel van Huyssteen.

In an essay, ‘Living with Strangers? On Constructing Ethical Discourses’, celebrating his extraordinary career, I already engaged his question about evolutionary ethics (Smit 2017; see also my earlier tribute, Smit 2013a). Yet, his call to a conversation about Arendt remains both unanswered and fascinating. After all, few were as respected as Arendt for thinking about thinking – thinking about her views and practices could indeed lead to intriguing and timely conversations, as also argued in Young-Bruehl (2006) and Bernstein (2018).

Thinking as responsibility

Arendt became famous – albeit controversial – after *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963, her report on Eichmann’s trial. There were also other reasons for the world-wide controversies – particularly her comments on the role of Jewish Councils and on the problematic political nature of the judicial process in the absence of international law – but the main focus was what many had seen as the scandalous way in which she used the seemingly shocking term banality of evil (Arendt 2006; for excerpts only on Eichmann, see Arendt 2005b).

It was for these observers as if she was not morally outraged enough. Many expected her to describe Eichmann as moral monster, but instead she perceived a normal person on trial, just another bureaucrat, someone with a conscience and even some understanding of Kant’s ethics of duty and obedience, someone performing monstrous acts, for sure, and therefore punishable by death, but no exceptional or remarkably evil figure.

To her mind Eichmann was not so much evil as thoughtless, *Gedankenlos*, without thoughts, consideration, thinking, imagination. This was the banality of evil which caused such an uproar. In a few later interviews, as she mostly refrained from responding to the criticism, she commented on what she had meant. Some of the interviews are available in *Eichmann war von empörender Dummheit* (Arendt & Fest 2011; also, Arendt 2018:274–290), *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Arendt 2013) and *Ich will verstehen. Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk* (Arendt 1998, comments she shared about herself).

In an interview with Joachim Fest, she explained that Eichmann did not really have what we normally regard as criminal motives (2018):

> He wanted to go along with the rest. He wanted to say ‘we’, and his going-along-with-the-rest and wanting-to-say-we were quite enough to make the greatest of all crimes possible. The Hitlers, after all, really aren’t the ones who are typical in this kind of situation – they’d lack power without the support of these others. (p. 275)

‘These others’ were clearly the loyal and thoughtless supporters and followers.

Ideology played no great role, and to her this seemed decisive, Eichmann was ‘a typical functionary’ and ‘a functionary, who is nothing but a functionary, is really very dangerous’. ‘The real perversion’ of being a mere functionary is that ‘everything else in acting together with others, namely, discussing things together, reaching certain decisions, accepting responsibility, thinking about what we are doing, is all eliminated … What you have there is empty busyness’ (Arendt 2018:276) – and no thinking.

It is a mistake to describe him with language of demonisation. ‘I think this is all total rubbish, if you don’t mind me saying so’. Eichmann and many others were not tempted to do evil, in fact, they ‘were very often tempted to do what we call good’, but easily withstood those temptations without thinking. Banality did not mean commonplace or ‘that there’s an Eichmann in all of us and the Devil knows what else’. It was really banal, just rubbish, because his whole story was so ‘outrageously stupid’:

> [*H*]e was rather intelligent, but in this respect stupid. It was his thickheadedness that was so outrageous, as if speaking to a brick wall. And that is what I actually meant by banality. There’s nothing deep about it – nothing demonic! *There’s simply resistance ever to imagine what another person is experiencing*. (Arendt 2018:277–279, my italics)

She quoted Kant about ‘the ability to think in the place of every other person’ and argued that precisely this was absent. ‘This inability … this kind of thoughtlessness is like talking to a brick wall. You can never get a reaction because these people never pay you any attention’. She linked this to ‘this frankly maniacal way that obedience is idealized’. After the war Eichmann was suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling that the world was coming to an end, because he could not imagine ‘a life without a führer!’ She called this a ‘sham existence’, ‘slavish obedience’ (Eichmann’s own words) and found ‘something outrageously thoughtless about this too’ (Arendt 2018: 279–280).

