

Wolfgang R. Heuer

# COSMOS AND REPUBLIC

Arendtian Explorations of the Loss  
and Recovery of Politics

Wolfgang R. Heuer  
Cosmos and Republic

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**[transcript]**

The publication was made possible by co-funding for monographs and anthologies from Freie Universität Berlin.

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>



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**First published in 2023 by transcript Verlag, Bielefeld**

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Cover layout: Maria Arndt, Bielefeld

Language editing: Richard Holmes, Berlin

Proofread: Wolfgang R. Heuer

Printed by: Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839465943>

Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-6594-9

PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-6594-3

EPUB-ISBN 978-3-7328-6594-9

ISSN of series: 2702-9050

eISSN of series: 2702-9069

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

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## Foreword

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This volume brings together essays from the past two decades, some of which have been published in books and journals before. They have become even more topical in view of the problems in the world today. Only when they were brought together did it become clear to me how the thematic impulses, which sprang from a further thinking of Arendt's perspectives, form a dramaturgy of decline and salvation.

Cosmos and republic, nature and politics, are closely linked, either through the long-lasting exploitation of nature or the necessary change of perspective in favour of its preservation, so that humans and nature form an indissoluble unity. It is important to understand the principle of sustainability not only in the relationship of politics to nature, but also of politics to itself. Politics is sustainable when it strengthens its republican institutions and principles such as democracy, participation, rule of law, and shared sovereignty in the form of separation of powers and federalism.

Although principles and institutions are designed to guarantee freedom and security in the long term, and indeed have a positive influence on everyday political culture and morality, a republic naturally does not function by itself; it does not blossom automatically and does not perish as if moved by magic. It is the actors whose actions lead to the realisation of principles and institutions and decide the fate of the republic.

Hannah Arendt discussed both elements – the actors and the institutions. Her analysis of the catastrophe of totalitarianism with its world-destroying ideologies was accompanied at the same time by the question of why tradition failed and why a fundamentally new understanding of action and politics is necessary. Likewise, she accompanied her critical analyses of the contemporary crises of the republic and her critique of the rule of a democratic oligarchy in the USA with reflections on horizontal power formation in the form of civil disobedience and councils. The fact that Arendt's concept of power is not compatible with the prevailing instrumental power, as Habermas criticised, and that political councils get into serious trouble in a bureaucratic-administrative, apolitical society, as Arendt herself noted, does not make these phenomena superfluous. On the contrary, they belong to the anthropological realities, the human condition, insofar as they always appear anew as spontaneous

self-organisations and play an indispensable role in the unfolding and defence of plurality, critique, and participation.

This simultaneity of critique and design in Arendt is characterised by sharpness and openness, by essayistic, unfinished paths of thought, by non-academic language, by emotion, and finally by the rejection of a privilege of judgement by intellectuals.

This collection begins with a description of Arendt's standing out of line as an invitation to examine one's own methods of thinking.

Along this dramaturgy, the individual chapters present examples of

- the rather unintended demise of politics by the respective actors,
- the indispensable importance of personal responsibility as an impulse and orientation for action,
- the importance of imagination and emotion for judgement,
- the importance of the politico-philosophically undervalued role of federations, both within a nation state and between states, and finally
- the underlying importance of plurality in all essays as a starting point for cosmopolitan judgement and the necessary change of perspective towards the relationship between humans and nature.

Occasionally, topics are presented in more detail in another chapter, and here I have included cross-references.

My thanks go to all those who accompanied the creation of these essays with criticism and suggestions; among them my co-directors at the Inter-University Center Dubrovnik Cristina Sánchez, Waltraud-Meints-Stender, Vlasta Jalušič, Zoran Kurelić, Goran Gretič and Gilbert Merlio as well as colleagues in Germany, Spain, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile and Russia. I thank my American colleagues and friends Jerome Kohn, Alexander Bazelow and Roger Berkowitz, and those friends who provided proper English: Sunniva Greve and Richard Holmes.

Finally, I thank my wife Cristina, my son Rafael and his wife Elena and wish their new-born child a liveable world, and commemorate my friends Jani Rolshoven, Wolfgang Bauernfeind and Fred Dewey.

*Berlin-Madrid, May 2023*

## Beyond the Academic and Intellectual Worlds

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In the following, I would like to present some central aspects of Hannah Arendt's thinking and work that identify her as a non-academic and non-intellectual. In doing so, I would like to take up the criticism often levelled at her and turn it in a positive way. The criticism not only concerns her report *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, her supposedly conservative nostalgia for the Greek polis, or her critique of the social as anti-political, but also targets her method: for example, according to Benhabib her political theory lacks normativity, her historiography lacks the necessary objectivity according to Voegelin, and her philosophy lacks stringency according to Honneth. Moreover, her account of European colonialism in Africa is Eurocentric, if not racist.<sup>1</sup>

This critique presupposes standards of the academic which Arendt in fact did not adhere to: to pursue political theory on the basis of social science, to adopt the standpoint of objectivity, and to maintain the boundaries of the disciplines. Despite this, Arendt is currently in danger of being made into a classic,<sup>2</sup> whereby her thinking is treated as a quarry and adapted to one's own position, and she is consulted as a new authority in the face of global crises: "What would Hannah say?"<sup>3</sup> Regardless of whether the judgement is approving or disapproving, a cohesive edifice of thought is the criterion in such cases for engaging with Arendt.

As we shall see, this academic structure of thought and rules is anti-political. Not only does political thought and action differ from such academic thought and

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- 1 Seyla Benhabib: *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Lanham Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2003; Hannah Arendt: A Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company 1994, pp. 401–408; Axel Honneth: Vorwort zu Judith N. Shklar: *Der Liberalismus der Furcht*, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2014; Richard H. King / Dan Stone (eds.): *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, New York: Berghahn Books Inc 2007.
  - 2 For example, the book *Hannah Arendt: Hidden Tradition – Untimely Actuality?* is advertised by its publisher as follows: "Hannah Arendt has long since gone from being a controversial thinker to a classic of modern political theory. In an inimitable way, she has taken the rupture of German philosophical thought in the 1920s into her wider intellectual life and translated it into a political theory of the 20th century." <http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/232059> (2019.11.6)
  - 3 Jeremy Waldron: What would Hannah say? In: *New York Review of Books*, March 15, 2007.

action, but, according to Arendt, political-theoretical thought must also differ from it. This is not only Arendt's opinion, but also the opinion of the political scientists John Dunn, John Gunnell and Bonnie Honig. Since the 1980s, all three have lamented "the post-modern suspicion ... (of) the canon of great works"<sup>4</sup> and the displacement of politics in political theory.<sup>5</sup> Kant, Rawls and Sandel, according to Bonnie Honig,

confine politics (conceptually and territorially) to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities. They assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements of political conflict and instability.<sup>6</sup>

It does not look as if these criticisms have led to a rethinking of political theory. The academic habitus survives these objections with ease, in Germany also because in political science the subject of the history of political ideas is increasingly being eroded.

In the following, I will outline how Arendt's work differs from academic norms and conventions by focusing on the following points: her concept of personality, her change of perspective from the modern subject to the inter-subjects of the in-between, her discursive method and poetic thought, the radicality of her thinking and the role of emotions, and finally her critique of the world of intellectuals.

## Arendt's Concept of Personality

"Better to be wrong with Plato than to be right with these people – this is the political principle in which the person matters", Arendt noted in her *Denktagebuch*<sup>7</sup> She is not only concerned with the institutions of freedom, the securing of public space and the enabling of politics. It is always also about the agents themselves, the persons on whom the realisation and defence of freedom depend. It is about truth, but even more about trust and reliability.

The importance of the person can be seen throughout Arendt's work and is a logical part of her description of the *vita activa* and the location of the *in-between*. The person appears in the form of the thinking and judging human being in contrast to

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4 John Dunn: *The History of Political Theory*, in: *The History of Political Theory and other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 26; John G. Gunnell: *Between Philosophy and Politics. The Alienation of Political Theory*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1986.

5 Bonnie Honig: *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press 1993.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

7 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, Munich Piper 2002, p 595.

the thoughtless non-person of Eichmann and the moral collapse of “decent society”; “to speak about a moral personality is almost redundancy”.<sup>8</sup> The person is the precondition for forgiveness; only a person can be forgiven, not a crime. The person is the precondition for their appearance in the public space of action, for the revelation of the *who* of the agent as distinct from the *what* of a person’s qualities. Only a person has integrity, which is, among other things, the prerequisite for the successful use of artistic talent. In her lecture *On Evil*, Arendt explained:

The point about these highly cultivated murderers is that there has been not a single one of them who wrote a poem worth remembering or a piece of music worth listening to or painted a picture that anybody would care to hang on his walls. More than thoughtfulness is needed to write a good poem or piece of music, or to paint a picture – you need special gifts. But no gifts will withstand the loss of integrity which you lose when you have lost this most common capacity for thought and remembrance.<sup>9</sup>

It is the person who performs an action who is not merely moved by motives and oriented towards goals, nor is it remembered because of them, but because of the memorability of the deed, that is, the virtuosity and performativity.<sup>10</sup> Judging as a faculty of a concrete imagination also presupposes a person of integrity, as does storytelling that creates meaning and, finally, the personal assumption of responsibility as the price of interpersonal freedom, without which a community could not maintain its freedom.

Judgement and taste, morality and artistic quality are equally based on independent thought and judgement. Following Arendt, we can conclude that aesthetic terms also apply to the evaluation of non-artistic action: the “beautiful” or “ugly” gesture or speech, or the “inner beauty” of a person of integrity. According to Kant, this is a harmony of the powers of cognition, both in terms of inner proportions and in terms of the free juxtaposition of the powers of cognition and their mutual enlivenment; a harmony that occurs between form and content, as well as between imagination and understanding, without it being a matter of rational cognitive judgement.

Arendt’s portraits of *Men in Dark Times* are always about qualities that make up personalities, for example the non-conformist actions of her friend Waldemar Gurian, rector of the University of Notre Dame and founder of *The Review of Politics*, which still exists today. These are examples and exemplary actions of people described by Arendt not as theorists – of politics, literature, culture, or philosophy –

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8 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 95.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

10 Cf. Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday 1958, p. 166f.

but as thinking and acting persons, such as Rosa Luxemburg, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, or Karl Jaspers.

In her laudation for Jaspers on the occasion of the awarding of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in Frankfurt in 1958, Arendt explained that the prize was for the person and his work, but the eulogy, in the Roman tradition, was for the person, that is, “the dignity that pertains to a man insofar as he is more than everything he does or creates.” It is about the *who* of Karl Jaspers as a thinking and acting citizen, not about the *what* as a philosopher. This *who* appears inseparable from the work in public. “To recognize and to celebrate this dignity is not the business of experts and colleagues in a profession,” Arendt continues, “it is the public that must judge a life which has been exposed to the public view and proved itself in the public realm.”<sup>11</sup>

This position is by no means an exception due to the close friendship between Arendt and Jaspers. When Arendt was awarded the Emerson-Thoreau Medal for her work by the *American Academy of Arts and Sciences* in 1969, she paid tribute to Ralph Waldo Emerson in a way that comes close to describing herself. She had always thought of Emerson as an American Montaigne until she “with great joy, only recently, (realised) how close Emerson himself felt to Montaigne.”<sup>12</sup> Both, according to Arendt, were humanists rather than philosophers and they:

wrote essays rather than systems, aphorisms rather than books ... Both thought chiefly, exclusively, about human matters, and both lived a life of thought. ... This kind of thinking can no more become a profession than living itself, hence, this is not the *vita contemplativa*, the philosopher’s way of life who has made thinking his profession. Philosophers, as a rule, are rather serious animals; whereas what is so striking in both Emerson and Montaigne is their *serenity*, a serenity that is in no ways conformist or complacent.<sup>13</sup>

Thus we find in Emerson wisdom in which “are profound insights and observations which we have lost to our detriment, and which we may be well advised to unearth again now, when we are forced to rethink what the humanities are all about. For this great humanist, the humanities were simply those disciplines that dealt with language (which does not mean linguistics), and in the centre of all thoughts about language, he found the poet” – as Arendt herself. And she quotes him quite approvingly: “Language is fossil poetry.”<sup>14</sup>

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11 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio. In: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1968, p. 72.

12 Hannah Arendt: Emerson Address, in: *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb, Stanford: Stanford University 2007, p. 282.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 283.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 283f.

Finally, Arendt declares that she is more interested in the world than in political theory. She is an author, not a commentator:

The authors are *auctores*, that is (they) augment the world. We move in a world which is augmented by the authors. We cannot do without them, because they behave in an altogether different way from the commentators. The world in which the commentator moves is the world of books. This difference becomes visible in a person like Machiavelli. Machiavelli was interested in Italy, not in political theory, not even his own. Only the commentator is interested in political theory per se.<sup>15</sup>

This behaviour “in a completely different way” means not withdrawing like the philosophers, but seeing oneself as a thinking and judging, critical spectator on the sidelines of political events. Arendt described this position in her unfinished late work *The Life of the Mind* and presented and practically demonstrated it with her essays as “exercises in political thinking” and her essays on questions of her time.

## The Change of Perspective from the Modern Subject to the Inter-subjects in the In-between

Arendt’s book *The Human Condition* represents a fierce confrontation with modern subjectivism since Descartes, and its rejection. It is astonishing that this fundamental, existential change of perspective towards the in-between of an interhumanity has not yet been duly addressed, for this is accompanied by a redefinition of political phenomena such as power, violence, authority, or freedom from the perspective of interhumanity. Without this new perspective, a distinction between power and violence would not even be possible. The fact that these two phenomena were never distinguished in modern times is all the more surprising to Arendt because they are fundamental to modern politics.

The perspective of the in-between pervades the whole work: it underlies the inner dialogue, the enlarged mentality, the concept of the world, common sense as the mediation of a common world, those who act and judge together, the common formation of power, the formation of self-governments with the constitutions and laws that make them possible and at the same time protect them, the division and entanglement of power, the federation of peoples and states – and the oppositions that are based on the exclusion of the in-between: thoughtlessness, logic, loss of world, disorientation, abandonment, functionaryism, violence, sovereignty, domination, and expansionism.

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<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt: *History of Political Theory* (1955), unpublished, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1105600982/> (2022/11/1)



Heinrich Blücher, Arendt's husband, compared Cézanne's later painting with Heidegger's thought, which also characterises Arendt's position: painter and thinker are in perspective at the centre of the image and of thought. In her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt noted:

Ad Heidegger's Interpretations: The new consists in the following: Heidegger not only assumes (as others did before him) that every work carries within it something that is specifically unsaid to it, but that this unsaid constitutes its very core (psychologically speaking, it is the reason for its emergence: because this One was unsayable, everything else was written), that is, as it were, the empty space lying in the middle, around which everything revolves and which organises everything else. Heidegger places himself in this space, that is, in the middle of the work, where its author is precisely not, as if this were the space left out for the reader or listener. From here, the work is transformed back from the resultant dead to a living speech that can be responded to. The result is a dialogue in which the reader is no longer on the outside but is involved right in the middle. The sharpness or rigour of this procedure lies in the fact that this place 'objectively' really exists and can be discovered in every great work. The 'arbitrary' part is that only one individual can ever sit in the square – with their limited ears and ability to talk back. But that only means that the quality of the interpretations depends on the quality of the interpreter – a matter of course.

The appearance of arbitrariness and violence only arises from our unaccustomedness: just as in modern painting (Heinrich's interpretation of Cézanne) everything looks 'distorted' because we are used to painters painting the world 'from the outside', that is, three-dimensionally, whereas modern painting has the painter sitting in the middle of the picture and thus has the six human dimensions: Height – depth, right – left, front – back, all projected onto the surface, which is the human being for itself – so in Heidegger's interpretations, other dimensions emerge into which the work, seen from the listener's recessed middle space, disassembles. In order not to become dizzy in these dimensions, which can only arise at all in the moment of the reading listener, Heidegger uses the guiding word, as it were the 'Open sesame', which was the unsaid word in the omitted space, thus can only be found there, but then opens up everything to the listener in the way the empty middle had originally organised the whole.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 353f. Heinrich Blücher explained in his lecture on "Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Art – on the Understanding of Artistic Experience": "Cezanne in his lonely position of being the first artist who was really aware of man's changed position in the world had one great purpose: to put unity and order back into the chaos of nature he saw about him – which was the thing about the Impressionists that troubled him so much. What really disturbed him in Impressionist paintings (which had for him the only optical value) was that he became aware of the feeling in them of the dissolution of nature into

The middle that is left empty is Arendt's in-between with its multiple perspectives. It is taken in the awareness of the extreme of its annihilation, total rule based on ideology, the logical movement of an idea, and the breaking of tradition. Totalitarianism as "ideocracy", as Arendt remarked in a discussion.<sup>17</sup> There is no longer the modern central perspective, no longer the authority of tradition from Plato, Kant to Weber, but instead there is the 'hidden tradition' and Benjamin's pearl diver. As for him, it is also true for us to take from the past what seems useful to us; so too for Jaspers, who wants to dissolve the dogmatic metaphysical demands of the philosophical systems of the past into trains of thought "which meet and cross, communicate with each other and eventually retain only what is universally communicative."<sup>18</sup> Truth therefore also only exists in communication. The spatiality of human relations is fundamental here: for action, the shared responsibility of those acting and the definition of freedom as "freedom for", not "freedom from", and likewise for thinking and judging. "Jaspers' thought is spatial because it forever remains in reference to the world and the people in it."<sup>19</sup>

This means for judging:

(T)he more people's positions I can make present in my thought and hence take into account in my judgment, the more *representative* it will be. The validity of such

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the mere process of energy. In this he saw chaos as he saw chaos in nature itself ... the experience of permanently being amidst things, an experience Cézanne himself felt of masses and people and nature crowding in on him. This he was able to achieve by a unification of perspectives (which explains why his so-called distortions were necessary) and by creating for the beholder a feeling of space that was finite and full – by creating as space where air became a solid substance, where atmosphere as a solid and finite became the new space of man, where if the feeling within space was given, it was given as limited space, where still-lives had almost wider space than landscapes." ([https://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil\\_art/philart-pf.htm](https://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil_art/philart-pf.htm) (12/2/2022)). Cf. also: "The central perspective is not simply abolished, but only rendered ineffective (in very manifold ways) to such an extent that the picture no longer appears as a space for the viewer's imagination, but as a pure space of existence of the picture things." (Walter Hess *Zum Verständnis der Texte*, in Paul Cézanne *Über die Kunst. Gespräche mit Gasquet*, Mittenwald Mäander Kunstverlag 1980, p. 129; Fritz Novotny *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*. Vienna: A. Schroll 1938; Michael Quante: Philosophisches Interview, in: *fiph Journal*, Hanover, No. 23, April 2014, p. 5. On the connection between central perspective and the perspectival worldview of the modern era, see Philipp H. Lepeñies: *Art, Politics, and Development. How Linear Perspective Shaped Policies in the Western World*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2014.

