

Koffler Centre of the Arts

Books & Ideas: Dr. Ann Heberlein with Ken Krimstein

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Ken: Good evening, everybody. This is a real delight for me to have a conversation with Ann about her terrific book which I read digitally and looked at all the notes physically. So, we just want to have a conversation because it's so terrific for me to have read this book and I just want to start by saying, Ann, I wish this book was finished when I was working on my book because there's so many wonderful things in it. I'd like to ask you to start off, when did you first, do you remember when you first became aware of Hannah Arendt in your life?

Ann: Well, actually, I can't, because I think that Hannah is one of the sort of figures that's known, I mean, she's kind of a collective known of, or I don't know how to say, so I'm not really sure when I first heard the name or I meant her most well known concept on Banality of Evil because that's the thing that sort of just swirls around and you know about it, but I guess it was when I did my studies at the University of Lund when I studied practical philosophy when I first came across it because of my interest in the concept of forgiveness. I was very curious to find out what it meant to forgive and if everything is forgivable, so to speak. Actually, she meant a lot to me on a personal level then because she was one of the very few philosophers that really said that there are some deeds and acts that are unforgivable, and that's not a common, it's not a common perspective on forgiveness, especially in theology, and that's sort of my, that's where I started out in my studies.

Ken: Would you say that when you were working on that thesis or on that notion that this is what wanted you to go ahead and write this book, On Love and Tyranny, or how did that, how did this particular book grow out of your interest with her?

Ann: Yeah, I made my acquaintance with Hannah when I was a doctor student and that's, I mean, that's a lot of years ago, and then I had included some of her thinking in all of my books. I have written 13 or maybe 14 books, and I think that she is present in all of my books because I mean the topics that she's interested in it's love, evil, tyranny, it's responsibility, it's guilt, shame, and so on, and it's all of the big questions, really.

Ken: Right, right, and I think it's interesting, though, that you decide, you talk about these concepts, big, big concepts, yet, from reading your book and similar to what I tried to do in mine, we wanted to, instead of talking about her necessarily from her thinking down as more of maybe a scholarly book, you talk kind of about from her life up, or you talk about how her life and her thinking fed on each other or something like that. As a professional academic, what led you to think that this was the way to deal with these big

concepts that you were talking about, like forgiveness and these types of things? Why the life?

Ann: Because I think that ethics or moral philosophy is not just about thinking and your thought. It's also about, I mean, fundamentally it's about bodies and bodies who are suffering, who are enjoying things, who feel joy, sorrow, and so on. I mean, Hannah is as far away from a [word] philosopher as you can imagine, and I thought that, when I read about her life experiences, I understood her philosophy better, actually, because, in my opinion, she sort of, she made philosophy out of her experiences. I mean, the first book she wrote, her dissertation, was about Augustine, the Christian theologian, and his concept of love, and it's quite an unusual topic for a young Jewish student to choose, not at least because she was, I would say that she was not a believer in any way. She was an atheist when she was younger. Anyway, but then, history and her life forced her to think about evil, actually, because she met evil. She met evil, and she met cruelty, and she met all these totalitarian movements and ideologies and so on, so it forced her to change direction in her thinking.

Ken: Yeah, I mean the thing that struck me when I was going through it, and I think you may mention it, she sort of renounces philosophy at one point. I mean she ...

Ann: Yes, she does.

Ken: ...you know, so it's very hard to, you know, I'm reluctant to say, oh, who did you, who is Hannah Arendt? Oh, she's a philosopher because maybe she is but she didn't really, can you speak a little bit about that maybe?

Ann: Yeah, I mean when she left Germany, she had to flee from Germany, and when she left Germany she was very disappointed of all the academics and the intellectuals because she thought that they were this process called [German word], which meant, I mean, they were supposed to accept the Nazi ideology and the way of thinking and things like that, and she was so disappointed because she felt that nobody really rejected it. Nobody did any, they didn't oppose to it, so she was very disappointed at that, and she said, well, no, I, I, I, I'm finished with philosophy. She didn't want to, to talk to any philosophers, she didn't want to be a philosopher, she didn't want to be in that intellectual sphere anymore, and then she sort of promised herself to try to change the world, and she thought that we can never change the world for philosophy. You have to do something, and she did of course when she had to Germany and then she came to Paris where she lived in exile for some years and then she actually worked with a Zionist organization taking care of young children and teenagers who were prepared to leave to live in Palestine, Israel.