She pointed to the ‘really amazing phenomenon: none of these people expressed any remorse’. When asked ‘what possibilities there were to remain guiltless within a totalitarian society’, she appealed to Socrates for key distinctions in her own thinking. Even those who were powerless to resist, who just looked on and survived by keeping their mouths shut, were still able to think. Socrates said ‘it is better to be out of harmony with the whole world than with myself, since I am one’. This basic idea would later still inform Kant’s categorical imperative, she claimed. This idea ‘presupposes that, in actual fact, I live with myself, and am, so to speak, two-in-one, so that I then can say, “I will not do this or that”’. As this is true, the ‘only way out’, she explained, if we did do this or that, at least when thinking in Christian categories, would be ‘to change my mind and repent’ – which no-one however did (Arendt 2018:281–285).

Her explanation is instructive:

> Now living with yourself means talking to yourself. And this talking-to-yourself is basically thinking – a kind of thinking that isn’t technical, and of which anybody is capable. So the presupposition is: I can converse with myself … If situations

> therefore arise in which I fall out of harmony with the world, then in thinking at least I still have recourse to myself – and perhaps with a friend, too, with another self, as Aristotle so beautifully put it: *allos autos*. (pp. 281–285)

For her, this means that even someone who feels powerless can still think, which is why powerlessness is no excuse for those who were thoughtless but without remorse. This is what she found so 'splendid' about the law, that in front of the judge the defence that people were only bureaucrats plays no role, as there everyone becomes a human person again and therefore responsible because they did certain things – instead of thinking (Arendt 2018:285–286).

Her rich and complex comments on thoughtlessness indeed provide a key to her own thinking on thinking. Many of the themes in these interviews would later be developed more fully. It is therefore with good reason that Van Huyssteen (2011:459–464) engaged with this aspect of her thought, because his interest is in the evolutionary origins of moral evil.

Arendt was however never interested in questions of origin – she often made that very explicit. She was concerned with other questions and issues. Most of the articles which she wrote on the trial and its consequences were later collected in *Responsibility and Judgment* (Arendt 2003; see e.g. Arendt 1971c). The title speaks for itself. Her experiences during the trial challenged her to think deeper about human thoughtlessness and therefore human thought – about thinking as human responsibility and making judgements – about orientation, evaluation, weighing, drawing conclusions, coming to decisions and indeed to judgements. These questions about thinking would become central in the following years – but they had already been present earlier, also triggered by unheard of crises.

Thinking in dark times

The trial was her most momentous event after the mid-1950s and the one that made her well-known for thoughts about thoughtlessness. By that time, however, her thinking had already been deeply formed by an earlier event, the appearance of a new form of government in the world, in totalitarianism.

The year 1951 saw her first major study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She later commented on 'the curious inadequacy of the title' – because she was never concerned with origins, but rather with 'elements' of totalitarian movements and governments. The first two parts did cover 'antisemitism' and 'imperialism' respectively, historically, describing 'those subterranean streams of modern history' in which the elements may be found, but her main interest was in the third part, namely 'totalitarianism' (see Arendt 2018b:157).

She was always more interested in how things worked, in understanding the present, than in their origins, evolution, development and tradition or in their progress, improvement, success and future. She cared not so much for what was or may never be, but rather for the newness of the present moment. In the preface of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1985) she explained that:

> [*T*]his book was written against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair. It holds that Progress and Doom are two sides of the same medal, that both are articles of superstition, not of faith. (p. vii.)

She never trusted tradition *or* progress. What was necessary was totally new – namely new thinking:

> We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. *This is the reality in which we live.* And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain. (p. ix, my italics)

The challenge was to think – and 'the grimness of the present' made this even more difficult. She spoke of 'thinking in dark times' to describe this experience, in her collection *Men in Dark Times*, using the expression originally for the title of her reception speech for the Lessing Prize, 'On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts on Lessing' (Arendt 1968).

The expression came from the first line of her friend Bertolt Brecht's moving poem 'An die Nachgeborenen', his plea to posterity not to judge their times and failures harshly, remembering that those were dark times, in which it was difficult to discern and understand, difficult to practice wisdom and judgement.

For her, the expression referred not so much to the horrors themselves, but rather to the ways in which the horrors appeared in public discourse yet remained hidden. Following Heidegger that it was precisely 'the light of the public that obscured everything' – she argued that it was all the talk, opinions, viewpoints, information, media, so-called knowledge, propaganda, ideology, falsehood and lying that so darkened the times. Tragedy and terror were darkened by the 'highly efficient talk and double-talk of nearly all official representatives' (Arendt 1968:viii; also Arendt 1967 & 1971a). Brecht's poem painfully reminded how everything seemed so different from what they truly were, so that trust became difficult and innocence became lost (Wizisla 2016).