17 Carl J. Friedrich (ed.): *Totalitarianism. Proceedings of a Conference held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences March 1953*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1954, p. 134.

18 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World? in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 90.

19 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 79.

judgements would be neither objective and universal, nor subjective, depending on personal whim, but intersubjective or representative.<sup>20</sup>

The interest in this intersubjectivity is not a scientific one, but an existential one. The world we inhabit is a common one, which is why Arendt adds inter-interest in the relationship to others and solidarity as indispensable elements alongside the aspect of responsibility for everything that happens on our behalf. In her lecture on “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, she illustrates the principle of intersubjective judgement with the example of the inhabitants of a slum, whose points of view must be included. And “according to the implications of Jaspers’ philosophy”, Arendt says approvingly, “nothing should ever happen in politics which would be contrary to the actually existing solidarity of mankind.”<sup>21</sup>

### The Discursive Method and its Poetic Thought

We have heard of the primacy of the person over truth, of humanists over philosophers, of communication over logic and of the political world over political theory. In her 1953 essay “Understanding and Politics”, she thought further about the problem of her recently published book on totalitarianism, the problem of understanding political-historical events that are not subject to causality and regularity. The problem of modern science is to work with methods that are supposed to be universally valid and repeatable and whose results must be verifiable and valid at all times. Science is about the what, not the who of human actors. Therefore, science is only a tool that can be used in a limited way. “True understanding,” Arendt wrote,

always returns to the judgements and prejudices which preceded and guided the strictly scientific inquiry. The sciences can only illuminate, but neither prove nor disprove, the uncritical preliminary understanding from which they start. If the scientist, misguided by the very labor and his inquiry, begins to pose himself as an expert in politics and to despise the general understanding from which he started, he loses immediately the Ariadne thread of common sense which alone will guide him securely through the labyrinth of his own results<sup>22</sup>.

From this perspective, scientists who trust their science alone seem to be at high risk of losing the orientation of humanity. Thinking, according to Arendt, “arises in the element of the unknowable”<sup>23</sup>. It has nothing to do with the will to know, nor with

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20 Hannah Arendt: *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 141.

21 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Citizen of the World?* In: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 93.

22 Hannah Arendt: *Understanding and Politics*, in: *Essays on Understanding 1933–1954*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company 1994, p. 311.

23 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 261.

faith or logic, but with understanding. As with Heidegger, truth was regarded by her as an impulse, not a result of thinking. No compulsion of the will, no authority of faith and no subjective logic independent of experience<sup>24</sup> is compatible with this understanding; on the contrary, any compulsion puts an immediate end to an understanding thinking. Understanding consists of thinking one thing after another and can only take place as “free thinking” that pursues “no ends”, has “no objects” and produces “no results”, but creates “meaning”. “Thinking”, Arendt noted in her *Denktagebuch*, is “‘interrogating’ (reason), namely ‘sense interrogating’ or sensing actions”.<sup>25</sup>

Just as Arendt advocates not leaving the question of truth to the scientists, she also advocates not leaving thinking to the philosophers and literature to the experts. In her essay on Bertolt Brecht, she writes:

The voice of the poets, however, concerns all of us, not only critics and scholars; it concerns us in our private lives and also insofar as we are citizens. We don't need to deal with *engagé* poets in order to feel justified in talking about them from a political viewpoint, as citizens.<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of her life, Arendt said: “I would like to say that everything I did and everything I wrote – all that is tentative.”<sup>27</sup> This is her method: to think for herself, to think each thing through and to develop these thoughts in the conversation she enjoyed so much with her husband Heinrich Blücher and her friend Jaspers. Writing down these trains of thought leads to the essay, a form that characterises all her writings, including her books. They do not contain systems, they are not teaching material, Arendt does not want to instruct. “The road of the theoretician who tells his students what to think and how to act ... My God! These are adults! We are not in the nursery!”<sup>28</sup>

In the secondary literature, the unity of content, method and stylistic device in Arendt has only recently been pointed out. Her statement of the break with tradition and the departure from an essentialist, timeless thinking corresponds to her method of thinking in time, “which employs neither history nor coercive logic as crutches”<sup>29</sup>, but preserves phenomena before concepts and avoids historical determinism. Steve Buckler explains that “Arendt's anti-traditional standpoint ... is consciously one that seeks to avoid providing precepts that might be invoked as the ba-

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24 Ibid., p. 342.

25 Ibid., p. 183f.

26 Hannah Arendt: Bertolt Brecht, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 210f.

27 Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, in: Melvyn A. Hill: *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1979, p. 338.

28 Ibid., p. 310.

29 Hannah Arendt: On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 8.

sis for a new 'tradition' that would supply, in the form of decisive formulations, a cognitive replacement for the old one."<sup>30</sup> And Ari Helmeri-Hyvönen emphasises the unity of the anti-systematic and anti-static movements of thought with the stylistic devices of metaphors and the use of fragments of thought.<sup>31</sup> It is, according to Buckler, a "non-definitive, discursive theoretical formation"<sup>32</sup>, which "poses a potent challenge to established ways of theorising politics and presents a refreshing alternative to what have arguably become sterile debates."<sup>33</sup>

Arendt's interest in language, her agreement with Emerson's "Language is fossil poetry", consisting of coagulated metaphors, is part of her method of thinking. For Arendt, it was always about speaking with language (poetic), not through language (instrumental). What Arendt praised in Benjamin applied to herself: that in the face of the questionability of the past, he had to come across language, "for in it the past contained ineradicably, thwarting all attempts to get rid of it once and for all."<sup>34</sup> And that it would have been in Benjamin's mind to "trace(s) the abstract concept *Vernunft* (reason) back to its origin in the verb *vernehmen* (to perceive, to hear), it may be thought that a word from the sphere of the superstructure has been given back its sensual substructure."<sup>35</sup> Since Homer, such a metaphor, which is immediately obvious and requires no interpretation, has borne "that element of the poetic which conveys cognition"<sup>36</sup>. In *The Life of the Mind*, however, Arendt also writes that "all philosophic ... language ... is metaphorical"<sup>37</sup>.

That is why Arendt's work is permeated with linguistic images and metaphors, especially *The Human Condition*, in order to give the thought its own expression, to communicate precisely *through* language, not *with* language.<sup>38</sup> Thus, as an example for many, she noted in her *Denktagebuch* the linguistic image: "By fleeing from poli-

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30 Steve Buckler: *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2011, p. 34.

31 Ari Helmeri-Hyvönen: Tentative Lessons of Experience: Arendt, Essayism, and "The Social" Reconsidered, in: *Political Theory*, 2014, Vol. 42(5) 569–589.s

32 Steve Buckler: op. cit. p. 55.

33 Ibid., p. 4.

34 Hannah Arendt: Walter Benjamin, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 204.

35 Ibid., p. 165f.

36 Ibid., p. 166.

37 Hannah Arendt: *The Life of the Mind*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1978, One/Thinking, p. 102.

38 As an example for many: "Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes." (Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 183)

tics, we are dragging the desert everywhere – religion, philosophy, art. We are ruining the oases!”<sup>39</sup>

Her statement that she wanted her writing to understand and not to have an effect is echoed in Benjamin’s abhorrence of wanting to have an effect through language in the propaganda battles of the First World War:

Every action that lies in the expansive tendency of the word-to-word series seems to me dreadful and all the more disastrous where this whole relation of word and deed is spreading, as it is with us, in ever increasing measure as a mechanism for the realisation of the right absolute. I can understand scripture in general by poetic, prophetic, factual, as far as the effect is concerned, but in any case only magical, that is, un-means-able. Every salutary, indeed every not inwardly devastating effect of Scripture rests in its (the word’s, the language’s) mystery.<sup>40</sup>

Which is why Karl Kraus considered silence the only possible action at the time:

He who encourages deeds with words desecrates words and deeds and is doubly despicable. This occupation is not extinct. Those who now have nothing to say because actions are speaking continue to talk. Let him who has something to say come forward and be silent!<sup>41</sup>

Arendt’s unity of thought, language and form can be outlined more precisely in dialogue with Benjamin and Kraus. In the “Epistemo-critical prologue” to *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin describes thinking which is constantly renewed, as a form of philosophising that seeks knowledge, not proof, that always goes back to the matter itself and, with its “continuous pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation”, in which “the truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter.” The “fragments of thought” obtained in this way can best be represented in the form of the tract, which in their accumulation form a mosaic. “In their supreme, western, form the mosaic and the treatise are products of the Middle Ages; it is their affinity which makes their comparison possible.”<sup>42</sup> Arendt’s “exercises in political thinking” correspond to this; they are tracts that, in the words of Benjamin, form a picture like a mosaic.

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39 Hannah Arendt: *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 524.

40 Walter Benjamin: Letter to Martin Buber, July 1916, in: *The correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940* / edited and annotated by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno; translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, p. 80

41 Karl Kraus: In dieser großen Zeit, in: *Die Fackel*. Heft 404, Vienna, December 1914.

42 Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, London-New York: Verso 1998, p. 28f.

If it is true that Arendt's location is that of a centre which is left empty, around which revolve the concepts that are not explained in detail, such as the desire to act, or the end in itself of acting, which is tantamount to claiming that "storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it"<sup>43</sup>, then there is also a certain closeness to Benjamin's "sphere of the wordless", of the magical: "Only the intense direction of words into the core of the innermost silencing achieves true effect."<sup>44</sup>

What is then expressed in language is more than what we can say. Adan Kovacsics points out that Wittgenstein, as an attentive reader of Karl Kraus, also expressed himself along these lines: "That which expresses *itself* in language, we cannot express by language." (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.121) And: "There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical." (6.522)<sup>45</sup>

To approach Arendt's work with scientific methods is bound to fail. Either the work is criticised as scientifically insufficient or, like other classics, it is "treated in seminars, made the subject of qualification theses or even researched itself"<sup>46</sup>, that is, in any case made the object of science.

Equally misleading is the question "What would Hannah say?" Buckler rightly emphasises that Arendt's work is not a blueprint for recurrent applications but, on the contrary, a rare example of the open thinking that everyone must undertake for themselves:

The responsibility, then, is to think in a politically oriented manner, avoiding the temptation to resort to abstraction and so leaving the realm of action to its own unreflective devices.<sup>47</sup>

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43 Hannah Arendt: Isak Dinesen, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 105.

44 Walter Benjamin: Brief an Martin Buber, op. cit., p. 127.

45 Cf. Adan Kovacsics: *Guerra y Lenguaje*, Barcelona: Acantilado 2007, p. 89.

46 Michael Quante: Philosophisches Interview, op. cit., p. 5. Agnes Heller's sarcastic criticism of the usual forms of reception fits this. She noted that fashion from time to time unleashes all the "scientific 'termites' and intellectual 'itinerant locusts'" on a few texts "so that they can live off their interpretation. This is followed by hundreds of thousands of theses and dissertations on the same author and the same text at all the universities on the planet, hundreds of conferences are held, and the rest is known to us. After a few years, maybe even sooner, the whole thing comes to a halt because the text no longer offers anything new intellectually, since everything has already been said once. This is what I call hermeneutic exhaustion, oversaturation or overload." (Agnes Heller Warum Hannah Arendt gerade heute? In Hans-Peter Burmeister und Christoph Huettig (eds.) *Die Welt des Politischen. Hannah Arendts Anstöße zur gegenwärtigen politischen Theorie*, Loccum Loccumer Protokolle 60/95, 1996, p. 12. (Translated by WH)

47 Steve Buckler: *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory*, op. cit., p. 159.

Jeremy Waldron is concerned with learning what independent thinking might look like, for example, through Arendt's columns in *Aufbau* magazine on the situation in Palestine in the 1940s:

Reading these columns, it is just possible that we will learn something about *how* to respond to events – step back, look behind the slogans, listen to the other side, be aware on either side that you may be being lied to. But we will certainly not learn what our response should be. The tribute that is owed to the particularity of Arendt's work is not imitation and it is not the application of some lessons we are supposed to have learned; it is our own resolve to think things through here and now, as she thought about them there and then.<sup>48</sup>

It is no wonder that Arendt, who did not belong to this world of science and did not herself want to systematically explain its place, could only explain: "I am nowhere. I am really not in the mainstream of present or any other political thought. But not because I want to be so original – it so happens that I somehow don't fit."<sup>49</sup>

## The Radicality of their Thinking and the Role of Emotions

Cognition moves mind *and* soul, reason *and* feelings. According to Mary McCarthy, this became visible in Arendt as a theatrical trait. "And this power of being seized and worked upon, often with a start, widened eyes, "Ach!" (before a picture, a work of architecture, some deed of infamy), set her apart from the rest of us like a high electrical charge."<sup>50</sup> According to Alfred Kazin Arendt "talked philosophy as if she were standing up alone in a foreign county and in a foreign tongue against powerful forces of error. She confronted you with the truth; she confronted you with her friendship, she confronted Heinrich (Blücher, WH) even when she joined him in the most passionate seminar I would ever witness between a man and a woman living together"<sup>51</sup>.

Arendt's emotions are emotions of the mind: laughter, anger, passionate criticism. They run through her work. Thus, she was accused of writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with *ira et studio*, a clear scholarly misconduct. Arendt responded to this by referring to the unity of content and form using the example of the misery of English miners at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution:

If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and

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48 Jeremy Waldron: What would Hannah say? op. cit., p. 12.

49 Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, op. cit., p. 336.

50 Mary McCarthy: Saying Good-by to Hannah. *New York Review of Books*, January 22, 1976

51 Alfred Kazin: *New York Jew*, New York: Knopf 1978, p. 198.



have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities. ... This has nothing to do with sentimentality or moralizing ... To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be 'objective', but to condone them.<sup>52</sup>

In *Denktagebuch* she noted:

Only when poverty has been made "objective", i.e. dehumanised, i.e. torn out of the context of public life, i.e. out of the human context of solidarity, i.e. denatured (stripped of its, poverty's, peculiar nature), does one arrive at the moronic demand of freedom from value. (*Wertfreiheit*, WH)<sup>53</sup>

Thus Arendt also praised Lessing's political emotions, his laughter, his anger and his passions. She had to laugh when reading Eichmann's interrogation,<sup>54</sup> she unintentionally struck an "ironic" tone in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and she initially linked judging to the "understanding heart" (Solomon), a legacy of the Enlightenment, as the observation of the essayist and diplomat Melchior Grimm (1723–1807) shows: "The prerequisite for a distinct and accomplished taste is that one has a keen mind, a feeling soul and a righteous heart."<sup>55</sup> Arendt also had these three elements. They are indispensable even in the extended way of thinking that Arendt later described only formally, following Kant.

## The Non-intellectual

Arendt was not only not a philosopher of the conventional kind, but also not the supposed other, an intellectual or a *public intellectual*. For Arendt, intellectuals were mostly academically trained people who marketed their knowledge and were prepared to sacrifice any humanity in the process. They were the ones who, according

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52 Hannah Arendt: Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, op. cit., p. 404f. In a new preface in 1966 to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt explained that shortly after the Second World War it was impossible to write *sine ira et studio* given the "mood of those years". (p. vii f.)

53 Hannah Arendt: *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 89.

54 Hannah Arendt: "What remains? The Language Remains." A Conversation with Günter Gaus, in: Peter Baehr (ed.): *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, New York: Penguin 2000, p. 25. Likewise, she agreed with Brecht in "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui": "I found in Brecht the following remark: The great political criminals must be exposed, especially to laughter. They are not great political criminals, but people who permitted great political crimes, which is something entirely different." (Interview with Roger Errera, in: Hannah Arendt: *Thinking without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 504.

55 Melchior Grimm *Paris zündet die Lichter an. Literarische Korrespondenz*, Leipzig Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1977, p. 121. (Translated by WH)

to Arendt in her interview with Günter Gaus, unlike ordinary people, fell for Hitler, who came up with “fantastic things” in order to be there. They were, according to Arendt in a letter to Jaspers, “after all, ‘intellectuals’, which is a far worse breed than representatives of interests”<sup>56</sup>, because there were no limits to interests for their opportunism:

This new class of intellectuals who, as literati and bureaucrats, as scholars and scientists, no less than as critics and providers of entertainment ... have proved more than once in recent times that they are more susceptible to whatever happens to be ‘public opinion’ and less capable of judging for themselves than almost any other social group.<sup>57</sup>

And in her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt poured scorn on the quality of the intellectual’s thought performance: “The specifically outrageous-opposite thing about the intellectual is that even his worst stuff is still better than he is”.<sup>58</sup> As we have already seen, Arendt spoke of the characteristics of the “highly cultivated murderers”, the absence of personality and integrity. They formed Hitler’s elite.<sup>59</sup> Of course, not all intellectuals belonged to this elite, but the transitions were fluid.<sup>60</sup> It is thus the *who* of intellectuals, their unconscionability and lack of judgement, that Arendt places at the centre of her critique, producing, in the words of Jeremy Waldron, “clichés and jargon, stock phrases and analogies, dogmatic adherence to established bodies of theory and ideology, the petrification of ideas, these are all devices designed to relieve the mind of the burden of thought, while maintaining an impression of intellectual cultivation.”<sup>61</sup> Arendt laughingly agrees with the novel *The Golden Fruits* by Nathalie Sarraute, in which she sees the intellectuals of her time portrayed in an apt comedy. They represent the “élite of good taste and refinement”, “intellectuals boasting of the highest standards, who pretend to care about nothing, certainly talk about nothing but things of the highest spiritual order”.<sup>62</sup> The falseness of these intellec-

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56 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1992, p. 635 (April 18, 1966).

57 Hannah Arendt: European Humanism and the Jewish Catastrophe: Hannah Arendt’s Answers to Questions Discussed in a Maariv Round Table, in: *HannahArendt.net*, vol. 4, No. 1, p. 13.

