

I

POLITICIZING PHENOMENOLOGY WITH HANNAH ARENDT
POLITIZOVANJE FENOMENOLOGIJE SA HANOM ARENT

Sanja Bojanić

PLURALITY IS A *CONDITIO PER QUAM* OF ALL POLITICAL LIFE

ABSTRACT

The book *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* is a contribution not only to the phenomenological tradition of thought and Hannah Arendt studies, but also political science and, most importantly, political philosophy. Sophie Loidolt advances an intervention that stands in contrast to contemporary phenomenological research which in certain times have had the tendency to perform depoliticized examination of the self and sociality, actually revealing the intention of *Phenomenology of Plurality* to articulate the numerous elements that comprise the methodological novelty with which Arendt changes the theory of the political.

KEYWORDS

Hannah Arendt,
phenomenology,
political philosophy,
plurality, Sophie Loidolt

Differences in the presentation significance, and consequently interpretation of an oeuvre or crucial topics and texts of seminal authors, always lie in the form, that is, in the coherence of method and clarity of execution. As crucial as the content and the accompanying host of conceptual networks woven from the well-known terms and constructions, is the impression of ease and wholeness of accomplishment, suggesting to the reader that what has been written could not have been said differently. Sophie Loidolt's *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* enthralls with its precise language and unequivocal thesis, a contribution not only to the phenomenological tradition of thought and Hannah Arendt studies, but also political science and, most importantly, political philosophy – philosophy's foray into the public realm. Along the way, we actually recognize the well-established Arendtian ambition from "Introduction *into* Politics." In a word, the book demonstrated a new twist on a known subject matter for phenomenology as well as understandings of Arendt's political theory. It has the capacity of "leading [us] *into* (*intro-ducere*) genuine political experience".

The topic but also the author's approach are clear from the very title, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*. The endlessly commented and handled notion of plurality is here read from a phenomenologist's perspective, within the framework of a political understanding of intersubjectivity in Arendt's work. Those familiar with the phenomenological

gesture in philosophy will not be let down, as each segment of text presents certain justified and faithful uses of Husserl, Heidegger, Fink, Merleau-Ponty or Sartre, a series of 20th century thinkers who have given relevance to this philosophical tradition and school of thinking. Equally, Arendt scholars are given a book that will shortly become canonical for students, lecturers, as well as anyone who finds the philosophical and political heritage of this extraordinary figure of 20th century political thinking invaluable.

A glance at the contents hints at the Husserlian *ἐποχή*, which with surgical precision separates the necessary elements of analysis still grasping the whole and its very essence. A concise introduction follows the description of structure, and offers an overview of a rich and fertile literature on Arendt as well as indicating the author's ambition to wade bravely into thinking of a "new terrain with and beyond Arendt in the context of an autonomous 'phenomenology of plurality'" (Loidolt 2018: 4). Right away, the first half of the book concerns itself with the construction of Plurality and the Political, enriching the transformation of phenomenology; while the second half of the book is dedicated to the actualization of plurality, that is, a detailed examination of elements that comprise the construction of the paradigm of plurality: The We, the Other and the Self in Political Intersubjectivity.

These two large units are further divided into three smaller chapters each, progressively guiding the reader to and then through an analysis of topics given in the titles. Thus, along with the "Emergence of Plurality," two parallel plans of *Arendt's Critique of Existenz Philosophy* and *Classic Phenomenology* are presented, as are the bases of *A New Political Philosophy* and in a specific way presented in *Rethinking the With-World*. In the following chapter, "Basic Phenomenological Concepts," the author places under a microscope the notions of *Appearance*, *Experience*, intentionality, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, but also the *World*, in such a way as to politicize them by varying them through the paradigm of plurality. With an overview and critical consideration of the existing contexts of the enumerated terms and phenomena to which they are tied, Loidolt also advances an intervention that stands in contrast to contemporary phenomenological research which in certain times have had the tendency to perform depoliticized examination of the self and sociality, actually revealing the intention of *Phenomenology of Plurality* to articulate the numerous elements that comprise the methodological novelty with which Arendt changes the theory of the political.

This political appears as paradoxical fruit par excellence of "the human condition of plurality." Or to quote Arendt herself from the introduction of the *Human Condition*, "plurality is specifically the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life" (Arendt 1958: 7). Resisting Heidegger's grounding in existentialia, she indicates the importance of the conditioning of existence. The particularity of plurality that appears in the public sphere manifests in a double-tiered conditionality: not only is it a question of what political life cannot do without, but the condition that makes political life what it is. However, in contradistinction to the rich

phenomenological tradition that, due to its neglect of plurality is nevertheless marked by a given ontological immobile singularity, this reading of plurality ensures *An Enactive Approach to Conditionality*, from which emerge specific *Dynamic Spaces of Meaning*. The philosophical and phenomenological thinking of plurality is contaminated by politics. In action, it acquires a new dimension, which in turn bring it back to the world. The text maps out and manifests the transformative basis of “politicized phenomenology” in Hannah Arendt’s oeuvre through the analysis of notions such as “political intersubjectivity,” “politicized forms of Being-with” as well as “the with-world in different activities.”