This challenge, depicting her life and work, was later used by friends and colleagues to celebrate her 100th birthday, *Thinking in Dark Times. Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (Berkowitz et al. 2010).

At the time of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she did indeed speak of radical evil – taking the term from Kant – to describe the absolute evil that became real in new historical form in the 20th century, namely the radical notion that 'humanity is superfluous'. At the time, she thought that radical evil involved three characteristics, it was unpunishable in that no punishment could be adequate or commensurate; it was unforgiveable and it was rooted in motives so base as to be beyond human comprehension (Young-Bruehl 2004:369–378).

By the time of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, however, she changed her mind, thinking differently. She became convinced, confronted with this new experience, that the evil seen in Eichmann had no root and could therefore never be radical. It may be widespread and disastrous, but evil does not have enough depth to be regarded as radical. People like to demonise, because 'if you demonize someone, not only do you make him look interesting, you also secretly ascribe to him a depth that other people don't have', but she did not agree (Arendt 2018:277).

Julia Kristeva provides an instructive interpretation of Arendt's thoughts on evil and dark times in her chapter called 'superfluous humanity' in her *Hannah Arendt* (Kristeva 2001:101–169). She concludes with Arendt's words that evil happens when unpredictability, human spontaneity and all newness is eliminated. For herself, Arendt 'never stopped beginning anew' and she kept 'her faith in humankind'. To keep that faith (in newness) and reach, that (practical) judgement would however become a long and lonely journey.

Thinking without a banister

In dark times, the challenge is to think on one's own, for oneself, without support and guidance – whether of tradition, knowledge, authority, or morality. What Arendt appreciated in those figures depicted in *Men in Dark Times* was precisely this quality – their integrity, good judgement, willingness to resist the idle talk of the crowd and the deformation of political life. This was true of Lessing, but also of others, including her friends Walter Benjamin and Karl Jaspers. Their life and work illuminated their own dark times (Arendt 1968; also Arendt 1969a). Lessing exemplified what a *Selbstdenker* could be, someone with the ability to think for themselves. For complex and personal reasons, the related idea of being a pariah or loner, an outsider or even outcast, already intrigued her since early on (Arendt 1974).

Many years later, looking back at these traumatic events, she described her experience as learning to 'think without a banister'. It even became the title of a volume of 'essays in understanding', *Thinking without a Banister* (Arendt 2018; see also Arendt 1993 and Arendt 2005a). In comments during a conference on her work, published as 'Hannah Arendt on Hannah Arendt' (2018:443–475), she explained this expression, *Denken ohne Geländer*. As one goes up and down stairs one can always hold on to the banister so as not to fall, 'but we have lost the banister' –'this is indeed what I try to do' (Arendt 2018:473).

The metaphor describes a complex experience, including 'the business that the tradition is broken' – something to which she often returned. The past can no longer show the way. The tradition has been unmasked as failure. Authority became problematic. Past answers no longer apply, whilst many new routes with promises of progress and success – including science, technology and knowledge, valuable as they are – cannot provide answers either.

During this conference, she told a delightful anecdote. Coming to the USA, she wrote an article in her very halting English, which the editors then 'Englished'. When she asked them about their use of the word progress, as she had not used it herself:

> [*O*]ne of the editors went to the other in another room, and left me there, and I overheard him say, in a tone of despair, 'She does not even believe in progress'. (Arendt 2018:471; for her skepsis, see the 'Conclusions' to *Willing*, Arendt 1981:149–158)

This feeling was deep-seated. She no longer believed in intellectuals and she no longer believed in professional philosophers ('as Kant once very ironically described them'). She did not believe in so-called experts and she did not believe in ready-made answers provided by others. She did not believe in objective knowledge as answers to questions of practical judgement and responsibility. If anything, she agreed with Socrates who did not give answers but encouraged everyone to think for themselves. Thinking is for ordinary people and for everyone. Acting we do in concert with others, but thinking we do by ourselves. 'I always thought that one has got to start thinking as though nobody had thought before, and then start learning from everybody else' (Arendt 2018:473).