58 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 149f.

59 Cf. Christian Ingrao: *Croire et détruire. Les intellectuelles dans la machine de guerre SS*, Paris: Librairie Artème Fayard, 2010.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 149f.

61 Jeremy Waldron: What would Hannah say? Op. cit.

62 Hannah Arendt: Review of Nathalie Sarraute, “The Golden Fruits”, in: *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, op. cit., pp. 214–222. In her interview with Joachim Fest, she explains how New York intellectuals changed their minds about Arendt’s book on Eichmann: “They completely forgot that they had even read the book before. If you want to pursue this phenomenon ... you really have to read ‘The Golden Fruits’ by Nathalie Sarraute, she presented it as a

tuals, according to Arendt, “touches one of the most delicate and, at the same time, indispensable elements of human relationships, the element of common taste ... The feeling of natural kinship in the midst of a world, to which we all come as strangers, is monstrously distorted in the society of the refined who have made passwords and talismans, means of social organisation, out of a common world of objects”.<sup>63</sup>

It is therefore more than inappropriate to call Arendt a *public intellectual* just because she caused a sensation with her book on Eichmann in Jerusalem and took a political stand with her essays on the *Crises of the Republic*. She did not do this as an intellectual, but as a *citizen*. Her entire oeuvre, her writings, statements and letters express this position as a critically judging citizen. It is therefore no wonder that she preferred the simple dockworker Eric Hoffer in Berkeley far ahead of her intellectual colleagues. He was a “real oasis” for her as an independent thinker and writer.<sup>64</sup>

Learning and judging, following Arendt, consists in emancipating oneself from guiding and at the same time restricting mental banisters. “I always thought that one has to start thinking as though nobody had thought before, and then start learning from everybody else”<sup>65</sup> – also from Arendt.

Written in 2014. First published: *Jenseits der akademischen intellektuellen Welten – Arendts Standort*, in Tonio Oefterding et al. (eds.) *Hannah Arendt. Lektüren zur politischen Bildung*, Wiesbaden Springer 2020, pp. 105–123.

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comedy.” (Hannah Arendt and Joachim Fest *Eichmann war von empörender Dummheit*. Munich: Piper. 2011, p. 58)

63 *Ibid.*, p. 221f.

64 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence*, op. cit., p. 257 (March 26, 1955).

65 Hannah Arendt on Hannah Arendt, op. cit., p. 337.

# **When Politics Vanishes**



# 1. *Dogville* – Eight Steps to Hell. A film review

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*Dogville*<sup>1</sup> is a film that, like all films by Danish director Lars von Trier, leads to controversy. It is a parable in Brechtian style that describes the disintegration of a township's civility. A woman fleeing from gangsters shows up unexpectedly in *Dogville* and asks for help. She is taken in and treated kindly until doubts about her identity arise and the township is targeted by police and gangsters alike. The righteous citizens gradually give in to the external pressure, humiliating the woman they have sheltered in increasingly shameless ways and finally handing her over to her pursuers.

This agonising demise of civility raises the question of what is going on between the people of this township and between them and the stranger, and what is the role played by morality and politics in a crisis. The film describes this process without giving answers. Such conflicts with strangers and minorities are probably familiar to us. The wars in the former Yugoslavia and the massacres in Rwanda remind us that the 20th century was not only a century of totalitarianism, but also of civil wars and refugees.

Humiliation is one of the expressions of the simmering conflicts, it undermines civilised conditions. Humiliation is generally seen as a social phenomenon involving people's behaviour towards each other, rather than as a political problem. It seems to be political only when it is about national humiliation, i.e. an inter-state or inter-ethnic phenomenon that is not infrequently abused, most recently by the ideological movements in the Arab world. Humiliation in a domestic context, on the other hand, is rarely addressed, either as a component of dictatorial oppression or, more recently, as a rather unintended concomitant of institutions of the democratic welfare state, as in Avishai Margalit's book *The Decent Society*.<sup>2</sup>

*Dogville* shows us that humiliation in interpersonal relations can be of eminently political significance, much like the more familiar political forms of humiliation (by another nation, by a dictatorship, or by institutions of mass democratic society).

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1 *Dogville*, 2003, Lions Gate Films, written and directed by Lars von Trier, starring Nicole Kidman.

2 Avishai Margalit: *The Decent Society*, Harvard University Press 1998.

The kind of humiliation in *Dogville* is not about deficiencies in the welfare state, nor can it be confined to a sociological or social psychological consideration. Rather, it gains significance to the extent that members of the community respond to a political challenge individually and egoistically, but not politically. Humiliation here becomes a direct challenge to politics. One of the strengths of this film is that it also addresses another interpersonal relationship that could have prevented the moral decay of the community, namely love.

In the following, I will first give a synopsis of the film, secondly show the role of humiliation in the erosion of civilised conditions, then ask about the significance of love in preventing this erosion process, and then finally discuss the failure of political action in the face of the crisis depicted in this film. Precisely because this film shows us the development of a catastrophe in a quasi ideal-typical way, Hannah Arendt's political-philosophical remarks on love, friendship and politics seem like an indirect reaction to it, like a possible contribution to a dialogue.

## Dogville

The film is set in a very remote township somewhere in the mountains of the USA at the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s. We are not shown a real place but a stage, reminiscent in its sparseness of the theatre Bertolt Brecht. The plot is also reduced to a bare minimum, as a parable. There are 15 townspeople, the main character Grace, a beautiful young stranger, three policemen who occasionally come from the next town, and a gangster boss with his henchmen. The film is divided into nine chapters and a prologue and is accompanied by a narrator.

*Dogville* presents us with a township of orderly circumstances and friendly people. Occasionally, the young writer Tom tries to improve the moral values of the inhabitants with lectures that are ultimately unsuccessful. Everything goes on peacefully until one day shots are heard in the distance and a little later Grace appears and begs for help. Tom hides her from the pursuing gangsters, and the residents agree to house Grace for a fortnight. They are tolerant and in principle also willing to help, although finding suitable chores for Grace proves difficult. They don't really need Grace. Only slowly does a possibility arise here and there to do a meaningful job. Grace, who obviously comes from a better background and is unused to working, quickly finds her feet. The people are happy and the climate is very friendly. After two weeks, they unanimously decide at a meeting that Grace can stay on. Grace offers several times to leave if the townspeople want her to.

Then a policeman turns up and puts up a poster, saying Grace is missing. The residents agree that the gangsters are behind it and are therefore prepared to continue protecting Grace. A little later, however, the climate changes. They notice a love affair beginning between Tom and Grace, which leads to some unrest.

The decisive turning point, however, occurs when the police appear again and now put up a wanted poster for Grace, who is accused of having committed crimes. This worries the residents. They are only willing to continue protecting Grace if they get something in return for the risk they will be taking. Grace is expected to do twice as many chores for half the pay, work that originally, as the narrator points out several times, “no one needed”.

Now unfriendliness spreads, the township “bares its teeth”. Grace is unsettled by this, she works frantically, and she is increasingly criticised for mishaps. Distrust arises when the son of one family provokes Grace until she reluctantly spansks him, whereupon the mother no longer leaves Grace alone with the children, but constantly controls her. When the police turn up for the third time, the fruit grower takes advantage of the situation to blackmail Grace: either she sleeps with him or he will betray her. Grace is forced to accept the blackmail. She then wants to leave, but the residents now won't let her go, they have become accustomed to the comforts of her work. They want more of it; the fruit grower from now on regularly abuses Grace during work.

Grace then tries to escape. The local truck driver agrees to smuggle her out for money. Tom helps her and steals the necessary money from his father, promising to meet her at the destination of the escape. As Grace rides with the truck driver, he also takes the opportunity to rape her. He then claims that the road is closed by the police and they must return. Arriving back in Dogville, Grace learns that the truck driver had already given away the secret of the escape the night before. Since Tom denies having stolen the money from his father, suspicion falls on Grace. To prevent another escape, she is now tied to a mill wheel with a dog chain, which she struggles to drag along the ground. Now most of the other men also feel encouraged to rape Grace in her home. The men's behaviour is tacitly tolerated, Grace's dignity has sunk to the level of human chattel.

Tom wants to free Grace but does not know how. He is simultaneously fascinated by the events and wants to process them in literature. He wants to love Grace, but she refuses because she wants to be free first. Tom feels rejected by her and now decides, together with the other residents, to get rid of Grace. He informs the gangsters, whose phone number he has kept. When they arrive, it turns out that their boss is Grace's father. She had always refused to follow his criminal example and had therefore fled from him. Now, however, she is ready to return. The world of the gangsters and that of Dogville are no longer very different for her. In a final dialogue, she agrees with her father that the township's crimes must not go unpunished and that there is no need for mercy. Grace therefore orders the gangsters to shoot the inhabitants and burn down the houses, and she herself shoots Tom. The world, she says, must be freed from this township.



## Steps of Humiliation

Humiliation plays a decisive role in the decline of civility in this film. This civility is based on the people's tolerance of the stranger. They endure her presence because they are willing to protect her from persecution. But this willingness to help is limited, because it is really only a matter of accepting what Tom has already agreed to do. Tom directs things, believing he can persuade the residents to be more communal when presented with a practical challenge. He refers to Grace as a "gift" to the township, but the residents do not ask about why Grace was actually persecuted, where she comes from, or who she is. They are willing to behave decently towards her as long as nothing further is required. The fact that her work is not needed by anyone also means that her presence is unnecessary; people just put up with her. Grace makes more efforts to fully adapt to the customs of the inhabitants and their kitschy tastes. It soon becomes apparent that the benefits are worth the effort to employ Grace. Even the appearance of the police does not change this, because it is not a punishable offence to ignore the search for a missing person.

It is not until the second appearance of the police, and at the same time with the developing love affair with Tom, that the relationship changes. Now the residents are hiding a criminal, and the love affair with Tom stirs up passions such as jealousy and desire. From now on, a sequence of eight steps of humiliation begins, which finally ends in the revenge of the humiliated:

- The first step is the exploitation of Grace, that is, the demand that she does double the work in return for further protection. It is only a matter of time that this first humiliation will also lead to the destruction of the friendly relationship between the townspeople and Grace;
- The second step takes the form of self-degradation. Grace has so far experienced and herself cultivated a kind of mutual respect, which is now destroyed with the passing on of pressure from outside. Excessive irritation, criticism and the provocation of the boy cause her to smack him and thus do something that she herself perceives as humiliating;
- The third step is being blackmailed into sexual intercourse with the fruit farmer;
- The fourth step Grace experiences as an assault on her property, combined with a kind of psychological torture. The fruit farmer's claim that Grace seduced him serves as justification for his wife to take revenge on Grace. She destroys the objects Grace has bought for the wages of her labour, one by one, with the explanation that she will not stop until Grace shows that she can hold back her feelings about this destruction. For Grace, these objects, which she actually thought were obnoxiously tacky, signify the bond between her and the townspeople. For her, their destruction is an expression of the townspeople's final break with her;

- The fifth step consists of a kind of confinement that forbids her to leave the township;
- The sixth step is being chained to the millstone after the failed escape;
- The seventh step consists of repeated rape by the men of the village, her degradation as human chattel;
- The eighth step is betrayal, several times over: first by the lorry driver who pretends to drive her to freedom only to abuse her on the way, and then by Tom, who first accuses her of stealing the escape money from his father and then betrays her to the gangsters. Finally, his love is also full of betrayal because he wants to use Grace first as a pedagogical object, then as a literary model and finally as an object of sexual desire.

How can a civilised community abandon mutual respect, disregard personal integrity and place itself outside the law?

This process shows how thin the veneer of civilisation is in such a community. There are several factors that make up the fragility of civilisation in this story, and they all concern interpersonal relations. They are mainly the liberal aloofness, the primacy of self-interest and the absence of political interest in the common good. This is expressed firstly in the subordinate status of the stranger, in the distanced tolerance; secondly, in the increased assertion of self-interest as a reaction to increased risk; Thirdly, in the instrumentalisation of the relationships and the destruction of the dignity of Grace; and fourthly, in a questionable love and betrayal.

One might think that a fifth aspect is added, namely to interpret Grace's reaction to murder the residents of Dogville as revenge, but it is an attempt to find justice, as we will see below.

As far as the first factor, the status of the stranger, is concerned, the peculiarities of tolerance quickly become apparent. We know tolerance to be the main feature of relations between people in liberal society, characterised by a passive attitude of allowing, and indifference. Through it, other values such as self-interest relationships are not compromised. On the contrary, self-interest prevails and all actions are measured against one's own advantage. Kindness and helpfulness, and likewise the idea of what the common good is, are also subject to the priority of realising self-interest. The common good in liberalism sees the maintenance of a condition in which a community of individuals can successfully pursue their self-interest, as in Dogville.

The equality that Grace seeks is only established at the level of work and pay, not human dignity or even political rights. Therefore, there is no protection against arbitrary change. The opinion of the majority determines whether relations are changed, and this arbitrariness seems to be without limits.

It therefore only takes a certain external pressure that seems to threaten these self-interests to reveal the character of this tolerance and Grace's unsecured status. This is where the second factor comes into play, the reaction to fear through

the increased assertion of self-interest. The townspeople find themselves in a double moral dilemma: first, their initial moral relationship to Grace, namely to provide help from persecution, has changed to a purely material one of utility. Should the townspeople now keep her because of the original promise or merely out of self-interest? Secondly, the townspeople now face possible legal punishment for harbouring a criminal; should they risk punishment, or not? In both cases, they choose self-interest over moral considerations. In both cases, the starting point has changed. Grace is now no longer the one pursued by criminals, but is apparently a criminal herself. But because she is useful, and is not guilty of anything in the township, they would like to keep her. However, the risk of hiding a criminal from the police is considerable and must be worthwhile for them. So from their point of view, extra work by Grace to offset an increased risk for the residents appears to be fair. In reality, however, it has nothing to do with a fair deal, but on the contrary with pure arbitrariness and exploitation of Grace's situation.

This brings into play the third factor, the instrumentalisation of relations with Grace and the destruction of her dignity. From the beginning, kindness and mutual respect have been subject to considerations of utility. For this reason, the question of how to respond to the increased risk is decided according to the cost-benefit analysis. This consideration gains prominence with the exertion of external pressure. Grace is now seen exclusively in economic terms, and thus as an object – this seems all the more justified because she is obviously a criminal and had concealed this.

At the same time, residents are willing to collectively break the law and benefit a criminal. In this combination of maximising benefit and breaking the law, the sense of legal and moral boundary violations seems to dwindle. There emerges a separate standard for law and morality, for the right and the good. If Grace is only of value as a worker, why use phrases of kindness? If she is an object of utility, then why not a sexual object? And why then can't a claim be made on the whole person, on her possessions and her freedom of movement? The townspeople feel innocent as individuals of what they commit collectively. They are only doing what someone else has already done, and that someone else feels innocent because everyone else does it after them. And above all, the community tacitly claims some kind of reparation for Grace's alleged offences: the violence towards the boy, the adultery, and the theft of the money.

The fourth factor, love and betrayal, introduces an additional aspect concerning helping the defenceless stranger. When the townspeople reduce Grace to an object of utility, the only thing left is Tom's love for her, which does not seem to be driven by any utilitarian consideration. She could be the alternative to inhumanity and Grace. But even this love offers no protection; on the contrary. Tom remains loyal to the residents because his love for Grace is also driven by utilitarian considerations. As the disaster takes its course, he even considers writing a play about it as an observer.

## The Fire of Love and Active Charity

At this point, the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt intervenes, so to speak. A dialogue between the film and her is possible because she not only dealt with the decline of civilised society, but also made the role of politics, i.e. collective action in favour of the common good, the decisive prerequisite for the preservation of a civilised community. The central undoing for *Dogville* is precisely the absence of politics.

For Arendt, interpersonal relationships are at the centre of her work. Totalitarianism, freedom and politics are considered against the background of these relationships. Totalitarianism is characterised not only by its apparatus of power, the political movement and the use of ideology and terror, but also by people's lack of relationships and their sense of a meaningless existence at the beginning of totalitarian movements. The movement with its ideology seems to offer a new orientation. From the point of view of interpersonal relationships, freedom is not an abstract good, but, according to Arendt, only arises at the moment when people enter into an active relationship with each other. It is the opposite of relationality under totalitarianism. Politics is therefore not an administrative act nor a power struggle of individual persons or groups against each other, but the joint acting and speaking in which freedom first arises. For Arendt, this in-between is synonymous with world, and any impairment of relations, the introduction of violence or the instrumentalisation of others or the replacement of politics by administration, reduces the common world, enables the spread of violence and ultimately risks doom, as in *Dogville*. For Arendt, liberalism is based on a series of such impairments of freedom and political action.

The only assistance that seems to exist in *Dogville* is the love between Tom and Grace. Apart from the failure of this love, the question arises whether, in the selfish and humiliating community of *Dogville*, love can protect against inhumanity, lack of empathy and lack of commitment? Could it save people in the absence of political action?

Undoubtedly, love could have played an important role if Tom had found the strength to defend Grace at all costs. That could have led to a discussion about the state of the community. But acting out of love against humiliation and betrayal only puts the fate and concerns of two lovers first, not those of the community. Love can defend the dignity of a person and stop the degradation of the townspeople, but it cannot focus on the concern for the existence of the community. Love and politics are therefore distinguished by the twoness of lovers against the interest in the common good.

