

Review of Bachelor Thesis

Title: Hannah Arendt: Thinking and Action
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The bachelor thesis of Emma Lobenhofer tries to shed light on an issue that emerged in writings of Hannah Arendt in connection with her reflection of Eichmann's trial where she suggested that doing evil might be connected to an absence of thinking, "thoughtlessness". Which can imply that thinking is (or can be) a sort of a moving principle of (good, non-evil) action. This, however, contradicts some claims in her other writings where she seems to put a sharp separation between the realm of thinking and the realm of action. The bachelor thesis is well structured and complies with academical standards. A minor departure from them is in references: author-year style is used (instead of long references in footnotes, as is more usual in philosophical secondary literature) combined with two kinds of notes: author's comments in footnotes with arabic indexes and German quotes in endnotes with roman indexes. Also, references to Plato's texts should have been done properly using just the Stephanus pagination, and not combine it with author-year style (p. 33).

The point of departure for Emma is a claim from closing paragraphs of Arendt's essay *Thinking and Moral Considerations (TaMC)* that thinking can "prevent catastrophes". In order to explain the perplexity of this suggestion within the framework of H. Arendt, Emma first introduces her key concepts of action and thinking as are exposed in *Vita activa* and *The Life of Mind*. This step is necessary if we want to follow her later (unfinished) texts about the topic, or as Emma puts it, "*in order to identify potential grounds for connection and relationship between the two (i.e. action and thinking, p. 9)*". I find her exposition in these opening parts as excellent: she follows Arendt's reflections about the manifold relation between action and thinking (mostly) with precision, focuses on their key aspects and points out also some tensions that are inherent in Arendt's account (such as the "initiative" and "generative" aspect of action: *agere* and *gerere*; or withdrawal of thinking *from* the phenomenal world that nevertheless stays connected to it, see p. 18).

In the second part, Emma basically follows key points of argument structure of *TaMC*. We are presented with Arendt's views on Eichmann and Arendt's concept of "thoughtlessness" along with allusions to Heidegger's *Dasein*. Then she explores Arendt's attempt to inspect the socratic and platonic motives through which Arendt tries to explain her concept of thinking. These parts are not clear at times, yet the conclusion (and the answer) to the initial question seems well argued for: thinking is not a moving principle, but rather a limiting one (p. 39).

The last part is basically a short note on Beiner's essay about Hannah Arendt's unfinished work on judgement. This part serves as an outlook for further elaboration of the topic that is – due to its speculative nature – beyond what can be

asked for on the bachelor academic level.

Questions for the discussion:

- After presenting the difference between contemplation that seeks truth, and thinking that seeks meaning (p. 19–20), Emma mentions a question that she leaves unanswered: whether the meaning contemplated by a spectator watching a play is the same as the meaning that a thinker is seeking. Yet if they were the same, it would follow that the difference between contemplation and thinking evaporates: meaning would be accessible only in *contemplation*, i.e. only for a spectator. So the difference between contemplation and thinking would disappear, or would not be so clear. Is that correct?

And if it is only *thinking* that seeks – and possibly *provides* – meaning (see p. 22), where does meaning of our actions come from if the two are separate separate realms? Does it follow that (without a contemplative spectator) our actions are “meaning-less”?

- In the conclusion of part 2.4 (p. 35) we read: “*Thus, it might be concluded that Socrates, the thinker chooses their striving for the good, chooses to enter the conversation with himself, which makes thinking available for everyone and it is not necessarily contradicting to Plato’s assumption that everyone desires to be good, which makes it again an activity that is available to everyone.*” – This conclusion is confusing: the author does not provide any evidence for such interpretation. On contrary, she quotes Arendt’s own limitations on Plato/Socrates in this regard.

Summary In her thesis, Emma Lobenhofer has proven her ability of philosophical work with both primary and secondary literature. She has also proven a very good understanding for complex issues in philosophy of Hannah Arendt. Despite some shortcomings mentioned above, I **recommend** the thesis for a defence and suggest mark “**excellent**” (1).

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