Humanistic Knowledge, Service-learning, and Public Engaged Scholarship: Marie Sandy's Intersections with Hannah Arendt, Feminist Care Ethics, American Pragmatism, and Hans-Georg Gadamer

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Marie Sandy's interest in the philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Hans-Georg Gadamer has very much shaped her vision of service-learning and public engaged scholarship. Her article "Mothering as World-building and other 'Hera-cies': Tracing the Liberal Arts Traditions in support of Service-learning and Public Engaged Scholarship" is an example of just that. In it, she endeavors, quite ambitiously, to integrate key ideas of these two thinkers, as well as of feminist care ethicists and American pragmatists, in an attempt to substantiate a new role for liberal arts education and particularly for the knowledge of the humanities. The specific issue she has taken up here, namely, the "productive tension" between what she differentiates as "private study" and "a more civically engaged liberal arts education"[1] points immediately to Arendt's differentiation between public and private realms in *The Human Condition*.[2] Whereas, care ethicists' discussions of the social and theoretical significance of maternity, pragmatists' demand for the usability of scientific knowledge, and Gadamer's call for the participatory involvement of theory with practice, via prudence, have become Sandy's resources for building the bridge between the realms of private and public life.

Sandy's concern with the public-private distinction in academic

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[1] Marie Sandy, "Mothering as World-building and other 'Hera-cies': Tracing the Liberal Arts Traditions in support of Service-learning and Public Engaged Scholarship," *Sofia Philosophical Review*, Vol. VI, no. 2, 2012, 27.

[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958).

contexts appears to have been motivated by a conviction of the specific roles of intellectual culture and educational practice (primarily humanistic knowledge and general education) in the structure of modernity. This is most particularly tangible in the way she sees the area of "service-learning and public engaged scholarship," to which she pledges her professional allegiance and efforts, as the academic avenue that will ensure a mode of productive co-existence of both the private and public realms. As she puts it,

> I define service-learning and public engaged scholarship as an approach to teaching, learning and research characterized by participation in community-based environments to address community needs, integration of local and expert knowledge, the inclusion of academic texts, reflection, and hands-on work, and may include explicit goals for citizenship and character development as well as aspirations for social justice.[3]

One is immediately struck here by the broad range of knowledge and activities falling within the scope of service-learning and public engaged scholarship so defined. And yet, one is also reminded of a similar overarching role that some prominent contemporary thinkers have assigned to philosophy itself. Thus, Wittgenstein, Habermas, and Rorty reinvent the role of philosophy, respectively, as a thought-therapy ensuring the unproblematic publicity of the concrete language games,[4] a mediating interpreter of expert knowledge on all levels of modernity,[5] and a political emancipator of our society and culture from all forms of suffering and

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[3] Marie Sandy, "Mothering as World-building and other 'Hera-cies'", 28.

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: B. Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1967).

[5] Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1990); Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*. (Cambridge MA; London, England: MIT Press 1992); (Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Philosophie als Platzhalter und Interpret," *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1983), 26, and Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), respectively.

oppression.[6] It is, therefore, not a surprise that Sandy will search for substantial philosophical support in her inquiry, in line with an "integration of local and expert knowledge" and "hands-on work."

The beginning of this search is already indicated with the characteristic opening quote by Diana Schaub, which initiates a philosophical discussion of the public-private opposition in an educational context. More specifically, it addresses the peculiar symbolism associated with the status of the Ancient Greek goddess Hera as the patron of child birth and upbringing and its characteristic invocation by Socrates when discussing matters of education. Drawing on Schaub, Sandy first links what she calls the "true domain of Hera," associated with the private home in Ancient Greek culture, with the intellectual endeavors of Socrates whom she takes as a promoter of private study, which is not "tainted with the affairs of the market place and civic, public square."[7] Sandy here recaptures the well-known position of Socrates that the truth should be pursued in a dialogue (or in a sense privately) and guarded from unexamined popular opinions (*doxa*). However, the link of this position to the symbolism of Hera is a somewhat unorthodox one: Socrates is here seen as "never one to scorn the wisdom of women",[8] rather than as associated with the infamous statement, conveyed to us by Diogenes Laertius and much detested by most feminists, namely, that he was grateful to be "born a human being and not one of the brutes, … a man and not a woman," and "a Greek and not a barbarian."[9] This will

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[6] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, Volume 2 (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[7] Marie Sandy, "Mothering as World-building and other 'Hera-cies'", 28.

