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Responding to wrong doing

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ABSTRACT

I argue that educators, by introducing young people to various ways of responding to wrongdoing, help prepare them for the task of acting in and taking responsibility for the world. I begin by (a) introducing Hannah Arendt's understanding of the world, the characteristics of action as unpredictable, boundless and irreversible, i.e. the frailty of human affairs. I then move to (b) what Arendt calls the 'power of forgiveness.' Forgiving is an action, and as such is free and unpredictable. Moreover, (c) forgiving concerns the person not the deed. To understand the implications of this, I introduce Arendt's understanding of being a person in distinction to being merely human. I then ask whether all deeds are forgivable, which brings me to (d) the new crime against humanity. Finally, I ask (e) whether one can be reconciled to acts, such as genocide and whether solidarity with the wrongdoer is possible.

KEYWORDS

Forgiveness; Hannah Arendt; reconciliation; crimes against humanity; responsibility

Introduction

The political thinker Hannah Arendt was concerned for both children and the world. In her essay 'The Crisis in Education,' she argued that educators have a double responsibility, namely to the children they teach *and* to the world. Teachers introduce the children into the world, 'pointing out the details and saying to [them]: this is our world' (Arendt 1993, 189). A child is not 'simply a not yet finished living creature' (Arendt 1993, 185), he or she is also 'a newcomer in this human world' (Arendt 1993, 185), and as such needs to be gradually introduced into it.

The world is old; because it is made by human beings who are mortal, 'it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they' (Arendt 1993, 192). To save it from ruin, education must prepare the new and young 'for the task of renewing a common world' (Arendt 1993, 196). However, in their encounter with the world, young people will not only experience beauty and friendship, justice, equality and freedom,

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they will also be confronted with evil, violence, wars, humanitarian crimes, and all forms of injustice. Despite all of this, we hope that they will take responsibility for the world and set things right. This means they will have to take the initiative and act. This includes the risk that their actions – despite the best of intentions – may turn out to be wrong. Introducing them to Hannah Arendt’s reflections on forgiveness, revenge, reconciliation and non-reconciliation may help them in their task of taking responsibility for the world.

a) Belonging to a community

If we are to understand what Arendt has to say about forgiveness, I first need to introduce the concept of community and to summarize the characteristics of action. In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt conceptualizes the human-built world in terms of ‘the three fundamental human activities’: labor, work and action (1998, 7). These activities correspond to ‘the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man’ (Arendt 1998, 7), namely life itself, worldliness, and plurality. Labor is an activity driven by the necessities of life and is thus necessarily repetitive, without beginning or end. In Arendt’s own words, ‘necessity, not freedom, rules the life of society’ (1950, 149). Work ‘provides an “artificial” world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings’ (Arendt 1998, 7). Action is ‘the only activity that goes on directly between men’ (Arendt 1998, 7). It is the faculty that ‘corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world’ (Arendt 1998, 7). Arendt argues that we always act within an ‘already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions’ (1998, 184). This precisely is the reason why ‘action almost never achieves its purpose’ (1998, 184).

Actions are unpredictable, boundless and irreversible. Laws have always been understood as ‘stabilizing forces’; in other words, laws help secure the life of public affairs. ‘All laws,’ Arendt states, ‘first create a space in which they are valid, and this space is the world in which we can move about in freedom’ (2005, 190).

According to Arendt, ‘the people’s support [. . .] lends power to the institutions of a country’ (1970, 41). ‘The sanctions of the laws [. . .] are directed against those citizens who – without withholding their support – wish to make an exception for themselves,’ however the sanctions ‘are not their essence’ (Arendt 1970, 97). The ‘laws are “directives” rather than “imperatives” and can be ‘likened to the “rules of a game” [. . .], and these rules are “valid” rules’ (Arendt 1970, 97). According to Arendt, ‘the point of these rules is not that I admit to them voluntarily or recognize theoretically their validity, but that in practice I cannot enter the game unless I conform; my motive for acceptance is my wish to play, and since men exist only in the plural, my wish to play is identical with

my wish to live' (1970, 97). She states, 'Every man is born into a community with preexisting laws which he "obeys," first of all because there is no other way for him to enter the great game of the world' (1970, 97).