In short, thinking was for Arendt a deeply solitary pursuit, performed without a banister, yet not as withdrawal from the world and solitary monologue, but rather as 'an anticipated dialogue with others' and born out of love for the world (Arendt 1968:10) – which made her a public thinker.

Thinking in public

These traumatic experiences eventually led to the theme of her Gifford Lectures, *The Life of the Mind*. The introduction explains the two reasons for the topic (Arendt 1981:3–16). The first was the confrontation with the banality of evil in Eichmann's thoughtlessness. The second was the way in which these disturbing experiences renewed questions in her which had already plagued her whilst working on *The Human Condition*, namely, what we are doing? when we are thinking?

She in fact wanted to call *The Human Condition* 'The Active Life' (*vita activa*) and actually did, later in German. The study was about the problem of action, the oldest concern of political theory, she called it, the question what human beings do together in the world – but precisely this raised for her the deeper problem. For the term *vita activa* itself was coined by the so-called thinkers, professional philosophers, those devoted to the so-called contemplative life – for many the real life, the true life, of solitude and meditation and thinking, the non-political life – so what were *they* thinking they were doing whilst thinking?

She decided to use the prestigious Gifford Lectures to finally figure this question out for herself. For once she left the political questions which concerned her over the years aside and reluctantly returned to the philosophy of which she always felt that it was her training but not her task. She completed the first series, *Thinking*, but suffered a heart attack during the second. Recovered, she completed the manuscript for the second series, posthumously published as *Willing*, but died just days later, with only the empty page for the third and crucially important series on *Judging* in her typewriter.

In spite of much speculation, no one really knows what the third lecture series would have been about. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* would have been her point of departure, so that the notes of her last lecture course on this political philosophy of Kant were published as part of the one-volume *The Life of the Mind*, but no one really knows (Arendt 1981:241–272).

Perhaps an early essay on 'Culture and Politics' provides some clues, where she briefly discussed Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, in her opinion 'the greatest and most original aspect of Kant's political philosophy'. The categorical imperative, she explained, rests on an agreement of rational judgement with itself, meaning that if I do not want to contradict myself, I should act only on those maxims that could in principle also be general laws. This is the same ancient principle of self-agreement already encountered in Socrates, that 'it is better for me to be in contradiction with the world than to be self-contradictory'. According to Arendt, this proposition formed the basis for Western conceptions of both ethics and logic, with their emphases on conscience and the law of non-contradiction respectively.

However, Kant then added the principle of 'an enlarged way of thinking', she said, submitting that one can also 'think from the standpoint of everyone else'. The agreement with oneself is thus joined by potential agreement with others – and this is extremely important for Arendt. Our power of judgement finally rests on this enlarged way of thinking. Only in this way can our judging derive legitimacy. Our judging is not merely about 'our own subjective private conditions'. Our judging 'cannot prevail without the existence of others from whose standpoint it can also think'. The presence of others is key to our own judgement. 'A certain concrete generality' is necessary. Judgement does not call for 'universal validity' – which would be impossible – but certainly for the presence of other judging persons in the public sphere.

In short, the power of judgement is a *political* faculty – emphasis Arendt – namely, 'the faculty of seeing things not only from one's own perspective but from that of others who are also present'. In this way, 'judgment is perhaps the basic faculty' (of the life of the mind, even more than thinking and willing), as it enables us to orientate ourselves 'in the public-political sphere and therefore in the world held in common'. No other philosopher before or after Kant has ever made this judgement the object of their inquiries, she said, and 'the reason for this surprising fact may be found in the antipathy towards politics in our philosophical tradition' (Arendt 2018:180–181). This probably explains some of what she would have argued in *Judging* and also her own interest in being a political thinker rather than a philosopher.

However, her own way of 'thinking in public' was complicated, even ambivalent (see e.g. *Thinking in Public* by Wurgaft [2016], comparing Strauss, Levinas and Arendt as three Jewish thinkers, all Heidegger students, but with different paths).

She was deeply critical of the intellectuals whom she encountered in Nazi Germany and of their blindness, failure, complicity in silence, lack of thinking about public and political issues, in short, their own thoughtlessness. That is why she never wanted to be a philosopher herself, but a political thinker. She saw in these intellectuals and professional philosophers how easily they could stand in service of tyrants and their falsehoods and lying – again recently described by Adam Knowles (2019) in *Heidegger's Fascist Affinities. A Politics of Silence*.