Before we continue onto the second part of the book, on actualizing political intersubjectivity of plurality, let us linger a moment to look at the units that thematize a certain “approach to conditionality,” as well as specific “spaces of meaning” that mark Arendt’s “well-hidden methodology” in which operate her key terms such as appearance, activity, world, conditionality, plurality and the political. It is precisely these two phrases that introduce new elements while breaking up the classical construction sequence of the static ontological argument on the political being in the world. The author recognizes mechanisms that awaken and induce conditional structure, bind themselves to concrete and bodily forms. From the skein of various phenomenological readings, Loidolt selects those elements that are marked as specifically Arendtian, and thus politically engaged. The style, speed and basic dynamics of these movements “vertically/historically and horizontally/relationally” (Loidolt 2018: 110) result in “mutual realization of subjectivities” (ibid: 264) that “enact” or act out human plurality. *Vollzug* (which is, after all, Scheler’s term of enactment that greatly determines a person) depends on plurality; better still, performing the intersubjective relation, and then also recognizing the importance of common existence, could not be fully comprehended from without, but only as “enacted” or “acted out”.

In that sense, being-in-the-world is not an interior quality characteristic of myself alone, but represents a form of my life, structured such that it cannot be rendered outward or “enacted” or “acted out.” This form of enactment ensures an approach to conditionality – which is here understood not within the borders of a “human condition,” but precisely as a mechanism that enables this very “human condition.” The challenge of the last section of the first part, which gives a detailed account of the novelty of Arendt’s phenomenology of plurality, rests in the fact that Loidolt offers a sophisticated and respectful alternative to “phenomenological essentialism” that Seyla Benhabib ascribes to Arendt in *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Benhabib 2003: 123–171). With the authority of an expert in the phenomenological tradition, to which she herself belongs, the author corrects moments of potential misunderstanding and insufficient clarity in the phenomenologically ambitious account of Benhabib. Also rejecting the strict boundary between private and public, and analogously the distinction between the social and the political in Hannah Arendt, Loidolt really presents a more contemporary Arendt and allows us to consider the phenomenological approach amid current myriad

cacophonous interpretations of the political. “Spaces of meaning” are sorted according to their characteristics, as the awareness of being in the world is always already within a given medium of meaning. These spaces represent the basic structures of lived time and space. In addition to such “quasi-transcendental, fundamental meaning-spaces,” Loidolt describes contingent spaces that can be explored, while leaving aside objects of analysis in their “psychological states,” and regarding them as “a primary form of orientation and encounter.” Such spaces comprise temporalities and spatialities of the world in which, following a rhythm of internal logic, mutuality and exchange, certain forms of intersubjectivity appear. “Conditions of appearance” and possible “forms of intersubjectivity” transform these spaces of meaning. With the achievement of these changes the conditions are met to actualize plurality.

The second part of *Phenomenology of Plurality* is dedicated to the analysis of actualizing plurality. The introductory portion provides a detailed overview of understandings of this term in political theory, ontology and Arendt Studies, referencing Arendt’s own definition from *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958: 7–8). According to that definition, the first elements of plurality rest on “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world,” but also “because we are all the same, that is, human... nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.” At the same time, addressing the issue of equality and difference as well as our inevitable interaction with each other, Arendt opens a broad space for interpretation, which Sophie Loidolt explores within her phenomenological framework for reading plurality.

The chapter on the actualization of the plural “we” maps the relation of special activities of speaking, acting and judging, following their visibility to pay particular attention to public space in which they are manifested. Only through exchange can actualization of activities take place, which can be used to build the plural “we.” This “we” allows for the articulation of all those equal/different that appear in public space. Equality and difference become valid forms of appearance of “we” only if the transformation of individuality leads to a certain form of togetherness (*Miteinander*), that is, of a “we” in which all those I’s participate willingly. Arendt’s theory of action is, to use Loidolt’s words, anti-reductionist, intersubjective, and holistic, and means that the “we” is not conceptualized exclusively through intentions or goals or purposes. Action cannot be mere realization of the content of my intentions, since in that case it would reduce the possibility of plurality – in contradistinction to the methodological individualism characteristic of John Searle. Loidolt elaborates on the “we” topic, which has become in the last few decades central to the discussion between phenomenologists and social ontologists and developmental theories.

An exchange with Arendt scholars would also be extremely important because it rests in the notion that the phenomenology of plurality, as the careful dissection of the performative power of “we” in *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* shows, arrives at an ethics of plurality, which is precisely the subject of the last chapter of the book. It elaborates an ethics inherent to the actualization of plurality. This is a specific response

to certain objections to Arendt's work, according to which she lacks "moral foundations." Experiences of a plurality of the first-person (such as acting and speaking) have opened entirely specific kinds of possibilities for democratic forms of "we" when some forms of agonistic practice (such as debate and in-between processes) exclude or distance antagonisms. An analysis of plurality grounded in phenomenological premises above all points to the fact that the response to what is plurality cannot rest exclusively in political science or structural constructions shaded by Marxism, existentialism or other schools of thought characteristic of the twentieth century. In Sophie Loidolt's book, on the other hand, phenomenology becomes politically engaged in the most representative possible way, through the works of Hannah Arendt.

References

- Arendt, Hannah (1958), *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Benhabib, Seyla (2003), *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham et al: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Loidolt, Sophie (2018), *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Sanja Bojanić

Pluralnost je *conditio per quam* celokupnog političkog života

Apstrakt

Knjiga *Fenomenologija pluralnosti: Hana Arent o političkoj intersubjektivnosti* doprinos je ne samo fenomenološkoj tradiciji mišljenja i studijama Hane Arent, već i nauci o politici i, što je najvažnije, političkoj filozofiji. Intervencija Sofi Lojdolt suprotna je savremenim fenomenološkim istraživanjima koja su u određenim periodima imala tendenciju da depolitiziraju ispitivanje sopstva i društvenosti, zapravo otkrivajući nameru *Fenomenologije pluralnosti* da artikuliše brojne elemente koji sačinjavaju metodološku novost kojom Arent menja razumevanje političkog.

Ključne reči: Hana Arent, fenomenologija, filozofija politike, pluralnost, Sofi Lojdolt