Ken: Yeah. It was very, she was action oriented, I think.

Ann: Yes.

Ken: She came out of this notion, I think, of like phenomenology, like what you do is what matters, and she had an aversion to just, I think, the *vita contemplativa*, like just contemplative life. She liked *vita active*. She wanted to live ...

Ann: Yes.

Ken: ...and I think it was so exciting to me when I was reading your book to see how we addressed similar actions in her life because, like her escape from Germany or certain arguments she had with people and how that was so tied into the thinking and then of course, you know, I want to get back to this notion that you have of, because I'm not as deep of an expert, you know, I'm a cartoonist, but, like she's somebody who didn't believe in forgiveness. I thought that was really, really interesting, because I think her notion of forgiveness is so overwhelmingly powerful. We can talk, you know, more about that, or maybe that factors into my next question a little bit, which is, she seems to have been very much relevant over the past few years, at least certainly in America there's been a huge interest in her work. Why do you think Hannah Arendt's thinking or her life or whatever speaks to us so, in such an immediate fashion now and really almost 50 years after she died? Why is it that so, is she so relevant?

Ann: Well, in a way, she's dealing with questions that are sort of determined in a way, but I think the questions that she is addressing is very acute or accurate right now because she's, I mean, she's, the biggest book she wrote, a very thick one, on totalitarianism is on a subject that is, unfortunately, very up to date because we do see globally how authoritarian movements are growing and that's, of course, something that we have to address and oppose to, and that's another thing that we can learn from Hannah and her life and her thinking. She was a very suspicious kind of person. She never believed in things that people just said. She always thought that she had to find out for herself, and I think that's very good advice in times where we have world phenomenon like fake news and so on, so she's extremely relevant now, and then she's of course relevant in the person she was. She was a woman who sort of crossed borders in many ways. She was a refugee, and she wrote this marvelous piece on refugees. We don't want to be called, first of all, we don't want to be called refugees, she said, so she sort of gives all these people their subjectivity back because she didn't want to be objectified, and I think that's something for us to remember, as well, when we live in times when people do have to move from their home and so on so we don't just, she was very opposed to the idea of looking at people at just collectives or as groups.

Ken: Right.

Ann: She was always stressing the need to look at people as individuals with individual choices, individual responsibility, individual dreams, and so on, and I think that's important to remember. Today there is this tendency of discussing people as well, in order of their religious beliefs or the color of their skin or ethnicity and so on, but she always wanted to look at people as an individual.

Ken: It raises a lot of questions. I mean, one thing that, you call her suspicious, and what I thought was so interesting about some of the terms and some of the things that you had was it provided some ammunition to, like I see her as a real, somebody real. I mean, reality. She said you have to face reality, and I guess, you know, I would ask in this age, like how do we know what's real and what's not? How can we know that? Or, I guess another way of putting that, what would she think of the Twittersphere, you know, or the internet or whatever? I know it's hard to project, but how do we know? How did she base her understanding of the world and her action in this age, do you think?

Ann: Yeah, well, let me just say something about Twitter and the question of what is real and what is true and what is false because she pointed out propaganda as very important for totalitarianism, that propaganda is essential to make people do what you want them to do, or, rather, to make people don't do anything, don't oppose, don't reflect, and that was what she always stressed. You have to reflect on your own, and I think she would say that now, as well. Can you really believe what you read on Twitter? I mean, even if it's the president you have to sort of reflect upon it and question it.

