INTRODUCTION

The History of an Irony

In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt evokes the "absolute seriousness" with which in *Theaetetus* Plato recounts the story of the young peasant woman from Thrace who burst out laughing when she saw Thales fall into a pit while observing the motions of celestial bodies: "In his eagerness to know about the heavens, he could not see what lay at his feet" (174a, ff.). And Plato adds: "Anyone who gives his life to philosophy is open to such mockery. . . . The whole rabble will join the peasant girl in laughing at him . . . [as] in his helplessness he looks like a fool" (*L.M.*, 1: 82–83). Regarding the rigid demarcation between the speculative thinker and the average individual Arendt adds the following commentary: "Kant . . . seems to have been unique among the philosophers in being sovereign enough to join in the laughter of common man" (*ibid.*, 83). To the name of Kant she could also have added Aristotle's since he is the one who in *Nicomachean Ethics* alludes to the Thracian maid and, regarding Thales, notes that it is perfectly possible to be *sophos* without ever being *phronimos*. In any case, one may think that in Plato's dialogues there was more irony than Arendt seems to believe, and indeed more so than in texts by Heidegger. There is, however, a curious passage in *Die Frage nach dem Ding (What Is a Thing?)* in which Heidegger repeats the story of the maid from Thrace related in *Theaetetus* and adds the following commentary: "The question 'What Is a Thing?' must always be rated as one which causes housemaids to laugh. And genuine housemaids must have something to laugh about" (*What Is a Thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton and Vera Deutsch, New York: University Press of America, 1967, p. 3). By just saying this much in this commentary Heidegger seems merely to repeat the Platonic distinction between the thinker and ordinary persons and the condescension of the former for the latter. But he does not limit himself to this alone and adds:

> Philosophy, then, is that thinking with which one can start nothing and about which housemaids necessarily laugh. Such a definition of

> philosophy is not a mere joke but is something to think over. We shall do well to remember occasionally that by our strolling we can fall into a well whereby we may not reach ground for quite some time. *(Ibid.)*

Such a commentary suggests that at the very least on certain occasions Heidegger was aware of the risks of professional thinking.

In any case, Arendt's irony for professional thinking was itself the result of a slow transformation of her intellectual relationship to Heidegger, a relationship whose first phase was characterized by an overwhelming fascination, soon thereafter to be followed by an extreme bitterness. I would like to attempt to show here that the eventual irony, which can be sensed in *The Life of the Mind*, has much to do with the combined interaction *[jeu]*—but also the overcoming—of both the initial fascination and the subsequent bitterness.

Let us consider the initial fascination. It began in Marburg in 1924. She was eighteen years old and he was thirty-five. He was in the midst of composing *Being and Time* and giving courses or seminars all connected to the elaboration of his fundamental ontology. She was no young peasant maid, but an educated young woman from the bourgeoisie, a brilliant student in philosophy. The account of their love affair is of no concern to me here. The reason of her fascination has something to do with the history of ideas, and Arendt herself mentions it in the text of homage she wrote for Heidegger on his eightieth birthday. She recalls in those pages, which allude to Heidegger as well as Plato, that at the beginning of the 1920s "the rumor of Heidegger's teaching reached those who knew more or less explicitly about the breakdown of tradition and the 'dark times' (Brecht) which had set in, who therefore held erudition in matters of philosophy to be idle play and who, therefore, were prepared to comply with the academic discipline only because they were concerned with the 'matter of thought' or, as Heidegger would say today, 'thinking's matter'" ("Heidegger at Eighty," in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Michael Murray, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978, p. 295). The rumor, she wrote, that attracted them to Freiburg-in-Breisgau and later Marburg, "had it that there was someone who was actually attaining 'the things' that Husserl had proclaimed, someone who knew that these things were not academic matters but the concerns of thinking men—concerns not just of yesterday and today, but from time immemorial—and who, precisely because he knew that the thread of the tradition was broken, was discovering the past anew" *(ibid.)*.

The very words by which Arendt describes Heidegger's teaching at Marburg were used again almost verbatim in her introduction to the Gifford Lectures she gave at the University of Aberdeen. When she used them again, it was no longer to describe Heidegger's teaching, but rather her own way of approaching the treasures of a legacy, which in the words of René Char "is preceded by no testament" (*L.M.*, 1: 12). This reiteration means that a common denominator exists between Arendt and Heidegger, consisting in the effort to discover the past anew simply because the thread of the tradition was broken. This reiteration further suggests that their approaches overlap, but this does not mean that they are similar. In order to understand their difference it is necessary to gain some clarity for the "things themselves" that fascinated Arendt in Heidegger's teaching in 1924–25. In fact, a certain light is already shed by the very sentences of the 1971 homage "Heidegger at Eighty" which immediately follow the ones I have just quoted.

The text of the homage in no way specifies what those problems were, but the very tone in which the mention is made suggests that they mattered as much to Arendt as they did to Heidegger. Let us try to determine what they were.

"The immediate and urgent importance" talked about by Arendt is all the more surprising since one does not find a trace—to say the least—of any reappropriation whatever of Plato in her own work, whereas by contrast there exist many manifest signs of such a reappropriation in Heidegger's first works. It so happens that the text of homage to Heidegger at eighty refers in fact to the memory Arendt had kept of a lecture course Heidegger had given during the 1924–25 winter semester with the title *Interpretation Platonischer Dialog (Sophistes)*. It is therefore appropriate to go back to this lecture course in the attempt to come to terms as much as possible with our surprise.

As it turns out, the lecture course on *The Sophist* pronounced by Heidegger three years before the publication of *Being and Time* is the document which articulates clearly for the first time the question on the meaning of Being into a problematic, one that Heidegger soon thereafter would term "fundamental ontology." This lecture course, of which Arendt was a fascinated listener, has been recently reconstituted and edited by Ingeborg Schüssler (*GA*, 19, 1992). Let me determine from the introductory pages of this lecture course the essential points allowing Heidegger's fundamental ontology to make a claim on certain basic concepts of Greek philosophy all the while integrating and reappropriating them in his own way. In this

process, my only intention is to establish the way in which this lecture course could open up a whole set of problems that were, or became, "of immediate and urgent importance" for Arendt herself.

