

Jon Nixon, *Hannah Arendt: The Promise of Education*, Springer, 2020

Hannah Arendt: The Promise of Education is one of the recent books in the field of Arendt studies, which is written with a special focus on the theme of education. The Author, Jon Nixon, makes his discussions based on the point that while Arendt herself has addressed educational matters directly in two articles, *The Crisis in Education* and *Reflections on Little Rock*, there is much more to be said on the topic from a supposed Arendtian perspective, when the ideas developed in her works all together are brought under consideration. The book, in five chapters, refers to the basic concepts – such as natality, action, and thoughtfulness – in the thought of Arendt in order to show how the outlook would provide the scholars with a productive resource for thinking about education and its impacts on our lives and future of the world.

At the beginning, Nixon highlights certain personal experiences of Arendt as well as the significant events of her time as influential on her path of thinking. This aims to be not simply a biographical description but rather an illumination of the inseparability of her life from her thought and its direction. So the author maintains that in order to understand properly her concerns as a whole we must consider them against the background of “experiences of totalitarianism, of exile and statelessness, and of being a Jew in an anti-Semitic society” (p. 12), and in connection with the challenges of the relevant historical period. Such remarks direct the readers also to see from the start, how the philosopher, the label that she would refuse to accept, personally has been involved in an educational process, in a very wide sense of the term, throughout her life. Through the rest of the book, fundamental themes in Arendt’s thought come into view in relation to each other and with respect to the main topic. Here I would refer to four of these issues.

It is shown that, first, educational practices are to be thought with emphasis upon the necessity of cultivation and maintenance of human inborn potentials for new beginnings and the dependence of the renewal of the world on collective commitments with respect to the future. In this connection, educators must also be involved in the preservation and transmission of the already existing human achievements to the next generations, whilst the educational material here would include not just scientific knowledge and specific theories, but also and more importantly, significant experiences and historical facts that are to be safeguarded properly. So the institution of education, along with its transformative potential, is of a protective character. The point would be about how to encounter the world, “to see it as it is while identifying the necessary changes to save it from the false or no longer applicable assumptions and wisdoms of the past” (p. 22).

Second, according to Arendt, to begin through action, as the highest human activity, we must be engaged in thinking for ourselves with others, for the lack of thoughtfulness and the inability to take other perspectives into account and make judgements can result in evildoing. But becoming thoughtful requires nurture, support, and endeavour. Thus, as long as education really provides “a space devoted to thoughtfulness” (p. 27), with the

accentuation of communicational practices and dialogue, through the actualization of the capacities that we all have, it can prepare people for living a more human life.

Third, Nixon with reference to Arendt defends the position that connects education to democratic ends and the formation of active citizenship. He argues that an adequate educational system can play a constructive role for both individuals as well as the society, in which they live, as long as it is not based on the idea of a one-voice monolithic structure. Education understood this way empowers educated people to effectively participate in a plural realm with the acknowledgement of the equality of human beings both in difference and in similarity. So the author asserts “that is the point and purpose of education: to enable us to live together in mutual recognition of difference, dissent, and sometimes deep disagreement” (p. 41). That is also the direction that Arendt herself as a university professor pursued.

And fourth, education is not limited to schools and classrooms. Concerning the notion of friendship with the attributes of “mutuality, reciprocity, trustworthiness, and continuity” (p. 61), and its significance for encountering other opinions and alternative points of view as an educational value, the author refers to the potential of such relationships with others outside the formal settings of education for human growth and interactive development. The friendship-based process of education is epitomized in the life of Arendt herself especially in her own intellectual relationship with Karl Jaspers.

Hannah Arendt: The Promise of Education engages with the Arendtian principles and their derivative consequences for the manner in which educational issues must be understood, more than with the question of education as Arendt articulates it or the well-known contributions to the topic. Thus, for instance, the focus of the book, in contrast to Arendt, is not on the primary education and its requirements, but rather proposes a unified approach within a broader framework. Although the author himself acknowledges that for Arendt “there is a sharp distinction between the education of the child and the education of young adults” (p. 17), sufficient explanation of the related differences seems to remain out of the scope of the discussions. Nevertheless, the book benefits from its holistic stance and overall offers a succinct and very informative exploration into both the life and thought of Arendt and the conception of education on this ground. It includes also specific sets of unanswered questions that motivate the readers for further reflection and research on the relevant matters such as the required practical procedures for the achievement of educational aims and pedagogical concerns in this context.

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