[8] As Plato's dialogues tell us, Socrates has recognized Diotima of Mantinea as his teacher in erotics (*Symposium*) and Aspasia of Miletus as his teacher in rhetoric (*Menexenus*). In fact, Plato tells us that Socrates has learned his famous doctrine of the forms precisely from Diotima. We also learn from the *Apology* that Socrates has heeded and taken very seriously the opinion of Pythia, the oracle of Delphi. Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, (Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, 1997).

[9] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Volume I, trans. by Robert Drew Hicks (Loeb Classic Library, 1925), 33.

serve an important purpose in Sandy's query: it will secure a peculiar bond between her notion of mothering and the production of knowledge, i.e., between the workings of Hera and the intellectual endeavors of Socrates, the man who can most readily be called the arch-philosopher of the West and who likewise was never troubled to make his oath "by Hera."

What comes next is a discussion of characteristic points raised by feminist care ethics thinkers, as well as by Sandy's personal experiences, exemplifying philosophically (with an intended theoretical significance) a variety of passages between the realms of private and public, which present aspects or the aura of mothering as knowledge-significant and, by this, also as publicly significant. Sandy's examples point to controversial contemporary issues such as domestic violence, homelessness, health care, and social justice. At the same time, the linkage they convey between private mothering and public knowledge also points to their necessary connection with politics as the principal venue of their resolution. Here, therefore, is the point where Sandy intersects with Arendt's view of the significance of the political life and its interdependence with private affairs. As a result, she embraces Arendt's apperception of Socrates' endeavors, which he himself viewed very indicatively as a dialectical maieutic, as fundamentally political:

> The connection between the private and public life realms were likely not lost on Socrates, who described his practice of improving the opinions of young Athenians through one-on-one questioning as "the art of midwifery" or maieutic – the private craft for which the goddess Hera had dominion – but planted himself firmly in the public marketplace to do this.[10]

Following Arendt, Sandy sees the specific art of maieutic practiced by Socrates as an infusion of friendship in the community, which in this way makes possible the appreciation of the opinions of others. Friendship thus becomes a politically significant phenomenon precisely in a transition between private and public, so much so that Sandy now claims that "(w)hat

[10] Marie Sandy, "Mothering as World-building and other 'Hera-cies'", 29-30.

seems private, one-on-one conversation with oneself or with another to see more clearly the truth of one's position has political implications."[11]

While outlining her Arendtian perspective, Sandy also intersects, more explicitly, with feminist care ethics. This becomes prominent in her introduction of the term "Hera-cy". The term is not explicitly introduced but is rather elusively presented via a reference to Mary Daly and in an association with the term "heresy," which, for its part, is introduced with its common meaning of 'unorthodox viewpoint.' Thus, one might gather that, beyond the immediate alliterative association, "Hera-cy," is a kind of "heresy" associated with the introduction of aspects of the private realm of care into the public realm of politics. Whereas this sense is not made evident in the text, it is nonetheless the one which can be read in the examples of "Hera-cies" that Sandy gives subsequently, the first of which is Arendt's view of Socrates' goal of friendship in "civic education." [12] Other of these examples include Sara Ruddick's apperception of "mothering and caring for particular others" as promoting "the principle of non-violence in the public life"; Grace Clement's point that care ethics promotes justice in the public realm including a consideration of the "'concrete other' or 'concrete collective other', the idea of 'positive rights' of others, such as the right to health care"; as well as Nel Noddings' view that "the quality of how well our relational selves are nurtured [at home] impact society,"[13] but they do not amount to a clear-cut specification of the term. Nevertheless, while the term "Hera-cy" remains non-explicit but exemplified, it is obviously purported to convey an emancipatory meaning, which is revealed to us in Sandy's politically correct outlook – by means of a markedly feminist symbolism – towards the two realms of private and public:

> In a related vein, feminist scholars propose other Hera-cies, including explorations of how the "private" arts of midwifery, mothering, and nurturing and caring for others, which often take place in private homes, have implications for our participation in public life.