At the very beginning of the lecture course Heidegger's argument underscores that philosophy in its cardinal form, which is metaphysics, is not a doctrine, but rather a form of existence, and even the highest.

In *The Sophist*, he claims, "Plato considers human existence according to one of its extreme possibilities, namely philosophical existence" (12). He adds, however, that Plato does not clarify directly what makes philosophy an eminent form of existence; Plato proceeds only indirectly by raising objections against a mode of being which the philosopher must set aside, that of the sophist. The sophist never gets past *doxa*, which is a gaze narrowly focused on what comes to appearance and at the outset is manifest. To *doxa* Plato opposes *aletheia*, truth. The negative and privative structure of that word is significant; according to Heidegger it indicates that "the Greeks had understood the 'non-veiled character' of the world as having to be conquered: the world is not available at the outset; at the outset it is not uncovered. And what is uncovered in natural life is precisely that which was no sooner uncovered than covered up again—covered up again because of *doxa*. Moreover, opinions get hardened into propositions which are repeated in the absence of originary seeing." That is why, according to Heidegger, the work of the lives of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was "a struggle against sophistry and rhetoric" (16). This struggle is the conquest of a mode of existence dedicated to the ultimate possibility of uncovering *(erschließen)*, namely the uncovering of Being itself.

At this point of his exposition Heidegger in order to elucidate this uncovering in terms of existence decides to draw upon an Aristotelian treatise which he claims is focused on a detailed description of the possible modes of uncovering characteristic of the human *Dasein*. He has in view *Nicomachean Ethics* which, from that point on, he holds to be the best introduction for the study of the struggle mounted by Plato against sophistry. "Truth is a character of beings inasmuch as they stand against us, but in its ownmost meaning *(eigentlichsten)* it is nonetheless a determination of being of *Dasein* itself. This is what emerges and is given expression to when Aristotle says *alētheuei hē psychē* (1139ab5). Inasmuch as *psychē* characterizes the ownmost being of man, being-in-truth is a determination of *Dasein*" (23). Because Aristotle carefully explores the various ways of being-in-truth accessible to man while giving the highest

status to philosophical existence, i.e., to being devoted to *sophia* or to the "authentic understanding *(eigentliches Verstehen)*" (22) of the Being of beings, Heidegger holds *Nicomachean Ethics* as tantamount to an ontology of *Dasein*, whose study may clarify retrospectively the Platonic conquest of philosophic existence.

Let me recall briefly the essential points of the analysis made by Heidegger of what he holds to be the Aristotelian ontology of *Dasein*. Actually, those points sketch out the very structure of his analysis of the *Dasein*, i.e., of the first step of his fundamental ontology. By the same token, I would like to suggest that those essential points amounted for Arendt to decisive and urgent themes for her own interpretation of active life and the life of the mind.

What Heidegger perceives in Aristotle's descriptions of the possibilities of human uncovering is a hierarchy of two modes of being that correspond to two levels of comportment. On the inferior level there is a deliberative and active comportment and, on a superior level, there is a contemplative and theoretical comportment. Let us first consider the Heideggerian interpretation of the Aristotelian analysis of the deliberative comportment.

Deliberative comportment itself is divided in two types of activity that are not on the same level. They are the activity of fabrication called *poiēsis* and, on a higher level, the activity of action called *praxis*. To these two activities or to these two comportments correspond two forms of uncovering, or two ways of being-in-truth. The mode of uncovering corresponding to the comportment of fabrication or production is a know-how, or *technē*. In the activity dominated by the light of *technē*, the principle of the being that must be produced resides in the agent or the fabricating individual: it is the *eidos*, the type or the model of the work or product. But this *archē*, or principle, is in no way in the product, for the product does not emerge from within itself, is not brought spontaneously or naturally to the light of day. By contrast, the *telos*, end or goal, of both *technē* and *poiēsis* does reside in the product; it is the work itself in which the productive activity reaches its accomplishment, i.e., what Aristotle calls *energeia* or *entelecheia*. This *telos* is not in the producer because, once completed, the work becomes independent from the producer. Moreover, as soon as it is here, the product may become an instrument for various goals and it may be used to satisfy the needs of many individuals. In addition, it falls within an infinite circle of means and ends. Because of the lack of equilibrium between *archē* and *poiēsis*, the ontological dignity of the doublet *technē-poiēsis* is afflicted with a deficiency: the agent

of the activity cannot in it be concerned with his or her ownmost mode of being (40–47).

It is easy to recognize in this reading of Aristotle the anticipation of the analysis of everydayness in *Being and Time*. And, indeed, the first thematic analyses of everydayness during the Marburg period—especially *The Prolegomena to the History of the Concept of Time*—teem with vocables such as *Werk* and *Herstellung*, which are overwhelmingly present in the interpretation of *technē* and *poiēsis* given in the 1924 lecture course.

Higher than the level at which *technē* and *poiēsis* reside is the level involving the doublet *phronēsis-praxis*. *Phronēsis* is a mode of uncovering or being-in-truth adjusted to action *(Handlung)*. Heidegger insists on the fact that *phronēsis* overcomes the ontological deficiency affecting *technē*. For the goal of *phronēsis* is nothing external to the agent, nothing which falls outside of him or her, nothing which may become indifferent to him or her: the end of *phronēsis* is not beside the agent, it is rather his or her being itself. The goal, says Heidegger, is "of the same ontological character as *phronēsis*." This goal is *eupraxia*, i.e., human *Dasein* itself taken in the how *(Wie)* of its acting. But this goal of acting is equally its principle: "In *phronēsis* the theme is the ownmost being of *Dasein* itself and in it are apprehended at the same time the principle and the end of deliberation." In other words "*praxis* is for *phronēsis* both *archē* and *telos*" (48–51).

