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PEDAGOGY WITHOUT A PROJECT: ARENDT AND DERRIDA ON TEACHING, RESPONSIBILITY AND REVOLUTION

Nobody wants to introduce as many reforms as children do. Franz Kafka *Fragments from Notebooks*

One ...must stop talking with authority about moral or political responsibility. Jacques Derrida *The Other Heading* 41

When, in 1958, Hannah Arendt diagnoses a crisis in education, it is a crisis brought on by the disappearance of authority from the modern world. The word of God, or the law of nature, or Platonic ideals no longer provide the authority to make legitimate, the exercise of political power, and with authority thus gone from the political realm, educators can find no grounds for maintaining it in the realm of education. The result is a disaster: progressive education is the order of the day, teachers are no longer experts in what they teach, children are too often left to their own devices and students graduate without being able to read. What is to be done? The answer, surprisingly, lies in the reestablishing of authority, albeit a new authority that is dispersed rather than centralized, restricted to pedagogy and still banned from politics, and based on responsibility rather than, Arendt claims, on received laws.

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1 My thanks to Greg Johnson, who provided the first occasion for engaging with these issues, to Richard Bernstein, who alerted me to the unpublished remarks on university education that Arendt made at Bryn Mawr, and to Jay Bernstein, Russell Wiener, Gert Biesta, Eduardo Duarte and three anonymous reviewers at *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, all of whom made valuable comments and suggestions.
Some 15 years later, when Jacques Derrida diagnoses a crisis in the teaching of philosophy, it is, on the face of it, quite a different crisis. Here the concern is with an academic subject (one for which Arendt professed to have little patience) taught only to a few students in university and, in France, to the last class of secondary school. Such a crisis would seem to be an esoteric, self-referring crisis of crisis, a parochially academic affair. As for what is to be done, the response appears to be the opposite to Arendt’s. There is no defence or apology for — and certainly no reaffirmation of — pedagogical authority; rather, the response is to champion a progressive pedagogy that will deconstruct the educational institutions to which power has accrued. Indeed, writing more recently, Derrida explicitly debunks the myth of the authoritative expert teacher, suggesting that the least desirable thing now would be a return to that model of education (Derrida, 2001a, p. 45).

I will argue here that Arendt and Derrida in fact offer accounts of the same crisis and that it is the crisis in which we still find ourselves. Moreover, Derrida’s response is a continuation and radicalisation — in the sense of deepening — of Arendt’s response. Specifically, reading Arendt through Derrida allows us to see the equivocal nature of the concept of responsibility on which she founds her new thought of authority. At the same time, reading Derrida after Arendt allows us to develop his thought that education is itself philosophical, and to show that he, like Arendt, is above all concerned with the place of education in the world. More particularly, what Derrida identifies as the threat posed to philosophy (which, when addressing an American audience, he extends to include the humanities) by the increasing instrumentalisation of the university is what Arendt treats in terms of the hegemony of the social realm and the evacuation of the political; where Derrida addresses the privileged institutional place of the university, Arendt sets education apart as a quasi-public space; the phenomenon Derrida describes as the profession of the professor turns out, after all, to be a version of what, for Arendt, is the peculiar authority of the educator, what is to be gained from reading these thinkers together, then, is an insight into their respective essential equivocations, an indication of their shared attentive worldliness, and a thought, built by both, of impossible, worldly education that may help us to grasp our own, contemporary, crisis of education.

THE CRISSES IN EDUCATION

In her essay “The Crisis in Education” (Arendt, 1977b, pp. 173–196), Arendt uses crisis in at least two ways, the one reactionary, the other revolutionary. On the one hand, she lays blame for the education crisis evident in the United States in the late 1950s on the abandonment of common sense. She writes:

Whenever in political questions sound human reason fails or gives up the attempt to supply answers we are faced by a crisis; for this kind of reason is really the common sense by virtue of which we and our five individual senses are fitted into a single world common to us all (Arendt, 1977b, p. 178).