[11] Ibid., 31.
[12] Ibid., 31.
[13] Ibid., 32.

> Mothering and caregiving today no doubt involve more contested terrain than in Socrates' day, and there are significant, socially constructed differences of these experiences based on race, class, cultural and ethnic heritage, and sexual orientation. But in a spirit that might be considered similar to Socrates, these scholars often use feminine speech forms, such as "maternal thinking" to describe relational experiences in which men and women are equally capable of engaging, but which draw on roles and experiences most typically associated with women in most societies.[14]

Based on her sense of Hera-cy, and drawing on Noddings and Robert Rhoades, Sandy can go on to clarify further her view of service-learning and public engaged scholarship. They are now understood as "important ways education institutions bridge the gap between the public and private spaces in higher education."[15] In other words, by going through particular experiences of caring for others, one can arrive at a new sense of the political significance of knowledge and service. Thus, associating the Arendtian vision of Socrates as a promoter of a democracy of friendship with the "deliberative democracy movement in service-learning and engaged public scholarship,"[16] Sandy now maintains that, due to the epistemically unestablished status of the truths to be encountered in a community-based learning or investigative environment, it is necessary to keep our minds open to alternative possibilities through a permanent deliberation. As she puts it, "it is our responsibility as educators to help us all cultivate our sociological imaginations so that we do not simply reify existing inequalities through community-engaged experiences but interrogate them."[17]

Having searched for a general philosophical perspective on the relation public-private, in which to project an interlinkage among the care of mothering, the publicity of knowledge, and the solutions of politics, Sandy

[14] Ibid., 31-32.
[15] Ibid., 33.
[16] Ibid., 33.
[17] Ibid., 33.

attempts to position within it also the workings of higher education. Now she endeavors to articulate the tension between public and private, which she identified in Schaub's stance with regard to the character of the academic disciplines contributing to the field of service-learning and public engaged scholarship. Whereas Schaub, drawing on Leo Strauss, has advocated the cultivation of an intellectual aristocracy that could counter the intervening forces of the market, Sandy now maintains that

> Rather than retreating from the workings of liberal democracy and the work of the world, public engaged scholarship requires learners to intentionally immerse themselves in action, and increasingly, political action.[18]

According to Sandy, however, this active involvement with liberal democracy in public life has not applied equally to all the known academic disciplines. Particularly, those most closely associated with "the modern Socratic-Platonic tradition", the humanities, appear to have been most underrepresented in the field of public service and public engaged scholarship and this, as she suggests, as a direct consequence of the pragmatic turn that John Dewy and others made in the area of pedagogy.[19] Sandy's intersection with the American pragmatism that demands educational solutions closer to practice and public life does not just present her with an argument that she could use against the Schaub-Strauss standpoint. On the contrary, it has made her realize, again with the help of Schaub, that whereas the two perspectives have had some history of tension, which has fallen into oblivion in the post-Enlightenment era, her stated goal to convey this tension as productive can be reached only through a new apperception of that history. [20]

Sandy's historical analysis of the two perspectives draws on Bruce Kimball's very loose distinction between "orators" and "philosophers" and generally associates the former with the public realm and the latter with the

[18] Ibid., 34.
[19] Ibid., 34-35.
[20] Ibid., 35-36.

private one. Most emblematic here are "the perspectives of the Sophists and the Socratic-Platonic philosophers," respectively, even though the different traditions they present are extended to include respectively the Roman orators and the Pre-Socratic thinkers. [21] Sandy's point, which is indeed a basic assumption, here is that,