Ken: One thing that struck me is a quote, and I don't know if she came up with it or if she, but she said, man does not inherit the world, men do, you know, and I sort of interpreted that as men do, women do, like the notion of man this and these big ideas, and she was about individuals, and when you said people don't want to be, you know, objectified, and she, and we were both talking before about that incredible essay that she writes in 1943, and she's not Hannah Arendt, and it's, and also I have to say on a personal note because when somebody was, when I was working on the book and I was talking to another author and he said, oh, you refer to her as Hannah, that's so, and you refer to her as Hannah, too, and I feel like she's the type of character that a biographer gets so close to her. I wanted to ask a little bit about her character. You allude to her strength a lot. You talk about she's strong and courageous and the strength to survive. I'm also taken by the strength in her writing as a writer. Could you talk a little bit about her character? What do you, I mean, as an individual, what would she be like if she were sitting here? You've seen interviews with her and read her writing. What was her character?

Ann: Well, I imagine her as being very sort of frank. She was never, she was always talking straight out. You know, her mother had this scrapbook when she was a child called Unser Kind, which means Our Child, and she wrote about Hannah's different, when she had some kind of she was ill or when she took her first step or when she said her first word and so, and she wrote about Hannah from an early age that she was what's in German is viderbosh, which means that she was very stubborn, and some of her friends mentioned that, too, in interviews and letters and so on. She seemed to have been a stubborn character, and she also seems to have had a bit of a temper, actually. I don't know if you've read about when she first met Mary McCarthy, the

author that later became a very close friend of hers. When she met Mary McCarthy, she was a very outspoken person and maybe she had had some drinks, I don't know, but she posed this joke that Hannah found inappropriate because it referred to Hitler in some way, so Hannah she put on the scene and sort of dismissed Mary, and then she didn't speak to Mary for a very long time, one and a half years, I think, and then she said to Mary, well, okay, maybe I was being silly so let's just forget about this because obviously we do like each other, and then they became very close friends, so she was probably a fierce person, a stubborn person, but also very, a person with a great sense of humor. Some of her friends said that she had this extraordinary talent for friendship, and she did have a lot of friends, and it's so moving and touching and illuminating to read all these mail exchanges between Hannah and her friends because you sort of think that you, well, you get a feeling that you get very close to her. I especially liked her correspondence with Mary McCarthy. Two intellectual women with different backgrounds with very, it's, it's exciting. Everybody should have a friend like that, I think.

Ken: Yeah, that leads me to something else. I mean, she was a woman, obviously, in an era that was probably very male dominated. There's one image that I found that I did something with in my book where she's sitting like for a picture in front of like at Princeton or I don't know where, the University of Chicago, and there must be 50 men with moustaches and suits and this and that and she's the only woman in the whole picture. Of course, she's sitting in the front, but what, do you have any sense of what it was like for her to be a woman in this world?

Ann: I'm not sure that she reflected on it in that way because she was still in her own right, and she did speak about, she had like a quite conservative view of men and women, men and women, and she thought that there were some things that women should not do. She didn't think that women should be bosses, for instance, which is strange because she seemed to be quite a dominant person herself, but I think that everybody around her sort of respected her for the person and the thinker she was, so probably she had this authority in herself. I've seen some clips from when she was teaching, for example, and she's very, I mean, she really fills the room when she speaks and always with this cigarette because she didn't think that she could think without smoking at the same time.

Ken: I was taken by one moment where she has a very dark moment, and I think it was in, I had read that it was in Gurs when she was in this detention camp, and the world was really going very, very, very poorly at that time, especially, I think this was the time of when the Nazis and the Soviets decided to join together. It was a very, very bleak time and, according to some of the things I've read, she actually reached a low where she almost thought she would take her own life, and somehow or another she manages to, I think you refer to it, she found strength, or can you talk a little bit about what, I'm curious about this incredible strength and where this came from. She had interesting

parents, and she grew up in an interesting time, but, you know, that struck me. So, in that moment, what, where did she find the resources to carry on?