Obviously, there are people who 'wish to change the rules of the game, as the revolutionary does, or to make an exception for [themselves], as the criminal does; but to deny them on principle means no mere "disobedience," but the refusal to enter the human community' (Arendt 1970, 97). How existential a guaranteed place in the community is becomes obvious when we look at the experience of 'European peoples between the two wars,' people who 'no longer felt sure of their elementary rights if these were not protected by a government to which they belonged by birth' (Arendt 1973, 292). When refugees become stateless, they become rightless too; in other words, they lose their legal status and 'no longer belong to any community whatsoever' (Arendt 1973, 295). Paradoxically, in such a case, 'a criminal offense becomes the best opportunity to regain some kind of human equality, even if it be as a recognized exception to the norm. [...] As a criminal, even a stateless person will not be treated worse than another criminal, that is, he will be treated like everybody else' (Arendt 1973, 286). It may sound absurd, but 'only as an offender against the law can [a stateless person] gain protection from it' (Arendt 1973, 286). As Christian Volk briefly and aptly comments, 'here the extent of the legal paradox becomes apparent, because through the theft, the stateless refugee could obtain all those legal rights that a citizen qua citizen was guaranteed, if a crime was committed. In other words, by committing an offense, the stateless refugee again became a member of a legal-political community and received some of his civic rights back' (Volk 2010, 189).

With this calamity of stateless and rightless refugees in mind, we can see that it is crucial 'to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions' (Arendt 1973, 296 f.). Arendt's point is that if a human being loses his place in the community, it seems that he loses 'the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow man' (1973, 300). When a criminal breaks the law, he puts 'himself outside the community constituted by it' (Arendt 1970, 97), and his return to the community requires that he first be punished. To give a recent example, the supporters of US President Donald Trump who attacked the US Capitol building on January 6 2021 thought to overturn his defeat in the 2020 presidential election by disrupting the joint session of Congress as they certified the votes, vandalizing and occupying the building for several hours. They have since been brought before the court and sentenced for their actions: for example, one rioter 'who attacked police officers working to hold back the angry pro-Trump mob on Jan. 6 was sentenced [...] to more than five years behind bars, the most so far for anyone sentenced in the insurrection' (as noted by Long, 2021).

b) The power to forgive

For Arendt, one of the chief characteristics of human affairs is their frailty. The outcome of the ‘human ability to act – to start new unprecedented processes’ (Arendt 1998, 231) remains uncertain and unpredictable. ‘Men,’ we read in *The Human Condition*, ‘have always been capable of destroying whatever was the product of human hands and have become capable today even of the potential destruction of what man did not make – the earth and earthly nature’ (Arendt 1998, 232), but they ‘never have been and never will be able to undo or even to control reliably any of the processes they start through action. [...] And this incapacity to undo what has been done is matched by an almost equally complete incapacity to foretell the consequences of any deed or even to have reliable knowledge of its motives’ (Arendt 1998, 233).

If actions are irreversible, is there, then, a way of ‘being unbound from the past in order to go on’ (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 100)? Arendt suggests that the remedy for ‘the uncertainty of human action, in the sense that we never quite know what we are doing when we begin to act into the web of inter-relationships and mutual dependencies that constitute the field of action,’ is ‘the human capacity to forgive’ (Arendt 2005, 56 f.). Surprisingly, Jesus of Nazareth discovered ‘the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs’ (Arendt 1998, 238). In her view, his concept of forgiveness was primarily political because he taught that ‘the power to forgive [...] must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope to be forgiven by God also’ (Arendt 1998, 239; Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 100). However, and this is important, this does not relate to what she calls ‘the extremity of crime and willed evil’ (Arendt 1998, 239). ‘Crime and willed evil,’ Jesus taught, ‘will be taken care of by God in the Last judgment, which plays no role whatsoever in life on earth, and the Last judgment is not characterized by forgiveness but by just retribution’ (Arendt 1998, 240). Jesus speaks in Luke 17:1–5 of *skandala*, ‘offences which are unforgivable, at least on earth’ (Arendt 1998, 240). For Arendt, these are those offences which ‘we can neither punish nor forgive, [and] which, since Kant, we call “radical evil”’ (Arendt 1998, 241). They are deeds about whose perpetrators ‘we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: “It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea”’ (Arendt 1998, 241).

There is a tragic element in all action, and ‘the tradition never lost sight of this tragic element [...], nor failed to understand, though usually in a non-political context, that forgiving is among the greatest of human virtues’ (Arendt 2005, 58). However, Arendt thinks something ‘was lost by the tradition of political thought, and survived only in the religious tradition,’ namely ‘the relationship between doing and forgiving as a constitutive element of the intercourse between acting men.’ According to Arendt, this was ‘the specifically political [...] novelty in Jesus’ teachings’ (58).