Love is exclusionary, whereas the regulation of public concerns requires precisely the relationship between many people, their inclusion. Since for Arendt the existence of the human world in the sense of a civilised world depends on this mul-

tiplicity, the plurality in the form of interpersonal relationships, she is very keen, as she noted in philosophical notebooks, to distinguish “the elementary human activities as modifications of plurality”. She counts five activities among these elementary activities: labour, work, action, thinking, and also love. And she defines them through interpersonal relations: labour, which takes place in abandonment as an activity of force; work in isolation, which creates objects and works of art and is based on violence; action, which is based on togetherness, the common world; thinking, which takes place in solitude, but knows the inner dialogue and the idea of others; and finally love, which consists in togetherness, but at the same time in worldlessness, that is, in isolation from others.<sup>3</sup> In labour, according to Arendt, people are always isolated and driven by worry and fear; in work, they are alone in the freedom of spontaneity and inspired by the work as creation; in action, they are together with others in political responsibility, and only in love “there is real mutuality, based on needing the other. To be a human being is at the same time to be in need of (another) human being.”<sup>4</sup> In love, the one needs the second; in plurality, on the other hand, the one is dependent on the others. “In the case of love, he seeks what is appropriate for him; in the case of plurality, he has to reckon with the ‘inappropriate’, the foreign, the different. The fundamental difference between the need, which arises from the two sexes, or at least is marked out in them, and the being dependent on one another, which lies in multiplicity.”<sup>5</sup> Thus she concludes that labour – thought – love “are the three modes of sheer life from which a world can never arise and which are therefore actually anti-world, anti-political.”<sup>6</sup>

The difference between togetherness and plurality becomes clear in speaking. What distinguishes politics as a relationship between those acting in its plurality is speech: “All speech with others is always already speech about something common to both”, while “the speech of lovers is free of this ‘about’; “in it one speaks with the you as with oneself. ... The speech of lovers is therefore inherently ‘poetic’, in it there is neither thinking *dialegesthai* (speaking with one another, WH) nor speaking about. It is as if in its people first become what they pretend to be as poets: they do not speak, and they do not talk, but they sound.”<sup>7</sup>

In Dogville, speech has no meaning; in the moralising monologues at the meetings as little as in the conviviality of the residents or in the blackmail and humiliation towards Grace.

Nowhere in her published work did Arendt write such a declaration of love as in the notebooks of her *Denktagebuch*. When she declares that love does not spring

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3 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, Munich Piper 2002, p. 459.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 203. (my translation WH)

5 *Ibid.*, p. 38f. (my translation WH)

6 *Ibid.*, p. 493. (my translation WH)

7 *Ibid.*, p. 214. (my translation WH)

from the heart but is divine, a power of the universe, and compares it to fire and lightning, she herself uses poetic images to describe love which only knows poetic words: “Love burns, pierces like lightning the in-between, that is, the world-space, between people. This is only possible with two people. When the third joins, space is immediately restored.”<sup>8</sup> That is why this divine love is so different from earthly action, this absolute worldlessness from the relative world of references.

Love, which Arendt so aptly described as lightning burning up the in-between, also consumes itself and is of limited duration. Love might save Grace, but hardly the village. In contrast, charity is of greater permanence. Active kindness has also at times defined the political sphere since the emergence of Christianity. But charity is also apolitical because its silent action has a negative relation to public action and responsibility for the common good. In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt, following Machiavelli, points out that where active charity, in the form of the church, determines public life and directs the destiny of a city, it becomes a power factor that exerts a corrupting and destructive influence.<sup>9</sup>

## Politics, Public Friendship and Political Institutions

What does politics mean for *Dogville*? The answer is: a necessary alternative to the apolitical liberal world of ‘enlightened self-interest’. For if this self-interest is not limited by laws and public discussion and concern for the common good, it can, under external pressure, turn into a kind of demagogic common interest.

A dialogue between the director’s critique of Liberalism and Hannah Arendt’s republicanism is unmistakable here. For Arendt, politics in this context means three things: first, the rule of law; second, action in favour of the common good; and third, the paradox of maintaining morality by keeping it out of the realm of politics.

As for the first aspect, the rule of law, it means the existence of both concrete laws and an effective separation of powers, thus preventing the development of lawlessness and natural centres of power. In *Dogville*, law and order fade away and the inhabitants create something like a dictatorial *volonté générale*, which gives rise to a new rule of interests, passions and demagogy. Similarly, in political reality, state legality is fading and arbitrary local rule is emerging, giving autocrats the opportunity to take over the leadership of such deficient communities.

Acting in favour of the common good presupposes the rule of law. This does not make action superfluous, on the contrary. *Dogville* shows how in a liberal society, which is, after all, based on the rule of law, the constitutional foundations and also liberality can be undermined and eliminated if there is no political action. Politics

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8 Ibid., p. 372. (my translation WH)

9 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Meridian 1958, Chapter 10.

in *Dogville* would mean that the residents would see themselves not as mere individuals but as citizens, and they would see their community not as a mere utility but as a *polis*. These citizens would ask Grace about her background, publicly discuss why and how they should help Grace, and ultimately deliberate on how to resolve the conflict between helping Grace and exposing themselves to prosecution. Such civic behaviour requires public-communal discussion, information, political judgement and active action. In *Dogville* there was no discussion but collusion, no information but ignorance, no judgement and not even prejudice, no action but behaving, seeking one's own advantage, and problem solving not in public but in secret.

What the citizens of *Dogville* also did not know through their behaviour are two experiences that come with public, responsible action: the sense of satisfaction of meaningful action, and the experience of public friendship, where the inhabitants of the township know that for all their differences, sympathies and dislikes, they collectively value and want to preserve the existence of their civilised place. It was this experience that Hannah Arendt sought to revive as what she called the 'treasure' of a republican tradition and to re-establish it in terms of interpersonal relations. *Dogville* makes it clear that politics and society or the interest in the common good and the pursuit of private interests are indeed not the same thing.

As for the third aspect, the maintenance of morality by keeping it out of the realm of politics, *Dogville* clearly shows that morality cannot replace politics. Tom's moral exhortations do not stand up to external pressures and internal temptations. Even a community subjected to a strict moral code would probably not have saved Grace from humiliation, for such a community would be based on a severe restriction of freedom and would breed hypocrisy and corruption. In proportion, a community acting in a civic manner would be much more able to take pressure off the individual citizens by publicly regulating their common affairs and in this way protect their everyday morality.

It is astonishing that, although these insights into the foundations of the civilised *polis* have been known since antiquity and the examples of catastrophes like *Dogville* are nothing new, in the liberal modern times there is so little public awareness of these threats to society and the need for self-binding.

However, the film does not offer this civic alternative. The film differs from Arendt's path in two respects: firstly, with regard to institutions, that is, the design of power. Lars von Trier rather argues for the hard hand of the Hobbesian state or at least the Machiavellian defence of the republic against internal corruption, when in the end the gangsters – and Grace – act with an iron fist; secondly, the restoration of justice is justified religiously rather than politically.

This religious aspect is already visible at the beginning of the film when Tom calls Grace a "gift". Her arrival has the character of a test. In her grace, as her name suggests, in her youthful beauty and apparent vulnerability, she embodies a purity that is reminiscent of the appearance of Jesus. Both Jesus and Grace were not of this

world, nor could they be, for they found no place in it. Humans failed the test both times. The conclusions drawn by religion and politics are diametrically opposed. Christianity interpreted the fate of Jesus as a sacrifice for the redemption of humanity, as an example of the pure way of life. Politics, on the other hand, cannot redeem people from sins, but must secure them a place in the world that at the same time prevents a catastrophe like that in *Dogville*. This does not require mercy, but political justice.

Hannah Arendt illustrated this difference in her book *On Revolution* using the story of the Grand Inquisitor by Dostoevsky and *Billy Budd* by Herman Melville.<sup>10</sup> In Dostoevsky's view, no one today would recognise Jesus; Melville depicts how the absolutely good man unwittingly becomes a murderer. Arendt used these literary examples as insights into the necessary limits that the *polis* must set not only for evil but also for good.

The justice that Grace now wants to establish by destroying *Dogville* in order to free the world from this evil does not consist in self-sacrifice, but in avenging punishment. It appears like the reversal of Jesus' death and wants to be political, but more resembles an apolitical, quasi-mystical act of purification that affects the guilty as well as the innocent, such as the children. For Hannah Arendt, politics would not consist in the arbitrary act of an iron fist, but in the common foundation of a new *Dogville*. Thus, although she chose a similarly worded justification when she agreed to Eichmann's execution, it is free of revenge and mysticism: since Eichmann and his superiors had arrogated to themselves the right, according to Arendt, to want to inhabit the world without the Jewish people and a number of other ethnic groups, "no member of the human race can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason and the only reason you must hang."<sup>11</sup>

Written in 2004. First Published: 'Dogville' – Humiliação, amor e política. Reflexões em diálogo com Hannah Arendt, in: Izabel Marson/Márcia Naxara (eds.): *Sobre a Humilhação. Sentimentos, gestos, palavras*, Uberlândia: EDUFU 2005.

10 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, New York: Viking Press 1963, Chapter 2

11 Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report of the Banality of Evil*, New York: Viking Press, revised and enlarged version, 1965, p. 279.





## 2. Phantasies of Omnipotence

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In 1886 Friedrich Nietzsche noted in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “PROPORTIONATENESS is strange to us, let us confess it to ourselves; our itching is really the itching for the infinite, the immeasurable. Like the rider on his forward panting horse, we let the reins fall before the infinite, we modern men, we semi-barbarians—and are only in OUR highest bliss when we ARE IN MOST DANGER.”<sup>1</sup>

What followed in the 20th century was full-blown immoderation and positioning on the fringes of extremism: the rule of totalitarian dictatorships, the Holocaust, and the use of the atomic bomb. The world seemed to end, as it did in every country impacted by civil war, state terrorism or armed groups after the Second World War and the Holocaust, such as Lebanon, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Somalia, Syria, or Colombia.

What is it about Nietzsche’s statement that “our itching is really the itching for the infinite, the immeasurable”? I would argue that it is about transgressing boundaries and the feelings of omnipotence that produce such extreme criminals as Adolf Eichmann, the organiser of the extermination of the Jews, or Anders Breivik, the mass murderer in Norway. And, as we see with Breivik, this does not require a totalitarian society; extreme violence already exists in our society.

The capacity to act violently and to use violence is an intrinsic human capacity, something we forget in countries where the state monopoly on the use of force is effective, and violence seems largely banished from public life. The violence I am dealing with here serves as a force of order in a contested field, the distinction between Us and Them, Good and Evil, and the highest form of violence, omnipotence, conveys the sense of being master over life and death.

What makes the matter even more precarious is the fact that from our earliest childhood we are all no strangers to the feeling of omnipotence. I will first explain this briefly and then present three forms of border transgressions in more detail: those of hooligans, of military snipers, and those of the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik. Finally, I would like to ask what relations exist between Hannah Arendt’s thesis of the banality of evil and these forms of violence.

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aphorism 224

First, however, to our early childhood experience of omnipotence, from which arises a persistence of the pre-social in the human being.

## A Controversy about the Persistence of the Pre-social in Humans

The American philosopher and psychoanalyst Joel Whitebook explained that there is an early childhood experience of omnipotence; according to Freud, at this earliest age there is no experience of limits and of the existence of others with equal rights. This means that “it was not capitalism ... that gave rise to human egoism, aggression and acquisitiveness; the potential for this was part of our basic anthropological and psychological equipment from the very beginning.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, “virtually all psychoanalytic theorists ... agree that experiences of omnipotence are a feature of both normal and abnormal childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Examples of this can be found in religious, aesthetic and erotic experiences, states of infatuation, in mass phenomena, and in certain forms of psychosis.”<sup>3</sup>

With this statement, Whitebook opposes an overly optimistic attitude of the philosophers Habermas and Honneth, who focussed on the possibilities of a free and rational society and mutual recognition. They did not appreciate what Whitebook calls the “work of the negative”<sup>4</sup>, that is, the persistence of human aggression and non-recognition. There is therefore not only the struggle for recognition, but equally the struggle for de-recognition, for humiliation and negation of the Other.<sup>5</sup> In the development from a pre-social to a socially shaped being, a personality emerges, according to Whitebook, which to varying degrees continues to carry the pre-social.

Furthermore, Whitebook also relates creativity to destructiveness. Thus, the high level of creativity we see in science, art, technology, business and not least in global finance is also often accompanied by a high level of destructiveness. “Indeed, the idea may not be implausible that in modernity the magnitude of creativity and destructiveness are coextensive.”<sup>6</sup>

So we can conclude that both destructiveness and creativity are accompanied by Nietzsche’s “itching for the infinite, the immeasurable”, the feeling of being able to

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2 Joel Whitebook Wechselseitige Anerkennung und die Arbeit des Negativen, in *Psyche*, 2001, 55/8, p. 759.

3 Joel Whitebook Die Grenzen des intersubjective turn. Eine Erwiderung auf Axel Honneth, in *Psyche*, 2003, 57/3, p. 254.

4 Joel Whitebook Wechselseitige Anerkennung und die Arbeit des Negativen, op. cit., pp. 755–789

5 Hans-Joachim Busch Intersubjektivität als Kampf und die Anerkennung des Nicht-Intersubjektiven. Kommentar zur Honneth-Whitebook-Kontroverse, in *Psyche*, 2003, 57/3, p. 265.

6 Ibid. p. 59f.

master the challenges of the uncertain, the feeling of omnipotence, of being able to create and destroy, and to decide over life and death.

What does this look like in concrete terms? I want to describe this using three forms of border crossing as examples and at the same time concentrate on two questions – Why does it happen? And how does it happen?

## Why Cross the Border?

In the first example, the answer to the why of extreme violence by hooligans is: desire for violence and temporary border crossing. Hooligans are football fans who differ from normal fans by a high degree of willingness to use violence and aggressiveness. They appear in larger groups and seek confrontation with similar opposing groups during or after football matches. There is a certain code of honour that the violence should be brutal but not deadly, that no bystanders are attacked, that no weapons are used and that the groups should be approximately equal in size. However, there are always clear deviations from these rules.

It is remarkable that the hooligans belong to the lower and middle classes, that their appearance is not an expression of social disadvantage and unrest, not a problem of insufficient education, nor of conspicuous mental problems. The vast majority of hooligans are normal neighbours.

These are ritualised fights of violent men between the ages of 14 and late 40. It is not about destroying the opponents, but only about defeating them. In this respect, their violence has nothing to do with the search for *omnipotence*, but with *power ad-diction*. Nevertheless, there is something in their behaviour that can open the way to omnipotence, which they themselves call a “kick”. It is a rush of violence that can be generated in a short time and only barely stops at the destruction of the other.

The American journalist Bill Buford lived for a time among British hooligans and observed in himself the excitement of each border crossing as a transcendent feeling that increased to ecstasy and made him, the individual, completely absorbed in the mass. “Violence is one of the most intensely lived experiences and, for those capable of giving themselves over to it, is one of the most intense pleasures”.<sup>7</sup> It is possible in the fusion of individual and mass through violence to increase violence continuously. It does not need leaders – Buford experiences how the masses create and control themselves. And he compares his experiences with the theories of violence of Hippolyte Taine, Gustave le Bon and other scientists in the 19th century, who report of vagrants and criminals, of the overexcitable and the half-mad, of “people without reason, judgement or discrimination, who, because they are incapable of

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7 Bill Buford: *Among the thugs*, London: Arrow Books 1991, p. 204.

thinking for themselves, are susceptible to agitators”<sup>8</sup>. None of this applies to hooligans. It is simply this “extraordinary, raw, uncontrollable force ... (that) is in all of us”<sup>9</sup>, or at least in the men, and precisely that work of the ever-present negative that Whitebook speaks of.

As far as crossing the border to omnipotence is concerned, a German police officer who was a member of a hooligan group in Bielefeld on his weekends for seven years describes in his memoirs how far the threshold between the feeling of power and the search for omnipotence can sink in the addiction to the experience of violence. Namely, when one of the hooligans tells him how much he wants to go even further beyond the limit of what is permissible – to the point of killing an opponent, so that, as he says, he can also experience the feeling of killing.<sup>10</sup>

The second phenomenon of crossing borders that I would like to present here briefly concerns snipers and also mercenaries, whose answer to the why of crossing borders is the desire to kill. The American Chris Kyle became the most successful sniper of his time during four missions in the Iraq war. Between 2003 and 2009, he officially shot 160 enemy combatants, but according to his own account, he shot over 250. Chris Kyle loved guns, at the age of eight he received his first rifle. He joined the SEALs, the special forces of the US Navy, his profession became killing, his field of work was war. “The first time you shoot someone, you’re shaken up. You think, can I really shoot this guy? Is it really okay?’ But after you kill your enemy, you see it’s okay. You do it again. And again. You do it so the enemy won’t kill you or your countrymen. You do it until there is no one left for you to kill.”<sup>11</sup> The killing finds justification in the existence of the enemy: “Savage, despicable evil. That’s what we were fighting in Iraq. That is why a lot of people, myself included, called the enemy ‘savages’. There really was no other way to describe what we encountered there. ... I only wish I had killed more.”<sup>12</sup>

When his marriage threatened to fail, he returned to the USA. Death remained his theme there as well. For a while, he was involved in serious fights and was an alcoholic, shot two car-thieves as a civilian, founded a company to train snipers and looked after traumatised veterans by taking them to shooting ranges, among other things. He was finally shot by one such traumatised soldier on a shooting range in 2013. Chris Kyle received many awards; the nation was proud of him.

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8 Ibid., p. 208.

9 Ibid., p. 179.

10 Stefan Schubert *Gewalt ist eine Lösung. Morgens Polizist, abends Hooligan. Mein geheimes Doppelleben*, Munich Riva 2022, p. 239f.

11 Chris Kyle / Scott McEwen / Jim DeFelice: *American Sniper*, New York: Harper Collins, 2014, Prologue.

12 Ibid.

Kyle crossed the line into the pleasure of killing, but not the line into war crimes beyond “civilized” war. Others also crossed that line into war crime with ease. In the Lebanese civil war in the early 1980s, for example, militias fought militias and snipers received bounties for people killed, including women and children.<sup>13</sup> In Sarajevo in the 1990s, the civilian population was fair game for snipers posted on the mountains above the city.

The desire to kill is also widespread among mercenaries. To give just one example, an estimated 100 German mercenaries took part in the Kosovo war at the end of the 1990s, including a paratrooper dishonourably discharged from the German army, who carried out terrorist attacks and murdered dozens of people in the process. Neo-Nazis from Germany and Austria also took part, travelling to Bosnia over the weekend to fight alongside Croatian troops. Their pay was the spoils, and some of them became rich in unknown ways.<sup>14</sup>

The third form of border crossing is embodied by the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik. His border crossing was not primarily about the desire for violence or killing, but was ideologically justified to an extreme degree. In 2011, he carried out a bomb attack in the government district of Oslo, killing eight people, then drove to a holiday island disguised as a policeman to call together the young people of a social democratic camp and subsequently murdered 69 of them in a massacre lasting more than an hour. Before committing his crimes, he assumed that he would die in an exchange of fire with the police. To explain his reasons, Breivik had written a 1500-page manifesto entitled *2083 A European Declaration of Independence*, which he sent to 1003 e-mail recipients shortly before the attacks. Breivik was judged sane at the time of the crimes.

