

Openbare gesprek en wêreldlikheid. Aspekte van die politieke filosofie van Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)¹

Public discourse and worldliness. Aspects of the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)

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ABSTRACT

Public discourse and worldliness. Aspects of the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)

According to Hannah Arendt public discourse and "worldliness" are two of the constitutive elements of or basic conditions for a healthy and flourishing political life amongst the citizens of a polity, which in turn is indispensable for a meaningful and truly human existence. This article

¹ *Opedra aan Johan Degenaar.* Hierdie artikel was oorspronklik bedoel as 'n bydrae tot die Degenaar gedenkbundel wat in 2006 verskyn het onder die titel *Gesprek sonder grense* (H&B Uitgewers, Stellenbosch). Vanweë 'n tegniese oorsig van die redakteurs het die bydrae nie in die bundel verskyn nie.

explores Arendt's views in this regard. Particular attention is given to her famous essay on Lessing (published in *Men in Dark Times*) and her unsentimental view of civil friendship or respect between citizens, which is reminiscent of the Aristotelian *philia politiké*. In Arendt's own words this is "a kind of 'friendship' without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem." (HC 243)

KEY CONCEPTS: Hannah Arendt, Johan Degenaar, Theodor Lessing, public discourse, worldliness, politics, civil friendship, respect, forgiveness

TREFWOORDE: Hannah Arendt, Johan Degenaar, Theodor Lessing, openbare gesprek, wêreldlikheid, politiek, burgerlike vriendskap, respek, vergiffenisvolheid

OPSOMMING

Volgens Hannah Arendt is openbare gesprek (diskussie) en "wêreldlikheid" twee van die konstitutiewe elemente van of grondliggende voorwaardes vir 'n gesonde en lewenskragtige politieke lewe tussen die burgers van 'n samelewing, wat op sy beurt weer onontbeerlik is vir 'n sinvolle en waarlik menslike bestaan. Hierdie artikel ondersoek Arendt se opvatting in dié verband. Besondere aandag word gegee aan haar beroemde opstel oor Lessing (gepubliseer in *Men in Dark Times*) en haar onsentimentele opvatting van burgerlike vriendskap of onderlinge respek tussen burgers, wat sterk herinner aan Aristoteles se begrip *philia politiké*. In Arendt se eie woorde kom dit neer op "'n soort 'vriendskap' sonder intimiteit en sonder nabyheid; dit is eerbied vir die persoon op 'n afstand, dié afstand wat die ruimte van die wêreld tussen ons skep, en hierdie eerbied is onafhanklik van watter kwaliteite ons ook al mag bewonder of welke prestasies ons ook al hoog mag aanskryf'" (HC 243).

Die jaar 2006 was op filosofiese gebied 'n belangrike herdenkingsjaar. Internasionaal is die geboorte van die Duits-Joods-Amerikaanse denker Hannah Arendt honderd jaar vantevore in herinnering geroep, en hier in Suid-Afrika is die gevierde Stellenbosse filosoof Johan Degenaar gehuldig by geleentheid van sy tagtigste verjaarsdag. Die meegaande artikel handel oor Arendt, maar myns insiens is daar talle aspekte van Arendt se politieke filosofie wat raakpunte met die werk van Degenaar vertoon. In wat hier volg beperk ek my tot twee temas wat van sentrale belang is in die denke van Arendt, naamlik openbare gesprekvoering en wêreldlikheid. Albei temas speel volgens my ook 'n belangrike rol in die lewe en denkwerk van Degenaar.