On such a scheme, a crisis is a failure, a fact to be lamented. Something has gone wrong and what is needed is a return to the right way of doing things, the way dictated by “sound human reason.” Yet Arendt is too modern a thinker to settle for the rule of a traditional common sense. Earlier, in “The Concept of History” (Arendt, 1977c, pp. 41–90), she has reminded us that, in the days of the Roman Republic, the education of young citizens consisted in introducing them to the words and deeds of the great Romans of the past, and doing so in such a way as to impress upon them the demand issued by

2 Although Derrida has written extensively on education and has long been active in the politics of education in France, his writings devoted explicitly to pedagogical issues have not been translated into English with the same alacrity as his other work, and thus the theme has remained somewhat neglected in the English-speaking world. The assumption appears to have been that these are in some sense secondary works. Now, with the appearance of part of his collection Du droit à la philosophie (Paris: Gallièe, 1990) in English under the title Who’s Afraid of Philosophy? (Derrida, 2002a), that situation has begun to change. This is not to say that the issue has been utterly neglected. Derrida and Education edited by Gert Biesta and Denise Egea-Kuehne (Bieta et al., 2001) is the most comprehensive treatment, while Peter Peregrines Trifonas The Ethics of Writing is a valuable though none too readable source. See also the 1996 volume of Philosophy of Education, (Philosophy of Education, Urbana, IN: Philosophy of Education Society, 1996) particularly Gert Biesta “Education, Not Initiation,” (Biesta, 1996), Denise Egea-Kuehne’s “Neutrality in Education and Derrida’s Call for Double Duty”. However, none of these, with the exception of Trifonas’ book, take account of the texts published in Du droit à la philosophie.


4 This is vital to his argument L’ Université sans condition.
such a tradition: “Be worthy of these ancestors.” Tradition was a massive, cumulative force and the citizen’s task was to sustain it; to become oneself was to become one with tradition. Such an understanding of education and indeed of self is impossible after the advent of the modern world and this is not what Arendt proposes.

Nevertheless, the fact that, in this passage from “Crisis in Education”, Arendt’s targets are the excesses of progressive education theorists makes it tempting to hear only the traditionalist connotation of the term, and her argument certainly trades on that association. Arendt’s mistake here is the conflation of “crisis,” understood as the abdication of common sense, and “disaster” understood, as she says elsewhere in the same essay, as the result of responding to a crisis with preformed judgments, that is, prejudices. “Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides” (Arendt, 1977b, p. 175). The problem might be described like this: in this essay, Arendt turns a critical eye on crisis, neglecting the fact that critique and crisis are implicated one in the other (a fact which is indicated, Derrida will argue, by their sharing a common root in the Greek kínein, judgment). Crisis demands a critical response, but the practice of critique itself precipitates crisis, with the result that modernity, the age of critique, must also be the state of permanent crisis.

On the other hand, when Arendt frames the issue of her essay, she uses an understanding of crisis that begins to acknowledge precisely this. She writes that:

Here it is not the failure to supply answers that is the cause for concern, but rather answers themselves as calcifications that have come to be regarded not as answers at all but as truths exempt from critique. Thus crisis provokes critique and demands judgment, while her language here does suggest that crisis is a discrete and rare phenomenon, it is nevertheless true that at the core of her argument is a claim that thoroughly undermines any such implication: the fact of natality – that is, that each of us had to be born – means that we are constantly experiencing the arrival of newcomers by birth whose introduction to the human world will always promise – and threaten – to tear away façades and obliterate prejudices. Provided, that is – and this is the whole point of her theory of education – that the natals’ capacity for newness has not been educated out of them.

This is an indication of what Gert Biesta calls the deconstructive understanding of Arendt’s work (Biesta, 2001, p. 391). It is true that while she rejects the traditionalist Roman model, she replaces it using the thought of natality and the constellation she builds around it in The Human Condition – plurality, action – to explain that newcomers are free – even obliged – to remake the world. Yet this is a line of thinking that quickly exceeds itself. We rebuild the world by acting, but, because acting is always acting with or in the midst of others, we have no control over what becomes of our action. It depends utterly on the actions and reactions of those around us, all free, natal, contemporary inhabitants of our shared world, and all confronted by the universal fact that the constantly rising wave of newcomers by birth stands to provoke constant crisis.

Thus, when Derrida addresses “The Crisis in the Teaching of Philosophy” (Derrida, 1990) some 15 years later, in France and Benin rather than in the United States, and in the context of late secondary and university education rather than elementary school, he nonetheless addresses the same crisis.

Derrida’s early explicit attention to philosophical pedagogy comes in the wake of the la réforme Haby which, in 1975, proposed a restructuring of education in France in such a way that, among other things, philosophy would be all but eliminated as a subject in secondary schools. Just 4 years earlier, Arendt also found herself again addressing the issue of education in a short, unpublished address at

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5 It is true that Arendt has a sophisticated understanding of common sense as a translation of Kant’s sensus communs from the Critique of Judgment. There common sense is the one sense by which our senses of taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell are related one to the other, but it is also construed as the shared sense that makes possible a sort of Kantian intersubjectivity or, as Arendt puts it, fits us into a single common world. The thought is troublesome, however, given that it is never made sufficiently clear how the sense that binds my senses becomes also the sense that binds me to my fellow subjects in a common world but, more importantly, it is also unclear – despite a detailed treatment in her Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy (Arendt, 1982) – how that common sense can fit us into a common world.