In court, he explained that he represented a Norwegian and European resistance movement that opposed liberals and representatives of a multicultural society. The latter had established a cultural Marxist dictatorship since 1968 and were allowing the Norwegian indigenous population to be outnumbered by a constant influx of migrants. This would lead to a loss of social cohesion and a crisis in the economy. Therefore, national resistance of the “indigenous population” was necessary. His goal was not a national dictatorship, but an ethnically segregated society like that of Japan or South Korea.

Breivik, unlike many hooligans or the American sniper, had been a difficult child, had started a number of businesses that failed, had undertaken criminal dealings, and had eventually moved back into his mother’s flat unemployed. But mass murder

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13 Jussuf Naoum *Der Scharfschütze. Geschichten aus dem libanesischen Bürgerkrieg*, Fischerhude Brandes & Apsel 1983, p. 63.

14 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/644240/rund-hundert-deutsche-soeldner-in-ex-jugoslawien-aktiv> (2022/10/3)

does not follow from all this. For that, it took a free decision and overcoming the inhibitions of crossing the boundaries.

## How to Cross the Border

For all perpetrators, crossing the border from a world of legal and moral norms to the world of the forbidden is difficult. It requires its own justification as legal, as legitimate, as morally right, or as obeying a higher law. In this process, new individual or collective norms are worked out. If they sound plausible and are also shared by others, the level of personal responsibility can be lowered, and the transition takes place all the more easily. The hooligans have their code of conduct, which includes bodily harm and damage to property, but excludes manslaughter. The rapid crossing of boundaries required from one hour to the next is considerably easier in a large group. It is legitimised by the mutual voluntariness of the fights with hostile groups and is additionally accelerated by large quantities of intoxicants.

Professional snipers in a regular army carry out a legal activity through their state mission, which legally distinguishes between killing and murder, war and war crimes, and is morally justified by the enemy image of the bad guys, the invocation of values such as human rights, or reason of state. As with all groups and all perpetrators, violent action crossing the border is a matter of short-term habituation. Already the second street fight, the second shooting is much easier.

Snipers in non-regular militias replace legality with their group affiliation and the invocation of an overriding legitimacy that must be particularly exaggerated in view of the border crossing to war crime or crime against humanity.

The same happens in guerrilla groups. The essential prerequisite is the ideologically based dehumanisation of the potential victims and their own transformation into cold-blooded killers. Relatives or so-called lackeys of “imperialism” must not only be murdered, but the murders must be carried out as cold-bloodedly as possible in order to have the greatest possible effect. Thus, the adventurer Che Guevara declared in his “Message to the Tricontinentalists” in 1967: “Hatred as a factor of struggle; the unyielding hatred towards the enemy that drives far beyond the natural limits of a human being and transforms it into an effective, violent, selective and cold killing machine. Our soldiers must be like that.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in 1970, German terrorist Ulrike Meinhof, a respected journalist who had gradually become radicalised as part of the student movement, justified violence first against property, then against people, and finally the cold-blooded murder of police officers: “We say, of course, the cops are pigs. We say the guy in uniform is a pig, not a human being. And so we have

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15 Che Guevara *Message to the Tricontinental*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm> (2022/10/2)

to deal with them. That means we don't have to talk to him, and it's wrong to talk to these people at all. And of course, they can be shot. Because we don't have the problem that these are human beings, insofar as their function or their job is to protect the crimes of the system, to defend and represent the criminality of the system."<sup>16</sup>

Where the perpetrator acts alone, as Breivik did, a particularly strong ideological justification must replace the lack of exoneration by the collective, whether state, ethnicity or group. Hence the scenario of a seemingly fantastic present that appears highly threatening due to an overpowering enemy, hence the self-image as a member of an ethnic group threatened with extinction, and hence not only the justification but also the presumed immortal merit of sacrificing oneself for this ethnic group like a martyr. But ideological isolation from reality alone is not enough to commit mass murder as a lone perpetrator. Breivik knew that he had to distance himself emotionally from his fellow human beings beforehand. He avoided interpersonal contacts for months and spent his time exclusively playing killer games on the computer.

## The Banality of Evil

What differs from these forms of violence is state-wide organised terror, as first practised in the 20th century by totalitarian rule encompassing the whole of society. In a letter to her teacher and friend Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt characterised the difference between conventional and totalitarian violence as that "between a man who goes to murder his old aunt and the people who, as it were, without any direct calculations of utility ... build factories, for the production of the dead." And Arendt surmised that in the process "it is not individual human beings who are beaten to death for human reasons by other individual human beings, but an organised attempt is made to eradicate the concept of man."<sup>17</sup> To do this, human beings must be made superfluous, which is more than merely using them as a means to an end or violating their human dignity. "All this ... is connected with the delusion of man's omnipotence (not simply addiction to power). If man *qua* man were omnipotent, then indeed it would be impossible to see why men should exist ... man's omnipotence makes men superfluous."<sup>18</sup> This difference between an addiction to power that

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16 Ulrike Meinhof, in *Natürlich kann geschossen werden*. Ulrike Meinhof über die Baader-Aktion, in *DER SPIEGEL* 25/1970, p. 74. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-44931157.html> (2022/10/3)

17 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers *Briefwechsel 1926–1969*, Munich-Zurich Piper 1985, p. 106 (17 December 1946).

18 *Ibid.*, p. 202 (4 March 1951).



wants to control others and omnipotence that wants to dispose of the bodies of others and their lives like God is the difference between pre-totalitarian and totalitarian society.

Unlike Breivik, Adolf Eichmann did not murder anyone, or even use physical violence. He had “only” organised the transport of over 5 million Jews to the sites of their murder. He did not act as an individual perpetrator, but as a leading functionary of a totalitarian apparatus of domination and extermination, whose actions were accompanied by an ideologically closed world view of friend and foe, domination and race. However, Arendt also discovered in him a pleasure, namely that of functioning well. In an interview with Joachim Fest, she said he wanted to “join in. He wanted to say ‘We’, and this taking part and this wanting to say ‘We’ was quite enough to make the greatest crimes possible. [...] In this acting there is a very great feeling of pleasure.”<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the psychoanalyst Whitebook, Arendt was not interested in the anthropological possibility of a “work of the negative”, but rather in the question of how completely normal people organise state-planned genocide without batting an eyelid, and in the next moment, as law-abiding citizens in a democracy, are not guilty of anything. In the postscript to her trial report *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Arendt wrote of Eichmann that “Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post.”<sup>20</sup> “No motives” here means no base motives.

Just as political science had no explanation available for totalitarian rule, Arendt could find nothing useful about the phenomenon of Eichmann in the philosophical or even theological theories of evil. Kant examined the conditions of a self-orientation and self-responsibility of man along the great questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? What is man? Evil, for Kant, like good, is a matter of free will – of wanting to do evil. Eichmann, on the other hand, did not primarily want to do evil, but to be part of what everyone was part of, to get a leading position and to function particularly well there. He was not a conventional murderer, Arendt explained, “He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*.”<sup>21</sup>

What we do when we think, and what we do when we act, therefore became for Arendt the central issues facing us today in modern mass societies. That Eichmann was very creative as a functionary does not contradict his inability to think and judge

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19 Hannah Arendt / Joachim Fest *Eichmann war von empörender Dummheit. Gespräche und Briefe*. Munich-Zurich Piper 2011, p. 38f.

20 Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report of the Banality of Evil*, New York: Viking Press 1965, p. 287.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

*humanely*, to distinguish right from wrong. This inability, according to Arendt, was also expressed in his language. His language during the trial was bizarre, whereby the horrific sounded comical to Arendt's ears, as did his "heroic fight with the German language"<sup>22</sup>, in which he mixed metaphors and strung together clichés. "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, ..." <sup>23</sup> This was also evident in the many conversations with former SS member Willem Sassen and other Nazis in Buenos Aires in the late 1950s, which were recorded on tape and have been preserved as the so-called Sassen Protocols. Eichmann, seeking recognition, appeared as a pompous expert in extermination, but he also used strangely crude language<sup>24</sup>.

As a good functionary, he boasted of having done a proper job of exterminating the Jews. He didn't have to concoct any ideological exaggeration; average anti-Semitism and a warlike world view with a final battle between Nazis and Jews were enough for him to do everything for the smooth functioning of the state extermination programme. He knew that he had crossed a boundary in a hitherto unknown way, but that was beside the point, because the whole state had crossed that boundary, and he, Eichmann, was protected by the state, so that on the one hand he could boast of his deeds to the former functionaries, and on the other hand he could declare to the representatives of the old world of law and morality that he had been only a small cog in a large functional structure.

Finally, the question: What do hooligans, snipers and Breivik have in common with Eichmann? They belong to what Arendt called the elements and origins of total rule in non-totalitarian modernity. The totalitarian movement did not come from outside, rather it arose within its own society. It gathered together all those who, in Kant's words, wanted evil and were characterised by hatred, humiliation and the work of the negative. Eichmann, however, had gone a decisive step further – no longer wanting evil but wanting to function well in totalitarian society. There were two stages: the conquest of power and the institutionalisation of totalitarian omnipotence. Arendt also described these two stages of the Nazi movement: "In contrast to the earlier units of the SS men and Gestapo, Himmler's overall organization relies not on fanatics, nor on congenital murderers, nor on sadists; it relies entirely upon the normality of jobholders and family men."<sup>25</sup> The English historian and

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22 Ibid., p. 48.

23 Ibid., p. 49.

24 Bettina Stangneth: *Eichmann before Jerusalem – The unexamined life of a mass murderer*, London: Vintage 2016, *passim*.

25 Hannah Arendt: *Organized Guilt*, in: *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, New York et al.: Harcourt, Brace & Company 1994, p.129.

Hitler biographer Ian Kershaw summed up this development with the simple and apt sentence: “The road to Auschwitz was built by hate but paved with indifference.”<sup>26</sup>

Written in 2016. First Published: El mal como omnipotencia: ir más allá de los límites, in: Antonio Gómez Ramos/Cristina Sánchez Muñoz (eds.): *Confrontando el mal. Ensayos sobre violencia, memoria y democracia*, Madrid: Ed. Plaza y Valdés 2016, pp. 51–68.

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26 Ian Kershaw: *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933–1945*, Oxford University Press 2002, p. 277.

### 3. The Temptations of Lying

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Lying is by no means a new phenomenon of human action. It is practised in both the private and the public realm, as well as in politics. Psychological research has shown that we lie as often as 200 times a day, while Austrian scientist Peter Stiegnitz introduced the scientific study of lies or mentiology. It distinguishes five forms of lying: the self-deceptive lie to suppress uncomfortable truths; the white lie to keep friendship unharmed; the prestige lie to impress people; the anxiety lie to avoid the disagreeable consequences of one's own actions, and the unscrupulous lie to deceive, disadvantage, misinform or mislead others for self-benefit.<sup>1</sup> One could add the obsessive, pathological lie or *pseudologia fantastica*, as in the case of a man in Switzerland who dressed as an orthodox Jew in the 1980s and 1990s, inventing and living out a life story as a child survivor of the Holocaust in Auschwitz.<sup>2</sup>

A lie cannot exist without the truth. It is a “parasite of the truth”<sup>3</sup>, its opposite and frequently its partner. In ancient times, Plato approved of lying to others for the benefit of the common weal.<sup>4</sup> During the Renaissance, Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* declared dissimulation to be the duty of courtly conduct, while Machiavelli saw lies and violence as a legitimate means of domination in defence of the republic and Torquato Accetto, whose work *On Honest Dissimulation* was published in 1641, recommended placing a “veil of honest darkness” over life's sad truths. In modern times, Leo Strauss distinguished between the philosopher's truth reserved

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1 Werner Stangl Mentilogie, in *Online Lexikon für Psychologie und Pädagogik*. <http://lexikon.stangl.eu/6008/mentilogie/> (2022/10/3).

2 Daniel Ganzfried ... *alias Wilkomirski*. *Die Holocaust-Travestie. Enthüllung und Dokumentation eines literarischen Skandals*, Berlin Jüdische Verlagsanstalt 2002.

3 Simone Dietz *Die Kunst des Lügens. Eine sprachliche Fähigkeit und ihr moralischer Wert*, Reinbek Rowohlt 2003, pp. 43–44. – Maria Bettetini *Eine kleine Geschichte der Lüge. Von Odysseus bis Pinocchio*, Berlin: Wagenbach 2003.

4 Plato: *Politeia*, Book III.

for the ruler and pious myths and illusions, i.e.<sup>5</sup> religion and morals, alleged to be good for the masses.<sup>6</sup>

Philosophy was more purist: St. Augustin refused to accept lies or any excuse for lying, while Kant strongly declared with reference to metaphysics and politics that lies always harm someone else, “if not some other particular man, still it harms mankind generally, since it vitiates the source of justice”<sup>7</sup>. With this argument he rejected Benjamin Constant’s reasoning that lying would be legitimate if a murderer, for example, were to enquire about the location of a potential victim.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, adopted a radically different perspective. Rebellious against conventional morals and the corresponding practices, he considered lies to be business as usual and truth a construct of illusions. “This art of dissimulation reaches its peak in man. Deception, flattering, lying, deluding, talking behind the back, putting up a false front, living in borrowed splendour, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, playing a role for others and for oneself – in short, continuous fluttering around the solitary flame of vanity.” According to Nietzsche, men “are deeply immersed in illusions and in dream images; their eyes merely glide over the surface of things and see ‘forms’. Their senses nowhere lead to truth; on the contrary, they are content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to engage on the back of things. “What then is truth”, asks Nietzsche, and replies: “A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms ... Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions – they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force...” And he concludes that we are dealing with a “great columbarium of concepts, the graveyard of perceptions”<sup>8</sup>. It is not Nietzsche’s intention here to nihilistically question all access to truth, but rather to offer the stoic man of reason to lay aside “his masterpiece of deception” and “with dignified, symmetrical features” even “when a real storm cloud thunders above him”, to walk “with slow steps ... from beneath it”. In other words, not to be a slave to concepts and the game of creating them, but to acquire instead the independence of the non-conformist in both thought and action.

This is the path Arendt chooses. Unlike Kant’s formal analysis and Nietzsche’s perspective of cultural and epistemological criticism, Arendt concentrates on the lie as a political phenomenon, simultaneously discussing the existential-philosophical

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5 Leo Strauss: *What is Political Philosophy and other Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; New ed, 1988.

6 See Robert Pippin: “Strauss believed that good statesmen have powers of judgment and must rely on an inner circle. The person who whispers in the ear of the King is more important than the King. If you have that talent, what you do or say in public cannot be held accountable in the same way.” Cited in: Hersh, S. M.: *Selective Intelligence*. Donald Rumsfeld has his own special sources. Are they reliable? In: *The New Yorker*, May 12, 2003.

7 Immanuel Kant: *On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives*, 1797.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche: *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, 1873.

dimensions of the lie and the truth. This against the backdrop of the heated debate on her report of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, an experience that confronted her with the significance of factual truth and truth-telling, and the exposure of the truth about the Vietnam War waged by the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, which led her to raise the question of the temptation to lie in politics. We cannot ignore that the lie in the guise of a so-called “post-truth” has currently taken on a new form. Can Arendt’s analysis help us to deal with the lies that are prevalent in contemporary politics and society today?

In answer to this question, I will discuss firstly, Arendt’s position on truth and lies in politics and human existence, secondly, the new “post-truth” phenomenon of fake news, conspiracy theories and populist propaganda, thirdly, the underlying conditions of this post-truth and where they differ from those of the political lie Arendt faced in her time, and finally, I would like to present Arendt’s concept of qualitative pluralism as an effective antidote to “post-truth”.

### Arendt’s Position on Truth and Lies

Arendt’s essay on “Truth and Politics” was published in 1964, shortly after her report on the Eichmann trial appeared, while “Lying in Politics” came out in 1971 following publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times*. Each essay was a response to a current debate. Arendt regularly responded to the challenges of the day and saw this as her civic responsibility, one that forced her to think, to judge and, at least as an observer and author, to act. In the course of a discussion with friends she declared: “What is the subject of our thought? Experience! Nothing else! And if we lose the ground of experience then we get into all kind of theories.”<sup>9</sup> All her writings were triggered by current events.

The two essays are closely linked. Given Arendt’s pathos about a new beginning and about political action, anyone who hopes to find a definition of politics that is bound to truth and effectively excludes lying will be sorely disappointed. Her two basic insights on truth and lies are: The truth is apolitical, whether it appears in the shape of historical facts, i.e. as factual truth that is immovable and cannot be destroyed by any attempt to conceal it, or in the shape of a conviction, as a truth of reason, which, pronounced to be the only valid truth, becomes tyrannical and apolitical, and is directed against human plurality. Error, illusion, or pure opinion are the opposite of the truth of reason; the opposite of a factual truth is a lie.

In comparison to truth, lies are structurally closer to action. “The deliberate denial of factual truth – the ability to lie – and the capacity to change facts – the ability

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9 Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, in: Melvyn A. Hill (ed.): *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, New York: St. Martin’s Press 1979, p. 308.

to act – are interconnected; they owe their existence to the same source: imagination.”<sup>10</sup> Action and lying come from the same mental source, a place in the mind where we distance ourselves from reality and truth. When Arendt defined *enlarged mentality* in her posthumous writings as the capacity to imagine an abundance of plural opinions through which common sense is set in motion and universally valid judgements are made, she knew it also had the potential to serve the development of non-plural thinking, disparate judgements, dissimulation and concealment from the public eye. Hence her statement on thinking as dangerous, but not thinking as far more dangerous, clearly evidenced in the case of conformists or careerist bureaucrats such as Eichmann.