At the same time, she did not really get directly involved in public issues herself, like many 'public intellectuals' in the USA. She did not think that intellectuals should provide answers for political life or claim knowledge and wisdom, and being able to give guidance. She remained sceptical of moral claims about public issues and critical of compassion as motivating force for politics (Nelson 2004; see e.g. Arendt 1969b).

In fact, she shied away from public life, in all possible ways. She refused appearances on television and seldom gave interviews, only allowed a few pictures, taken from behind, was reluctant to publicly defend herself, simply did not see herself in the role of public figure.

Still, she is regarded as one of *the* public intellectuals of our times – probably because of her views on the nature of thinking. It is not without reason that Socrates was so important to her, the one philosopher who did not tell anyone what to think but how to think, who did not have any teachings or doctrines of his own, who did not offer answers or solutions to problems, who respected plurality and the ability of all to think for themselves – and together in public conversation (on Socrates, e.g. Arendt 1981:166–178, 2005c, 2016).

Thinking for Arendt was deeply personal and performed in solitary silence within oneself, but always striving to include others as well, by expressing thinking in language (although this can never be performed fully), thereby inviting and involving others. Friendship was crucial (see Nixon 2015), but also being open to all potential conversation partners, which made imagination so important.

Following Kant, she saw imagination as the ability to attempt to think what others may think, to strive to see what others may see, to take seriously what others may have to say, to share the consequences which others may have to suffer. In 'Imagination' she used Kant's description of imagination as 'the faculty of making present what is absent' to develop her own view of judgement in public and political life (Arendt 2018:387–394). Jerome Kohn, her authoritative editor and interpreter, calls this essay 'the best, if not the only, indication of what Arendt's third volume of *The Life of the Mind, Judging*, which has roused so much speculation, might have been like' (Arendt 2018:387). Arendt here remarks that: 'In the *Critique of Pure Reason* imagination is at the service of the intellect; in the *Critique of Judgment* the intellect is "at the service of imagination"' (Arendt 2018:393). These are therefore two ways of thinking – both crucially important – one scientific, concerned with intellect and knowledge, the other concerned with human life together, with discernment and judgement, and responsibility.

For a life of thinking that actively pursues responsibility and judgement – even, and perhaps especially, in dark times – examples are crucial. They help us to imagine. Such was the role of the *Men in Dark Times*. 'Examples lead and guide us', she said, 'and judgment thus acquires "exemplary validity"' How are we able to judge an act as courageous or good? 'We say that someone is good because we have in the back of our minds the example of Saint Francis or Jesus of Nazareth' (Arendt 2018:393–394). Such judgement is not based on rules and does not offer solutions to problems, it rather helps to make responsible judgements in every new moment, implying that 'judgment has exemplary validity to the extent that examples are rightly chosen' (Arendt 2018:394).

In an intriguing feminist and psychoanalytic interpretation *Speaking Through the Mask: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Social Identity*, Norma Moruzzi even reads Arendt herself as exemplary figure for social and political life (Moruzzi 2005), whilst going against what Arendt herself wrote, arguing that 'these are readings against the grain, but loyal' (Moruzzi 2000:5).

In short, her complicated image as public thinker offers much for ongoing conversations both about thinking (see e.g. Beiner 1992; Bernstein 2000; Burch 2011; Burke 1986; Grunenberg & Daub 2007; Minnich 2003; Vogel 2008) and specifically about thinking and public life and politics (see e.g. Barash 2003; Dolan 2000; Elshtain 2007:69–88; Etxabe 2018; Garsten 2007; Habermas 1994; Luban 1983; Marshall 2010; Ring 1998; Taylor 2002; Thiele 2005; Villa 2009; Wurgaft 2016; eds. Yeatman et al. 2011; Young-Bruehl-Kohn 2007; Zerilli 2005, 2016a, 2016b) – but there is more.

Thinking as thanksgiving

The motto in *The Life of the Mind* is a four-fold claim by Heidegger (Arendt 1981):

> Thinking does not bring knowledge as do the sciences. Thinking does not produce usable practical wisdom. Thinking does not solve the riddles of the universe. Thinking does not endow us directly with the power to act. (p. 1)

For Arendt, each phrase was significant.