The most striking feature of this reading—schematically presented here—is the way in which it channels what according to Aristotle pertains to the ethical realm and is connected with the plurality of human affairs into a debate strictly dealing with ontology. To this extent, it is not exaggerated to recognize in the Heideggerian analysis of *phronēsis* the anticipation of the maxim requiring that "*Dasein* exist for the sake of itself," in short the anticipation of the analysis of care and authentic existence in *Being and Time*. Two remarks are sufficient to suggest this anticipation. First, Heidegger insists on the fact that *phronēsis* is required because at the outset "*Dasein* hides itself from itself and forgets itself" (51–53). Second, the constellation of German words by which he highlights the structure of *phronēsis-praxis* is itself sufficient to suggest a parallelism with the future analysis of care and the specific sight adjusted to the ownmost mode of being of *Dasein*. These notions are *Durchsichtigkeit* (transparency), *Gewissen* (conscience), *Entschlossen-sein* (being-resolute) and *Augenblick* (moment of vision).

But the anticipatory character of this analysis is manifested with

even greater clarity in the very question raised by Heidegger to lead to his inquiry into what in Aristotle beyond *phronēsis* and also *epistēmē* stands as the highest potentiality of uncovering. This eminent potentiality is *sophia*, i.e., according to Heidegger "the authentic understanding of Being." He begins by underscoring that *epistēmē* and *sophia*, which are forms of *theōria* or contemplation, are also forms of *praxis* or existence, aiming at conquering the unveiling of Being. He underscores, next, that for Aristotle *sophia* is higher in rank than *phronēsis* and that as *bios theōrētikos* it represents "the highest meaning of human existence for a Greek" (61). And it is at this juncture that his question is asked: Why is there room for *sophia*, which is deemed of higher rank than *phronēsis*, if this *phronēsis* is oriented toward *Dasein* itself? In other words, "Why isn't there in Aristotle an identification between *sophia* and *phronēsis*?" (136). Put differently still, in ontological terms, "what is the meaning of Being on the basis of which Aristotle grants to *sophia* a rank higher than to *phronēsis*?" (164).

The answer to this question, we can see fairly quickly, will have two stakes, Being and Time: Being, because for the Greeks *Dasein* is not the highest being there is on earth and thus the being of *Dasein* seems ontologically deficient; time, because for the Greeks the highest being is the one that is always and for ever, whereas human *Dasein* is mortal. Consequently, the Greeks believed that human *Dasein* reaches its highest possibility of being-in-truth not by turning toward *Dasein* itself but by "remaining as long as possible within the pure consideration and within the pure presence of what is eternal" (171). *Sophia* is the pure contemplation by means of which the Greek philosopher who experiences the *bios theōrētikos* is immortalized or reaches *eudaimonia*, a word which Heidegger translates without hesitation as "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*) (see 172–79).

Thus, the meaning of Being in Aristotle is Time. It is with respect to time that he grants a higher dignity to *sophia*. But the time focused upon for understanding the meaning of Being is a specific time understood as the constant presence of the present. This poses for Heidegger the question of knowing why the present is being privileged in this fashion. "Why can't the past and the future claim such a right? Shouldn't Being be understood from temporality as a whole?"

This question, we can surmise, was a decisive one for fundamental ontology. Fundamental ontology would soon show that the very time in which past and future count as much as—and even more

than—present is the finite temporality of a *Dasein*. It is this temporality which would become the new center of gravity of ontology and bring about a complete metamorphosis of the Aristotelian ontology of *Dasein* in the reappropriation sought and brought about by Heidegger. At the outcome of this metamorphosis-reappropriation, Heidegger is still in agreement with Aristotle and Plato in granting *bios theōrētikos* the status of the highest possibility for *Dasein*, i.e., authentic existence. But he parts entirely with Aristotle when he changes the orientation of *theōria*. Instead of considering the perpetual being of *physis*, *theōria* in Heidegger's fundamental ontology has eyes only for the being mortal of *Dasein*. As a result, instead of being separate from *phronēsis*, *sophia* in the Heideggerian sense intimately connects with it. More specifically, its essential task consists from now on in redoubling *phronēsis* inasmuch as the latter is understood in purely ontological terms as the pre-ontological discovery of *Dasein*'s being, a status which Heidegger attributes to the seeing inherent in resoluteness. In other words, the metamorphosis of the Aristotelian legacy is to consist in projecting *sophia* and *theōria* upon the axis of *phronēsis/praxis*. This very projection entails a deconstruction of the Greek privilege given to *ousia*, or to the presence of the present. The deconstruction aims at showing that it is by dint of a movement consisting in *Dasein*'s falling from its *praxis*, from the assumption of its ownmost potentiality for Being—i.e., by dint of a fallenness leading *Dasein* to granting superiority to the everyday comportment of *poiēsis* or production—that this *Dasein* is put on the way of focusing on *ousia*, on the *Vorhandenheit* or subsisting presence of the present instead of taking in view its own existence. In other words, the pollution of *sophia* by *poiēsis* and *technē* explains that the Greek ontologist grants more attention to the being of nature than to his own being. The reason is that Being in the sense of the subsisting presence of nature is that which the activity of production never ceases presupposing and taking for granted.

This brief sketch is sufficient to clarify the sense in which, for Heidegger, a methodical reading of Plato's *Sophist*—which celebrates *bios theōrētikos* in the light of *Nicomachean Ethics* interpreted as an ontology of *Dasein*—(indeed "opened up the way for a set of problems of immediate and urgent importance." For his reading reveals several of the essential problems of his own fundamental ontology. It is even the entire structure of his analysis of *Dasein*, namely the tension between on the one hand public and fallen everydayness and on the other one's ownmost possibility, that is

being sketched out in this interpretation of the Aristotelian analysis of *poiēsis* and *praxis*.

