

Book Review

***Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice
in Dark Times: Education for a World in Crisis***

Wayne Veck and Helen M. Gunter, Eds.

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, 184 pages.

There has been a growing interest in the implications that Hannah Arendt's thought has on education, and *Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times* is one of the latest additions to the expanding bibliography on the topic. The title of the collection is a nod to Arendt's own preoccupation with the theme of catastrophe. The phrase "in Dark Times" recalls *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt's volume of ten essays about nine individuals who were alive during the first half of the twentieth century, a period of, in her words, "political catastrophes" and "moral disasters." The word "crisis" in the subtitle recalls the titles of three of Arendt's works: "The Crisis in Education," "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and its Political Significance" (both published in *Between Past and Future*), and another of her anthologies, *Crises of the Republic*.

It is timely that this collection was released at the beginning of one of the most adversity-filled years in recent world history, even if the editors—Wayne Veck, Reader in Education at the University of Winchester, and Helen M. Gunter, Professor of Educational Policy at the University of Manchester—could not have imagined the depth of difficulty into which the world would be plunged in 2020. The introduction to the volume enumerates the types of “darkness” they had in mind when they conceived of the collection. First, echoing Arendt’s own criticism of the progressivist movement in education during her time, Veck and Gunter refer to an intergenerational crisis in which adults today have shunned their responsibility and left the young to worry about the state of the world, as exemplified by the climate change school strikes begun by Swedish youth activist Greta Thunberg in 2018. Second, they imply that the very existence of public education is in danger, as support for it in many parts of the world is threatened both by the privatization of schooling and by the relativization of truth in the public realm. Cognizant that one of Arendt’s two major essays explicitly about education has aroused criticism, “Reflections on Little Rock” being among them, Veck and Gunter emphasize that the approach they and the individual contributors take is not to apply Arendt’s ideas as “ready-made solutions to ongoing difficulties and dilemmas, but rather to enter into dialogue with her thinking.”¹

¹ Wayne Veck, and Helen M. Gunter, Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times: Education for a World in Crisis (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 6.

The individual contributions to the anthology are from an impressive list of educational researchers, political theorists, and philosophers either based or partly based in the US or the UK. As is often the case in anthologies such as this, the individual papers, though united around a common theme, are pitched to slightly different audiences. Veck and Gunter categorize and order the nine main essays in this book thematically: *The Promise of Education*, *Education and Crisis*, and *Education for the Love of the World*. For the purposes of this review, I deviate from their arrangement and group the essays based on the audiences most likely to appreciate them: those unfamiliar with Arendt, those interested in politics and education, and those interested in education for citizenship.

Three of the essays are largely theoretical and exegetical in nature. The first essay in the collection (Chapter 1) by Roger Berkowitz can be read as an introduction to Arendt's educational thought for readers less familiar with her work. It orients newcomers to her main essay on education, "The Crisis in Education." Although some of the points made in the chapter have previously been made by other Arendt commentators, Berkowitz deepens readers' understanding of these familiar arguments by drawing from both the well-known English version of the essay and the German original, using the latter to clarify specific terms that Arendt used. The second and last papers of the collection, by Faisal Baluch and Eduardo Duarte, respectively, are both directed

at readers who have greater familiarity with the breadth of Arendt's work. Addressing his paper (Chapter 2) to scholars aware of the debates surrounding her educational thought, Baluch advocates for an alternative to the typical approach of making her conception of "natality" the central focus of her thinking on education. He argues that thinking instead about Arendt's educational work through the lens of "temporality" leads to a more faithful appreciation of her thought in the context of her overarching vision of politics. In the last paper of the collection, Duarte (Chapter 9) draws from Arendt's various works while also referring to ancient and medieval philosophy (Heraclitus, Epictetus, and Augustine) to clarify her thesis in "The Crisis in Education": the purpose of the school is to teach children about the world as it is.