Ann: Well, I was very taken by exactly that episode that you mention when she was in Camp Gurs and she really felt that the world was going in the wrong direction and she seriously contemplated suicide, and she tells later in a letter for Kurt Blumenfeld, I think it is, that she did seriously consider to kill herself, to take her own life, and she spoke about it with some of the other women in the camp, but then this sort of concluded that suicide is sort of an individual solution on an individual problem, but their situation in the camp was not an individual problem, so suicide should be that's the wrong solution to that problem because it was really a collective problem in a way. I think that she had this extraordinary ability to feel hope in the most hopeless situations, actually, and I think, also, that she linked hope to responsibility because she told afterwards that she was sort of, I mean, she was, she was trying to encourage the other women in the camp, and she was trying to have like this high moral standard to comb your hair every morning, to wash yourself, put on clean clothes, try to exercise in the way it was possible, and so on, and I think she had a nightly conversation with Heinrich Blücher, the man she lived with all of her life, actually, before she went to Camp Gurs, because he had been interred earlier in another camp and then he came back home and he was with her in their flat in Paris for a couple of weeks and they managed to get married during that very short period of time and then they were separated again because she was interred at Guls and he was sent to another, in another direction, and he said to her the importance of having routines, to do things all the time, and not just sort of be indifferent, and I think that she took on a responsibility to try to encourage the other women to do this, as well, and that helped her survive, actually.

Ken: Right. It's too bad in a way that she wasn't around with her, we were talking earlier about her very great friend, Walter Benjamin ...

Ann: Yes. Yes.

Ken: ...who seemed to not have that kind of hope at the last moment, but it could have been something else because he, and, again, in one of those ironies of history, he tried to flee.

Ann: Yeah.

Ken: You know, they've said Benjamin had terrible luck and like on the one day that they were checking passports at the Spanish border he arrived, and he had just hung out they would have let him go but his despair kind of overtook him, and I think that that relationship might have, you know, when I was working on it, I found that relationship to be a very interesting relationship. We don't need to go deep down that path right now, but an interesting thinker, and I also want to applaud because in your book you were able to talk about Heinrich Blücher, who you talk about, who was her husband and quite an incredible character.

Ann: Yes.

Ken: Her second husband and they had some sort of an extraordinary relationship and you allude to it. Somebody called them the dual monarchy when they were in New York.

Ann: Yes.

Ken: They were literally like, so she had a capability to love, obviously a big capability to love, and love is in the title of your book, and I want to talk a little bit about love because forgiveness and love I think kind of go together in the way that you try and figure her out, and this is kind of a naïve question, but I'll ask it to you. Maybe, maybe we're, I'll just say maybe we're of a similar age. I don't know, but when I, but I was aware of like the Beatles and all these songs and everybody all you need is love, love, love, love, and all this stuff, but if you think about it, the age of love and whatnot that became so big in the 60s, well then when I started reading Hannah it was connecting for me. I mean, what is this concept of love that Hannah is talking about and how does it function in the world? That's a huge question, but it's in your title so I'll ask you.

Ann: Yeah, I mean, she has this concept, or she mentions *amor mundi*, and that really means for love of the world, to love the world, and she sort of, she decides that you have to love the world to not despair, actually, because the world is not always a happy place or a beautiful place or a place where people take care of each other. The world could be an evil place, as well.

Ken: Well, you start your book with a little quote...

Ann: Yeah.

Ken: ...from Hannah, and it's quite a provocative start. If only world history were not so awful it would be a joy to live. Yet, it seems to me that she did have some joy in living. How do you square, I mean, it's an interesting

Ann: Well, she did. She did. It's very, I mean, it's beautiful, really, because just a couple of, well, some years before she died, she had this accident in Central Park, actually, and then she, she thought was doing to die. I guess she was unconscious for a while, and then she told Mary McCarthy that she was prepared to die but she felt that I would like to live on for a bit longer because I really enjoy life, so it's so, it's so beautiful because she, she sort of through her life she finds this feeling, this joy in living, and she had a lot of fun in her life, as well. She was a person who liked to laugh and have fun and so on, but I think it's a beautiful, and when she speaks about *Amor Mundi*, to love the world, it has a lot to do with accepting the world and the world imperfections and its flaws because the world is not a perfect place and human beings are not perfect creatures, but we have to love humans and the world so we can stand it actually.