Bryn Mawr College (Arendt, 1971a). The historical moment the two writers thus shared is a significant one because both find themselves responding to the post-1968 reform of higher education in France and the United States, respectively. In a later interview, Derrida couches the reforms and his response in these terms:

[After the fact of the movement]...I saw the spectacle of resentment and of reassurance of control by the most conservative, even retrograde forces, especially within the University. It is in the aftermath that I began to give a more visibly, let us say, “militant” form to my work as a teacher. The formation of the GREPH (Groupe de Recherches sur l’Enseignement Philosophique) dates from those years. (Derrida, 2001b, p. 61).

Meanwhile, in her Bryn Mawr address, Arendt rejects the trend of reforming universities and colleges on the model of vocational education with its focus on applied knowledge and skill acquisition, what she regarded as the use of “modish fads in order to satisfy not the needs of the mind but the needs of society.” She says:

[Higher education will either understand that the life of the mind is something to be cherished for its own sake, that learning can exist and flourish only if it is done for its own sake, or it will wither away and die (Arendt, 1971a, p. 12).]

Derrida too—in his militancy—finds himself also taking a conservative position against reform. Yet to be conservative where philosophy is concerned is to be critical, which is to say that conserving philosophy means conserving critique and perpetuating crisis. This is Derrida’s alibi in the fight against reform. He writes:

Philosophy will always be the very experience of its own crisis, it will always live by questioning itself about its own resources, its own possibility, in the critical instance of judging or deciding (krinein) as to its own meaning, its own survival, and of evaluating itself, posing the question of its rights and its legitimacy (Derrida, 1990, pp. 157–158, 2002a, pp. 100–101).

This has particular significance for the teaching of philosophy: “Philosophy repeats itself and reproduces its own tradition as the teaching of its own crisis and as the paideia of self critique in general” (Derrida, 1990, pp. 157–158, 2002a, pp. 100–101).

Arendt insisted on often reminding her readers that she was not a philosopher and that what she was engaged in was not the practice of philosophy; for her, philosophy was the name for the vita contemplativa, a valuable but necessarily solitary and disengaged form of the life of the mind. In the Bryn Mawr address, she is committed to the preservation of the university precisely as a place where “the enterprises of the intellect could be and should be undertaken for their own sake.” (Arendt, 1971a, p. 12). For Derrida, in contrast, the questions that philosophy poses to itself in its crisis—questions about its own rights and legitimacy—are also questions about philosophy and the world, that is to say, they must also be a worldly critique. Worldly critique requires a worldly, public space and, on the one hand, Derrida and Arendt are united in their concern at the loss such a space. What would seem to divide them, on the other, is the question of whether or not the realm of education, specifically the university, is that space.

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE SPACE OF CRITIQUE

In Derrida’s case, the loss is the experience of finding that we are no longer in the place where philosophy’s crisis and self-critique “was destined to reproduce itself” (Derrida, 1990, p. 159, 2002a, p. 101). He argues in “The Crisis in Teaching of Philosophy” that it is not that this space has closed over. Rather, we have exceeded it, or been exceeded by it. When we talk about a crisis of philosophy, we rely on philosophy to adjudicate its own critique. That is to say, we understand philosophy not as the Queen but as the Empress of the sciences, the one who—as ontology—specifies the regions of being for which other disciplines are responsible, but who is itself answerable only to its own self-questioning. Today, however, in what Derrida calls the age of deconstruction, the empire’s constituents (and it is no accident that he appeals to the model of post-colonialism in a lecture delivered in Benin, the former French colony in West Africa) are no longer willing to receive word; the imperial authority has been undermined from the side of history, politics, linguistics and so on. With the result that philosophy—understood as ontology but also as perpetual self-critique—is brought into question, that is, subjected to what might be called hetero-critique. It now becomes clear that philosophy’s self-perpetuated, self-critical crisis relied on the assumption of the possibility of decision and the logic of decidability and opposition.

Derrida writes:

The very concept of “crisis,” insofar as it belongs to a logic of opposition and decidability, comes to vacillate. A crisis of crisis, if you will. When the crisis of crisis concerns the mode of production and reproduction of the philosophical as such, of self-critique and the onto-encyclopaedic itself, it is naturally also a matter of teaching (Derrida, 1990, p. 160, 2002a, p. 102).