Much has and could be said about her personal and intellectual relationship with Heidegger, whilst much also has and could be said about Heidegger's problematic relationship with Nazism. There can, however, be no doubt about how her thinking was informed – positively *and* negatively – by Heidegger's own fascinating and controversial thinking about thinking. In the preface to the second edition of her authoritative biography of Arendt, *Hannah Arendt. For Love of the Word*, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl admits that even in her biography she still underestimated Heidegger's role in Arendt's intellectual development after the war and at the end of her life, writing *The Life of the Mind* (Young-Bruehl 2004:xiii). She only later realised that. Perhaps a conversation about Arendt should therefore also include Heidegger's thinking? As phenomenology remained important for Van Huyssteen because of his Merleau-Ponty studies – as he assures his colleagues (Van Huyssteen 2015) – surely Heidegger's voice should also be heard?

After the 'reversal' in Heidegger's thinking – which according to Arendt took place between his first and second courses on Nietzsche, 1936 and 1940 (both published in 1961; Arendt 1981:172–194), he published several remarkable works on thinking. They include the 1944 'Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking' (published as part of *Gelassenheit* in 1955, translated as *Discourse on Thinking* in Heidegger 1959), an important 'Letter on Humanism' (1949), his influential 'Bauen Wohnen Denken' (August 1951), his first lectures after permitted to teach, 1951–1952, published as *What is Called Thinking?* (Heidegger 1968) and his autobiographical 'Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens' *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Heidegger 1969).

Many of the motifs in his late thinking are also present in Arendt. In her dedication on his 80th birthday, 'Heidegger at Eighty', she honoured him for his thinking (Arendt 2018:419–431). 'The rumor about Heidegger' going around and exciting so many students at the time, she remembered, was 'quite simply' that 'thinking has come to life again … there is a teacher; one can perhaps learn to think' (Arendt 2018:421). In her brief dedication at his death, 'For Martin Heidegger', she summarised his life saying 'To me it seems that this life and work have taught us what *thinking* is' (Arendt 2018:432, her italics). In *The Life of the Mind* she deals at length with his reversal and concludes her Gifford Lectures series on *Willing* by discussing his 'will-not-to-will', the final pages she probably finished just before her death (Arendt 1981:172–194).

Many others were also intrigued. In his fascinating *Heidegger's Hut*, Sharr (2017) discussed the impact of Heidegger's hut in the Black Forest on his work and accounted how Heidegger thought that it is almost as if environments – spaces, places, contexts – think through us. Heidegger (1950) was intrigued with thinking on wood-paths, *Holzwege*, paths leading into the dark of the forest, cleared by thinkers themselves; with thinking on country-paths; with thinking made possible by dwelling in provincial forests or cosmopolitan city houses. It was as if his well-known 'fourfold' – earth, sky, divinities, mortals – were mysteriously present in diverse ways in these different spaces. It is no wonder that these ideas would inspire floods of interdisciplinary work – for example, architectural phenomenology (like Sharr's), environmental ethics, agrarian environmentalism and new media studies.

It is as if certain thoughts can only be thought under certain circumstances and in certain places, they make sense there, and would hardly have been possible, thinkable, elsewhere. This was already expressed in 'Bauen Wohnen Denken' – we think the thoughts made possible by where we are at home, building in order to dwell in order to think are basic human activities, deeply inter-related (even etymologically). Although she meant it quite differently, Arendt also repeatedly asked '*where* we are when we think' (e.g. in the final part of her first Gifford Lectures, Arendt 1981:197–216) – for her it was the experience of the present, the awareness and discernment of the moment, the *nunc stans* between past and future, but they share that thinking is real, concrete, embodied, historical, happening in time and place.

Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?* became famous, amongst others, for his claim that *Denken ist Danken*, to think is to thank (Heidegger 1968:138–147, 244). He argued for this in his customary etymological way, but the implications were far-reaching. What is is because it has been given. *Es gibt*, there is, because it was received. For him, this leads to an acceptance and affirmation of life, of the real, every day, ordinary, indeed, the givenness; it leads to an attitude and practice of *Gelassenheit*, releasing, letting-go. This view of life has been beautifully documented by the Dutch philosopher Samuel Ijsseling (2015), in *Heidegger. Denken en Danken. Geven en Zijn*, but also, albeit more briefly, by Peter Leithart (2014; Hörleinsberger 2010) in *Gratitude. An Intellectual History*.

