

Sophie Loidolt. *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity.* Routledge 2017. 290 pp. \$145.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781138631892); \$47.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780367887575).

Loidolt's reading of Hannah Arendt is oriented by two refusals: that of the depoliticization of her work, and that of its dephilosophizing. Resting on a thorough engagement with Arendt's two most philosophical and least directly political works, *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*, Loidolt resituates Arendt within the existential phenomenological tradition in which she was trained and makes the case that she continued to think in its framework throughout her life. One of the book's major contributions is to fill the void regarding Arendt's involvement with, transformation of, and possible contributions to phenomenology. What is more, this introduction of Arendtian political thought into phenomenology involves taking plurality as a political concept, rather than an epistemological or ontological one: plurality is not only a human condition, but also something human beings actualize.

The first chapter goes the furthest in showing the various ways in which Arendt belongs to the tradition of phenomenological philosophy, by exposing her critique of Husserl and Heidegger and the concepts and overall approach she borrows from them. Her critique consists in rejecting their respective searches for reality outside of the world in the *epochè* or in the self of *Dasein* and their reduction of spontaneity to the self or to being. Instead, Arendt seeks reality in the world itself, through interactions and confrontations with others, which make it possible to go beyond the view of the self her predecessors, had developed. In doing so, she takes up their questions and concepts, as in the case of Heidegger's *Mitsein*, which she politicizes, and finds answers where their philosophies could not lead them, that is, in the realm of politics. She thus finds herself closer to other phenomenologists of the second generation, nonetheless criticizing French existentialism for being concerned with making sense of the world rather than being concerned for the world itself, or for embracing arbitrarily any revolutionary politics for its capacity to solve the meaninglessness of the human condition rather than that of present social and political conditions. Arendt thus rejects the notion that one must act alone in an attempt to resist the human condition—especially in Malraux and Sartre—arguing instead that 'the realm of plurality and action' (46) must be protected and invested.

The second and third chapters focus on the concepts that are operative in Arendt's work and are the medium through which she sees politics and the themes of self, we, plurality, the public, the world, and speaking, acting, and judging. This 'conceptual medium' (52) includes appearance, actualization, the world, and the structures of the human condition. Loidolt reminds Arendt's readers of the participation of appearance (as a process, as manifestation) to reality; of the reversal in Heidegger's thought as he abandons phenomenology; of her closeness to Merleau-Ponty's view of subjectivity; of her understanding of experience as singular, tied to general structures, interpretations, and responses, which all make up the experience; of the world as appearing and space of appearance, and the condition of an in-between actors, as the product of plurality as it is actualized. Loidolt deploys equal efforts to showing the ways in which Arendt questions some of the central tenets of first-generation phenomenology, for instance in the opposition between Arendt's understanding of the world as an in-between and a web of relationships, and the phenomenological concept of horizon as all-encompassing.

Since Loidolt's aim is at once to provide a reading of Arendt and to offer a phenomenology of plurality, her book offers grounds to think politics along new lines. By showing labour, work, and

action as ways in which life unfolds and as conditions of appearance rather than as categories for human activities, Loidolt opens the door to an expansion of the concept of action, beyond its usual understanding as instrumental action, but without developing this idea. However, with her focus on Heidegger, Loidolt also limits some of the strength and fecundity of Arendt's thought. She presents these conditions—life, worldliness, and plurality as they are experienced through labour, work, and action—as equivalent to Heidegger's existentialia (among which we find notably being-in-the-world, fallenness, and anxiety), and so belonging to the ontological rather than ontic level. Indeed, Loidolt notes that Arendt blurs 'the ontological and the political meanings of the terms "world," "visibility," and "appearance"' and normatively combines the ontic and the ontological (116). She takes a distinction among activities – action is not like labour and work notably in that others cannot do it in our place – as a problem rather than as the reason for Arendt to value action, and undoes this blurring of ontology and politics, which is at the heart of Arendt's phenomenology by introducing the ontological difference within it.