While there is no trace of nostalgia in his assessment of our exceeding philosophy’s critical space, Derrida is loath to abandon it. After all, it is there that we are free from merely instrumental thinking, that is, that mode of thinking that tries to answer the question of how we can reach an end rather than why that end is what we should aim for at all. This is precisely the space Derrida needs in his struggle against the Habermas reforms, themselves an example of the far more general threat of global instrumentalisation. Those reforms claimed to be motivated by the technical-economic need to direct secondary school students away from “literary” disciplines. Derrida writes:

The unprofitability of philosophy in this industrial society – its immediate unprofitability – which it would share with all the “humanities,” notably history, had for years already justified an active, indeed violent and frenzied orientation of students selected as the “best” toward scientific disciplines in the lycées (Derrida, 2002a, p. 109).

Of course, Derrida adds, this need is in no sense an objective necessity but rather a self-interested interpretation construed by certain technocrats and managers as a general necessity. In an advanced industrial society, how is it possible to identify their interpretation as such if not from the critical point of view of a realm free from domination by instrumental thinking? How are we to think about the value of industrial society unless we have a public space (Arendt), the space of crisis (Derrida) where we can ask and engage precisely the question of ends?

Meanwhile, Arendt’s depiction of public space involves far more than the requirement that it be a space not dominated by instrumental thinking. While the university may satisfy this requirement, does it also satisfy the others, particularly the requirement of equality? Can it satisfy this requirement insofar as it is a teaching institution? In other words, does the classroom share the other characteristics that Arendt includes under “publicness”? Is it a place where we enact our human plurality in its “twofold character of equality and distinction”? (Arendt, 1958, p. 175). In a properly public space, we appear before our fellows to demonstrate who we are. The difficulty is that the young, the members of the new generation, are in the throes of becoming and they must have a sheltered not-quite-private, not-quite-public space where they can come to be. The classroom provides that space as the “institution that we interpose between the private domain of home and the world in order to make the transition from the family to the world possible at all” (Arendt, 1977b, p. 189).

Is a system of education based on the idea of the classroom as the realm of equality imaginable? It is important to recognize that the question of whether or not the classroom can function if there is no inequality between teacher and student is the same as the question of whether or not education can work without authority. Arendt’s answer is an emphatic “No” and the aim of her “Crisis” essay is to show the need to find a new source of authority now that teachers are experts in teaching and not in the material they teach. Whatever the fate of authority in the world at large, it cannot be abandoned in the realm of education because, Arendt says, of the natural inequality between the young and the old, between the new generation and the old one. The educator is responsible for creating a realm in which the young become capable of withstanding the private forces of family, the social forces of their peers and the critical scrutiny of public life, which is to say, she must set her authority against determination by familial bonds of love and duty, against the tyranny of the majority and at the boundary of the public realm.

This is the core of Arendt’s assessment of the crisis not just as a crisis of education but of modernity. She writes:

The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition (Arendt, 1977b, p. 195).

Such a thought of authority is complex and ambiguous, not to say aporetic, and it is remarkable that Arendt refuses to reject the term and instead dwells upon it to the point of inhabiting the ambiguity. Her contribution is understanding that this authority is founded in responsibility, and the danger in jettisoning authority is that we would find ourselves in a world afflicted, as our world is, with poverty and violence and injustice as a state of affairs for which no one is

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A In “What is Authority?” (Arendt, 1977) Arendt writes that authority in education is understood as a natural and as a political necessity. The latter is quite appropriate, since as such, that authority is included in the realm of what is subject to critique, debate and deliberation; the former poses the difficulty, since designating a phenomenon as natural has the result of setting it beyond critique.
towards the public world, describing it as "our world." In a related way, the professor – an educator-researcher – must maintain the distinctively professorial relationship with the public realm, on the one hand, and with students on the other. The Arendtian professor would seem to have a three-fold role: to pursue the life of the mind, to perform a "politically relevant function ... from outside the public realm (Arendt, 1977d, p. 262)" and to inculcate new participants into intellectual and public life. All three are part of a single task, and each is quite thoroughly implicated in the others. What concerns me here is the last – the professor's role as educator – and concentrating on this will allow a reading of the other two as sources of authority for the university teacher. First, the professor's ability to fulfill the role of solitary, disinterested scholar can be identified as the source of her authority in much the same way that, in the days before educational reform, teachers at all levels received their authority from their command of a body of knowledge. Yet it is not exactly the accumulation of information that lends this authority, but rather the commitment to the pursuit of a truth that is independent of the intrigues and power struggles of political life; at its Platonic extreme it is the philosopher's attempt to mimic the "highest god," who is "forever solitary by reason of his excellence, able to be together, he himself with himself, needing nobody else, neither acquaintance nor friend, he sufficient with himself," (Timaeus 34b, quoted in Arendt, 1971b, p. 92). By her withdrawal into thought, and through her scholarly work, insofar as it is the product of such philosophical withdrawal, the professor shows her students what it means to be engaged in thinking. Yet will a student body meeting such authority for the first time be capable of recognizing it as such? Will a group of