Now all this actually renders all the more enigmatic Arendt's words in her text of homage. For never did she take a share in the task of a fundamental ontology. After she left Marburg to work on her doctoral thesis under the directorship of Jaspers in Heidelberg, she found her interest in the concept of love in Augustine and subsequently in the life of Rahel Varnhagen: these are texts without any trace of a concern for fundamental ontology. I do not mean that it is impossible to detect already in her doctoral thesis the first signs of an oblique debate with Heidegger: in a sense this debate is already announced in the resistance that Arendt feels toward the Augustinian theme of the nothingness of the world.[1] But the point is that already then as well as in her subsequent work no traces of a fundamental ontology are to be found. But then how could she seem to claim that Heidegger's course on *The Sophist* opened up the way for "a set of problems of immediate and urgent importance" for herself?

In order to elucidate this question, it is appropriate to consider briefly the extreme bitterness that followed upon her initial admiration, for I think it is because of this bitterness that the themes treated by Heidegger in the lecture course on *The Sophist* initiated the motion that gave rise in her to questions of "immediate and urgent importance."

Extreme bitterness about Heidegger is the foremost feature of the first philosophical article Arendt published in America immediately after the war. It came out in *The Partisan Review* (13: 34–56) under the title "What Is *Existenz*-philosophy?" Concerning Heidegger's fundamental ontology, the article is tantamount to a violent rejection of it in the name of Jaspers and his philosophy of communication. Arendt's bitterness was comprehensible. She could not ignore that it was in the language of fundamental ontology, which is the very one Heidegger was forging around 1924, that he defended the National Socialist revolution of 1933. She knew that the "Rectorial Address," after the 1924 lecture course, celebrated the *bios theōrētikos* of the Greeks and presented itself as a sort of remake of Plato's *Republic*. In light of these painful developments she might have recalled a surprisingly foreboding remark of 1924 on Plato's concept of the philosopher-king. Heidegger said: "Admitting that *phronēsis* is the most serious and decisive knowledge, then the science developing in the field of *phronēsis* would be the highest science. And inasmuch as man is a *zōon politikon*, inasmuch as his *Dasein* is with others, then authentic *sophia* would be

political science. As a consequence, the philosopher might be the true politician" (135–36). Yet in her article of 1946 Arendt does not seem to consider the possibility of a link between Heidegger's political blindness and the peculiar style of his reappropriation of Plato and Aristotle affecting his fundamental ontology. In any case it is not this question that is at the center of the article. Its leading characteristic is rather the abrupt dismissal of any connection between Heidegger and herself. Self-centeredness, attraction for nothingness, irresponsibility, deceptive genius, despair, Romanticism—such are the terms she uses to dismiss fundamental ontology. In other words, limiting ourselves to this article, it seems almost impossible to understand why twenty-five years later she would claim that Heidegger's teaching at the time of the gestation of the fundamental ontology could have made her suddenly aware of "a set of problems of immediate and urgent importance." In any event, although Jaspers liked the article, we know from Elizabeth Young-Bruehl that Arendt always refused to include it in any of her collected articles.[2] But if we consider this small writing in hindsight and from the perspective of her subsequent work, we cannot fail to note in it the announcement, so to speak *a contrario*, not of a subsequent agreement but rather of a debate with Heidegger.

From this perspective let me recall a few significant points of the article.

Apparently in full agreement with Jaspers, she concluded her text in the following terms:

> Existenz itself is never essentially isolated; it exists only in communication and in the knowledge of the Existenz of others. One's fellow men are not (as in Heidegger) an element which, though structurally necessary, nevertheless distroys Existenz; but, on the contrary, Existenz can develop only in the togetherness of men in the common world. In the concept of communication there lies embedded, though not fully developed, a new concept of humanity as the condition for man's Existenz. In any case, men move together within this "surrounding" Being; and they hunt neither the phantom of the Self nor do they live in the arrogant illusion that they can be Being generally.[3]

These sentences—given in conclusion of a quick overview of the existential analytic, introduced under the title "The Self as All and Nothing: Heidegger" (46)—condense the import of Arendt's critique. In her view the Self in *Being and Time* is everything because it is within it that the answer to the question on the meaning of

Being is to be found: since its essence is to exist, the Self takes the place formerly occupied by God in traditional metaphysics and thus becomes "master of Being." But this Self is nothing because the authentic mode of being, which is the center of care for *Dasein* in its most intimate potentiality-for-Being, entails in the end the nothingness of all beings, of others as well as of itself: indeed, it is in the anticipation of its own death that *Dasein* becomes a *Selbst*. According to Arendt, the Heideggerian notion of resoluteness—"the arrogant passion to be a Self"—is therefore contradictory. Only a complete withdrawal from the world would allow it to succeed. But because this is impossible, the Self is condemned to a constant "fall" and its resolution is the admission of an insurmountable failure. This notion is not merely contradictory, it is also "really contrary to Man" (*ibid.*, 51).

> The most essential characteristic of this Self is its absolute egoism, its radical separation from all its fellows. The anticipation of death as existential was introduced to achieve this; for in death Man realizes the absolute *principium individuationis*. Death alone tears him from the context of his fellows, within which he becomes a public person and is hindered from being a Self. Death may indeed be the end of human reality; at the same time it is the guarantee that nothing matters but myself. With the experience of death as nothingness I have the chance of devoting myself exclusively to being a Self, and once and for all freeing myself from the surrounding world. (*Ibid.*, 50)

Reading this critique in light of her own subsequent work—especially *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*—it is not possible to avoid thinking that the bitterness of 1946 called for—beyond refusal and rejection—a future work of analysis, demonstration and justification. For it is one thing to deny that the anticipation of death is the unique principle of individuation; it is another to show that very different factors determine individuation. It is one thing to claim that the Heideggerian resoluteness is merely an arrogant and contradictory passion; it is another to demonstrate that the Self cannot be without public relationships. It is one thing to substitute the notion of a common world conceived as habitat for the Heideggerian concept of authentic world; it is another to determine how a human world is constituted as common habitat.