Ken: I've, yes, I think it's, you know, sometimes I shorthand that as saying, you know, life isn't Disneyland, and if you think about it, Disneyland isn't even really Disneyland

because it's interesting that Bruno Bettelheim, who you quote, who I didn't really realize the person who talked about how the darkness of like fairy tales makes us human, but I'm curious, to go back to your concept if you have to love the world and all its imperfection, does this help explain this concept of forgiveness and where some things are not forgivable. I'm curious to loop back to that because obviously later in her life she got in a lot of trouble, she got in a lot of trouble all of the time and you have a picture of ...

Ann: Different kind of trouble.

Ken: ...yeah, I mean she, but, how did she, where did she draw the line, if you could, between forgiveness and why is forgiveness this important concept and where does it, you know, where does something become unforgivable?

Ann: Yeah, that's very interesting because when I first met Hannah as a thinker it was through her thinking or writing about forgiveness, and then she said that there are things and deeds and acts that are unforgivable, and the definition of an unforgivable act is an act that is not punishable. If there isn't a punishment that is suitable for the act, you can't forgive, either, and of course she was writing about the Holocaust. I mean, how you can punish a thing like that? There is not a punishment that is great enough to punish something like the Holocaust. Hence, you can't forgive it, either. Then, on a personal level, she did forgive people in a way that I found astonishing because she had this love affair with Martin Heidegger when she was a very young student. She was only 17 when she entered university in Heidelberg, and she soon became, they became lovers quite soon, and it's not hard to understand why she was attracted to this much older man because he was called a magician because he was sort of mesmerizing students, and he was, it was said about him that he was going to revolutionize the German philosophy, so he was the big thing in German philosophy, and he shows her, and of course that was very flattering, but then he was married and then unfortunately he seemed to have some, he seemed to be impressed by the Nazi ideology and he was a member of the National Socialist Party, and he also did some, I mean, he had this infamous speech, so he really let her down in so many ways. She left Germany. She had to leave, and she broke with him, but then many years after the war she returned to Germany in a work related mission, actually, and she sent him a note when she was in the town where he lived and they met after all these years and he was sort of a broken man, and he had been through the denazification process, and he had been hospitalized because of his mental, lack of mental health and so on, and she forgave him, and after that moment they stayed friends the rest of their lives and they wrote to each other and they sent each other books and so on, and that fascinated me because it seemed so irrational to forgive him, and when I first read Hannah, her philosophy, it strikes me as a very rational system in a way. She's very square in many ways, but she's more, I think her system is easier to understand in a way and, as I said, rational, but this, to forgive the man who had betrayed her in so many ways and actually had

joined a movement that wanted her and her people dead. I mean, I couldn't really understand it, but I guess that was some kind of love between them.

Ken: And I think, you know, an issue that she's also very aware of is the danger of emotion in politics, which

Ann: Yes.

Ken:she feels like emotion is something that's great on a private level or maybe even a social level, but she is not one, and you can kind of understand why when you see what she lived through, why she would want to stay away from that. I agree. I think the notion of forgiveness, and I have a slightly different take on it, I mean, we interpret it, but I, I'm curious about, yes, where she draws that line and the unforgiveable nature, but I like to say, the way I shorthanded it was, don't forgive and forget, forgive and remember

Ann: Yeah.

Ken:which is kind of interesting, and another thing that struck me is that she talks about promise and forgiveness because I think she sees that, you know, life just comes at us, the phenomenology thing, like life comes at us ...

Ann: Yeah.

Ken: so we can promise people stuff and if that messes up, she says if we don't have the, if we don't use the ability to forgive it's like everything's frozen in amber like those bugs that are frozen, you know, we're stuck, but so hard to live it out. Maybe she made some mistakes, you know, maybe she made some mistakes. I'm curious also because your book is a wonderful story and you tell it really well and I think you also really, it's interesting to see how your mind as a thinker and as a writer, I'd love to, I don't know if your book is in English, your novel, but I'd like to see it, or I'll learn Swedish and read it, but she inspired me a lot in her way she talked about storytelling. Story is so important to her, and it's a word that we hear a lot thrown around in the narrative, this, that, and the other thing, but when I was working I found this quote of hers, and I put it over my desk, and I love it, and she said, story reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, and maybe I'm, you know, why, you tell this story that kind of blends you a little bit and her. Did you see that come alive, like do you feel, again I'm coming back to what I said before, why was this instead of a strict intellectual footnoted thing? What is the larger meaning of Hannah than the narrow definition if you could? I mean that's hard to put into words, but what does she mean?