The truth can be uncomfortable and is not always convenient. In everyday life, a small lie tends to be the lubricant that prevents processes from stalling. Not always telling the truth, not saying everything that could be said, forms the basis of our daily dealings and political diplomacy. It allows for smoother cooperation. But there are factual truths that dare not become the victim of diplomacy: historical truths such as the genocide of the Armenians by the Ottoman authorities, or the mass murder of Jews under the German Nazi government. In Arendt’s view, denying these facts means watering them down into opinions so as to strip the truth of its mandatory nature. There is a strong link between the conscious negation of facts and action, which is generally guilty of negating facts in the interests of unfettered behaviour. Here, one advantage the liar has is knowing beforehand what people want to hear, which is often something much more plausible, more appealing to reason, than reality.<sup>11</sup> The ardent nationalist cannot accept the fact that the Armenians were massacred as security measures of the Ottoman Empire. The fact that the Vatican pursued a pro-fascist policy during World War II was highly unpleasant for many Catholics after the war, while the French were reassured by the declaration that despite the shameful collaboration with Nazi Germany, France belonged to the victors. Since historical facts – bare facts – always require interpretation, they are vulnerable. Arendt’s portrayal of Eichmann and of the Jewish councils caused an outcry among the survivors: her report on his trial in Jerusalem described Eichmann not as a monster, but as someone whose inability to question or think for himself manifested itself in the trite language he used, which was riddled with clichés. Arendt described the cooperation of the Jewish councils installed by the Nazis in the occupied countries as a very dark moment in Jewish history. Facing up to these uncomfortable truths caused her tremendous anguish. The portrayal of Eichmann as a monster and of the victims as completely innocent would have been much more palatable. In a letter to Arendt, her friend Helen Wolff quoted from the speech delivered by Socrates

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10 Hannah Arendt: Lying in Politics, in: *Crises of the Republic*, San Diego et al.: Harcourt Brace & Company 1972, p. 5.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

in his own defence: “Don’t be angry with me when I speak the truth”<sup>12</sup> – but many were angry with her. Since time immemorial, the bringer of bad news has always been punished. Those who succumb to this threat, however, are treading dangerous ground: “What is at stake here is this common and factual reality itself, and this is indeed a political problem of the first order.”<sup>13</sup>

In summary, according to Arendt this means that “our ability to lie – but not necessarily our ability to tell the truth – belongs among the few obvious, demonstrable data that confirm human freedom. ... It is this freedom that is abused and perverted through mendacity.”<sup>14</sup>

A striking example of this is the lie about the Tonkin incident that led to the United States engaging directly in the Vietnam War, supposedly in self-defence. This lie was used for propaganda at home and especially for the purpose of deceiving Congress. New in the context of the Vietnam era, according to Arendt, was then dispensing with the idea that reality had to be concealed by a lie. Instead, facts and opinions were manipulated to such an extent that the difference between truth and lie was no longer visible. It was all about the *image* of the invincible United States. Warfare had detached itself completely from reality and depended on “problem solvers”, cyberneticists and futurologists. Unlike the lie as a parasite of truth with expert knowledge of it, the Vietnam War and its transformation of the truth also bore witness to the loss of the reality of the war and the conditions in Southeast Asia at the time. Deceiving the opposition and the voters led to self-deception, the most dangerous form of lie.<sup>15</sup> The American president, surrounded by advisors, seemed to be the very person who was most manipulated and most isolated in his own country.

In Arendt’s analysis, three protagonists are responsible for the derealization and fiasco of the Vietnam War: the intellectuals who were keen to act politically as problem solvers, the isolated and unsuspecting president, and the lack of monitoring activities by the senate, all of which made it impossible for the separation of powers to work effectively by enabling criticism, defending the truth and putting a stop to derealization.

Already the fundamental difference between these circumstances and the current “post-truth” situation is apparent. I will address this in the next section.

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12 Hannah Arendt *Wie ich einmal ohne dich leben soll, mag ich mir nicht vorstellen. Briefwechsel mit den Freundinnen Charlotte Beradt, Rose Feitelson, Hilde Fränkel, Anne Weil und Helen Wolff*, ed. by Ingeborg Nordmann and Ursula Ludz, Munich Piper 2017, p. 593.

13 Hannah Arendt: Truth and Politics, in: *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 232.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 249.



## The New So-called “Post-truth” Phenomenon with Fake News, Conspiracy Theories and Populist Propaganda

The Vietnam War lie was a lie organized by the ruling circles and their intellectuals in the sense of Leo Strauss, and we encounter it again in the amateur lie about the alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which the United States proclaimed in the UN security council in 2002 to justify their planned invasion.

Current lies are quite a different matter. No longer presented by the government for the alleged good of the nation, lies are now a double act: practised by politicians and certain sections of the population. Their common aim is to change the balance of power, not by using the enlightening nature of truth-telling to defend reality, but on the contrary by de-realizing reality with the help of lies. Communication developments through the Internet using social media allows for information exchange and the creation of pressure groups to a hitherto unknown extent and with breathtaking speed. The Australian political scientist John Keane coined the term “post-truth” to describe the obvious transgression of the standard of truthfulness valid up to now. A “post-truth” differs from a lie in this case, whereby a lie is merely one of several means of confronting the truth with other truths, with “alternative facts”, as US President Trump’s advisor Kellyanne Conway called them. Factual truths are dissolved into opinions and vice versa, opinions become facts, alternative facts. During his first presidential year, Trump made 2000 false statements, that is between five and six each day. According to Keane, “post-truth” consists of lies, bullshit, buffoonery, gaslighting, and endless exaggeration.<sup>16</sup> This characterization applies notably to the United States government, which has abandoned the traditional relationship between truth and lie.

Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz claimed that Trump mocks “any principle and any axiom of communicative action and rationality in the public space: He lies constantly and disregards the principle of at least giving the impression of speaking the truth. He challenges the validity of science and consequently the existence of objective criteria by which competing claims can be evaluated. He vigorously challenges the notion of a common world for all men and women. For him, there is only one world, comprised of people who support him and his interests – his denial of global warming is but one example of this. His communication with other nations shows that he is not even interested in pretending to work towards a common understanding.”<sup>17</sup> Whether Mexico, the EU, NATO, North Korea or China – Trump’s statements change constantly for no plausible reason. He never tires of emphasizing that regardless of the challenge he is the greatest, the most knowledgeable and the best. “He gives his own personal feelings free rein, be they feelings of hurt or the desire for revenge,

16 John Keane: *Reflections on Post-Truth*, conference at the WZB, 17 January 2018.

17 Eva Illouz Interview, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 30 January 2017.

making him a private person in charge of the country.”<sup>18</sup> In a similar manner, populist parties and politicians in Europe seek to destroy truth with propaganda: Marine Le Pen’s fake news videos to discredit state media during the electoral campaign; at a time when thousands of Syrian refugees were arriving in Germany, the newspaper report falsely claiming that the young daughter of Russian immigrants had been kidnapped and raped by men who looked like Arabs, which led the Russian community in Berlin to call for a mass demonstration; the designation of the media as “the lying press” and the denial of global warming; the claim by a growing number of people, 15 000 to date, that the German Empire had never been dissolved and that therefore no one in Germany today was obliged to follow the rules of the authorities (many in this group are armed, one police officer has been killed to date).

The boundaries between truth, lies, denial of reality, invented facts, and anti-Semitism and racism are blurred. It is only a short step from the xenophobic assertion that Germany has become the target of Islamization to the racist claim that refugees are causing a demographic transformation that will culminate in the genocide of the “white race”. Conspiracy theories thrive in such a climate and are highly effective when it comes to undermining truth and reality: from the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” to the alleged truth about 9/11, or the claim that the condensation trails left by planes are in reality “chemtrails” laced with chemical additives to reduce the size of the population. In contrast to lies, conspiracy theories offer an enclosed parallel world in which nothing happens by chance, nothing is what it seems to be, and everything is connected to everything else. The conspirators are the elites, ranging from the Queen, the Rothschilds, and the German chancellor to the Illuminati or freemasons, or all of them combined. Those who enter these parallel worlds are largely impervious to criticism, and the critics are part of the conspiracy, further confirming its existence.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Conditions that Led to “Post-truth” in Contrast to the Political Lie that Arendt Faced in Her Time**

I have already discussed the fundamental distinction between a state lie and the enlightening nature of truth-telling in defence of reality, in contrast to populist lies that see politicians and certain sections of the population working together in an attempt to destroy reality. How come this strategy is so successful within large parts

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18 Ibid.

19 Leonie Feuerbach Das Muster der Verschwörung, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 30 October 2017. See also Michael Butter “Nichts ist, wie es scheint” *Über Verschwörungstheorien*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2018.

of the population? Eva Illouz interprets Trump's election not so much a "result of ideological convictions (apart from a minority), but rather of an immense rage that has accumulated in American society without an addressee."<sup>20</sup> Unlike in Arendt's time, criticism here does not serve constructive change for the future. On the contrary, it serves to reject change, not in the sense of utopia or heterotopia, but *retrotopia*, to borrow Zygmunt Bauman's term. In his view, the current historical phase is marked by "back-to tendencies", "notably the rehabilitation of tribal models of community, the resort to the image of an original/unspoiled 'national identity', whose destiny is predetermined by non-cultural factors and those that are immune to culture." This tendency is enhanced by the prevailing belief in the social sciences and among popular opinion that "there are essential, non-negotiable *sine qua non* preconditions for a 'civilizing order'".<sup>21</sup> This popular but illusionary notion of a cast-iron cultural identity has now reached racist circles, with the "Identitarian Movement" in Austria, Germany and France demanding that all peoples should stay in their own nation.

The Edelman Trust Barometer survey carried out in twenty countries in 2017 found a high degree of insecurity among the population and a lack of trust in the media and information. 63 % said they were unable to distinguish between quality journalism and fake news; 80 % feared that fake news would influence elections, and 50 % listened to the news less than once a week.<sup>22</sup>

According to Bauman, *retrotopia* is the result of a general uncertainty caused by the delimitation of job markets, wars and migration, political and social insecurities, the end of an optimistic future, or indeed of a safe future, and the death of the great narratives such as liberalism or socialism. Furthermore, familiar values and role behaviour are undergoing a shift. In Eastern Germany, for example, a fundamental insecurity of middle-aged and older men has been observed with regard to their role behaviour following the reunification of Germany. They in particular are the men who support right-wing parties and movements.<sup>23</sup> Their *retrotopia* emerges where former male values predominated, such as physical strength, leadership and the binary problem-solving form of the either-or alternative. Everything Eva Illouz described in her Adorno lectures in Frankfurt in 2004 about "feelings in capitalist times"<sup>24</sup> disconcerts these men: the therapeutic society and its narrative of personal responsibility and self-realization, the vast attention given to the role as victim, emotionalization of the product world and de-emotionalization of privacy, as

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20 Eva Illouz: Interview, op. cit.

21 Zygmunt Bauman *Retrotopia*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2017, pp. 17–18.

22 *Edelman Trust Barometer*, <https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer> (2022/10/3)

23 Martin Machowecz Oh, Ostmann! In *Die Zeit*, 29 September 2017.

24 Eva Illouz *Gefühle in Zeiten des Kapitalismus*, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 2007.

well as the “transformation of the public arena into a showcase for privacy, emotion and intimacy”.<sup>25</sup>

This general sense of disconcertion leads to a longing for unambiguousness, not for plurality, interdependencies and relations, but rather for the either-or truth, the *I* among the *We* against *Them*, the others. It is the search for a truth that lies in unambiguousness and interprets reality from this perspective and sensitivity.

In the quest for unambiguousness there is a rejection and active combatting of all things insecure: experts, the media, refugees, the European Union, the Euro and referendums for greater economic cooperation, for example with Ukraine. It is easy to find like-minded people on the Internet and create a comfort zone, an echo chamber, a hall of mirrors. “Free from the unsettling and discouraging cacophony of reality, the comfort zone is a place where nothing else is heard but the noise produced by oneself, nothing is seen but the reflections of what is similar to oneself.”<sup>26</sup> Here, the feeling of sovereignty and control returns; likewise the sense of no longer being a helpless victim, but one with the right to defence by any means. The emotion that sustains this self-isolation is rage for its own sake; when it turns to violence, then for the sake of violence. Ordinary citizens are capable of attacking their fellow citizens with hate and lies in a manner hitherto unknown.<sup>27</sup>

On the political level, this orientation leads to a revoking of plurality and the splitting of society. Populist movements declare themselves to be the genuine representatives of the “people”, at the same time excluding all others as non-people and as enemies of the people. Since a society’s democratic-republican constitution rests on and institutionalizes the plurality of both opinion and action, revoking it inevitably weakens its institutions. This is clearly visible in the current efforts of populist governments in Poland and Hungary to undermine the separation of powers to the advantage of the executive. Arendt’s statement that freedom is the meaning of politics implies that without the practice of plural, diverse thought and action, freedom would wither away.

Liberalism, at least in its characterization by Rawls, fails to provide a viable alternative.<sup>28</sup> Up to now, we have for the most part seen inventories of democratic

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25 Ibid., p. 160.

26 Zygmunt Bauman: *Retrotopia*, op. cit., p. 184.

27 See the report of a German journalist who was constantly persecuted because he reported as an eye-witness on the terrorist attack in Nice and a short time later from the terrorist attack in Munich, but at the same time rejected conspiracy theories which claimed that the attacks were organized by an international conspiracy in order to conquer the world. Richard Gutjahr, in: *Die Zeit*, 18 January 2018, p. 6.

28 See Regina Kreide: The Silence of Political Liberalism, in: *Eurozine*, 31 May 2016, <http://www.eurozine.com/the-silence-of-political-liberalism/> (2022/10/3) See also the criticism of neo-liberalism and its disastrous depoliticizing consequences for Europe by Jan Zielonka: *Counter-Revolution. Liberal Europe in Retreat*, Oxford University Press 2018.

institution deficits in terms of legitimacy and agility, including *Post-democracy* by Collin Crouch and *Democracy without Demos* by Catherine Colliot-Thélène. Thoughts on greater participation have been suggested by Claus Leggewie, for example, and a reform of the electoral system in favour of the lottery procedure proposed, among others, by David Van Reybrouck.<sup>29</sup> There is, however, an absence of ideas that see this era of change as the interrelationship between globalization, *retrotopia*, and a shift in economic and political power at international level.

Since *retrotopia* is directed against a globalization that affects us all, it is a global occurrence rather than a phenomenon exclusive to a number of individual states. It merges with traditional autocracy methods of organization and forms sustainable governments. As John Keane points out, the focus of international trade and the global economy is gradually shifting eastwards, to a region extending from Turkey and Saudi Arabia to India, Southeast Asia and China, where economic growth rates will have the potential to give legitimacy and stability to “despotisms”, as Keane calls them. This process is enhanced by the fact that Europe’s strength and importance for the global economy and world politics is diminishing to a similar degree. The same holds true for the United States in the wake of the Obama administration. This vast region in the East is clearly not pursuing the long tradition of European Enlightenment or an enlightened understanding of politics, so that neither Tocqueville nor Montesquieu can help with absorbing the situation.<sup>30</sup> Keane observed:

These despotisms ... have their own ‘reality’ – we resemble the blind men examining different part of an elephant’s body in the dark and on the basis of traditional knowledge attempting to grasp what kind of creature it is. Undoubtedly, we need to rethink the old concept of despotism. We erroneously tend to perceive despotism as a political system in which violence vents its fury unrestrained ... New despotisms are different, more subtle, much more efficiently organized and focused on stability.<sup>31</sup>

Are we dealing with a new form of despotism? Are we in the same situation as Tocqueville, who at the intersection of aristocracy and democracy was forced to admit that “Our heritage was left to us without a testament”?

Arendt’s concept of qualitative pluralism marks a position beyond neo-liberalism and authoritarianism, that is, beyond a quantitative interpretation of pluralism

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29 Collin Crouch: *Post Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity 2004; Catherine Colliot-Thélène: *Democracy and Subjective Rights: Democracy Without Demos*, Colchester UK: ECPR press 2017; Patrizia Nanz / Claus Leggewie: *Die Konsultative. Mehr Demokratie durch Bürgerbeteiligung*, Berlin: Wagenbach 2016; David Van Reybrouck: *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy*, London: Bodley Head 2016.

30 John Keane Die neuen Despotien. Vorstellungen vom Ende der Demokratie, in *Merkur* 69 (790), 2015, pp. 18–31.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 29f.

as merely a multitude of different people and opinions, on the one hand, and beyond the desire for simplification and unambiguousness, on the other. The seemingly extreme juxtaposition of an unlimited mass and a restriction on diversity through leadership leaves room for the collective and the individual, but not for distinction and personality. In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt defined the “fact of human plurality” as “the basic condition of both action and speech” and characterized this plurality as “the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood.”<sup>32</sup> This existential duality is the basis of civilized society. Its institutions, the separation of powers, the public realm and any form of opinion-making must guarantee room for its development. As a matter of interest, the concept of plurality also contradicts that of the sovereign nation state in favour of the federation concept as a further pivotal form of vesting the powers of government in separate bodies.<sup>33</sup> Arendt is certain that the stubbornness of facts is superior to all power constellations. Even totalitarian ideology, with its large-scale attempt to substitute reality entirely with its compelling logic, failed.

But this calls for protagonists to defend truth and reality. The proximity of the necessary interpretation of factual truths to grasp their meaning and the falsification of facts to avoid unpleasant consequences clearly testifies to the importance of the independence of those who judge. Journalists and historians must remain independent and cannot become lobbyists. Their personalities hinge on their veracity, their integrity and their independence. They help persistent facts to withstand power. It seems promising that the Edelman Trust Barometer found that despite considerable confusion, 2017 saw an increase in people’s confidence in experts and quality journalism.

Arendt compared the impartial judgment of the historians with that of judges, and also with that of witnesses and professional journalists.<sup>34</sup> The separation of powers, and the independence of the judiciary, guarantees not only the impartiality of jurisdiction but also, in its field of competence, the space of truth. Therefore, the attacks of autocrats against the constitution and the independence of the judiciary are so alarming. They undermine truth in favour of the arbitrariness of majorities.

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32 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Meridian 1958, p. 156.

33 Cf. chapter 13 in this volume: Federalism – A Hidden Treasure.

34 Hannah Arendt: Truth and Politics, op. cit., p. 255.

Therefore the calculated attacks against the independence of judiciary weaken the key elements of the republic: democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.<sup>35</sup>

And Arendt adds another aspect: it not only holds true for professional journalists, judges and historians, but for all of us, the citizens who shape civil society by our actions and judgements. The basics of a republic, which once were discussed and adopted by constitutionally established authorities like parliaments and courts, have to be discussed critically time and again. Just as freedom only exists when it is practiced, other republican values can only be defended when they are discussed and reinforced anew in concrete contexts. Why is torture generally forbidden, even though you think under certain circumstances it might be able to rescue a life? Why is there a right to asylum even when hundreds of thousands make use of it at the same time? Why does a republic need an independent judiciary? Why do we allow freedom of speech, even for views that we cannot agree with at all?