Most discussions of forgiveness focus on the moral domain. However, in *The Human Condition* Arendt develops the idea that forgiveness is a necessary foundation of human action. 'Without being forgiven, being released from the chain and pattern of consequences of what we have done,' she writes, 'our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover' (Arendt 1998, 237; see also Tsao 2010, 53).

Forgiving is an action, and actions are free and unpredictable; therefore, forgiveness is not an automatic reaction 'but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from the consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven' (Arendt 1998, 241). She thus sets forgiveness in opposition to vengeance, 'which acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed' (240). Arendt values Jesus' discovery highly. In her view, 'the great boldness and unique pride of this concept of forgiveness as a basic relationship between humans does not lie in the seeming reversal of the calamity of guilt and error into the possible virtues of magnanimity or solidarity. It is rather that forgiving attempts the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, and that it succeeds in making a new beginning where beginnings seemed to have become no longer possible' (Arendt 2005, 57 f.).

Finding a remedy to the irreversibility of action in human action itself was the result of a longer process of thought. In 1942, Arendt argued that 'it is one of the laws of life in the human community that every victim – but not every conquered enemy – cries for vengeance' (Arendt 2007, 262). In 1946, she admitted in a letter to Karl Jaspers that she did not know how the Germans and the Jews would ever get out of a situation which 'for the Germans [means that they] are burdened [. . .] with thousands or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people who cannot be adequately punished within the legal system; and [for the] Jews [that they] are burdened with millions of innocents, by reason of which every Jew alive today can see himself as innocence personified' (Arendt and Jaspers 1992, 54). In 1958, in her book *The Human Condition*, she suggested that forgiving is 'the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences' (Arendt 1998, 241).

However, as I mentioned earlier, forgiving does not include the extremity of crime and willed evil. Is it then possible to find a reasonable attitude towards the fact of 'the organized guilt in which the Nazis had involved all inhabitants of the German lands, the inner exiles no less than the stalwart Party members and the vacillating fellow travelers' (Arendt 1968, 19 f.)? According to Arendt, this is difficult because it involves mastering the past, which 'perhaps cannot be done with any past, but certainly not with the past of Hitler Germany' (Arendt 1968, 20). Why not? The reason is Auschwitz. 'What we learned about Auschwitz [. . .] in 1943,' she said in a conversation with Günter Gaus, 'was the real shock. Before

that we said: Well, one has enemies. [...] But this was different. It was really as if an abyss had opened [...] *This ought not to have happened*. And I don't mean just the number of victims. I mean the method, the fabrication of corpses and so on – I don't need to go into that: [...] something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves, none of us ever can' (Arendt 1994b, 13 f.). Roger Berkowitz is quite right to note that 'Arendt's embrace of reconciliation as a response to the wrongs of the world is not absolute. Not every wrong and not every wrongdoer can or should be reconciled. And some wrongs, while not irreconcilable, are bad enough that they do not merit active reconciliation' (Berkowitz 2017, 32).

It is true, 'aggressive warfare is [...] as old as recorded history' and 'war crimes [...] [are] no more unprecedented than the "crimes against peace"' (Arendt 1963, 234). 'Both were covered by international law,' but the 'crime against humanity perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people' (Arendt 1963, 247) was not 'a matter of criminal excess in the pursuit of war and victory' (Arendt 1963, 235) but genocide and as such new and unprecedented.

c) Forgiving the person not the deed

'Directly or indirectly,' Young-Bruehl remarks, 'Arendt's reflections on forgiveness have had great influence since 1958 when *The Human Condition* appeared' (Young-Bruehl 2006, 110). One example is Martin Luther King, Jr. who in the 1960s noted, 'Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship' (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 111 f.). Another example is 'the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), 'which, for the first time in history, made forgiveness a guiding principle for a state' (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 112). The head of the commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, raised the question in his memoir of 'whether repentance should be a necessary precondition for forgiveness. His answer was that [...] unconditional forgiveness [...] is possible, not just on the grounds of unconditional love; it is also possible for a person to forgive [...] because the person doing the forgiving understands that forgiveness offers to release to the forgiver, freeing the victim from the role of being a victim' (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 117). Two things are important to keep in mind: *first*, 'the TRC was not a court. Its function did not include sentencing or punishment' (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 114); and *second*, 'the TRC arranged meetings between perpetrators and their victims,' but 'forgiveness [...] could not be requested of the victims by the commission; it had to be freely chosen by the individuals who had been wronged' (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 115).