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9 It is in part this concern with protection and shelter that led Arendt to her controversial position on desegregation in the Little Rock schools, and it is not merely coincidence that the two essays – "The Crisis in Education" and "Reflections on Little Rock" – were written at the same time. "Reflections on Little Rock" was written in 1958 but did not appear in print until a year later. In her preliminary remarks to the published essay, Arendt writes: "[A]lrightly observed that my criticism of the Supreme Court's decision did not take into account the role education plays, and has always played, in the political framework of this country. This criticism is entirely just and I would have tried to insert a discussion of this role into the article if I had not meanwhile published a few remarks on the wide-spread, uncritical acceptance of a Rousseauian ideal in education in another context, i.e., in an article in the Fall 1958 issue of Partisan Review, entitled "The Crisis in Education" (Arendt, 1959, p. 46).
young people not already initiated into the ways and values of the life of the mind need this authority?

In the face of this doubt, the professor’s second role suggests another source of authority. Her scholarship might require withdrawal, but, instead of a Platonic withdrawal towards an otherworldly truth, it may be a Kantian withdrawal whose aim is to achieve a larger picture of this world, a withdrawal for judgment rather than the withdrawal of the philosopher (Arendt, 1971b, p. 94). As a judging spectator, the scholar is again in a liminal position, no longer an actor, but engaged in an “act of deliberate, active non-participation in life’s daily business.” (Arendt, 1971b, p. 93). She is not caught up in the play of opinion but is in a position to attempt to understand the meaning of the scene as a whole.

In the remarks at Bryn Mawr, Arendt seems at pains to emphasise the first of these professorial roles, suggesting that the professor is doing her job as an educator when she is committed to the purest of intellectual pursuits. The professor thus instils a spirit of intellectual enquiry in her students through her commitment to “serious scholarly work” pursued in “conditions of austerity,” (Arendt, 1971a, p. 13). However, in “Truth and Politics” that model is supplemented by that of a professor who understands the relevance of that pursuit for the world of action. The universities, Arendt argues, perform a function like that of the judicial branch of government. They are refuges of truth, places from which very unwelcome truths can emerge to challenge power in the political realm, just as very unwelcome judgments can be handed down by the judiciary. Within the university, this crucial political function is performed not by the natural science divisions – for all their importance for the national interest – but by the “historical sciences and the humanities which are supposed to find out, stand guard over and interpret factual truth”. (Arendt, 1977d, p. 261). Thus the professor is the educator whose authority rests in her clear-eyed grasp of some impartial truth about the world, and her insistence on making it known.

When we find Derrida, in “University without Conditions,” tracing the story of the professor, he does so in terms that resonate remarkably with this Arendtian picture. He recognises that we are seeing the end of a certain sort of professor and a certain sort of professorial authority, but holds that there is still a need for the professoriat. The word “professor,” he points out, originally referred to one who made a profession of faith, that is, to someone joining a religious order. A profession, then, was a vow or promise, in the strongest sense, an engagement (Derrida, 2001a, p. 35). It is used today to mean a free, open, public declaration, itself an engagement, an intervention in the public world. In other words, the professor, like the Arendtian educator, stands at the limit between the public world and the quasi-public world of the university. For the professor, as for the Arendtian educator, it is a matter of responsibility: “to profess is to offer a guide in the course of engaging one’s responsibility” (Derrida, 2001a, p. 35).

How does Derrida come to this characterisation? Why must the educator take responsibility? Not for the sake of authority, and for two related reasons. First, he refuses to claim a need for authority on the basis of nature. When Arendt claims that the original need for authority in education lies in the natural inequality of children and adults, she sets the ground of her argument beyond critique. This is precisely why Derrida, at every turn in his fight for philosophical education in France, will resist the temptation to claim that philosophy should be taught at all levels because humans have a natural propensity to it. Second, Arendt bases her understanding of authority (not just in education) on the historical Roman thought of the authority (auctoritas) that augments (auregere) a foundation (Arendt, 1977c, p. 121). That is to say, Arendt’s critique stops short not only by leaving the realm of education the realm of authority on the basis of an uncriticised claim about nature, but also by sustaining a foundational thinking of authority. Given her reading of authority, along with her desire to maintain its place in the quasi-public realm of education, she finds herself forced to find another source of authority that must have something of the same foundational structure. This is why she says that the teacher must unequivocally grasp responsibility and thereby authority, and here the deconstructive reading of Arendt’s work reaches a limit.