Ann: The larger meaning in like a global way or for me personally or?

Ken: I guess for you personally. Yeah. What were you trying to ?

Ann: Well, for me personally I think that her story, her life is a story, of course. I think I write it in the preface of the book that if Hannah didn't exist you have to invent her, actually, because her story it's like a saga, with all kinds of elements, love and hate and

escape and failure and success and things like that, but what she really told me, and still tells us, is that nothing is really impossible in both a good and a bad way, if you see what I mean, because through her life she did things that nobody could imagine that this little girl when she was born just before the outbreak of the first World War never thought that she would be like this world famous writer and thinker, and she couldn't really imagine, I mean, nobody could imagine the Holocaust, and that's really how she, when she tries to define what evil is she says that evil is what makes you think this should never have happened, but for her story we learn, and we have to, to be aware of that everything can happen, actually, both good and bad.

Ken: I think it's interesting that you point to some of her flaws, too. I mean, if she says you have to accept the world with its flaws, I mean, I don't know, I didn't get the sense from your book, and I think it would be difficult to write a hagiography about Hannah Arendt. I don't think she would have necessarily wanted it. She didn't want followers.

Ann: No, she didn't, and that's interesting because that's sort of, you know, I think you have like these Heideggerians or you have like, I mean, everybody has met all these young men who Nietzschean. Every course I have talked on there have been like two or three men that really adores Nietzsche, but she's not a thinker like that, and she doesn't want to have these followers, I think.

Ken: She pushes the responsibility to each of us?

Ann: Yes, that's true. She doesn't want to formulate some rules for you. You know, like [name] she had these rules, live like this and everything should be great, and Hannah would never do a thing like that because she always said you have to think for yourself. That's your responsibility to think. Even when, I mean, there's this story about the student who wrote to her, who admired her a lot, and he wanted Hannah to help him to be a good person, and the answer to him was, I guess he didn't expect that because then she answered, well, I'm not sure I believe in being a good person. I'm not sure that that's the right word to use, actually.

Ken: Yeah. I noticed that in your book you had a whole section on good, like she didn't like the concept of good, like don't be good. It's like the word nice. Don't be, you know, and could you speak a little bit to that? What does she mean by that?

Ann: Yeah, because earlier we spoke about in what ways she is relevant today, and I think in that way she is relevant today, also, because a lot of the debate in public and the political debate and so on sort of corrupts into the extremities good and evil, and I don't think that's good words to use in that debate. It's better to discuss what is right and what is wrong because good and evil isn't supposed to be a part of the public sphere. As you mentioned earlier, that's, she didn't think that emotions have anything in public life to do, and, I mean, good and evil, it's not that easy to define really, but right and wrong is easy because you can argue it. You can say, well, you have this argument, you can make sort of a list. I often do lists, pros and con.

Ken: What do you think might have been some of her flaws? I mean, I have my list of things that I think because I had to latch on to some things, but I'm curious what would have been maybe some of her flaws?

Ann: I think she was a bit vain, actually. She was not vain about her looks, but she was intellectually vain because she did want to be in a way superior, and I think that's the reason that she hold on to Heidegger and she did forgive him was that she wanted him to admire her because that would have been like the ultimate victory in a way because he was this big professor, he was the most intellectual, the most admired in Germany when she was very young, and, you know, what, the people we meet or the music we listen to, the books we read when we are very young, they affect us in another way than things and music and books that we meet later in life, and so I think really that's part of the mystery with her forgiveness of Heidegger that she was vain and she wanted him to admire her, which he sadly never did, I think, because he never gave her that kind of confirmation that she was his equal, so maybe that's one of her flaws that she was vain.

Ken: Yeah. I thought she might be a little bit of a snob. That's kind of the word that we have here.

Ann: Yeah, that's kind of the same thing, I think.