For Arendt, 'love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others' (Arendt 1998, 242). 'Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason [...] that it is not only apolitical but

antipolitical' (242). Love is not concerned 'with what the loved person may be, with his qualities and shortcomings no less than with his achievements, failings, and transgressions' (242). In her view, respect is better suited to the worldly appreciation of others than is the passion of love: 'what love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs' (243). 'Respect, [...] because it concerns only the person,' she argues, 'is quite sufficient to prompt forgiving of what a person did, for the sake of the person' (243). This is precisely the point Arendt wishes to make: when we forgive, we do so because of the person in question, that is, *who* she is. This does not mean that she should not receive punishment for *what* she has done. We find 'this shift from the objective *what* somebody did to the subjective *who* of the agent [...] even in our legal system' (Arendt 2003, 111). She goes on, 'For if it is true that we indict somebody for what he did, it is equally true that when a murderer is pardoned [...], it is not murder which is forgiven but the killer, his person as it appears in circumstances and intentions' (111).

In Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, Arendt was confronted with a wrongdoer who refused to think about what he 'was doing and who also refused in retrospect to think about it, that is, go back and remember what [he] did' (Arendt 2003, 112). Here was someone who failed to constitute himself as somebody. He 'stubbornly remain[ed] [a] nobody' who proved 'unfit for intercourse with others who, good, bad, or indifferent, are at the very least persons' (112).

To understand Arendt's argument fully, it may be helpful to consider the distinction she makes between merely being human and being a person. 'We might call [people],' she argues, those 'who in the moral collapse of Nazi Germany [...] never doubted that crimes remained crimes even if legalized by the government, [...] moral personalities' (Arendt 2003, 78 f.). However, this is, according to Arendt, 'almost a redundancy' because 'the quality of being a person, as distinguished from merely being human, [...] is precisely his "moral" quality' (79). It means a person does 'not need to feel an obligation' not to participate in crimes since he has a conscience; and his conscience says, "'This I *can't* do," rather than, "This I *ought* not to do"' (78). These persons were 'morally the only reliable people' because they did not act according to a moral order but according to self-respect.

After the Eichmann trial, Arendt made the general statement that 'the trouble with the Nazi criminals was precisely that they renounced voluntarily all personal qualities, as if nobody were left to be either punished or forgiven. They protested time and again that they had never done anything out of their own initiative, that they had no intentions whatsoever, good or bad, and that they only obeyed orders' (Arendt 2003, 111). Consequently, 'in rootless evil there is no person left whom one could ever forgive' (Arendt 2003, 95).

d) The new crime against humanity

'Crimes against the Jewish people' have a long history. Given this history, Arendt recognized that it was 'almost inevitable' that the Jews suffering under Hitler were 'thinking exclusively in terms of their own history' (Arendt 1963, 245). Thus, the atrocity of Auschwitz was not thought of as 'an unprecedented crime of genocide, but, on the contrary, as the oldest crime they knew and remembered' (Arendt 1963, 245). Auschwitz 'was seen mainly as a *familiar* crime of mass killing, as "the most horrible pogrom in Jewish history." Auschwitz was the worst of this continuum, but Arendt asserts, it was "different not only in degree of seriousness but in essence"' (Nenadic 2013, 46). Arendt repeatedly insisted 'that the new facts of the Holocaust demanded *breaking fresh conceptual ground* (. . .). Philosophy and law needed to "[rise] to the challenge of the unprecedented"' (Nenadic 2013, 44). Instead, the Nuremberg Trials applied 'the familiar paradigm of "war crimes,"' and thereby concealed the 'crime of genocide.' The 'Nuremberg Trials were cited in Jerusalem as valid precedent' (Arendt 1963, 233; Nenadic 2013, 44). Old conceptual paradigms 'were applied to the new circumstances in a manner that [. . .] obscured what was distinctive about them' (Nenadic 2013, 44). True, the Jerusalem trial did not apply the 'war crimes' framework to genocide; however, by charging 'Eichmann under the main legal category of "crimes against the Jewish people," the Jerusalem trial,' Arendt claims, 'missed an opportunity to better express the crime and thus to establish a firmer legal precedent for its future prosecution' (Nenadic 2013, 46). In her epilogue to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she argued that 'justice of what was done in Jerusalem would have emerged to be seen by all if the judges had dared to address their defendant in something like the following terms':