It is well known that as soon as Arendt attempted those demonstrations in *The Human Condition* she reappropriated in her own way the legacy of the Greek tradition. Regarding this point, many

experts of political theory were surprised by the stress she was putting on Homer or Pericles and by her argument for *doxa*, or by her insistence on themes such as immortality and *eudaimonia*. All this is less surprising if one keeps in mind that, most of the time, these analyses are retorts to the reappropriation of the Greeks conducted by Heidegger at the time of the genesis of his fundamental ontology and already, more specifically, in the lecture course on *The Sophist*. When Heidegger considers the Greek world, it is with respect to one single criterion: the excellence of *bios theōrētikos* celebrated by Plato. In this fashion, he accepts as given and unquestionable the legitimacy of Plato's struggle against *doxa*, sophistry and rhetoric. He therefore lends no attention whatever to the previous criterion of excellence against which Plato stood opposed: that of *bios politikos*. Never therefore did Heidegger consider the possibility for *doxa*, the discourse of the sophists, and rhetoric, of being quite legitimate with respect to that previous criterion. No testimony to the excellence of that other *bios* is ever taken into consideration by him. There is no doubt in his mind—and he admits so much unambiguously at the beginning of *Being and Time*—that compared with Plato's *Parmenides* or Aristotle's *Metaphysics* all of Thucydides is superficial. This explains that when Heidegger is inspired by the Aristotelian analysis of *poiēsis* and *praxis*, he is led to inscribing the analyses within the strict framework of his ontology of *Dasein* and to subordinating them entirely to the superiority of *bios theōrētikos* conceived as understanding of Being. Because this *bios*, as philosophical and contemplative existence, is solitary and private, because it is deemed to be the highest form of action, all other activities, namely, the productions of works, public interaction, interlocution, are relegated within an anonymous sphere afflicted with fallenness. This Platonic bias in Heidegger is underscored by Arendt a few years after the violent 1946 article of *The Partisan Review* in a lecture on "The Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in which she said:

> Thus we find the old hostility of the philosopher toward the *polis* in Heidegger's analyses of average everyday life in terms of *das Man* (the "they" or the rule of public opinion, as opposed to the "self") in which the public realm has the function of hiding reality and preventing even the appearance of truth." (*E.U.*, 433)

Arendt's analysis of active life in *The Human Condition* may be considered as the attempt to consider from a fresh perspective all

the Platonic and Aristotelian themes reappropriated by Heidegger in the lecture course on *The Sophist* and subsequently in *Being and Time: doxa*, rhetoric, work, action, public and private, immortality, *eudaimonia*. This reexamination is carried out with respect to *bios politikos*. It is with respect to this non-Heideggerian criterion that Arendt was led to realize after the fact that the problems raised by Heidegger in the 1924–25 lecture course were in fact of "immediate and urgent importance" for her. To be sure, Heidegger's name is not even mentioned in the whole work; but the reason is merely that in it she does not address *bios theōrētikos* itself. The book as a whole however—in its structure as well as in its themes—may be viewed as a retort to Heidegger with respect to the previous type of excellence which *bios theōrētikos* aimed at supplanting. In any event, it is only by considering the matters from this perspective that I can understand why Arendt was so interested in having Heidegger read the German translation of *The Human Condition*. Heidegger did not like the book, perhaps because a former muse is rarely entitled to stand on the same footing as the one she inspired and perhaps because Heidegger never managed to confront directly the prejudices inherent in his fundamental ontology, in spite of many indirect retractations and his conceding—only once—that the publication of *Being and Time* had been a "disaster" *(Unheil)*.[4]

A few remarks on three themes of Arendt's book will suffice to highlight this feature of retort. They were already indicated in the very bitterness that marked her 1946 article. These themes are: the world, the principle of individuation, publicness.

Fundamental ontology establishes a clear cut distinction between what everydayness holds to be the world and the world in its ownmost, ontological sense. The world to which everyday comportment refers is the surrounding world, *Umwelt*, which presents itself as the functional context on the backdrop of which tools in general appear and the entities that are means for the sake of various ends. This environment is the intentional correlate of a concernful comportment, whose fundamental feature resides in the productive activity. The everyday world is pronounced inauthentic by Heidegger inasmuch as the production and preoccupation which animate it have eyes only for those beings whose mode of being is other than that of *Dasein*. By contrast, the world in the authentic sense is announced when the stability and the safety of the environment have been shaken and reduced to nothingness, as when tools break down or are revealed inadequate to the task at hand. Such a rupture foreshadows—but foreshadows only—the true experience

of the world. Such an experience encounters nothingness face to face and is revealed in the fundamental mood of anxiety. By the agency of this mood what is being revealed is that the world in the ownmost sense is not at all a dwelling or a home that we inhabit in common, but rather strangeness, the absence of dwelling *(Unheimlichkeit)* of the existing of *Dasein*. This world that is no longer a dwelling place is that for the sake of which *(Worumwillen)* a Self exists, outside of any relation with things and others and in a face to face with itself. What we recognize here is a very particular and highly metamorphosed reappropriation of an Aristotelian theme previously broached in the lecture course on *The Sophist*, namely the analysis of *praxis* as an activity that aims at *hou heneka*, at being for the sake of itself. But what is absolutely no longer Aristotelian in such a reappropriation is the fundamental solipsism entailed in the Heideggerian notion of *praxis* as being-in-the-world.

It is against this demarcation between a common or public world deemed inauthentic and an ownmost, solipsistic world that the descriptions of the world in *The Human Condition* are directed. Against any negative connotation of fallenness into the improper, the activity of production of works under description by Arendt is an activity that makes possible the duration of a properly human habitat—beyond the biological environment to which the activity of labor and the vital cycles that circumscribe labor are bound, inasmuch as labor and vital cycles leave nothing behind themselves. The activity of work or fabrication, starting with the fashioning of the most humble tools and ending in the production of useful artifacts beyond those consumer goods to which the labor activity is limited, is what gives "the world the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature that is man."[5]

In other words, whereas Heidegger attributes the persistence and stability of *Vorhandenheit* to nature, Arendt by contrast does not hesitate to consider insertion into nature as a renewed evanescence. Moreover, whereas Heidegger attributes to artifacts an intermediary status between natural persistence and the finite temporality of *Dasein*, Arendt's first step is to separate the artifact from nature and conceive nature as the cycle of being born and perishing—the artifact only being what endows the emerging human world with stability; likewise at the other pole, far from considering the time of the artifact as fallenness from the ownmost time of *Dasein*, she sees in the duration of the artifact the first condition of possibility for a properly human duration. This being said, a detailed analysis of the

description Arendt makes of the activity of work would show that she accepts a great many aspects of the Aristotelian theory on *poiēsis*. Regarding this point, her debt to Heidegger's lecture course on *The Sophist* is beyond doubt, but there is no trace in her reappropriation of Aristotle of the movement leading Heidegger to emphasize the *Unheimlichkeit* of *Dasein*. There is a good reason for this. The life of a pariah to which Nazism condemned her for a number of years and her own trial of exile prevented her forever celebrating *Unheimlichkeit* in any fashion whatsoever.