> Education in the orators' tradition emphasizes the cultivation of a community of learners, reflecting on tradition, and preparation for public democratic life, particularly through mastering language and texts, to focus on the 'conventions' of human life. In contrast, the tradition of the philosophers emphasizes the private contemplation of 'eternal' or 'primary' things, unfettered pursuit of truth and systematic inquiry through the scientific method. [22]

In the course of her discussion of these two perspectives, Sandy observes that while "the orators tradition prepared students and scholars for participating in democratic forums,"[23] "(t)he philosophers' paradigm significantly influenced the development of the modern Western university system during the Age of Enlightenment."[24] As a result of this influence, the post-Enlightenment university began perceiving itself and its workings in terms of "autonomy from church and state," "freedom for academics," "knowledge for its own sake, value-neutrality, and radical doubt or skepticism"; it also "created an environment for academics to pursue self-directed research, and included a practical orientation that privileged the natural sciences."[25] For Sandy, this led to a specific estrangement of the university from public affairs, which she illustrates through Gregory Jay's observation that the established ideals of higher education often covered up "oppressive inequalities of power," as well as others based on "race, class, gender, rationality and sexuality."[26] At the same time, there was another

[21] Ibid., 36-39.
[22] Ibid., 36.
[23] Ibid., 37.
[24] Ibid., 39.
[25] Ibid., 39.
[26] Ibid., 39.

consequence of Enlightenment ideals: whereas they generally appeared to direct higher education to "serve more private rather than public purposes,"[27] the humanities found themselves not only in the position of being least useful, but also of being most disadvantaged with regard to their putative contribution to service-learning and public engaged scholarship.

Still, in Sandy's view, the reconfiguration of the academic disciplines ensuing from "the European Enlightenment" had different consequences in the United States – there a "new public-oriented philosophers' paradigm" was established that conveyed also the orators' view of the humanities.[28] Pointing to the traditionally "most prestigious" status of the humanities specializations in the American university and to the adoption after the war of independence of the German scientific model of "useful knowledge," Sandy now perceives the "American higher education institutions" as taking "a populist orientation" towards the public realm with its "need for an educated populace for a democratic, self-governing state" and she "contrasts" it with "the European universities that provided access only to the elites."[29] While her claim is not unproblematic,[30] her association of the "populist orientation" involved with American pragmatism does ring true. The pragmatic philosophers regarded knowledge as closely related to social and political practice and, particularly in the face of Dewey, promoted a vision of higher education that extrapolates the sciences from their academic reclusion to enhance the public realm and its mechanism of democracy.

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[27] Ibid., 40.
[28] Ibid., 39-40.
[29] Ibid., 40.
[30] It must be noted first that Sandy's meaning of "elite" is not specified here and therefore remains unclear. Second, the same applies also to the time period to which she refers. And third, her claim that "the European universities provided access only to the elites" is simply too strong and can be quickly countered with examples of people like Vico, Kant, Fichte, even Heidegger (and these come only from the philosophical tradition), who were able to educate themselves despite their non-elitist origins. The claim in question applies more fittingly only to countries like Russia, whose social system remained very feudal until late in the 19th century and beyond. Finally, it is to be noted also that, whereas it is generally true that American institutions maintained a "populist orientation," high educational fees have kept and continue to keep much of the citizenship away from higher education and likewise from the public life.

Sandy further associates the educational perspective of American pragmatism with the orators' perspective upon the humanities, which she admits has been forgotten and is currently little known, and argues for a greater integration of the latter within the workings of the higher education. Pointing to the similarity of the mission statements of many liberal arts colleges to the orators' paradigm appropriated in service-learning and public engaged scholarship, she also identifies well-established scholars like Edward Said and Martha Nussbaum as advancing points conducive to the same paradigm. We can surely acknowledge here that Said's demand for the greater involvement of the humanities with everyday life and public affairs, and Nussbaum's perception of the role of the humanities and populist education in promotion of citizenship and empathy for the good of society, fittingly resonate with Sandy's Arendtian vision of the interdependence of public and private enhanced by humanistic knowledge.[31]