Derrida comes to an understanding of the educator that is more critical, that is, more Arendtian than Arendt’s. He does so precisely by grasping the impossibility of foundations and thereby allowing us to discern the deeper insight that remains implicit in Arendt’s own work, under girding her thought not only of education and authority but also on revolution. It is a familiar Derridian mode of thought, the one carried out with such rigour in his work on friendship, the gift, hospitality and so on, and involves thinking the impossibility of responsibility and, indeed, of education. It is a thought that has already been treated with great acuity by writers such as Julian Edgoose (See Edgoose, 2001) and Gert Biesta (See Biesta, 1998), and I
draw upon their analyses to argue that Arendt’s thought of taking responsibility is more thoroughly haunted by the repudiation of responsibility than she allows.

The point is made well by Edgmoose in “Just Decide: Derrida and the Ethical Aporias of Education” (Edgmoose, 2001). Here, responsibility is the Levinasian ethical responsibility for the other which is extended by Derrida and revealed to be structured on an irreconcilable tension. Although Arendt is specifically concerned here with a political and not a moral responsibility, and although this sets her use of the term at a great distance from Levinas’s, the tension is not dissimilar. In the face of the call to responsibility, as in the face of the demand for justice, we are struck – not to say stricken - by the aporias of the situation. If I am responsible for something in the sense of having been its author, taking responsibility is not a choice I can make; that is not my prerogative. If I take responsibility for something, whether or not I am its author, I, in doing so, repudiate responsibility for all the rest. If, then, I take responsibility for the world, I am assuming responsibility for something for which I cannot have been responsible and it is not clear that this can be distinguished from the repudiation of responsibility as such. Yet the world continues to issue its demands, and we must still respond, still take responsibility, make that decision in the face of undecidability. It is vital to remember that undecidability never shields us from the demand to decide; rather, it makes possible our decision, because undecidability is “that condition from which no course of action necessarily follows” (Laclau, p. 78, quoted in Biesta, 1998, p. 509).

On Derrida’s understanding, taking responsibility cannot grant a foundational authority with the result that Arendtian education is rendered impossible. This is entirely appropriate. Geri Biesta, appealing to Arendt’s concept of natality and her insistence that education hold open the possibility for a new generation to do something new, has argued precisely this. He quotes Derrida:

When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make; irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program (Derrida, 1992, p. 41, quoted in Biesta, 1998, p. 510).

An educator cannot conceive herself as implementing a program, or moulding minds, or, for that matter, conveying information or knowledge. She can lay claim to no stable authority but only to that granted by her constantly renewed claim of responsibility. That is also to say that she should not be imagined as a version of the authoritative professor of times gone by, since hers is a way of being which quite exceeds that of one who is merely equipped with techno-scientific knowledge. It is a step beyond the image of the Kantian professor inhabiting a Kantian university who is free to make judgments and draw conclusions about the truth but only within the confines of the university. While securing such freedom from the police powers of the state was a remarkable achievement, it was won at the cost of denying the professor the possibility of making any prescriptive claims about the world. Derrida concludes:

I do not believe that this limitation was ever tenable or respectable, in fact or in principle. But the transformation of public cyberspace, a globally public space beyond all national frontiers seems to make it more archaic and imaginary than ever (Derrida, 2001b, p. 45).

If the university is a privileged quasi-public space, its professors must be the ones who stand at its limit, engaged, as a matter of profession, with the public world as well as with teaching and research. Professing, Derrida explains, presupposes a public engagement, an ethico-political responsibility. In other words – and this example will demonstrate how misplaced Arendt’s faith in the old professoriat was, or at least the inadequacy of her description of the source of its authority - the professor as public thinker is the opposite of the figure that we have in its absence, that is, the expert or, more particularly, the television expert. While the public intellectual is alive (if not all that well) in France, the mass culture that has come to fill public space in the United States has no place for such a creature, preferring as it does the expert whose pithy assessment of the state of
affairs is easily digestible and easily contained in a sound bite.\textsuperscript{11} Television experts are certainly – for the most part – possessed of the knowledge that, as Arendt claimed, is used to give authority to teachers. But their expertise is technical and need have nothing to do with the critical skills of the engaged thinker, and the result is that we must conclude that their predominance in mass culture is evidence of the hegemony of instrumental thinking and the triumph of the social after all.