And if the mentality of *homo faber* suffers in her eyes from a fundamental deficiency, the reason is not that it is linked as in Heidegger to a world that is a stable dwelling, but quite on the contrary that its fundamental utilitarianism leads to transform endlessly all ends into means for the sake of further ends, thus threatening the stability of every dwelling. Furthermore, if Arendt insists on the necessity of action as an activity of a rank higher than fabrication, it is not as in Heidegger in order to distance herself from the dwelling erected by *homo faber*, or for the sake of an ontological absence of dwelling. Instead, this higher rank points to the attempt of keeping dwelling safe, of maintaining a common and public world secure for the sake of *amor mundi*, which has no room in Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

What about the second theme, that of individuation? In fundamental ontology, individuation comes about by means of the face to face with nothingness, which means that every intercourse with things as well as every interaction with others must sink in order to allow *Dasein* to become individuated. More importantly, individuation is fundamentally hostile to communication and expression. At the outcome of his analysis of *Gewissen*, the internal forum and intimate knowing with the mission of calling every time each *Dasein* to assuming resolutely its own selfhood, Heidegger writes: "Dasein is *authentically itself* in the primordial individualization of the reticent resoluteness which exacts anxiety of itself" (*Being and Time*, 322; 369). In other words, to the celebrated question "Who is *Dasein*?" there can be an answer only in the ontological repudiation of every sharing of words and deeds. Such is the peak of the Heideggerian reappropriation of the Aristotelian teaching on the *hou heneka* of *praxis*.

The Arendtian concept of individuation is in many respects a reaction against such views. Indeed Arendt too poses the question "Who are you?" instead of the traditional question "What is the human being?" Moreover, in apparent agreement with Heidegger,

she claims that individuation is not truly possible within the activity of production and that it requires action in order to come to light. Yet her notion of individuation contains no longer anything Heideggerian. Whereas Heidegger is focused on being-toward-the-end and on the anticipation of one's own death, which as a certain impossibility is the most individuated possibility, Arendt puts the burden of individuation on what she calls "natality," conceived not as the mere emergence of *zoē* but as a capacity to initiate something unforeseeable and exceptional. Whereas Heidegger divorces individuation from any interaction as a result of the anticipation of one's ownmost death, Arendt inserts it within human plurality. Where Heidegger separates authentic *praxis* from any communication and reserves its manifestation to the intimate and silent knowing of *Gewissen*, Arendt insists by contrast on the essential link between *praxis* and *lexis*.

> When I insert myself into the world, it is a world where others are already present. Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must always also answer the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you?" The manifestation of "who somebody is" is implicit in the fact that speechless action somehow does not exist or, if it exists, is irrelevant. (*L.W.A.*, 39–40)

It is hard to conceive of a clearer distancing from the analytic of *Dasein*. A final feature confirms this divergence. At the beginning of his introduction to his ontology of *Dasein*, Heidegger insists in full agreement with Plato's *Sophist* that the first philosophical step consists in "not *mython tina diegesthai*, in 'not telling a story'" (*S.Z.*, 6). On the contrary, in a gesture that reawakens Aristotle's *Poetics*, in opposition to both Plato and Heidegger, Arendt insists on the fact that "it is precisely in stories that the actual meaning of a human life finally reveals itself" (*L.W.A.*, 40–41). It is the narrative that reveals the individual "such as he is himself in the end" and grants him *post mortem* his *eudaimonia*. By contrast, after translating this word as *authenticity (Eigentlichkeit)*, Heidegger claims that the true meaning *(Bedeutung)* of human existence only reveals itself to the Self in the silence and solitude of an internal forum, in confronting one's mortality: *eudaimonia ante mortem*.

Not less patent is their disagreement concerning the public realm. Publicness in the Heideggerian sense is everydayness in which everyone is no one; it is the rule of the "they." Since every-

day comportment is dominated by the activity of work, this is tantamount to saying that the public domain may be adequately understood in terms of fabrication. And when, by opposition to this comportment, Heidegger in the analytic of *Dasein* reappropriates in his own fashion the Aristotelian notion of *praxis* after metamorphosing it into authentic existence, it turns out that in his eyes this notion is entirely private and thus that a public *praxis* would be a contradiction in the terms.

Against this analysis, Arendt claims that the activity of *poiēsis* could never really be public because only the product is and may remain apparent, whereas *praxis* is essentially public because it is conditioned upon human plurality, upon the sharing of words and deeds in a common world of appearances. This reversal is the very fundament of her political thought.

It seems to me that, taken by themselves, the three previous points are retorts that sufficiently show that indeed for Arendt it became a matter of "immediate and urgent importance" to consider anew—from the point of view of *bios politikos*—the very themes of Heidegger's fundamental ontology and thus to surmount her bitterness. And if her reexamination was the target of many objections on the part of specialized scholars, historians and political scientists, it is because she was not aiming at some objective neutrality but rather at a hermeneutic reappropriation. In this measure only, as Heidegger had done previously, she came to make hers Nietzsche's recommendation in the second *Consideration Out-of-Season:* "It is only from the perspective of the highest force in the present. . . that we can discern what is worthy of being known and preserved, what is great in the past." But contrary to Heidegger, she assigned this highest force to one's active belonging in a common world of appearances.