Once again, this is similar to some of the convictions in Arendt's thinking about wonder and joy – which underlie the attitude of *amor mundi*, love for the world, which some interpreters regard as her most fundamental conviction and which her friend Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2004) used as title for her beautiful biography, *Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World*.

Problems or puzzles? – An ongoing conversation

There is so much to talk about. Many of these themes resonate with convictions and themes of Van Huyssteen's own career. He also argued for an enlarged understanding of rationality and would certainly agree with many of her viewpoints, albeit from his different background. He could probably find her thinking of much more interest than merely the banality of evil and Eichmann's thoughtlessness. He would be able to show how he has further developed many of her intuitions in his own life project – from 'imagination' to 'the more comprehensive capacity of rational agents to form responsible judgments and to seek optimal understanding', and many more (Van Huyssteen 2015:208).

We could perhaps talk about why Van Huyssteen remains so committed to problem-solving. In his response to colleagues, he reiterated this as key concern of his career. It is particularly interesting that he credits this passion behind his own thinking to Johan Heyns' question how theology could be performed as a science, which remained the driving question behind his life's work (Van Huyssteen 2017e).

We could perhaps talk about an impression that Arendt's thinking was deeply sceptical of some notions of central importance to Van Huyssteen – science, rationality, truth, progress, success, especially problem-solving. She seemed concerned with different questions, questions fundamental to the human condition, responsibility and judgement; questions of understanding, learning and unlearning (see the fascinating study by Knott 2017); questions of action and appearance (see the essays edited by Yeatman 2011); questions of thinking and willing and judging as faculties of the life of the mind; questions arising from our love for the world; questions about being new-born, again and again, with natality as *the* human condition – such questions can after all never be solved or resolved like problems, but accompany us all on our way through the world. One only has to read her final remarks in *Willing*, concluding with 'The abyss of freedom and the *novus ordo seclorum*', to sense these differences (Arendt 1981:195–218).

The powerful image of natality (often contrasted with mortality, central to Heidegger) she learned from Augustine during her doctoral studies (Arendt 1996; excellent discussions in Kristeva 2001:30–48; Young-Bruehl 2004:490–500), yet her concern for natality 'was later brought urgently to the center of her thought by her political experiences' (Young-Bruehl 2004:495).

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality … It is … the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very common and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora's box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their 'glad tidings'. 'A child has been born unto us'. (Arendt 1958:247)

As important as all scientific notions of rationality and pursuits of knowledge may be – and she had the highest appreciation for them – they only represent a part of being human and the life of the mind. She rather stood in the tradition of Heidegger who claimed that 'the most thought-provoking thing about our thought-provoking age is that we are still not thinking' – the opening theme of his first post-war lectures. As 'thought-provoking' is ambiguous (as so often with Heidegger), it may also mean 'disturbing' – the most disturbing thing about our disturbing times is that we still do not think, because thinking for him meant not answering but questioning, asking the right questions, the questions for this time, which have to be given to us ('Das Bedenklichste in unserer bedenklichen Zeit ist, daß wir noch nicht denken', Heidegger 1968).

For her, there is more to thinking than solving problems. Limited questions cannot lead to life-giving answers. Her own deepest question, some claimed, was therefore how to live now in order to face herself in future. This is clearly not a problem to be solved in any final way. In light of this, perhaps we could therefore also talk about the significance of the titles of Van Huyssteen's last two published essays, 'Can we still Talk about "Truth" and "Progress" in Interdisciplinary Thinking Today?' (Van Huyssteen 2017d) and 'Is there any Hope for "Truth" and "Progress" in Theological Thinking Today?' (Van Huyssteen 2017e).