1. OPENBARE GESPREKVOERING

'n Mens kan *as mens* volgens Arendt leef sonder om te arbeid of iets te vervaardig (hy kan dit aan andere oorlaat), maar nie sonder om te handel en te praat nie: "A life without speech and without action ... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men" (HC 176). Deur sy handeling en sy spreke verskyn 'n mens aan andere, en kom sy unieke, onvergelykbare identiteit (*wie* hy is, in teenstelling tot *wat* hy is) tot openbaring (HC 179). Alhoewel Arendt onderskei tussen handeling en spreke, is dit duidelik dat handeling sonder spreke nie werklik handeling sal wees nie. Handeling is onverbreeklik verbonde met redevoering ("speech"), want slegs in die redevoering kry dit enige relevansie of betekenis. As daar geen verskille tussen mense was nie, sou hulle nie werklik taal nodig gehad het nie, en as handeling uitsluitlik 'n middel tot 'n bepaalde doel sou wees, dan sou dit veel doeltreffender verrig kon word in stilte of deur die gebruik van eenduidige tekens of kodes (*ibid.*).

Handeling in die volle sin van die woord transendeer die orde van natuurlike lewensprosesse (die ryk van die noodsaak). Dit is slegs moontlik binne die kunsmatige ruimte van die publieke (politieke) lewe, en dié ruimte is by uitstek ’n taal- of gespreksruimte. Soos Aristoteles reeds gesê het, word die mens – in onderskeid tot ander “sosiale” wesens soos byvoorbeeld bye – gekenmerk deur sy vermoë tot redenering en taal (*logos*), en dit is wat tegelykertyd van hom ’n *politieke* wese maak.² Deur onderlinge oorlegpleging, gesprekvoering en debat – deur taal dus – word ’n mens eers waarlik mens, betree jy die wêreld van menslike aangeleenthede. In haar beroemde essay oor die Duitse filosoof en skrywer, Theodor Lessing, skryf Arendt:

For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become human just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it becomes the object of discourse. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows. Whatever cannot become the object of discourse – the truly sublime, the truly horrible or the uncanny – may find a human voice through which to sound into the world, but it is not exactly human. We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human (MDT 32; vgl. HC 204).

Arendt beklemtoon voortdurend dat taal die Griekse *polis* oorheers het. In ’n kommentaar op die onderskeid wat Aristoteles gemaak het tussen politieke en nie-politieke vorme van gesag, skryf Arendt soos volg:

To be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command rather than to persuade, were prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis* ... [E]verybody outside the *polis* – slaves and barbarians – was *aneu logou*, deprived, of course, not of the faculty of speech, but of a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other (HC 26; vgl. OR 35).

Dwarsdeur haar geskrifte maak sy dit duidelik dat egte, outentieke politiek geleë is in *handeling*, en dat politieke handeling by uitstek *spraak*handeling is: ’n spreke in die openbaar oor openbare aangeleenthede.³ Die Griekse *polis* dui volgens haar op ’n grootse kultuurprestasie in dié sin dat dit politieke handeling “gereguleer” of gekanaliseer het in die medium van spraak: “most political action, in so far as it remains outside violence, is indeed transacted in words” (HC 26). Individuele kragtoere soos dié waarmee Homeros se helde vorendag gekom het, word sekondêr gestel aan die vergaderings van burgers waarin onderlinge gesprekvoering, beraadslaging of diskussie ’n deurslaggewende rol speel in die proses van besluitneming oor sake van openbare belang.

² Vgl. die volgende uitsprake van Arendt: “Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being” (HC 3). “What makes man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert ... No other faculty except language, neither reason nor consciousness, distinguishes us so radically from all animal species” (OV 82).

³ Plek-plek definieer Arendt politieke handeling as politieke *spreke* (vgl. HC 3, 27, 31), of sê sy dat “most acts ... are performed in the manner of speech” (HC 178). Woordlose aktiwiteite is geen handeling nie; dit is óf stilte óf geweld.