PEDAGOGY WITHOUT A PROJECT

Against this, Derrida presents the publicly engaged professor as the embodiment of the unconditional principle of resistance of the university. Insofar as the professor resists the rule of technocratic thinking, she must do so as a teacher. But if such resistance begins only in the university, it is far too late and the professor professing resistance will find herself in confrontation with students not just disposed but quite committed to non-critical modes of thought, students with an overwhelming tendency to regard themselves as informed, autonomous consumers of an educational product.\textsuperscript{12} What is needed, he argues, is progressive education. Yet the term is a misnomer, having nothing in common with the mainstream trends of educational theory and in fact having as its central proposal the extension of education in philosophy to the early years of school.\textsuperscript{13} This is why Derrida, as a member of GREPH, argued that education specifically in philosophy should start very early. It is not enough that other disciplines that form part of the primary and secondary school curriculum contain philosophical elements. He writes:

Everything in the effective and concrete conditions of these teachings, however, leaves one to fear that these so-called human, economic and social “sciences” are the

\textsuperscript{11} This is not the same as saying that there are no intellectuals in the United States who have important things to say that are of great relevance to public affairs. My point is, rather, that these figures have no proper place in public life, and their interventions are reduced to sound-bites of expertise.
\textsuperscript{12} See G.J.J. Biesta’s Arendtian response to this trend in education in Biesta (2004).
\textsuperscript{13} In fact, GREPH shifted quickly from describing its campaign as a campaign for progressive education to one for the extension of philosophical education. As a result, when the term progressivity is used, it indicates the movement of a student through a programme of philosophical thought. See Derrida (2002c, p. 162).

The solution must be to give philosophy the right already possessed by every other discipline to have students work through a long and progressive curriculum beginning in the earliest classes.\textsuperscript{14} Without this, access to a teaching of philosophy is granted to students only at a stage in their development when other teachings “(notably those of the “humanities” and of the so-called “human” sciences) have played their role of ideological impregnation” (Derrida, 1990, p. 173, 2002a, p. 112).

It is worth noting that Derrida is less dismissive of the humanities when he addresses an American audience (at Stanford University in 1998, see Derrida, 2001a), which can in large part be accounted for by the different institutional and disciplinary arrangements in France and the United States. As one no doubt apocryphal anecdote goes, a French philosopher once asked about philosophy in the United States replied: “Ah yes, I know that. It’s called Comparative Literature.” Yet whether in Europe or America, each discipline – philosophy included – has its own requirements, its own canon consisting of texts that make their own demands; what is peculiar to philosophy is the essential role of critique. Even if one can conceive of an expert in literature who is not a literary critic and a research historian who does not explicitly engage questions of historiography, the same is not true of a philosopher who eschews critique. Insofar as they are critical, all the humanities are capable of harbouring resistance, but only philosophy is essentially critical and therefore the philosopher cannot avoid having a peculiar responsibility to resist. The philosopher withdrawn from the world experiences this as the disciplinary

\textsuperscript{14} There are several groups interested in some writing on philosophy for children, though it is rare to see thinking in that takes anything of the deconstructive approach I am investigating here. See, for example, Robert Fisher’s “Philosophy for Children: How Philosophical Enquiry Can Foster Values Education in Schools” in Gardner (2000, pp. 59–66) where the author relies on a model of community and communitarianism that does nothing to challenge the hegemony of the autonomous subject. On the other hand, some exceptions to this tendency, which deserve more attention, include William Hamrick’s discussion of the teacher who leads by civic example in “Civic Virtue: Democracy and the Philosophy for Children Program” and Hans-Ludwig Freese’s: “Philosophie Unterricht für Kinder im Lehrplan: anhand von Texten oder Philosophie als Unterrichtsrrgrund?” which deals with specific questions regarding which texts from the history of philosophy are useful for teaching children and how they can be used; both articles appear in Camby, pp. 55–65 and pp. 71–75.
responsibility to resist the pressure of the tradition by means of a critical engagement with it: the Derridian professor or the Arendtian educator, positioned between the realm of education and the public world must also experience it as a responsibility to resist the forces of received public wisdom and to critically engage ideological and instrumental thinking.