We could perhaps even talk about what seem like the alternative approaches to doing theology of some of his long-standing personal friends. Already in 1988, his later successor in Port Elizabeth, Piet Naudé, asked about 'The Limitations of Problem Solving as a Criterion for Paradigms in Theology' during an inter-disciplinary conference on Paradigms and Progress in Theology, celebrating Van Huyssteen's ground-breaking *Theology and the Justification of Faith* (Van Huyssteen, 1986 [1989]). Naudé argued for several limitations to such an approach, acknowledging that they 'do not necessarily entail the discarding of problem-solving as valid criterion for theological paradigms', yet they call for 'refinement' and 'supplementation' (Naudé 2015). And what about Jaap Durand (see Durand 1973 and 2007 as well as his autobiographical 2002; for his interest in science and faith, Durand 2013, 2015, 2018), whose approach has been described as taking history seriously (see e.g. Smit 2009, 2013b)? He famously once responded to Heyns' contribution on the political situation in South Africa by pointing out its a-historical and a-contextual nature ('met geringe wysigings kon dit net so goed geskryf gewees het oor die kerk in … sê, Lapland', Durand 1981:21). Or De Gruchy (2013) and his moving *Led into Mystery*, or Vincent Brummer's admiration for Chesterton's description of Francis of Assissi, whose faith 'was not like a theory but like a love affair' (Brümmer 2011:vi, 2013:15)?

One is almost tempted to call to mind the infamous incident in Cambridge between Popper and Wittgenstein, wonderfully recounted by Edmonds and Eidinow (2001) in *Wittgenstein's Poker. The Story of a Ten-Minute Argument Between Two Great Philosophers*. In 1946, Popper was invited to give a public address to Wittgenstein's colleagues and students at the Moral Science Club. He came prepared to defend his position that there are philosophical problems and that it is the task of philosophy to solve them. To his mind (Edmonds & Eidinow 2001):

> [*I*]f I had no serious philosophical problems and no hope of solving them, I should have no excuse for being a philosopher: to my mind, there would be no apology for philosophy. (p. 221)

He announced his topic for the evening as 'Are There Philosophical Problems?' He knew that this would anger Wittgenstein, who did not believe that there are philosophical problems to be solved, only puzzles to be clarified. In fact, he was hoping to anger Wittgenstein and later wrote 'I admit that I went to Cambridge hoping to provoke Wittgenstein into defending the view that there are no genuine philosophical problems, and to fight him on this issue'. If this was his hope, then he was not disappointed. A disastrous conflict erupted. Those present later disagreed about what exactly happened. Popper's own account was that Wittgenstein grabbed a poker from the fireplace and threatened him. For the whole delightful story, one should enjoy the colourful account by Edmonds and Eidinow. Their chapters on the respective positions are called 'The Problem with Puzzles' and 'The Puzzle over Problems'. For Wittgenstein, the aim of philosophy was not solving problems, but helping to clarify, 'to turn latent nonsense into patent nonsense' (Edmonds & Eidinow 2001:233). Popper disagreed. In 1952, a year after Wittgenstein's death, he gave another lecture called 'The Nature of Philosophical Problems and their Roots in Science'. In 1970 during a BBC interview he said that, forced at gunpoint to say with what in Wittgenstein's work he disagreed, he would have to say nothing – because there was nothing with which one could disagree, as he disagreed with the whole enterprise and he confessed that he was bored by it – bored to tears. This raises the question whether these are indeed contrasting traditions regarding the nature of thinking, and it would be instructive to hear Van Huyssteen's perspectives.

Of course, our conversation will not be in the spirit of their evening in Cambridge. Many wonderful moments over the years with Wentzel van Huyssteen come to mind in which it became clear how important space and atmosphere also is to his own thought (in fact, both Gregersen 2017; Van Huyssteen 2015:207 affirm the importance of 'space and context', of 'different geographical locations and intellectual venues that profoundly shaped my own thinking over many years') – an evening in Dennesig Street when he confessed how deeply European his passions and interests were and I tried to persuade him to visit the USA by singing Frank Sinatra's 'Chicago, Chicago'; his looks of belonging when at work in his impressive office in the Carriage House; his praises for New York City, for him exciting and fulfilling like the New Jerusalem, and his regular visits with students to the Museum of Natural History in Central Park; his emotional longing to stroll once more in Princeton's Nassau Street. I know there are many other places in this world with equally wonderful memories for him and Hester, and many other friends with their own memories and thoughts of them. It would indeed be grace, gratitude and thanksgiving, to share more such moments – and together converse further about thinking.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author’s contributions

D.S. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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