Arendt verwyt die filosowe vir hulle geringskating van hierdie burgerlik-politieke lewe deur dit ondergeskik te stel aan die *vita contemplativa*. Tekenend hiervan is Plato se “concern with the eternal”, wat volgens Arendt heeltemal iets anders beteken as – en trouens in stryd is met – die (politieke) strewe om “onsterflik” te word deur grootse daade en woorde:

The philosopher’s experience of the eternal, which to Plato was *arrhéton* (“unspeakable”), and to Aristotle *aneu logou* (“without word”) ... can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men, as we know from the Cave parable in Plato’s *Republic*, where the philosopher, having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect “singularity,” as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others. Politically speaking, if to die is the same as “to cease to be among men,” experience of the eternal is a kind of death ... It may be that the philosophers’ discovery of the eternal was helped by their very justified doubt of the chances of the *polis* for immortality or even permanence, and it may be that the shock of this discovery was so overwhelming that they could not but look down upon all striving for immortality as vanity or vainglory, certainly placing themselves thereby in open opposition to the ancient city-state and the religion which inspired it (HC 20).⁴

In teenstelling tot die filosofiese tradisie met sy afkeer in die burgerlik-politieke lewe, wil Arendt juis die aandag vestig op die onontbeerlikheid van die politieke ruimte vir ’n gelukkende en eg menslike bestaan. Volgens Arendt is daar eenvoudig geen plaasvervanger vir die “drawn-out wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise” wat kenmerkend is van die politiek nie (OR 86-7). Die alternatief vir politieke oorlegpleging en onderhandeling is noodwendig geweld.

Die aktiwiteite van onderlinge meningswisseling, beraadslaging, oorreding en gesamentlike besluitneming is in die *politiek* (anders as in die sfeer van administrasie en bestuur) nie bloot net ’n middel of ’n tegniek ter bereiking van ’n bepaalde doel nie. Die doel (die “goeie” wat nagestreef word) is in die politieke aktiwiteite self geleë. Dit neem vorm aan of kry gestalte in die “uitvoering” van die aktiwiteite self, en staan nooit los daarvan nie. Deur hierdie prosesse van beraadslaging styg individue uit bo die vlak van blote eiebelang en strategiese oorwegings, en hulle raak betrokke by aangeleenthede en vraagstukke wat bepalend is vir die *soort* van politieke gemeenskap waarvan hulle deel uitmaak. In die laaste instansie gaan dit oor die sin of betekenis – hier en nou – van ons lewe in gemeenskap met andere.

2. GEMEENSKAPLIKHEID EN WÊRELDLIKHEID

’n Belangrike voorwaarde vir politieke handeling is dat die individuele deelnemers ’n “wêreld” met mekaar in gemeen moet hê. Hierdie wêreld konstitueer die ruimte of konteks waarbinne die individuele akteurs aan mekaar kan verskyn. Arendt beklemtoon deurgaans dat dit ’n mensgemaakte ruimte is en nie van nature gegewe is nie:

⁴ Arendt meen egter dat “the eventual victory of the concern with eternity over all kinds of aspirations toward immortality is not due to philosophic thought. The fall of the Roman Empire plainly demonstrated that no work of mortal hands can be immortal, and it was accompanied by the rise of the Christian gospel of an ever-lasting individual life to its position as the exclusive religion of Western mankind. Both together made any striving for an earthly immortality futile and unnecessary. And they succeeded so well in making the *vita activa* and the *bios politikos* the handmaidens of contemplation that not even the rise of the secular in the modern age and the concomitant reversal of the traditional hierarchy between action and contemplation sufficed to save from oblivion the striving for immortality which originally had been the spring and center of the *vita activa*” (HC 21).

The birth and death of human beings are not simple natural occurrences, but are related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable entities, appear and from which they depart. Birth and death presuppose a world which is not in constant movement, but whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible, which existed before any one individual appeared into it and which will survive his eventual departure. Without a world into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other species (HC 96-97; vgl. HC 52).

Om deel te hê aan 'n gemeenskaplike wêreld beteken egter nie vir Arendt dat 'n mens deel moet wees van 'n "organiese" gemeenskap of één moet word met 'n groter geheel nie. Die wêreld en die dinge daarin bring individue byeen deur 'n (gedeelde) ruimte tussen hulle te open:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak (HC 52; vgl. HC 182).