Ken: Yeah, you know, but I don't think she ran from fights. I mean, she would not, you know, she'd say bring it on. I mean, she liked that confrontation. She never, you know, asked for, you know, a pass, you know, and maybe she, you know, she, but I did want to ask a little bit about, and I want to get to something, dignity. The idea of dignity. Human dignity. I mean, that strikes me with her. She really, I mean, in the absence of maybe being stateless, you know, having a state or this or that, she felt that people needed dignity. Would you agree? What does this mean? How can this help us as we move forward because you said people didn't want to, can you be objectified, you know, and still have dignity, be treated with dignity? It doesn't seem to work, you know.

Ann: No, I think that's a bit of a contradiction, actually, and if we go back to the early discussion on goodness and evil, I think that one of Hannah's objections to good or goodness was that it's a lot about words, but she meant that you have to act. You have to do something. If you speak about human dignity, you don't, it's not enough to speak about it. You have to act. You have to recognize this person's dignity, and I think that that's an explanation for her. She was actually critical about the human rights, which may surprise some people with her background as a refugee and so on, but she said that, well, it's not enough that you have this, you say that there are human rights because someone has to guarantee me of my human rights, so our dignity and our rights are always depending on other people, really, other human beings who gives us them or acknowledges that we have them, and I think that's fundamental when you speak about human dignity. It's some kind of an interpersonal phenomenon, as well.

Ken: Yeah, and I think it touches a little bit on, and we, you know, we don't have really time to get into it, her ideas about plurality, how you have to kind of like listen to

everybody even if you can't stand them, but then they have to listen to you, like you can't not listen to anybody, and people, I find with Hannah Arendt, you know, because her thought can be, and I'm sure you had, it can be very convoluted. I mean, she's not linear. I mean, she's, she can sometimes seem to contradict herself a little bit, and to that point you allude a little bit to her Jewish identity, and this is a, you know, again, an issue, the whole idea of identity or identity politics as we may call it, but let's just speak a little bit to her Jewish identity. How do you interpret that because you said she wasn't really aware of it at first and yet she worked for all these causes. I mean, can you explain it at all?

Ann: I mean, she wasn't brought up in a Jewish environment or a Jewish family because her parents were like sort of, they thought of themselves as modern people and they thought that really just beliefs were something that belonged to the [word], but then she had a grandfather, grandparents, who were a part of the Jewish community where she lived as a child, so she was familiar with it, and she really loved all the stories that were told in the synagogue, but then, I mean, she said in an interview that it was really other people who told her that she was Jewish, so it's, in some ways it was like the Nazis that made her Jewish because she became aware that she was something else, and then I think, I mean, she wrote this, I love, I love this book by her, as well, on Rahel Vernhagen who was this Jewish woman who had like a meeting for the intellectuals of that time, and Rahel Vernhagen helped her, I think, to find her own Jewish identity, and also her sort of intellectual struggles and her longing for truth. I think that's in a way a bit of her Jewish heritage.

Ken: She said, you know, she could never it. She said it was, I can't deny the fact that I was born, you know, I was born as a Jew, so that's it. I gotta deal with it. She was such a realist. I mean, even if you look at some of the things that she said about like the earth and the planet. If you look, she's like to be human means to live on earth, and I sort of see that as a rebuke to Elon Musk. It's like, you know, you can't just build a rocket. Once we've used the earth, you can't just build a rocket ship and go off to another planet, and I thought that was a really, you know, maybe in the future, maybe she would modify it if she were around, but somehow I think, you know, the fact that we exist with other people and they have to exist with us, she had no illusions about that, so I think the Jewish identity thing, she did say, and, you know, I picked it up, her mother used to evidently have to come pick her up from school almost every day because her mother said if anybody ever says, you know, you're a Jew, just tell that teacher, and she was constantly being, you know, thrown out of school.

Ann: I think she had a very strong for herself and her own right in a way. She had what you would integrity, and she didn't put up with anything.