You admitted that the crime committed against the Jewish people during the war was the greatest crime in recorded history, and you admitted your role in it. [. . .] Let us assume, for the sake of the argument, that it was nothing more than misfortune that made you a willing instrument in the organization of mass murder; there still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder [. . .]. And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations – as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world – we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang. (Arendt 1963, 254)

Whereas the Nuremberg Charter defined "'crimes against humanity" as "inhuman acts" [. . .] (*Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit*),' the Jerusalem trial 'centered on the crime against the Jewish people, a crime that could not be explained by any utilitarian purpose' (Arendt 1963, 252). In other words, the Jerusalem court did not 'fall into the trap of equating this crime with ordinary war crimes.' Yet, and this is Arendt's critique,

at no point [...] either in the proceedings or in the judgment, did the Jerusalem trial ever mention even the possibility that extermination of whole ethnic groups – the Jews, or the Poles or the Gypsies – might be more than a crime against the Jewish or the Polish or the Gypsy people, that the international order, and mankind in its entirety, might have been grievously hurt and endangered. (Arendt 1963, 252)

Arendt's judgment that none of us ever can be reconciled to what happened in Auschwitz is not only consequent but also entirely understandable since we are confronted with *skandala* (offences), which are unforgivable on earth. However, while 'reconciliation had had no role in the Nuremberg court, [...] it was perceived as necessary in South Africa' (Young-Bruehl 2006, 113). The reason Young-Bruehl gives is that 'apartheid, "separateness," had not been a state policy for the elimination of nonwhite peoples, a Final Solution; it had been a protototalitarian state policy for depriving all non-white people of citizenship and relocating them from areas designated for whites only' (Young-Bruehl 2006, 113f.). Additionally, she claims that 'Arendt's conceptualization of forgiveness as a necessary [...] ingredient of political life [...] has become central to political discourse around the world under the broader, more political term reconciliation' (112).

Moreover, Arendt herself stated, 'every single person needs to be reconciled to a world into which he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger' (Arendt 1994, 308). How, then, does she understand the notion of reconciliation? How does it differ from forgiveness, and why is it necessary to be reconciled to the world? Trying to answer these questions, I hope, will also further explain why Arendt's final judgment of Adolf Eichmann is 'a judgment of nonreconciliation.'

e) Reconciliation: 'An act of political judgment affirming solidarity'

Examining the notion of reconciliation in Hannah Arendt's work is not an easy task because she produced neither a theory of justice nor a theory of forgiving or reconciliation. She avoided coherent theories because, as Jerome Kohn argued, 'implicit in the finality of any theory' is a 'potential danger to human freedom.' He links this statement to justice:

To formulate a coherent theory of justice would seem to be a worthwhile philosophical endeavor, one with Platonic roots but also current today, and at worst a harmless one. Would it not be worthwhile to know the truth of what we are talking about when we talk about justice? Would not such knowledge instruct us how to deal with injustice when it occurs? But Arendt suggests something quite different. If we knew what justice was [...], then we would no longer have to think about the meaning of justice. (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 230)

However, I have argued that the capacity of forgiveness plays a central role as a remedy to the irreversibility of action and that we have reason to expect justice when crimes are brought to court. The difficulty or challenge is that justice, forgiveness and reconciliation are themes implicit in many of Arendt's writings. Therefore,

[A] discussion of reconciliation may seem circumstantial, a mere accident. Reconciliation appears sporadically in Arendt's published writing. It does not appear in *On Revolution* (. . .). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the idea is present, but is spoken under the name "comprehension." In *The Human Condition*, reconciliation is mentioned only once, although the discussion of forgiveness in the section on Action is heavily influenced by Arendt's approach to reconciliation. Arendt's book most indebted to the thinking of reconciliation is *The Life of the Mind*, her unfinished final book, which contains important passages on reconciliation, many of which originate in the *Denktagebuch*. (Berkowitz 2017, 10f.)

It gets even more complicated since 'reconciliation figures prominently in numerous published essays such as "Understanding and Politics," "The Gap Between Past and Future," "The Crisis in Education," "Truth and Politics," "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," and "Isak Dinesen 1885–1963"' (Berkowitz 2017, 11). Finally, we should also look at her *Denktagebuch* in which she 'energetically returns to the theme of reconciliation over the two decades that she actively engages with [it]' (Berkowitz 2017, 11).