Die wêreld as tussenruimte is dit wat pluraliteit – 'n ware verskeidenheid van perspektiewe op dieselfde saak – moontlik maak.⁵ Politiek word wesenlik bedreig waar hierdie gedeelde sin vir die wêreld verlore gaan, waar individue onverskillig raak en hulleself onttrek van die gemeenskaplike wêreld, waar daar geen sorg en geen liefde meer is vir die wêreld nie. Arendt dui hierdie toestand aan met die term "worldlessness", wat vir haar sinoniem is met 'n toestand van kulturele verval en barbarisme (MDT 21; vgl. HC 248 e.v.). Sy verwys na tydperke waarin hierdie toestand heers as "dark times", en sy gebruik ook die term "wêreldvervreemding" om hierdie toestand aan te dui. In teenstelling tot Marx is sy van mening dat "world alienation, and not self-alienation ... has been the hallmark of the modern age" (HC 254).

Wêreldloosheid tree in wanneer daar uitgegaan word van die veronderstelling dat die wêreld geen duur of permanensie het nie:

Worldlessness as a political phenomenon is possible only on the assumption that the world will not last ... Only the existence of a public realm and the world's subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence. If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men... It transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but

⁵ Vir Arendt is die veelvuldigheid van verskillende perspektiewe die waarborg vir 'n gemeenskaplike werklikheid en 'n gemeenskaplike wêreld (HC 50, 57, 58): "[T]he public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself ... For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it... Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives... Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear... The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective."

also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time (HC 55).

Daar is verskeie maniere waarop hierdie toestand van wêreldloosheid of wêreldvervreemding kan intree. Arendt verwys onder meer na “eksterne” faktore soos globalisering en die grootskaalse onteiening/ontworteling wat deur kapitalisme veroorsaak word (HC 254-257), asook die bandeloosheid en eensaamheid wat kenmerkend is van die moderne massa-samelewing.⁶ Die bedenklike rol wat die filosofiese tradisie in hierdie verband gespeel het, moet ook volgens Arendt nie onderskat word nie. Wêreldloosheid is nie slegs kenmerkend van die Platonies-Christelike tradisie met sy asketiese inslag nie, maar ook van die subjek-gesentreerdheid van die moderne filosofie wat sig (op uiteenlopende maniere) manifesteer in beide die rasionalisme van die Verligting én die Romantiek.⁷

Oor die algemeen kan wêreldvervreemding in verband gebring word met houdings van onverskilligheid of afkeer (“resentment”) ten opsigte van die wêreld en die menslike kondisie. Dikwels gaan dit gepaard met ’n terugtrekking in meer intieme vorme van gemeenskap of “broederskap”, soos byvoorbeeld by die vroeë Christendom, wat die wêreldlike “tussenruimte” uitwis of laat platval en hulle lede aan mekaar bind deur die alles-opeisende krag van die “liefde” of van die gedeelde geloofsoortuiging (HC 53). Nog voorbeelde waarna sy verwys is die broederskap van die “pariahdom” (die bannelinge of uitgeworpenes) en die onderdrukte en uitgebuite groepe of klasse (*les malheureux* soos hulle in die 18de eeu genoem is, en *les misérables* in die 19de eeu) (MDT 19-24). Hierdie mense het weliswaar die vermoë om mekaar by te staan en dikwels vertoon hulle “a kindness and sheer goodness of which human beings are otherwise scarcely capable”, asook “a joy in the simple fact of being alive, rather suggesting that life comes fully into its own only among those who are, in worldly terms, the insulted and injured.” Nogtans meen Arendt dat hierdie toestand dui op ’n “radical loss of the world, so fearful an atrophy of all the organs with which we respond to it – starting with the common sense with which we orient ourselves in a world common to ourselves and others and going on to the sense of beauty, or taste, with which we love the world – that in extreme cases ... we can speak of real worldlessness. And worldlessness, alas, is always a form of barbarism” (MDT 21).