What is the connection with the irony of the maid from Thrace in all of this? In fact the tonality of *The Human Condition*—when the time came for the task of identifying the various symptoms of blindness in the approach by various philosophers to active life—is not ironic yet. When she maintains that the status Plato grants to *bios theōrētikos,* and also Aristotle although less exclusively, induces a failure to acknowledge the specific articulations of active life and tends to subject action to the model of the fabricating activity, no irony looms in these views. In order for her to adopt an ironic attitude toward professional thinking, an extra step was necessary. Her irony emerged and gained substance when she realized that those who devote their lives entirely to *bios theōrētikos* not

only fail to recognize the essential features of active life, but also wrap thought itself in various fallacies. I do not doubt that it is by comparing what she had retained of Heidegger's teaching at the time of the project of fundamental ontology with what he expressed in his post–World War texts that she came to realize this speciousness. I do not doubt also that the emergence of her irony toward the professional thinkers had something to do with a sort of self-critique. I mean to say that she came to realize along the way by reflecting upon *The Human Condition* that her 1958 book still remained influenced in spite of herself by the lecture course on *The Sophist*. Indeed, in spite of its implicit objections to Heidegger, in replies and retorts I highlighted, her book rests on the tacit presupposition that thought is ultimately contemplative, even though in the last page she wonders whether it is not perhaps an intense activity. Characterizing thought as contemplation: such is the central thesis of the 1924 thesis and of the entire project of fundamental ontology. At that time, Heidegger was saying repeatedly that thinking is a matter of knowing and that knowing is a matter of gaze. He claimed to agree with Plato on that point. Indeed fundamental ontology gravitates around the hierarchy of three forms of gaze, three levels of seeing. On the lowest level, there is according to Heidegger the intuitive grasp of what is at hand *(vorhanden)*. Once this intuition has been deconstructed, it turns out that the seeing that it contains is abstract and derived after a loss from a higher seeing, the one that illuminates productive and prospective circumspection, which Aristotle called *technē*. But this seeing also turns out to be derived and in a position of fallenness with respect to a still higher form of seeing, which is the moment of vision, or *Augenblick*, by means of which *Dasein* sees ontologically in full lucidity and transparency *(Durchsichtigkeit)* the finite totality of its potentiality-for-being. Fundamental ontology as a philosophical corpus claimed to limit itself to reflecting within the conceptual element of a theory on Being this eminent seeing, which sheds light pre-ontologically on existence itself. Of this pre-ontological seeing fundamental ontology claimed to be the anamnesis. As I have suggested above, the lecture course on *The Sophist*, which sheds light on the Platonic anamnesis by drawing upon *Nicomachean Ethics*, claims to show how this hierarchy of the levels of seeing rests upon a particular metamorphosis of the Aristotelian notions of *phronēsis* and *sophia*. Once metamorphosed, *phronēsis* is not longer what it was in Aristotle, the judgment on private and public matters; rather it becomes the silent seeing by an individual of his or her ownmost

potentiality-for-being. Consequently the new *phronēsis*, now become resoluteness, in addition to supposing a withdrawal from human plurality and the common world of appearances in which the mortals live, is deemed to be for each one the prelude to *sophia*, conceived as understanding of Being. In 1924–25 Arendt had been the fascinated witness of these metamorphoses. Her bitterness exploded when she came to realize that they had constituted the backdrop for the arrival of Heidegger on the political scene in 1933. Bearing witness to this bitterness, the 1946 article limited itself to rejecting Heideggerian resoluteness as a contradiction and an impossible withdrawal from the world. Subsequently, *The Human Condition*, which no longer bears any trace of this bitterness, takes for granted also that the philosopher holds himself in a position of withdrawal from the common world and that this withdrawal leads to pure contemplation. Because of this feature, her book reiterates a major theme of the 1924 lecture course, namely the thesis that in the final analysis the accomplishment of *bios theōrētikos* is purely contemplative and that thought consists in a sight by means of which the mind *(nous)* extends beyond speech *(aneu logou)*. It is after the fact only that irony appeared, when Arendt attempted to question the very notion of "withdrawal" from the common world of appearances, instead of abruptly rejecting this withdrawal or defining it in terms of contemplation. This questioning was based on the discovery that such a withdrawal is in fact essential to the life of the mind and necessary in order to think, will, and judge.

Concerning thought, it would not be exaggerated to claim that the analyses conducted by Arendt bear witness—at each step she takes—to a renewed debate with Heidegger, but to a debate in which her revived admiration is accompanied with irony. Her admiration was revived because, in her view, Heidegger was a living testimony to what thinking is, the weaving of a Penelope, a task with no end, an incessant *retractatio*, which burns today what seemed to be valuable yesterday as stable product or work, an intense activity endlessly tracing new paths, which lead to still different ones, while these lead back to the first ones, in a labyrinth with no way out. Her admiration can be explained also by the fact that in her view Heidegger was not only one of the rare thinkers of the West to have made his "residence" in the activity of thinking, but also had been able to express the specific traits of this purely intransitive, "entirely non-contemplative" activity, an activity of which one cannot say that it aims at knowledge, at a science where it would find satisfaction, for it has no respite, never brings an

ultimate foundation to a seeing, edifies no doctrine or theory whatever. Her admiration, finally, was justified in that in the retrospective light of texts such as *What Is Called Thinking?*, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, *Gelassenheit*, she could make sense again of her initial fascination. It had not been owed to the talents of an architect of a new doctrine but to the fact that she had accompanied and shared an experience of thought, that is to say, as she herself wrote it in her text of homage for Heidegger at eighty, a "fresh rethinking of what was already thought" ("Heidegger at Eighty," *ibid.*, 298).