Ken: Yeah, but she said some things that are just outrageous in some ways when she goes to Gershom Scholem after Eichmann and he says, well, you don't show any love for the Jewish people, and she says, well, I don't love a people. I love persons. So, she was so, and maybe you could say, I don't know to Germanic or rational or whatever in

her thinking, she really tried to steer by it, but then there were times when she was human, so it was very hard to mix it all up. You know, sort of getting to the end a little bit, in many ways, from what I've gotten to know a little bit about you, and you're a multifaceted person. You're an activist, you're a thinker, you're a writer, you're an intellectual, you're a fiction writer, you do a lot of different things. I'm just curious, you know, if you had the opportunity to sit down for dinner with Hannah Arendt, what would, if you had one question, and, I mean, not one question, what would you like to talk to her about?

Ann: Well, I would like to ask her if it was worth it, actually.

Ken: If it was worth it?

Ann: That may be a strange question, but, I mean, we sort of touched upon it a while ago in our conversation, but she was, when she wrote about Eichmann, she was deplatformed, you may say, actually. France turned their back on her, there were a lot of gossips, they were hated and so on, and it took some years and then she was sort of restored, but I think that she had to live with this reputation for the rest of her life, and she did this because I think she wanted to tell the truth, and she thought that she was telling the truth, and she was so stubborn that she didn't understand when Mary McCarthy told her, you have to change, Hannah, because this destroys you, and she said, well, I have to explain a bit more and they will understand, but they didn't because they didn't want to understand what she really meant, so I would like to discuss that moment in her life, actually. I think that's so interesting that she really, really believed so much in telling the truth that she was, I mean, sort of prepared to lose it all. In a way, she did. She did lose a lot.

Ken: Yeah. It struck me that this was a person who made very, very radical, huge shifts, like she was a brilliant philosopher and she renounces philosophy. She was a genius of friendship and she throws away so many of her friends. Yes, I think when you say, was it worth it, I think it's even more maybe then, I mean, I don't want to interpret your words, but I just love your impulse because she, the title of her, a great collection of hers, is *Men in Dark Times*, and she's somebody who really lived through really dark times, and, you know, and it's hard for me to even read the *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and hard for me to even, and some of the things that she says, and I try and I try, and she said this was darkest episode in the darkest time, and she, you know, she doesn't mince words. Yet, I'll come back to your initial quote and something that we were talking about before, if only world history were not too awful it would be a joy to live, and we were talking a little bit about this moment. She grew up sort of in this interwar period between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II when things just went really bad. They were exciting and really bad, and you were alluding a little bit to how it might have influenced her thinking at the time and how it kind of relates to the moment that we're in now. If you could talk about that again. Remember? You were saying like

Ann: Yeah, of course, but, I mean, we do live in dark times now because of political movements but also of course because of this pandemic that we are still in the midst of and we are not really sure when this is over, but I do hope that it will be over, of course, and I do hope that we can use like this window in our, in the history of the world to do something new to sort of start all over again, to think fresh, because that was really what happened I think between the first and the second world war where a lot of new like philosophical movements, a lot of new ways of living together, like, for instance, existentialism and so on, but people really they questioned everything and they felt free to think and do new things, and it would be so wonderful if something like that could be the outcome of this very dark and boring and in many ways scary times. I mean, I'm privileged. I mean, my biggest concern now is that I'm really bored because I'm just staying home as are a lot of people in the world, so I'm fortunate that I haven't been ill, but we could really use this for something good. That's what I think when I'm feeling optimistic.

Ken: Yeah, and I think she believed in the power of, another thing I think she got from Augustine was this natality, like we can make, like the one thing we can do is make things new, so this is, you know, when I took some philosophy classes, they always said the big issue in philosophy is do you believe in fate or free will? Where does Hannah fall on this question?

Ann: Ooooh. I'm not sure, actually.

Ken: Really? I thought that was a softball. I thought that was an easy one.

Ann: I think that she obviously thinks that we have free will because she says that everybody's responsible for their own destiny and you have to make these informed choices and so on, but in a way, I mean, a lot of things in life you can't really, you don't have the power over them, so in a way it's all about when we are born, in what time, what place, and so on, and then you have to do the best of it, of course, so that's the free will, so I would say that she is what you call, she has this voluntaristic view.

Ken: Well, that's a great way. She's a little bit of every, she's the best. Read the book. It's a fantastic book. Mary, if you would like to rejoin us?