Finally, Arendt speaks of the “joys and gratifications of free company” which “are to be preferred to the doubtful pleasures of holding domination.”<sup>36</sup> This joy is the emotional side of independent judgement, and what unites these men and women here is their discerning ability to judge not only other people’s opinions but also the quality of other people. With whom we want to be together, does not depend on political programmes or declarations, but on the personality of others, on their integrity. The idea goes back to Kant and before him to the early Enlightenment. It clearly contradicts our values and our practice of utilitarianism, our individualism and conformism and our only quantitatively understood plurality. This is the path Arendt offers as a solution to the current crisis.

Written 2018. First published: The Temptations of Lying, in: *Russian Sociological Review*, 2018, vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 27–38.

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35 Susanne Baer, judge at the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany, declared at a meeting of the Venice Commission: “The talk and acts that need to worry us today are not just critical. Rather, they are attacks on the foundation of constitutionalism, with the intent to do away with courts that deserve the name. This happens when people, or governments, refuse to comply with rulings from the ECHR or reject the very idea of the ICC, which keeps happening. Then such fundamental rejection, which is different from critique, is not the problem of that one court alone. Rather, it is the problem of all who care for constitutionalism.” Council of Europe (ed.): *Venice Commission: Joint Council on Constitutional Justice. Mini Conference Courageous Courts: Security, Xenophobia and Fundamental Rights*, Karlsruhe, Germany, 19 May 2017, p. 17.

36 Hannah Arendt: *Truth and Politics*, op. cit. p. 242.

## 4. “Ice cold”. The Way to Totalitarianism

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There have been various attempts to define a totalitarian form of rule. Among the undisputed classics are the studies of Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, and those of Hannah Arendt. In their work *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*<sup>1</sup>, Friedrich and Brzezinski presented a typology of totalitarianism whose core elements are ideology, a mass party, a terror system, the state monopoly of the means of mass communication and the use of the armed forces, and surveillance and control of the economy. Since then, numerous critiques and additions have addressed the question of whether this approach adequately describes a fascist regime such as that of Mussolini in Italy, or the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death, and the GDR – apart from many ideologically motivated attempts to save the idea of socialism by explaining Stalinism as a bureaucratically degenerated system or to relativise the crimes of Nazi Germany by referring to Stalin’s totalitarianism.

In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt starts from a different question: not what characterises a totalitarian regime, but what are the reasons for its emergence in a non-totalitarian society, and how did it become what it eventually was. Or, as Arendt retrospectively describes the emotional impulse of her writing: “It was, at any rate, the first possible moment to articulate and to elaborate the questions with which my generation had been forced to live for the better part of its adult life: What happened? Why did it happen? How could it have happened?”<sup>2</sup>

In her search for answers to these questions, Arendt inevitably enters the territory of several disciplines: historical and cultural studies, individual and social psychology (without explicitly mentioning these fields) and political science. Arendt’s questions determine which scientific disciplines are touched upon, not the other way around: the discipline does not determine which questions may be asked. And since for Arendt there is no determinism that determines the course of history, one

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1 Carl J. Friedrich / Zbigniew Brzezinski: *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.

2 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New Edition, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World 1966, p. viii.



cannot assume an origin that necessarily led to the new form of rule of totalitarianism. "I therefore talk only of 'elements', which eventually crystallise into totalitarianism," she explained in a reply to Eric Voegelin.<sup>3</sup>

The metaphor of crystallising is not used by Arendt by chance. Metaphors have great significance in her work for denoting phenomena and processes for which there are (as yet) no terms, and in this case Arendt is referring to how a perception becomes clearer and develops fixed and definite forms.

Arendt was not content with describing total domination as such but was concerned with deciphering the process of its crystallisation. In doing so, it becomes clear that simple answers are not enough, for example, to explain the Holocaust in terms of 19th century anti-Semitism and racism. It is not enough to trace the Nazis' war of world views back to 19th-century nationalism, to explain the Nazis' ideology with 19th-century world views, the population's receptivity to Nazism with Hitler's seductive power or the mass marches with an extreme politicisation that had already begun in the Weimar Republic. Arendt contradicts all this and develops her own detailed theory on numerous aspects of this crystallisation process. Unfortunately, Arendt rarely provided information about the method of her work. Only once in a manuscript she left behind, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism", Arendt explained:

The task of the social scientist is to find the historical and political background of anti-Semitism, but under no circumstances to conclude that Jews are only stand-ins for the petty bourgeoisie or that anti-Semitism is a surrogate of an Oedipus complex, or whatnot. Cases in which people consciously tell lies and, to remain with our example, pretend to hate Jews while in fact they want to murder the bourgeoisie, are very rare and easily detectable. In all other cases, self-understanding and self-interpretation is the very foundation of all analysis and understanding. ... Yet while our standards of scientific accuracy have constantly grown and are higher today than at any previous time our standards and criteria for true understanding seem to have no less constantly declined.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Hannah Arendt: A Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, New York: Schocken 1994, p. 405.

4 Hannah Arendt: On the Nature of Totalitarianism. An Essay in Understanding, in: *Essays in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 339. – At a conference on totalitarianism in 1953, organised by Carl J. Friedrich, Arendt declared that total rule was a new form of rule. "This conclusion seems inevitable; yet it is extremely daring. For throughout our history there have been few forms of government, all of them already known to and described by the ancients. It seems so unlikely that we of all people should be confronted with a novel form of government. This doubt, which certainly is legitimate, has given rise to certain descriptions of totalitarianism, usually couched in psychological or sociological terms, in which totalitarian government appears as some more radical form of something already known. It is indeed true that the novelty of totalitarian government reveals itself clearly only if one considers its political institutions and modes of action." Carl J. Friedrich: *Totalitarianism. Proceedings of a Conference held at*

Arendt ties this "true understanding" to two phenomena that play a key role in the existential philosophy of the first half of the 20th century: *Experience* and *World*. For Arendt, experience not only means experiencing or suffering something, but also reflecting on and judging these experiences. The basis for such judgement, however, is the relationship to other people, what Arendt calls worldliness or being in the world. People's sense of reality depends on the extent to which they can have experiences and be in the world. Regardless of how close or far they are from reality, their thoughts and actions are always intentionally filled with meaning. It is from this theoretical foundation that Arendt undertook her analysis of the emergence and characteristics of total domination. Understanding total domination means understanding people's meaningful actions and relating them to total domination, and thus understanding how and why the totalitarian movements, especially National Socialism, came to power with great popular support.

In the following, I will outline the changes to the loss of experience and world and their replacement by ideology and terror, as discussed by Arendt in detail. Since Arendt refrains from psychological explanations and seems to look exclusively at the spiritual dimension of ideology and worldlessness, I will then go into the psychological dispositions in the Weimar Republic under the catchword of the "behavioural doctrines of coldness", which gives Arendt's analyses an interesting confirmation.

## The Loss of Experience and the World

The First World War, as a modern, mechanised war operating with poison gas and entirely unheroic, represents a caesura that is representative of far-reaching social changes. In Germany, it is the end of the Empire and the introduction of democracy without majority support. For Arendt, this caesura means a rupture of tradition through loss of authority, which in the 1920s is accompanied by a disintegration of the old class society and the emergence of an anonymous mass society, on a European level by the disintegration of great empires and the emergence of national minorities without their own rights and of refugee flows without citizenship, the stateless. Walter Benjamin described the loss of experience in and after World War I: "For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers."<sup>5</sup> This means the dissolution of interpersonal ties, existence as stateless persons and refugees,

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*the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, March 1953, Boston: Harvard University Press 1954, p. 75f.

5 Walter Benjamin: *Experience and Poverty* (1933), Translated by Rodney Livingstone. <https://www.atlasofplaces.com/index/277ES>. (Accessed 2022/10/18)

and the emergence of the feeling of homelessness and abandonment. “Loneliness,” says Arendt, “in such a world is no longer a psychological matter to be handled with such beautiful and meaningless terms as ‘introvert’ or ‘extrovert’. Loneliness, as the concomitant of homelessness and uprootedness, is, humanly speaking, the very disease of our time.”<sup>6</sup> If, under these conditions, we were to condemn people who take refuge in propaganda promises as stupid or weak, we would be making it too easy for ourselves. “These people are nothing of the sort. They have only escaped the despair of loneliness by becoming addicted to the vice of solitude.”<sup>7</sup> Loneliness and abandonment are not the same thing for Arendt. In solitude there is still the dialogue with oneself, but in abandonment pure “logicality, mere reasoning without regard for facts and experience”,<sup>8</sup> can exert an irresistible attraction.

Such an existence between abandonment and loneliness characterises the modern mass. According to Arendt, the strength of the German Communist Party and Social Democracy in the Weimar Republic, as well as the existence of other major parties, belies the disintegration of class society and the emergence of a large part of the population that was not organised in any party, trade union, professional associations, etc. The slumbering majorities were transformed into “one great unorganised, structureless mass of furious individuals who had nothing in common except their vague apprehension that the hopes of party members were doomed, that, consequently, the most respected, articulate and representative members of the community were fools, ...”<sup>9</sup>. These masses came out of the First World War, according to Arendt, with a “peculiar selflessness ... as a yearning for anonymity, for being just a number and functioning only as a cog”<sup>10</sup>. This selflessness was not an expression of goodness but, on the contrary, of the feeling “that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable”<sup>11</sup>, which, however, did not produce despair but “cynical or bored indifference”<sup>12</sup> even to one’s own death.

What Arendt described here at the end of the 1940s she encountered again in Eichmann at his trial in Jerusalem. Himmler’s mass murderer “clearly bore the features of the philistine rather than of the mob man, and was not driven by passion and ready to sacrifice everything – belief, honor, dignity – on the slightest provocation”.<sup>13</sup>

The moral upheaval of the First World War and the loss of ties led to a division of the masses. For Arendt, “It is as though mankind had divided itself between those

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6 Hannah Arendt: *On the Nature of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 358.

7 Ibid.

8 ibid.

9 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 315.

10 Ibid., p. 329.

11 Ibid., p. 315.

12 Ibid., p. 316.

13 Ibid., p. 338.

who believe in human omnipotence (who think that everything is possible if one knows how to organize masses for it) and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives."<sup>14</sup>

For the organisers of the masses, Nietzsche's insight in *Beyond Good and Evil* applies:

*Proportionateness* is strange to us, let us confess it to ourselves; our itching is really the itching for the infinite, the immeasurable. Like the rider on his forward panting horse, we let the reins fall before the infinite, we modern men, we semi-barbarians—and are only in *our* highest bliss when we *are in most danger*.<sup>15</sup>

For Arendt, there are two border areas that need to be distinguished: those of modernity and those of total domination. The difference between the two, Arendt wrote to her teacher and friend Karl Jaspers, is like "between a man who sets out to murder his old aunt and people who without any direct calculations of utility ... built factories to produce corpses." And she surmised that in the process, "it is not individual human beings who are struck dead for human reasons by other individual human beings, but an organised attempt is made to eradicate the concept of man."<sup>16</sup> To do this, human beings must be made superfluous, which is more than merely using them as a means to an end or violating their human dignity. "All this ... is connected with the delusion of man's omnipotence (not simply addiction to power). If man qua man were omnipotent, then indeed it would be impossible to see why men should exist ... man's omnipotence makes men superfluous."<sup>17</sup> This difference between an addiction to power that wants to control others and omnipotence that wants to dispose of the bodies of others and their lives in a god-like way is the difference between pre-totalitarian and totalitarian society.

The thrill of the infinite, the immeasurable, which Nietzsche observed, also appears in Arendt's description of the elite's lust for evil in the aftermath of the First World War. The "anti-humanist, anti-liberal, anti-individualist and anti-cultural instincts of the *front* generation" in the Weimar Republic with their literarily sophisticated writings propagated violence, striving for power and cruelty as "the supreme capacities of men who had definitely lost their place in the universe."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, according to Arendt, the expressionism of the 1920s was a kind of "bomb" expressionism based on a philosophy of terror. And the bourgeoisie itself rejoiced in the

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14 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Preface to the First Edition, op. cit., p. vii.

15 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aphorism 224. See also chapter 2 in this volume: Phantasies of Omnipotence.

16 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence, 1926–1969* p. 69 (17 December 1946)

17 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence*, op. cit., p. 202 (4 March 1951)

18 *Ibid.*, p. 330.

unmasking of bourgeois hypocrisy, which Brecht had actually undertaken with critical intent in his *Threepenny Opera*.

The art of organising this amorphous mass fell to propaganda. Unlike conventional worldviews such as traditional anti-Semitism, it was no longer simply a matter of picking out elements of everyday experience and generalising them in such a way that they became unverifiable. Siegfried Kracauer, in his manuscript *Totalitarian Propaganda*, written in 1938 but only recently published, stated that Hitler was not concerned with representing interests but solely with conquering the masses. Kracauer quotes the propagandist Ernst Kriek: “That is why National Socialism is not party and programme, ... but a fluid and fluidising movement, which will one day flow into a new form, order and *ratio* with victory, but which must remain in flux as a pure movement until it has seized and permeated the whole of our *völkisch* living space.”<sup>19</sup>

Totalitarian propaganda, according to Arendt, was extended to include the “violence of organization”, so that the lies were accompanied by acts of the Nazis, “as though the world was dominated by the Jews and needed a counter-conspiracy to defend itself.”<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, totalitarian propaganda promises a remedy for the feeling of homelessness, anonymity and atomization of the masses. The more trust in the power of common sense and differentiated perceptions of reality dwindled, the more trust in one’s own sensory perception also dwindled and grew a “longing for fiction” a “revolt of the masses against ‘realism’, common sense and all ‘the plausibilities of the world’ (Burke) was the result of their atomization, of their loss of social status along with which they lost the whole sector of communal relationships in whose framework common sense makes sense.”<sup>21</sup>

The great fallacy of the masses is to believe that they had successfully escaped from homelessness and deceptive reality and had taken safe ground with the railing of logical coherence and the power of organisation. What they did not see was the fact that in this way, with the help of propaganda, the totalitarian movement succeeded in dominating the masses not only from the outside but also from the inside. This includes the abolition of the difference between rulers and ruled, the binding of everyone to each other by a kind of co-optation through the Aryan proof, the creation of an organised connivance and therefore also the awareness that no one is innocent anymore. Totalitarian propaganda leaves no room for manoeuvre. It is, as Kracauer writes, about “the total occupation of the zone of spontaneity; that

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19 Ernst Kriek *Nationalpolitische Erziehung*, Leipzig Armanen-Verlag 1937, p. 36. Quoted in Siegfried Kracauer *Totalitäre Propaganda*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2013, p. 38.

20 Hannah Arendt *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 362.

21 Hannah Arendt *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 352.

zone in which opinions are formed. ... In order to block the source of opinion formation, propaganda must therefore make the question disappear, which it seeks to accomplish by deliberately staging the cult of the leader and that of obedience."<sup>22</sup> It is soldierly obedience, war is the starting point and returns as totalitarian war.

With the conquest of power, the whole society can be transformed into a totalitarian organisation. The fictitious world of propaganda is now completely detached from the previous world and reduced to the essential, ideology, and the atomised society is welded together with terror and set in motion to reshape reality in the sense of the ideological assertions. Experience and the world, the two bridges to reality that had become fragile in mass society, are replaced by ideology and terror.

## Ideology and Terror

After completing her book on totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt, in contrast to the social sciences of her time, which disregarded the classics of political theory, found in Montesquieu a theory of government with the help of which total rule can be described as an independent, new form alongside the classical forms such as monarchy, aristocracy and republic. "This conclusion seems inevitable," she declared at the 1953 conference mentioned above, "yet it is extremely daring."<sup>23</sup> Following Montesquieu, Arendt distinguishes the essence and principle of this form of rule, i.e. what characterises and holds it together, and what drives action. The essence, according to Arendt, is terror, which takes the role of law, and ideology is the principle of action, not fear, as in tyranny.

"Ideologies," according to Arendt, "always assume that one idea is sufficient to explain everything in the development from a premise and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction."<sup>24</sup> With the seizure of power, the idea itself recedes into the background and the logical process as such into the foreground. Thus, under Stalin, the question of building socialism takes a back seat to the logic of the class struggle, according to which there continue to be objective class enemies under the dictatorship of the proletariat, regardless of whether they are subjectively aware of it. The purges are set in motion according to this scheme. The novel *Darkness at Noon* by the former communist Arthur Koestler is a startling depiction of this abstract logic to which an innocent senior revolutionary of the first hour submits.

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22 Siegfried Kracauer *Totalitäre Propaganda*, op. cit., p. 50f.

23 Carl J. Friedrich: *Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 76.

24 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 470.

One could speak of an ideocracy, a rule of the idea.<sup>25</sup> The idea of the superiority of socialism therefore does not shrink from stating that only in Moscow would there be an underground railway; it implies the call to make the idea a reality and to destroy all subways in the world. Only in world domination, the unlimited domination of the idea over man, can the idea receive its full validity.

Here also returns the metaphor of the crystallised form assumed by the emerging totalitarianism. In accordance with the unemotional logical operation, the laws of nature, in the case of Nazism, or of history, in the case of Stalinism, are described as merciless and Hitler prefers to speak of “ice cold reasoning”.<sup>26</sup> Perpetrators and victims cannot escape this logic. And it is this iciness, together with an unconditional incorporation into the totalitarian movement, that is demanded of the totalitarian personnel. Those who still cling to old ideas of nationalism, like the Röhm group, are eliminated. Those who want to enrich themselves, like the concentration camp commander Koch, are executed. Those who remain “decent” and function diligently, like Eichmann and Himmler, are promoted.

In the process, Arendt notices how the ideological content becomes all the more insignificant the further one looks inside the organisation. Here there are no longer any challenges from an external reality, here the struggle no longer has to be waged in favour of fiction, but “the statement, all Jews are inferior, means all Jews should be killed”.<sup>27</sup> The way into this interior leads through the sluices of the front organisation. This “functions both ways: as the façade of the totalitarian movement to the nontotalitarian world, and as the façade of this world to the inner hierarchy of the movement.”<sup>28</sup>

Finally, terror ensures that interstices between people are eliminated and that everyone moves uniformly. It is, says Arendt in another apt metaphor, like an “iron band which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man off gigantic dimensions.”<sup>29</sup> What remains when terror has welded the whole society together is a whole people as one; people in the plural no longer exist. From here it is only a step to consider the whole of society as a single field of human experimentation: the concentration camps and death camps as places for dehumanising people and making them disappear without memory, and the purges as experiments in how perpetrators can be smoothly transformed into victims.<sup>30</sup>

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25 Carl J. Friedrich: *Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 134.