This problem may be tied to the focus on two major works of Arendt's, which leaves aside the texts in which Arendt approaches not only labour and work (as Loidolt points out) but also action (against her assertions) as belonging to what others would term the ontic and ontological dimensions of being. Readers might thus balance Loidolt's account by paying further attention to *On Revolution*, where Arendt explains modernity as a time when the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning (her definition of action) coincided in revolution, or essays such as 'Civil Disobedience' and 'The Crisis in Education' which tie precise, limited political questions to existential concerns. This issue of focus does not take away from Loidolt's achievement in showing how the conditions of human experience (life, worldliness, plurality) as well as the forms of human activities (labour, work, action) equally have the character of structures which give several layers of meaning to human experience.

The second part of the book presents what is at once a reading of Arendt along the lines indicated in the first part, and an original contribution to the phenomenology of social and political life, which Loidolt rightly calls her own (151). In the three last chapters, actualizing plurality is analyzed, following Arendt's descriptions, as intersubjectivity and as a 'we' that remains plural. These two terms complement each other: intersubjectivity is the background for a 'we' that occurs in conflict or in concert rather than being a collective entity, while the 'we' makes intersubjectivity a matter of togetherness and interdependence, based in action and in 'being a self with others' (155) rather than in a primordial structure of the self. Both the 'we' and intersubjectivity are thus marked by the in-between that is plurality. Central here is Arendt's conception of *who* a person is (as opposed to *what* a person is) as appearing within a web of relationships, which Loidolt unfolds carefully over ten pages in one of the most important contributions of the book to debates about political (inter)subjectivity and in Arendt scholarship (179-89). It is also an occasion to rectify interpretations of Arendt's analyses of speech, action, and judgment that insufficiently delve into the centrality of plurality to her thought – and her relation to Kant's conception of judgment.

The last chapter, in which Loidolt presents her most original ideas, follows Arendt (and indeed phenomenology and most specifically Merleau-Ponty) in rejecting the position that political action rests on moral foundations and instead finding an ethics that is proper to politics (even though she states that she rejects Arendt's distinction between morality and politics, 235). Normative elements must be experienced before they gain any ethical weight and become relevant to action. They are ethical demands for the stability of relationships and space that make it possible to actualize plurality and to undertake further action, and to overcome the challenges to plurality made by life and its focus on needs, the unicity of truth, and the categorical demands of practical reason. Plurality

demands that the ‘who’ and the ‘we’ remain interrelated, hence the need for promises that bind persons to one another and for forgiveness that re-establishes the bond. It is something that can be, and ought to be, enacted, rather than a stable state.

Loidolt succeeds in situating herself within the many disjointed debates proper to Arendtian studies and to phenomenology, limiting her study to English-language sources where some references to German-language debates with which she seems to be familiar would have enriched an already well-developed survey of positions (present only implicitly in an endnote, 105). Her lack of engagement with French-language sources mirrors the lack of focus on the concept of action, present of instance in the work of Étienne Tassin, and leads her to erroneously situate Claude Lefort among the ‘left-Heideggerians’ (9) who focus on ‘the event’ rather than the ‘who’ that is disclosed in political activity, failing to recognize him as an inspired reader of Arendt and as a much more Merleau-Pontian than Heideggerian thinker. She also neglects the political aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s work, even as she rejects such a depoliticizing stance about Arendt, and presents him as being more concerned with painting than with politics (99), despite his numerous publications on the latter subject. Nonetheless, the strength of her engagement with English-language sources and her massive bibliography cover or anticipate many of the questions raised in French-language work.

Loidolt succeeds in providing an introduction to Arendt for phenomenologists and an introduction to phenomenology for Arendt scholars, and in making explicit many ideas implicit in her work. Most importantly, by showing the oscillations in Arendt’s thought, in pointing out certain arguments as unsound and reformulating certain aspects of her theory, Loidolt opens the door for further work in political phenomenology.

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