I will ask why reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) is crucial for politics and important for education too, on the condition that education has to prepare the new and young 'for the task of renewing a common world' (Arendt 1993, 196). In my attempt to answer this question, I am indebted to Roger Berkowitz who followed in detail 'the threat of reconciliation through the *Denktagebuch*' (Berkowitz 2017, 11).

For Arendt, 'at the center of politics lies concern for the world, not for man' (Arendt 2005, 106). The 'world and the things of this world [. . .] are not the expression of human nature [. . .], but, on the contrary, [. . .] the result of the fact that human beings produce what they themselves are not – that is, things [. . .]. It is within this world of things that human beings act and are themselves conditioned' (Arendt 2005, 106 f.). The world is common to all of us. When we decide to accept 'the world with the wrong in it,' we 'accept and affirm the reality of people whose acts we consider to be fundamentally wrong' (Berkowitz 2017, 13). Thus, while Arendt was deeply critical of totalitarian movements and thinking, she announced in the early 1950s, 'Those who have turned their back on it are welcome; everyone is welcome who has not become a murderer or a professional spy in the process. We are anxious to establish friendship wherever we can, and this goes for former Fascists or Nazis as well as it goes for former Communists and Bolsheviks' (Arendt 1994a, 399). In her opinion, 'the fact that one was formerly wrong should carry with it no permanent stigma' (400). The basis for her judgment is 'that this century [the twentieth] is full of

dangers and perplexities; we ourselves do not always, and never fully, know what we are doing' (399). She adds, 'we know that some of the best of us at one time or another have been driven into the totalitarian predicament' (399), perhaps thinking of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who at one time made wrong political decisions. Nevertheless, she reconciled with him, and, as Berkowitz suggests, 'to reconcile with Heidegger means to accept that what he did was wrong and yet still affirm that the world is better with him and his wrongdoing in it than without them. [. . .] thus, while Arendt disagrees with anti-Semites and racists [. . .], she believes that they and their opinions are part of the common world' (Berkowitz 2017, 13). Thus, one may say that reconciliation relates to the human condition of plurality 'in a way that forgiveness and revenge [do] not' (Berkowitz 2017, 13).

Forgiveness and revenge, Arendt writes in the *Denktagebuch*, 'spring from Christian solidarity between mankind, that all are equally sinners and all are capable of everything just as their fellow man, even the greatest evil' (*D* I.1.6., as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 13). On the Christian assumption, 'forgiveness is perhaps possible insofar as it is only the express recognition that we all are sinners, thus it claims that everyone could have done anything, and in this way it produces an equality – not of rights, but of nature' (*D* I.1.4, as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 12). However, forgiveness based on the assumption that we could have committed similar wrongs 'erases the difference between the one who forgives and the wrongdoer; thus, forgiveness erases the distance necessary to judge and makes judgment impossible' (Berkowitz 2017, 12).

We think of revenge as the opposite of forgiveness, yet revenge 'similarly follows the Christian precept of a natural equality of all, but in the reverse direction' (Berkowitz 2017, 13). 'Revenge presumes we all have the right to do wrong. [It] proceeds from out of a concept that "we are all born poisoned" by our vengeful lusts' (*D* I.1.5., as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 13). Berkowitz adds, 'To avenge a wrong is to claim the same passionate right as the wrongdoer' (13). Thus, for Arendt, 'Christian solidarity is a "negative solidarity which springs out of the idea of original sin"' (*D* I.1.6; as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 13). Not 'Christian forgiveness and vengeance' bring 'solidarity to be,' but 'when I decide to reconcile with the world as it is, I affirm my love for the world and thus my solidarity with the world and those who live in it' (Berkowitz 2017, 13f.). At the core of reconciliation is a specific political judgment. 'The solidarity of reconciliation,' Arendt argues, 'is firstly not the foundation of reconciliation (as the solidarity of being sinful is the foundation of forgiveness), but rather the product [of reconciliation]' (*D* I.1.6; as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 13 f.).