Arendt het groot lof vir ’n figuur soos Lessing wat vanweë bepaalde omstandighede “never felt at home in the world as it then existed and probably never wanted to, and still after his own fashion he always remained committed to it” (MDT 13). Hy het skepties gestaan ten opsigte van “philanthropic feelings” en ’n “brotherly attachment to other human beings which springs from hatred of the world in which men are treated ‘inhumanly’” (MDT 20). Teenoor die 18de-eeuse gedweep met broederskap stel hy *vriendskap* (“which is as selective as compassion is egalitarian”) as die belangrikste verskynsel “in which alone true humanity can prove itself” (ibid.).

Arendt is besonder fel in haar kritiek op beide die sentimentalisme en rasionalisme van die 18de eeu wat volgens haar slegs keerkante van dieselfde munt is:

[B]oth could lead equally to that enthusiastic excess in which individuals feel ties of brotherhood to all men. In any case this rationality and sentimentality were only psychological substitutes,

⁶ Arendt skryf uitvoerig hieroor in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Vgl. Kateb (1984: 175) se kommentaar in dié verband.

⁷ Kyk bv. Arendt se uitvoerige bespreking van die moderne filosofie in HC 257-294.

localized in the realm of invisibility, for the loss of the common, visible world. Now this “human nature” and the feelings of fraternity that accompany it manifest themselves only in darkness, and hence cannot be identified in the world. What is more, in conditions of visibility they dissolve into nothingness like phantoms. The humanity of the insulted and injured has never yet survived the hour of liberation by so much as a minute. This does not mean that it is insignificant, for in fact it makes insult and injury enduring; but it does mean that in political terms it is absolutely irrelevant (MDT 24).

Politiek word bedreig deur te veel of te weinig gemeenskap. Dit is wat Arendt lei tot die idee van vriendskap as ’n manier om die gepaste verhouding tussen burgers aan te dui. In navolging van Aristoteles definieer sy burgerlike vriendskap in opposisie tot verhoudings van intimiteit en privaatheid:

We are wont to see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, in which the friends open their hearts to each other unmolested by the world and its demands... Thus it is hard for us to understand the political relevance of friendship. When, for example we read in Aristotle that *philia*, friendship among citizens, is one of the fundamental requirements for the well-being of the City, we tend to think that he was speaking of no more than the absence of factions and civil war within it. But for the Greeks the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*. In discourse the political importance of friendship, and the humanness peculiar to it, were made manifest. This converse (in contrast to the intimate talk in which individuals speak about themselves), permeated though it may be by pleasure in the friend’s presence, is concerned with the common world, which remains “inhuman” in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings (MDT 31-32).

Vriendskap in ’n politieke sin is ’n soort vennootskap in argument- en gesprekvoering. Dit is gebaseer op wedersydse respek en toewyding aan die gemeenskaplike (publieke) belang. Burgerlike vriendskap skep die ruimte wat nodig is vir ’n mens om waarlik *mens* te wees, waarby onthou moet word dat “humaneness should be sober and cool, rather than sentimental; that humanity is exemplified not in fraternity but in friendship; that friendship is not intimately personal but makes political demands and preserves reference to the world ...” (ibid.: 33).

Ook waar Arendt skryf oor die waarde van vergiffenisvolheid as politieke deug, dring sy daarop aan dat dit nie in ’n sentimentele, moralistiese sin verstaan moet word nie. Vergewing moet nie, soos by Jesus en sy volgelingen, vereenselwig word met gevoelens van “liefde” en “deernis” nie:

Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others... Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason, rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces. If it were true, therefore, as Christianity assumed, that only love can forgive ..., forgiving would have to remain altogether outside our considerations (HC 242-43).