Three of the essays in the collection are most useful to readers interested in the intersection between politics and education. Jo-Anne Dillabough, Helen M. Gunter, and Wayne Veck all draw from Arendt's writings to construct conceptual tools for thinking about educational issues. Drawing from the work of Arendt and Paul Ricoeur, Dillabough (Chapter 4) conceptualizes a narrative conception of identity that, she argues, can be helpful for addressing various issues in citizenship education. On the other hand, Gunter (Chapter 5) looks at a very specific policy issue: the segregation of children in England's schools based on intelligence testing and selective entry into grammar schools. Building on Arendt, Gunter frames this issue as a problem of "depoliticized privatism." Veck

(Chapter 6) brings Arendt's insights about statelessness and education to bear on his thinking about the forced migration crisis and the specific challenges that come with the education of displaced children. He convincingly argues for the counterintuitive position that educating displaced children should, at least temporarily, involve their "withdrawal" rather than their assimilation.

The remaining three essays are likely to be interesting to civics education practitioners and researchers interested in education for citizenship. Jon Nixon (Chapter 3) uses Arendt's educational thought to reflect on the current phenomenon of political populism. He presents Arendt's emphasis on thinking as an educational antidote to contemporary political problems related to populism, similar to the way she believed thinking was the antidote to the thoughtlessness that plagued her own times. Marie Morgan (Chapter 7) goes beyond Arendt's educational works and looks instead at her writings on the Holocaust and World War II to reimagine Holocaust Education, a feature of school curricula in many Western countries. Finally, Aaron Schutz (Chapter 8) takes inspiration from John Dewey's work and Arendt's writings about council movements to propose how the classroom can be envisaged as a model of a polity.

To my knowledge, apart from special issues of academic journals, this is the first anthology about Arendt and education since the 2001 publication of *Renewing Our Common World: Essays on Hannah Arendt on Education*, edited by Mordechai Gordon. In contrast with the earlier volume, the

tone of the essays in this one is generally more scholarly (without being inaccessible), and the authors take for granted that readers will have at least some familiarity with Arendt's thought. The fact that they can now assume this demonstrates how much the field of Arendt Studies has matured in the last nineteen years. It is admittedly disappointing that despite the gap between this volume and Gordon's, only a few of the essays (e.g., Gunter's, Veck's) engage with Arendt's more recently published works. This does not, however, seriously detract from the overall quality of this collection, and the editors' concluding essay for the book helpfully summarizes how Arendtian themes are as relevant as ever two decades into the twenty-first century.

There are a number of copyediting errors in the text and a few misspellings not caught in the proofreading process. Also, the manner of referencing Arendt's works leads to some frustration. Although the succinct use of acronyms makes for clean copy, the editors use the abbreviations to cite entire anthologies (for example, "RJ" for *Responsibility and Judgement* or "PP" for *The Promise of Politics*), rather than specific essays, even when those anthologies contain essays that have been published elsewhere and might be known to readers by their individual titles. One notable error is that Morgan's chapter repeatedly refers to a work abbreviated as "LI," but the acronym is absent from the reference list at the beginning of the book. (The work referred to is Arendt's interview

with Gunter Gaus.) These are, however, minor complaints about an anthology that is otherwise of good quality.

Arendt was foremost a political thinker; her educational thinking was situated within her broader political thought. She understood formal schooling to be how we in the modern world prepare children to be adult citizens. This book may find its place in the current pandemic because of the challenges that the crisis poses to this educational task. Many of the ways that schools teach citizenship skills—live debates, collaborative work, and (most compatible with Arendt’s conservative educational stance) real-time discussions about the historical wellsprings of a political community’s ideals—are made more difficult in educational settings that are required to be socially distanced. Scholars who are reflecting on the pandemic’s potential long-term impact on civic education might find some useful insights in the book.

The more fundamental way that this book is relevant for the current times, however, has to do with the issues of politics and governance that predate but are exacerbated by the current health emergency. The years leading into 2020 saw a global rise in political populism and new, insidious forms of political communication and information manipulation, all of which have shaped the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of government responses. At the same time, because the pandemic is a global problem, any solutions for it cannot be imagined separately from the continuing issues of migration and displacement. Although *Hannah Arendt on*

Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times was published before the pandemic began, the book is worth reading for scholars of educational philosophy looking for fresh ways to think about today's interrelated crises.

Rowena A. Azada-Palacios

Department of Philosophy, Ateneo de Manila University

UCL Institute of Education, University College London

<razada@ateneo.edu>