But her renewed admiration was doubled with irony. The very one who as early as the 1920s had devoted himself to the purely intransitive and non-contemplative activity of thinking was also the one who had proclaimed himself capable of an ultimate gaze. The very one who was in a constant dialogue with himself was also the one who claimed reaching a seeing *aneu logou*. The very one who claimed day after day to withdraw from the common world of appearances in order to think was also the one who suddenly claimed himself capable of giving advice to a tyrant. It was the same person in fact, who was involved in an endless questioning and also, all of a sudden, wanted to contribute a new solution of, and foundation for, human affairs.

The Life of the Mind should be read as an attempt to confront the irony of such contradictory developments.

I would like to conclude this introduction with a few remarks on her attempt. At the end of the first volume of that work Arendt wrote the following: "I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from the beginning in Greece until today" (*L.M.*, 1: 212). For those who read too fast this seems to say: "Ultimately I agree with Heidegger." But then why, at the beginning of the volume, did she underscore the loss of "the age-old distinction between the many and the 'professional thinkers' specializing in what was supposed to be the highest activity human being could attain to" (*ibid.*, 13)? Didn't Heidegger throughout his career repeatedly proclaim the privilege of that activity? Precisely, by contrast to Heidegger, the dismantling of metaphysics conducted by Arendt does not claim an exclusive privilege for thought. Her own experience of the horrible effects of totalitarianism taught her that dwelling was not in the thinking activity but in the common world of appearances shared in words and deeds by a plurality of human beings, a world that requires to be safeguarded as the public realm in which individuals

express their judgment on human affairs. To be sure, she knew that, in order to protect this world, the thinking activity—an activity set in motion by *thaumazein* and whose questions in their quest for an ultimate are always without answers—is also necessary for it feeds both the capacity to judge, which is always inserted within a situation, and the movement of cognition, without ever being confused with them. But from the fact that "thinking" is necessary for the human condition, there does not result that the thinking activity should regulate the other activities—work-making, action, willing, and judgment. Consequently, instead of rekindling in a new fashion the ancient privilege of thought as in Heidegger post-*Kehre*, her own dismantling of metaphysics aimed at taking apart the fallacies brought in by this privileging. And concerning the thinking activity, the dismantling operated by Arendt consisted in locating thought with respect to a common world in which human beings interact, take initiatives on their own and express their judgments on specific events. In fact, the specious arguments she calls "metaphysical fallacies" all consist in hiding away the fact that the thinker belongs to the common world of appearances, even in hiding away the fact that the withdrawal necessary for the thinking activity cannot cut the link with appearances in spite of its intention to do so. The decisive point for Arendt—in *The Life of the Mind*—is that it is better to confront the existence of this link, as well as the tension that it entails between withdrawal and belonging, rather than covering it over. Such is the root of her deconstruction of metaphysical fallacies. The deconstruction aims at differentiating what the professional thinker tends to amalgamate.

Indeed, the irony of these "fallacies" emerges when the thinker —especially the professional thinker in whom *thaumazein*, upon which the thinking activity feeds, devours all other activities—returns to the common world of appearances where, in fact, we all have to act, will, and judge in the midst of our fellows in humanity. As a consequence of his total devotedness to the thinking activity, the professional thinker is inclined to claim the right of regulating all other activities and, therefore, to confuse or amalgamate thought and action, or thought and will, or thought and judgment. As I have attempted to suggest above, the lecture course on *The Sophist* was already exposed to such confusions and fallacies, for example when Heidegger amalgamated *sophia* and *phronēsis*, i.e., thinking and judging, but also when he attempted to understand the thinking activity in terms of willing, and vice versa. I cannot doubt that it is on the backdrop of recollecting those lectures that

in her homage to Heidegger at eighty Arendt insists that the more intense the pathos of thinking is, the more risks of blindness the thinker runs when he exchanges his residence in the thinking activity for the common world of human affairs. In other words, there are great risks that for his passion for the rule of thought he will substitute the passion for tyranny seen in a similar rule in the common realm of appearances. One finds the first example of this substitution in Plato's *Republic*. We find it repeated in the 1934 "Rectorial Address." It is, Arendt says, a case in "déformation professionnelle" ("Heidegger at Eighty," *ibid.*, 303).

It was given to me to witness an instance of this kind of tyrannical bend. The event took place during Heidegger's last seminar, to which I had been invited, in 1973. Heidegger was speaking on the *Gestell* and its contrast with *Ereignis*. His meditation reached a great intensity; it evoked themes such as Technology, Dwelling, *Gelassenheit*. The five participants, all French speakers, were carried out by the "wind of thought." Heidegger was in a dialogue with himself, in front of us, his gaze reaching somewhere else. But all of a sudden, he came out of his retreat and was back among us. And this is what he said in a firm voice: "Tourism should be forbidden." On the spot, no one smiled. We were all under the spell of the intensity of his monologue. For myself, I was quite ready to admit that tourism is indeed one of the contemporary modes of the *Gestell*, conceived as the generalized enframing of beings and the picture-making of the world. But from there to conclude that it should be forbidden, there was a shift which seemed to me to betray a change of register and to precipitate meditating thought into some despotic decisionism. Back in my hotel and in the company of one of the participants, I could not prevent myself from waxing ironic: "Who is going to enforce this prohibition on tourism? How does it agree with *Gelassenheit*? Isn't this the proclamation of a strict and pure nationalism? Doesn't he realize that without any tourist infrastructure in the city of Freiburg we would never have able to attend his seminar?"

Subsequently re-reading Kant's *Project for Perpetual Peace*—an "ironic" text, as Arendt notes[6]—I could not prevent myself from favoring Kant, against Heidegger, for thinking that the right to visit foreign countries and to stay there temporarily belongs to every citizen of the world. Much later, upon reflection, this incident contributed to convince me of the appropriateness of the irony directed in *The Life of the Mind* at the professional thinkers.

NOTES

1. See Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchielli Scott and Judith Chelius Start, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
2. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt, For Love of the World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 217.
3. *Partisan Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 55–56.
4. Correspondence Heidegger-Komerell, Paris: Minuit, p. 16.
5. See "Labor, Work, Action" in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James W. Bernauer, Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987, hereafter *L.W.A.*
6. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Biener, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 52.