Solidarity, we read in *On Revolution* is the alternative to pity. 'Solidarity, because it partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind' (Arendt 1963a, 88). Arendt adds, 'compared with the sentiment of pity, it may appear cold and abstract, for it remains

to “ideas” – to greatness, or honor, or dignity – rather than to any “love” of men’ (89). However, solidarity moves beyond pity since ‘it comprehends the strong and the rich no less than the weak and the poor’ (89). ‘Solidarity, therefore,’ Berkowitz rightly states, ‘is a conceptual judgment of reconciliation that is open to uniqueness and meaningful differences (of opinion, status, religion, and race), a judgment that appeals to a “common interest” not in majority opinion but in “the grandeur of man,” or “the honor of the human race,” or the dignity of man’ (2017, 14).

There is another important aspect of reconciliation, namely it ‘addresses not the sin of the wrongdoer but the fact of the wrong itself’ (Berkowitz 2017, 14). ‘*Reconciliation* has its origin in the coming to terms with [*Sich-abfinden*] what has been sent one as given [*dem Geschickten*]’ (D I.1.4; as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 14). ‘Arendt distinguishes the “mere wrong-doing” from “the reality of being-guilty” and writes, ‘What is so difficult to understand is that wrong can have permanence and even continuity. We call this guilt – wrong as continuity of the that-which-cannot-once-again-be-undone’ (D III.22.69; as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 15). ‘With guilty people, one cannot share a common world unless one punishes them or forgives them’ (Berkowitz 2017, 15). ‘Guilt,’ Berkowitz adds, ‘poisons politics,’ and the way Arendt finds out of this problem is ‘by separating guilt from wrong,’ with the result ‘that the wrong does not stick to the wrongdoer himself, and the wrongdoer can be freed from the permanence of guilt’ (Berkowitz 2017, 15).

However, to reestablish solidarity with the wrongdoer, first, the ‘wrongdoer must show himself ready to immediately correct his wrongdoing’; second, ‘the wronged person must be ready to no longer insist that a wrong has occurred [...]. This, [Arendt] writes, “is the sense of reconciliation, in which, in distinction from forgiveness, always both parties are engaged”’ (Berkowitz 2017, 15). Reconciliation involves a ‘two-sided approach,’ which Arendt turns to again in *The Human Condition* where she discusses forgiveness in the section on Action. Why, then, ‘does Arendt collapse the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation that occupied much of her earlier work?’ (Berkowitz 2017, 18). Berkowitz suggests as a possible answer, namely ‘that Arendt [...] integrates forgiveness into her political idea of reconciliation,’ a solution that he argues ‘is possible because reconciliation and the act of forgiveness are, as Arendt wrote already in a 1953 note in the *Denktagebuch*, two sides of a single coin: “Therefore no action is possible without mutual forgiveness (what is called reconciliation in politics)”’ (D VIII.17.303; as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 18).

As I mentioned earlier, ‘Eichmann could be neither reconciled with nor forgiven’ (Berkowitz 2017, 31). Arendt ‘made her own judgment of Eichmann,’ the final judgment she offered in the epilogue of her report, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Faced with his wrongs, she judged that ‘reconciliation would be

powerless to remake the shattered human community' (Berkowitz 2017, 31). 'Reconciliation,' she writes in the *Denktagebuch*, 'has a merciless boundary, [...] a boundary that "forgiveness and revenge don't recognize – namely, at that about which one must say: This ought not to have happened"' (D I.1.7.; as quoted in Berkowitz 2017, 31). One cannot reconcile with such acts of 'radical evil,' nor can one simply pass by. But one can judge, and that is precisely what Arendt does. She 'condemns Eichmann to be banished from the Earth' (Berkowitz 2017, 32).

f) Final remark

Education's task is to prepare the new and young for taking responsibility for the world, or what Arendt describes as the renewing of a common world. Human beings have been given the gift of free action, and since they always act into an already existing web of relations in which other human beings also act freely, nobody can know the outcome of deeds. Therefore, people must be willing to forgive each other. Reconciliation is the more political term for forgiveness. Although we may live in 'times full of dangers and perplexities,' human beings must not stop loving the world with all the wrong in it. If we do not wish to give up the freedom of action, we must release others and be released ourselves from the 'chain and pattern of consequences' that all action engenders. When we forgive, we always forgive the doer not the deed. If the deed is criminal, the doer must be punished before returning to the community. However, when deeds are unpunishable, such as these new crimes against humanity – as Arendt learned from the Holocaust – then perhaps 'the best that can be achieved is to know precisely what it was, and to endure this knowledge, and then to wait and see what comes of knowing and enduring' (Arendt 1968, 20).

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