Being Human Among Humans: Plurality in The Divided World
Το να είσαι άνθρωπος ανάμεσα σε ανθρώπους: η πολλαπλότητα σε έναν διαιρεμένο κόσμο

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Abstract

The main thesis I put forward in this article is that democratic theory needs an anthropological perspective which defines the human in plurality and signifies the possibility of achieving a fully inclusive rational consensus. I argue that a model of democracy in terms of cosmopolitan anthropology can help us to better envision the main challenge facing universal norms and principles today. How to create democratic forms of living together? I think we can answer this question by interpreting Hannah Arendt’s theory of political action on a philosophical anthropological basis. It is common knowledge that Hannah Arendt is suspicious of ethics and warns that ethics and conscience alone cannot produce the conditions for peace. In the present paper, I examine Arendt’s philosophical project together with Kant’s philosophical anthropology and try to demonstrate its importance for plurality and living together in peace.

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The most problematic issue in our age is living together in peace. Probably the greatest challenge facing mankind is the danger of conflict between peoples, cultures and political groups. Thus, the main question can be formulated as: What is the possibility of living peacefully and where is the basis for people living respectfully and considering the other? Can such a way of life be actualized on an ethical basis? In answer to this question, I think that we should turn to the question of human nature and its capabilities in order to rethink all conflicting problems and the disintegration of social and political realms. I will apply Arendt’s thought on what it means to be human, by highlighting her idea that we can establish a peaceful world through ethics. While she does not think that if we act ethically we can be free and peaceful, nevertheless, she maintains her belief to human capacities and establishes the human as political being with these capacities.

For Arendt, human nature can be defined by political action. Because she understands the proper nature as inherently political, she thinks man is a political animal, (zoon politikon). Thus man’s nature is perfected only in the active political life, in the vita activa. It is the vita activa and political life that define human freedom. Human freedom can only be realized on the basis of the space of appearances which has been idealized in the Greek polis. For this idea, a space for politics is necessary so that human freedom can only be realized in it. But this is only an ideal which we cannot experience in exactly the same way. At this point, Hannah Arendt criticizes Kant’s concept of freedom and categorical imperative for she sees the categorical imperative as concerning only the individual and thus ignoring the plurality of individuals in the world. For this reason, she points to Kant’s aesthetics with its emphasis on the individual’s subjective decision (for example in the idea of taste) as potentially undermining an eventual group judgment. Therefore she turns to commonsense (as sensus communis) for making possible being and acting together.

Common sense is a basic ability to understand, perceive and judge that can be a possibility for plurality. If we use common sense in everyday usage, it describes only things/thoughts shared by all people. But common sense has at least two specific meanings: One of that refers to the animal soul (Greek psukhe) as proposed by Aristotle. This meaning enables us to comprehend the different and unique senses of people to collectively perceive characteristics which are common to all things; behaviors, values or tendencies. It also helps us to distinguish and identify things and other animals in the world, by defining human in social life. The second special use of term is Roman influenced and it is used to describe the natural human sensitivity for other humans and the community.

Although common sense has frequently been used only negatively, and even pejoratively in modern times, sometimes it has been used positively as an appeal to authority. In 18th century the concept of authority was understood in different manner and the term common sense came to be seen more positively as the basis for modern thinking. For example Kant contrasted common sense to metaphysics which was associated with the ancient regime. Hannah Arendt follows Kant and she argues that Kant’s reference to sensus communis should be translated as “community sense” rather than “common sense”. Common sense should be purified emphasizes the “common” here as the key to move to judgment through language. It allows us to go beyond our own limited mode of thinking and the oppression of tradition; the form of government, religion, cultural practices, or all of these and the explanation for the way of living together becomes institutionalized. This is one way to understand what Arendt means by thinking with “an enlarged mentality.” Enlargement mentality places us in community which consists of autonomous citizens. In Arendt’s “detranscendentalization” of Kant,
human being is defined as communication and interaction with one another rather than a series of ethical codes. For this reason, judgment for Kant is only a faculty of the mind but for Arendt it depends on the actual interaction with others.

On the question of what it means to be human Kant and Arendt share some similar ideas. In Anthropology From Pragmatic Point of View, Kant focuses on humans as both free agents and of exercising their freedom in community. Kant asserts that when a child begins to speak first of all he/she feels himself/herself, but at the same time he/she becomes acquainted with others. When we speak about ourselves we have to approve existence of the other. This idea leads to Kant defining the human being in relation to others. A human being cannot imagine himself/herself as a Cartesian subject. Through his criticism of the Cartesian subject, Kant develops the subject of the Enlightenment as one who has to communicate with others to think critically, judge uncommittedly and act freely.\(^1\)