This principle of resistance is at work in the professor's role as a teacher, and it is as relevant in kindergarten as it is for college students. What Derrida advocates is a pedagogy which, though structured and involving a long introduction to the history of philosophy, is essentially a pedagogy without a project. It is a pedagogy that not only struggles to hold open a space - for non-instrumental thinking, for action - that might otherwise be filled with the concerns of economics, science and technology but is also attuned to the fact that this involves a new approach to the student's own conception of her goals, her projects, her self. Remember that Arendt does not think of action as consisting of the deeds of already self-possessed individuals; rather, it is in acting that we show and at the same time discover who we are. The same thought is expressed by Biesta when he argues that those undergoing education are doing so precisely because they do not know what they need to know, a fact that undermines all consumer models of education (Biesta, 2004). In Derrida's terms, it is a matter of constantly disrupting the model of product or project which, at its deepest, involves disrupting any tendency to think of ourselves as projects moving towards completion. Indeed, it undermines any thought of the self as a completed or complete-able being.

In philosophical terms, this is a demand for the displacement of the subject. More concretely, from a student's point of view, it is the experience of realizing that it is not all about her. A rigorous exposure to the history of philosophy has the advantage of providing the student with a starting point that is something other than her own immediate experience of the world, and starting there in a spirit of critical hermeneutic openness puts not only that history but also her self in question. If the humanities remain committed to the notion that the human - understood as the modern self - is the measure of all things, they can only hinder the fostering of that spirit and that questioning; if they can become the place in which the very concept of the human is re-thought, they become the privileged site of "irre-dentist resistance: that is, by analogy, a sort of principle of civil dissidence" (Derrida, 2001a, my translation).

The structure is the same as the openness that makes possible those experiences of public happiness that, for Arendt, coincide with moments of revolution. She remarks, quoting René Char, that our heritage is left to us by no testament (Arendt, 1977a, p. 3), and the first person plural is not accidental. A set of newcomers by birth, arriving into the world with the force of its natural energy, is always capable of destroying that heritage; what gives education its particular difficulty is that the newness of the newcomers can also be destroyed by their heritage. As a result, paradoxically, pedagogy must be conservative if it is to hold open the chaotic moment and foster the possibility for these newcomers to become a generation and enact their revolution. It embodies a principle of resistance because it must preserve for itself a quasi-public realm where the young are gradually shown the world without ever being allowed to think that how it is is how it must be. To fall into such thinking is to lay the groundwork for conformity in action and the loss of the capacity to criticize, not to mention the chance to experience the happiness of public life. The examples of such happiness that Arendt provides, the moments she mentions when the evanescent treasure that is the joy of acting together are all revolutionary moments: 1776 in Philadelphia, the summer of 1789 in Paris, 1956 in Budapest, and we could add the spring of 1968 in Prague, 1989 in Leipzig and 1991 in Belgrade. These are moments when the struggle with responsibility and for authority is univocally resolved, the happy polar opposites of the similarly univocal moments of authoritarian oppression.

Yet, insofar as the professor is engaged in the vita contemplativa alone, she can enact resistance only in the rarefied world of the intellect, from the point of view of the world - understood as Arendt's public realm - her resistance is merely formal. Yet what Derrida's account of the profession of the professor makes clear is that the professor is a scholar and educator and actor. If she is to have any claim on her students' thoughtful attention beyond the impoverished authority of the expert who can impart a body of knowledge and thus produce satisfied student consumers, it is a claim - Arendt would call it authority - based on this threefold profession, a complex

15 To begin such a list is dangerous, since one quickly encounters troublesome cases. What, for instance, would be an Arendtian reading of 1979 in Tehran? It is important to remember that in each case she has in mind the revolutionary moment and not the inevitable institutionalization or institutionalization of the revolutionary spirit, see On Revolution (Arendt, 1977a).
assumption of responsibility that cannot be reduced to or divided between theory and practice (Derrida, 2001a).

When I conclude, then, by claiming that the aim of education is to teach revolution I am echoing Biesta’s claim about the impossibility of education (Biesta, 1998, pp. 503–505). Given the contingency and unpredictability of action emphasised by Arendt, education has every appearance of an endeavour that can never reach a goal or produce a desired outcome; it cannot have a project. Yet this impossibility reveals education as a process in which, by virtue of its indeterminacy, a great deal is possible. What Derrida has allowed us to see in Arendt’s work is that the decision involved in education – she describes it as the decision that we love the world enough to take responsibility for it (Arendt, 1977b, p. 196) – and the decision for revolution are essentially the same, and unavoidably made in the face of undecidability. This is what it means to live after authority.

REFERENCES


16 The question of what this pedagogy might look like is difficult to answer in positive terms without appearing to present another program. Biesta directs us to Jacques Rancière’s “What do you think about it? pedagogy and to Jan Masschelein’s work on education as problematisation (Biesta, 1998, p. 505, no. 16).


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