Thus, Sandy's philosophical search has led her to recognize a necessary role for the humanities, not only for bridging the public and private realms but also those of knowledge and practice, along with the necessity of philosophical competence that would supply also her own stance on the importance of Hera-tic knowledge.[32] This necessity has led to her intersections with Hans-Georg Gadamer, the philosopher who has been perhaps most appreciative of the status of humanities in culture. Sandy gets from her encounter with Gadamer and his hermeneutics of participation an instrumentarium for perception of the aspects of humanistic knowledge, which she considers vital for bridging the public and private realms, or the orators and the philosophers' perspectives. The aspects at stake include the beauty she associates with the pursuits of the orators, the friendship she (along with Arendt) identifies with the goal of the intellectual endeavors of Socrates, the kind of scholarship of service-learning and public engagement, to which she herself aspires, and the ensuing from all these practical

[31] Ibid., 42-43.

[32] See Rossen Roussev, "Philosophy and the Transition from Theory to Practice: A Response to Recent Concerns for Critical Thinking," *Telos* 148 (2009): 86-110; as well as his *Philosophy and the Structure of Modernity*: *Fragments of Actualization.* (Sofia, Bulgaria: East West Publishers, 2005) (in Bulgarian).

wisdom. Sandy's perspective on hermeneutic participation is clear:

> Just as the experience of participation in teaching, learning, and research is essential to our understanding of service-learning and public engaged scholarship, *direct, embodied participation* is the essential component linking all of these concepts.[33]

This perspective encompasses the specific positions espoused by Gadamer, which she needs to support her stance on the interdependence of the public and private realms: that beauty becomes "concrete" in participation (*methexis*) and is to be found "not only in the arts, but in our everyday life"; that knowledge and scholarship are possible through caring participation in friendship in a community of individuals and scholars; that social inequalities can be adequately addressed only when one is able to "think with" another as friend; that the goal of education also requires learning something outside the classroom – what the Greeks called *phronesis* or practical wisdom.[34] The essential point Sandy adopts from her encounter with Gadamer is that, whereas "understanding the role of participation for the humanities and social sciences is critical to community-based research endeavors," a "detached, theoretical learning about social issues could desensitize us to the challenges of acting in particular situations and increase the likelihood that we will become arrogant."[35] Thus, Sandy rejects with Gadamer the possibility of "practical wisdom experts" and asserts that only "each one of us" can acquire "this capacity" and "learn from others" who have already done it "in their own lives."[36]

Sandy thus accomplishes her task of laying down a new role for liberal arts education and the knowledge of the humanities, which is to promote service-learning and public engaged scholarship. The "productive tension" between the privately and publically apperceived roles of education, which she sought to elaborate, has been delineated in terms of a quite impressive

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[33] Marie Sandy, "Mothering as World-building and other 'Hera-cies'", 44.
[34] Ibid., 44-47.
[35] Ibid., 47.
[36] Ibid., 47-48.

amount of cross-disciplinary scholarship. Bringing together the Arendtian perspective of political interdependence of private and public, through the feminist perspective of promoting a theoretical significance of the experience of care and the pragmatist vision of the interlinkage between knowledge and practice in democratic society to the Gadamerian philosophical apperception of the role of humanities and the value of participation and prudence in the communal life and scholarship, Sandy has advanced rather convincingly the idea she seems to covet most, namely, that of service-learning and public engaged scholarship. She has thus also apprehended the necessity of what, as already mentioned, I have tried to identify elsewhere as "philosophical competence," which essentially involves humanistic knowledge and critical and creative philosophical thinking,[37] even though she has done so within her own and preferred terminology. Whereas, to my mind, she could have deepened her inquiry into and articulated more philosophically elaborately the Hera-tic nature of her own investigative perspective, it is equally helpful (meaning also Hera-tic) that she has ventured to identify its phenomena in a variety of other conceptions that fall more readily within the scope of her own academic interests. As she already has at her disposal the resources for such ventures in many directions, it will only remain for her to pursue them in her future work.

[37] See Rossen Roussev, "Philosophy and the Transition from Theory to Practice"; as well as *Philosophy and the Structure of Modernity*.