Kant appeals to the moral aspect of man for defining the human and produces the categorical imperative as a possibility for interacting in a free public realm. Since considerations of the physical details of actions are necessarily bound up with a person’s subjective preferences, culture and experience - they could have been brought about without the action of a rational will; Kant concludes that the consequences of an act are irrelevant to moral deliberation. For Kant, the only objective basis for moral value would be the rationality of the good will, expressed in recognition of moral duty and leading to a man being human in the public sphere. The categorical imperative cannot contain any moral ingredient or thematic speech but it can be a formula, a heuristic principle to produce moral and political principles. Thus duty for humans becomes a necessity to act out of reverence for the moral law set by the categorical imperative, and human actions are conducted according to the categorical imperative. Then, only a categorical imperative can be the supreme principle of morality which has a public character. Because the categorical imperative demands to regard as end itself. This means that people have value in themselves and what we will for others we will for ourselves also. Kant means that rational beings are ends in themselves, so they can act for collectivity in the public realm. Hannah Arendt is suspicious of the role of the categorical imperative in the public domain within which humans are free to act. Under the devastating effect of the Holocaust, Arendt thinks that moral principles are not enough for being together and she gives reasons for this in the Eichmann in Jerusalem. Arendt turns to the conception of man as zoon politikon which is Aristotelian and defines humans as beings with the same capacities. Furthermore, she agrees with the Kantian way of explaining human capacities but she tends to read Kant’s moral philosophy on a political basis. By returning Kant’s concept of transcendentental ego, Arendt wants to constitute the possibility of living together in peace which cannot be realized if the public realm is abolished by violence. For the common life we should keep in mind that all human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men.

First of all, since both Kant and Arendt want to constitute the idea of political freedom they try to articulate common world. This common world can be made possible if and only if, we accept a concept of the human where humans live and act together without oppression and with free will. Arendt thinks that all humans live together in this common world both physically and historically. But the constitution of a space of public freedom appears as a con-

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Being Human Among Humans: Plurality in The Divided World

Dana Villa points that for Arendt the political judgment of a plurality of diverse citizens expresses what could be called the political _aletheia_ or _concrete truth_ of the city or political association; a judgment is concrete only if it is the product of a particular assemblage of free and equal citizens. For Dana Villa, Arendt follows Kant and describes such judgments as a variety of "enlarged thought" and Arendt's concept of political freedom refers to modern revolutions that have the same because of the traditional political thought. This idea which Dana Villa mentions depends on the assertion that Western metaphysical thoughts have dominant characteristics.

But I think that we can acquire a better understanding of Arendt's concept of political freedom in relation with the concept of human, if we connect it with the Kantian anthropology and with the Aristotelian conception of the citizen. Kant's critical philosophy is important to think of the human because he defines the free public realm in relation to the ideal of the cosmopolitan citizen. If we can judge and act only in community with communication and dialogue against all oppression then we can imagine universal moral-political laws that comprise all humans. For Kant, it is these moral laws that lay the groundwork of cosmopolitan ideals. However, Arendt does not think that morality can be a reliable starting point for universal, peaceful practices; she points that human freedom can only be realized by politics, not morality and for this reason political freedom is essential for being human.

Arendt explains that freedom, as a regulative principle, has been steering politics for at least two centuries and she identifies political action as the key to redefining the concept of human freedom. The ideal of the polis signifies the realm within which freedom was experienced through history. Therefore, the _polis_ stands for the _space of appearance_, for that space "where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly." The public space of appearance can be always recreated anew wherever individuals gather together politically, that is, "Wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action". Thus, the space of appearance becomes the space of human experience. It is highly fragile and exists only when actualized through the performance of deeds or the utterance of words which constitute the world. Arendt explains its peculiarity is that:

"Unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men — as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed — but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever."

Arendt's conception of action is intimately related to her conception of freedom and individuation, and her conceptions of temporal transcendence and of the public realm. To understand why Arendt turns to Kant, we shall focus our attention upon the central dichotomies in Arendt's conception of human condition. The main tensions in her political thought are

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5 Hannah Arendt, _The Human Condition_, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p: 199
freedom and necessity, uniqueness and uniformity, public and private. Both Kant and Arendt want to grasp the particular and universal at the same time without loss of autonomy. To that end, Arendt focuses on Kant’s judgment and its political meaning rather than on morality.

Arendt’s concern with judgment is related to political tragedies of the twentieth century, namely, Nazism and Stalinism. Faced with the loss of judgment and death of the human, Arendt tries to reformulate new standards of living together; at this point, it is evident that the human is defined in praxis. Thus she synthesizes sensus communis and judgment.

For Arendt, therefore, the enormity and unprecedentedness of totalitarianism can be resisted by using capacity to judge for it is precisely this faculty that underlies our conventional categories of interpretation and assessment, moral or political. And in this situation the only recourse is to appeal to the imagination, which allows us to view things in their proper perspective and to judge them without the benefit of a pre-given rule or universal. This solution places Arendt’s conception of the human between Aristotelian zoon politikon and the Kantian subject. For Arendt, the imagination enables us to create the distance which is necessary for an impartial judgment, while at the same time allows for the closeness that makes understanding possible; it is a new way for taking moral-political decisions and principles through action. Therefore the human is defined as a creature that has the capacity to act. Arendt makes possible both our reconciliation with reality and the ability to act against reality such as the tragic reality of the twentieth century. Political action becomes possible owing to her conception of human. Arendt asserts that there are living humans on earth, humans in the plural, not singular; so we should recognise that the being of human depends on plurality, and plurality can be enabled by political action, namely word, speech and discourse that require the use of judgment.

Arendt attempted to connect the activity of thinking to our capacity to judge. To be sure, this connection of thinking and judging seems to operate only in emergencies but today we need judgment and the conception of the human to overcomes disintegration, the monopoly of violence and the loss of value which are together in the divided world. However, the capacity to think representatively with an enlarged mentality is a specifically political ability that enables individuals to orient themselves in the public realm and to judge the phenomenal realm and memorize the importance of speech which is lost within oppression of morality, tradition and violence. If the human is outside the political realm, then we cannot be hopeful for a non-discriminative, peaceful world.
Bibliography