Om te vergewe is vir Arendt primêr ’n saak van handeling en nié van innerlike “gesindheid” nie. Dit is daarby nie bloot ’n reaktiewe optrede nie, maar ’n aktiewe ingryping waardeur iets nuuts geïnisieer word. Dit skep nuwe omstandighede waardeur mense die geleentheid kry om met vrymoedigheid weer te handel, om opnuut weer toe te tree tot die openbare lewe waar hulle aan andere kan verskyn en in woord en daad hulle unieke bydrae kan lewer tot die groot gebeure waarin die wêreld sig in sy nimmereindigende veelvoud aan ons vertoon. Juis om die wêreld-gerigtheid van vergewing te

benadruk, haal Arendt dit uit die “narrowly circumscribed sphere” van die liefde, en bring sy dit eerder in verband met iets soos *respek* oftewel eerbied:

Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politiké*, is a kind of “friendship” without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem (HC 243).

Vergiffenisvolheid, soos deugdelikheid in die algemeen, spruit voort uit ’n “sorg vir die wêreld”, uit ’n “ongeïnteresseerde welgevalle” daarin dat dinge aan ons verskyn en steeds weer op nuwe en onverwagse maniere in verskyning tree. Om vergiffenisvol te wees, beteken om ontvanklik te wees vir die wêreld en sy onuitputlike rykdom van betekenisemoontlikheide. Dit impliseer ’n houding van ruimgeestigheid of respek teenoor andere: iedereen moet (minstens in beginsel) die reg gegun word om in die openbare sfeer te verskyn suiwer op basis daarvan dat hy ’n *persoon* is, dit wil sê sonder om van hom te verwag dat hy eers bewys moet lewer van sy verdienstelikheid. In hierdie sin, so wil ek beweer, geld vergiffenisvolheid as basisdeug in die oë van Arendt. Dit is ’n onmisbare voorwaarde vir handeling en vir die instandhouding van die openbare sfeer en, soos ek elders probeer aantoon het (Schoeman 2004), kan daar geen sprake van deugdelikheid wees los van handeling en buite die openbare lewe nie.

Lessing is vir Arendt ’n toonbeeld van die onsentimentele vriendskapsverhouding wat sy beskou as konstitutief vir die politiek en ’n gesonde gemeenskapslewe, en wat sy in die volgende aanhaling oor Lessing te sê het, kan volgens my in ’n hoë mate ook van die figuur Johan Degenaar (en die omstandighede waarin hy gelewe en gewerk het) gesê word:

Lessing, too, was already living in “dark times” ... We have seen what a powerful need men have, in such times, to move closer to one another, to seek in the warmth of intimacy the substitute for that light and illumination which only the public realm can cast. But this means that they avoid disputes and try as far as possible to deal only with people with whom they cannot come into conflict. For a man of Lessing’s disposition there was little room in such an age and in such a confined world; where people moved together in order to warm one another, they moved away from him. And yet he, who was polemical to the point of contentiousness, could no more endure loneliness than the excessive closeness of a brotherliness that obliterated all distinctions. He was never eager really to fall out with someone with whom he had entered into a dispute; he was concerned solely with humanizing the world by incessant and continual discourse about its affairs and the things in it. He wanted to be the friend of many, but no man’s brother (MDT 37).

In nog ’n verdere opsig het Lessing ’n modelstatus in die oë van Arendt, naamlik wat betref sy nugtere siening van “waarheid” in die politiek. En ook in hierdie opsig is daar na my mening ’n sterk ooreenkoms met die figuur Johan Degenaar:

Because Lessing was a completely political person, he insisted that truth can exist only where it is humanized by discourse, ... [where] there are many voices and where the announcement of what each “deems truth” both links and separates men, establishing in fact those distances between men which together comprise the world. Every truth outside this area, no matter whether it brings good or ill, is inhuman in the literal sense of the word; but not because it might rouse men against one another and separate them. Quite the contrary, it is because it might have the result that all men would suddenly unite in a single opinion, so that out of many opinions one would emerge, as though not men in their infinite plurality but man in the

singular, one species and its exemplars, were to inhabit the earth. Should that happen, the world, which can form only in the interspaces between men in all their variety, would vanish altogether (MDT 38).

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