26 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 471.

27 Ibid., p. 385.

28 Ibid., p. 367.

29 Ibid., p. 465f.

30 Hannah Arendt: *Mankind and Terror*, in: *Essays in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 304f.

## Cool Conduct: the Culture of Distance

Hannah Arendt did not use examples in her remarks on the 'front' generation of literati and the elite of the Weimar Republic, as she otherwise did in her book on the origins of total domination, to reflect experiences, e.g. the encounter of the European colonisers with the African population using Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*.

All the more helpful is the study by cultural scientist Helmut Lethen *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance*. It supports Arendt's theses, without referring to them, of the disorientation of the 'front' generation after WWI, of being absorbed by the masses, of de-psychologization and de-moralisation and the search for adequate behaviour that allows survival in the new world. Lethen presents the writings of various philosophers and writers of the 1920s who discuss and establish rules of conduct: Helmut Plessner, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Jünger, Werner Sermer, and the novelist and resistance activist Werner Kraus. These are not masterminds of National Socialism or Stalinism, but influential thinkers who at the same time reflect the *zeitgeist* of the 1920s.

The prevailing cultural mood in the Weimar Republic is *Neue Sachlichkeit* (*New Objectivity*). It was characterised by a matter-of-fact, documentary style, reportage and functionality. Examples include Brecht's epic theatre and Bauhaus architecture. What sounds seemingly unexcited and peaceful when describing the New Objectivity is, for Lethen, quite the opposite, an emotional reaction to the experience of war and the loss of all traditional values. This reaction led to a withdrawal from all personal revelation, interpersonal encounter and psychological interest. "Having lost the mooring of an external metaphysics, people begin scavenging the ruins of historical systems for an orienting codex of conduct, which is to say, the tools of self-stabilization."<sup>31</sup> This requires a retreat from what Lethen calls the cult of psychologization of the 19th century. According to Lethen, the emotional, expressive human being is replaced by the 'cool persona', the other-directed 'radar type', and the 'creature'.<sup>32</sup> by the physics of human relations à la Hobbes, the psychology of the outside and the depiction of man as a machine of movement. Their feelings are nothing more than motor behaviour and their character is a mere mask. Authenticity is replaced by appearance. The *New Objectivity* polemicised against the culture of conscience: Benjamin wanted to get rid of "the tremendous complication of the indebted person, the complication and binding of his guilt" and "that mythical enslavement of the per-

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31 Helmut Lethen: *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2002, p. 50.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 26.



son<sup>33</sup> and Helmut Plessner, in his writing *The Limits of Community*, pleaded against the culture of conscience in favour of a culture of shame and against the closeness of community for a distance in society.

Just as Arendt blames social disorganisation for an increasing schematism in thinking and growing influence of worldviews as new stabilisers, Lethen observes an increased tendency towards schematism and classifications from physique to handwriting and race. “When social crisis takes hold, the external voices to which individuals have attended are no longer clearly audible and the interior seat of judgment is no longer credited. In such circumstances, codes of conduct operate as written receptacles for external directives to guide individual behavior.”<sup>34</sup>

Hence the writings of Plessner *The Limits of Community*, Werner Serner *Handbrevier für Hochstapler*, Brecht *Reader for Those Who Live in Cities*, and Jünger’s essays *Der Arbeiter* and *Über den Schmerz*. Turning away from inner guilt to outer shame enables salvation through immersion in the mass where one is free from shame and touch. Society, according to Plessner, is an “open system of traffic among unconnected individuals.”<sup>35</sup> The rapidly increasing public road traffic becomes a place and a metaphor for functional behaviour, for a flow, fulfilled by the circulation of commodity and labour power, in which people no longer have any substance and are always on the alert because of the constant demand to adapt.

“The decade of the new objectivity,” writes Lethen, “introduces a figure with his hat pulled down over eyes that, in their expressive dimension, are no longer of interest.”<sup>36</sup> Thus Brecht, whom Arendt attests a “strange tendency towards anonymity” from the beginning, recommends in his *Reader for Those Who Live in Cities* to pull the hat deep into the face:

If you bump into your parents in the city of Hamburg  
 Or anywhere else (for that matter)  
 Pass them like strangers, turn the corner, don’t acknowledge them  
 Pull the hat, which they gave you, over your face  
 Don’t, oh, don’t show your face  
 Instead  
 Cover your tracks!  
 Eat the meat that’s there! Don’t save anything!  
 Enter any house, when it rains, and sit on any chair that’s there  
 But don’t remain sitting! And don’t forget your hat.  
 I’m telling you:

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33 Walter Benjamin Schicksal und Charakter, in *Gesammelte Schriften* II-1, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 1991, p. 178.

34 Helmut Lethen: *Cool Conduct*, op. cit., p. 17.

35 Ibid., p. 26.

36 Ibid., p. 31.

Cover your tracks

Whatever you say, don't say it twice.

If you find your idea with somebody else: deny it.<sup>37</sup>

In his epic theatre, Brecht is with external gestures, not concerned with the theatrical expression of inner experience. The psychologist Karl Bühler made studies on the physiognomic connection between the gaze, forehead wrinkles, and the crease of the eyelids. Jünger described the new, disciplined face of coldness and closedness, which, in contrast to the "good" and open, changeable face of the liberal world, is "closed", has "a fixed point of view" and is "one-sided, representational and rigid".<sup>38</sup>

The Romanist Werner Kraus, who organised the resistance against Hitler in the *Red Chapel* and was imprisoned, wrote a study on Gracián's *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* and the art of *simulatio* and *dissimulatio* on death row, which he survived. In doing so, he redefined the concept of the political in contrast to a politics in the segregated sphere of statecraft as the art of distinction, of drawing boundaries and dissimulation, which every fighter needs.<sup>39</sup> The political fighter acts in anonymity, refuses confessions out of sincerity, chooses masks and does not complain about alienation.

With verve, the authors advocate closure and coldness. "In nothing is man's freedom demonstrated more purely than in his distance from himself", Plessner declared.<sup>40</sup> He is supported by Nietzsche: "Only masked is man entirely real."<sup>41</sup> The painter George Grosz prided himself on his "pack-ice character".<sup>42</sup> Benjamin declared, "that precise observation becomes possible only when 'the moral personality has been put on ice'".<sup>43</sup> And Jünger wrote: "We saw that man becomes capable of defying the attack of pain to the same extent that he is able to expose himself out of himself. This standing out, this objectification and objectification of life increases uninterrupted."<sup>44</sup> Finally, the cold *persona* is to merge with cold technology. Modern man, Lethen says of Jünger, realises "the dream of synchronization between organism and technical apparatus. Its being is integrated into technology. Enclosed within an armored cell, it is the intelligence of a bullet; an electric machine replaces the functions of a central nervous system." Man is transformed into an "electric human crustacean".<sup>45</sup> Jünger calls this new, armoured machine-being a "worker" – a

37 Bertolt Brecht: Reader for Those Who Live in Cities, in: *Bertolt Brecht Poems*, 1913–1956, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim, London Routledge 1976.

38 Ernst Jünger Über den Schmerz, in *Essays I, Sämtliche Werke* Vol. 7, Stuttgart Klett-Cotta 1980, p. 165.

39 Werner Kraus *Gracián's Lebenslehre*, Frankfurt/M. Klostermann 1947, p. 80.

40 Helmut Lethen: *Cool Conduct*, op. cit., p. 58.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

44 Ernst Jünger: *On Pain*, op. cit., p. 189.

45 Helmut Lethen: *Cool Conduct*, op. cit., p. 160.

being that comes from a mechanised war of position and – Jünger’s imagination did not yet reach that far – is on its way to factory-like work at the sites of the Holocaust.

It took 20 years after the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust for the second generation, those born during and shortly after that war, to break through the perpetuation of the anonymity and armouring of the cold *persona* and its “inability to mourn” (Mitscherlich) and give the “open, changeable face” back its place in public and private life.

Written in 2016. First published: El ‘frío glacial’ de la lógica del totalitarismo, in: Luis Fernando Cardona (ed.): *Totalitarismo y paranoia. Lecturas de nuestra situación cultural*, Bogotá: P.U. Javeriana 2016, pp. 17–32.

## 5. Truth and Post-totalitarian Narratives

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Telling the truth after the destruction of the world by totalitarian rule is more difficult and more extensive than simply naming the crimes. For the worldlessness is at the same time a speechlessness that necessitates the gradual recovery of speech. But it is not this problem that I want to address here<sup>1</sup>, but the social problem of truth. Not because truth, as Arendt notes, is resistant and resists action and the change of reality<sup>2</sup>, but because it is interpreted and discussed with all awareness of the facts and is therefore exposed to the ever-present danger of relativisation and concealment. There are many reasons for such relativisation: the defence against guilt and responsibility, or inopportuneness at a given point in time.

Thus, the position on the facts of the past is by no means only about memory based on the facts, but is above all about the narratives that are formed in the wake of dealing with these facts. Adding to Arendt's statement that we only understand an event when we clothe it in a story, the point here is that narratives are collective creations of meaning into which a wide variety of controlling interests influencing the narratives can enter.

Such meaning-making takes on further significance through the more recently discussed role of generations, i.e. intergenerational memory work. We know the important work of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, which strongly influences individuals in their recollection. What is remembered is determined above all by social references. But which ones? According to recent research, they are above all family relations. Their role becomes particularly clear when one observes the change in memories over the course of three generations, while the historical facts remain more or less the same over this time.

I am concerned here with communicative memory, not with political or symbolically represented cultural memory designed for the long term. Three generations

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1 I have done this elsewhere, see Wolfgang Heuer: *Volver a hablar tras la muerte del lenguaje. Sobre los esfuerzos de aprender a hablar y la facilidad de perder el lenguaje de nuevo*, in: Camila de Gamboa / Maria Victoria Uribe (eds.): *Los silencios de la guerra*, Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario 2017, pp. 297–342.

2 Hannah Arendt: *Truth and Politics*, in: *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin Group 2006.

are involved in such communication. Aleida Assmann calls this “three-generation memory” the “short-term memory” of a society, which after 80 to 100 years “naturally dissolves again and again, to make room for the memories of subsequent generations in fluid change”.<sup>3</sup>

In the following, I will present this “three-generation memory” using Germany as an example. The Second World War ended more than 70 years ago, but the facts of the war of aggression and the Holocaust have been known since then, and the question of guilt was settled by the Nuremberg Trials. It has also been known from the beginning that the totalitarian regime did not want to wage a conventional war with victors and vanquished, but rather an ideological campaign of extermination in which there were only perpetrators and victims. I will present how the three generations have dealt with this reality in the following steps: the first generation's defence against guilt and the myth of the decent Wehrmacht in contrast to the SS; the second generation's struggle to name deed and the perpetrators and for remembrance; and thirdly, the dwindling knowledge of perpetrators, deeds, and victims among the third generation.

## Defence against Guilt

In her study of totalitarian rule as a new form of domination, Hannah Arendt emphasised that what distinguishes it from conventional dictatorships is its total control and mobilisation. “The totalitarian policy, which has completely destroyed the neutral zone in which the daily life of human beings is ordinarily lived, has achieved the result of making the existence of each individual in Germany depend either upon committing crimes or on complicity in crimes.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, at the end of the war, the population found itself in the contradictory position of being accomplices or complicit on the one hand, and having acted under orders of the Party and the government on the other. The crimes were state crimes, and so everyone could claim to have acted only on behalf of superiors and in ignorance of the entire course of the bureaucratic process. Similarly, Eichmann, who in a leading position organised the extermination of the Jews, declared in his defence that he had only been a small cog in a large machine.

The facts are known: about 50 million people died in the course of the Second World War, including about 6 million Jews, half a million Sinti and Roma, 3.3 million mainly Soviet prisoners of war and 5–7 million so-called partisans. Some 500,000

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3 Aleida Assmann *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Munich C.H.Beck 2006, p. 26.

4 Hannah Arendt: Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility, in: *Essays in Understanding*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company 1994, p. 124.

personnel were involved in the Holocaust, of which only about 6,500 were convicted in West Germany and just under 13,000 in East Germany.<sup>5</sup> The SS had 260,000 members, and at the beginning of the war in 1939, 50,000 of them were in their own administrative institutions, which were not only in charge of the concentration camps but also managed industrial enterprises.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the Nuremberg trials, 50 per cent of the population was in favour of these trials, later only 30 per cent; most thought the sentences were too severe.<sup>7</sup> In 1953, 40 percent of the staff of the Foreign Office were former Nazi party members, more than during the Third Reich. In the new secret service of the Federal Republic, about 20 percent of the employees were former NSDAP members, 5 to 8 percent had also been members of the SS, SD or SA. Among the 487 members of the second Bundestag, more than a quarter were former NSDAP members, and at times in the Ministry of the Interior two-thirds of the employees were former Nazis. Numerous perpetrators were able to work unrecognised or unprosecuted in West German companies, in some cases in management positions.<sup>8</sup>

These shameful figures reflect two things: firstly, the fact that large parts of the population were compromised but were needed in the economy and administration. Secondly, the failure of the denazification carried out by the Allies with the help of formal questionnaires, which moreover became increasingly unimportant in view of the Cold War between East and West.

What gave support to the young democracy in these circumstances was the fact that the Western Allies only allowed unencumbered persons to draft the constitution – democrats, resisters, exiles, and made sure that the first mayors had also been exonerated.

What was the attitude of the population of the time to the question of truth and narrative? The answer is: collective guilt defence. In detail, it is that one must distinguish between the decent Wehrmacht and the criminal SS, that one had been seduced by Hitler and was otherwise clueless and innocent, that one knew nothing

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5 Jörg Echternkamp *Die Verfolgung nationalsozialistischer Gewaltverbrechen*, ed. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2015, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/nationalsozialismus-zweiter-weltkrieg/der-zweite-weltkrieg/199413/die-verfolgung-nationalsozialistischer-gewaltverbrechen/> (2022/10/3)

6 Hermann Kaienburg *Die Wirtschaft der SS*, Berlin Metropol 2003.

7 Kim C. Priemel/Alexa Stiller (eds.) *NMT. Die Nürnberger Militärtribunale zwischen Geschichte, Gerechtigkeit und Rechtschöpfung*, Hamburg Hamburger Edition 2013.

8 Bodo Hechelhammer *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Über den Umgang mit SS-Personal in der Organisation Gehlen und im Bundesnachrichtendienst*. In Jan Erik Schulte, Michael Wildt (eds.) *Die SS nach 1945. Entschuldungsnarrative, populäre Mythen, europäische Erinnerungsdiskurse*, Göttingen V&R unipress 2018. – Frank Bösch / Andreas Wirsching *Hüter der Ordnung Die Innenministerien in Bonn und Ost-Berlin nach dem Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen Wallstein 2018.

about the murder of Jews and had only been a member of party organisations to prevent something worse, that one had lost everything oneself, either through the bombing of German cities or through the expulsion from the German eastern territories by Stalin, and that finally not everything in Nazi Germany had been bad: Hitler had eliminated unemployment and built the autobahn. And of course, resisters were traitors. The state commemoration of the resistance group around Stauffenberg was accepted because they were members of the decent Wehrmacht. The end of the war was described as a collapse by the majority who had been involved. It was only in 1985, 40 years later, that the Federal President von Weizsäcker was bold enough to call this a liberation.

The picture just sketched conceals the hopes and illusions of many who became members of National Socialist organisations during the Nazi era, whether out of opportunism or conviction. After 1945, people concealed membership in the NSDAP, and even more so membership in the SS. Truth and narrative fall apart, and the narrative was once again divided into a justifying narrative for the outside world, used against critics at home and abroad, and an affirmative narrative for the inside world, which was used to come to terms with the experience. Since all perception has a clearly visual aspect, there is a strong pictorial element in the construction of meaning and the foundation of memory. But the lack of images in the justifying narrative is striking. The affirmative narrative, on the other hand, was cultivated among like-minded people, e.g. among former comrades with repeated descriptions of experiences. An impression of these affirmative conversations, which are about wartime adventures, is found in the recordings of conversations of German prisoners of war in Great Britain and the USA, which were recently published.<sup>9</sup>

The first ten years were accompanied by a public silence. During a visit to Germany in 1949/50, Hannah Arendt observed that people claimed to have no time for the past because of the reconstruction of the destroyed country. The government of Adenauer, a Catholic and anti-Nazi, focused on reconciliation, not by coming to terms with the past but by keeping silent and integrating the incriminated officials. It was not until the mid-1950s, when a growing minority had a television, that numerous war films were shown. In these films, the Nazi era and the Second World War were not specifically addressed, but instead general human themes of guilt and atonement, power and resistance, and interpersonal entanglements. The war was thus trivialised and transfigured and appeared as a test of young men's mettle.<sup>10</sup>

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9 Harald Welzer / Sönke Neitzel *Soldaten Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben*. Frankfurt/ M. S. Fischer Verlag, 2012.

10 Knut Hickethier *Kriegserlebnis und Kriegsdeutung im bundesdeutschen Fernsehen der Fünfziger Jahre* in Ursula Heukenkamp (ed.) *Schuld und Sühne? Kriegserlebnisse und Kriegsdeutung in deutschen Medien der Nachkriegszeit (1945–1961)*, vol. 2, Amsterdam/Atlanta Rodopi 2001, pp. 759–775. – Irmela von der Lühe *Verdrängung und Konfrontation – die Nachkriegsliteratur*, in

Even in the film *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (The Murderers Are Among Us) by the critical director Wolfgang Staudte, the narrative is retained. The film had been shot in 1946 in the destroyed Berlin and portrays the functionaries of the post-war period as murderers and opportunists, which made the film topical and therefore unpopular at the same time; however, the Wehrmacht and the common man remain decent in this film and undamaged by the Third Reich.

In reality, those who survived the cruel war in the Soviet Union were severely traumatised. Two million soldiers returned from Russian captivity over the years, the last in 1955. If they spoke, it was to former comrades, otherwise they remained silent and burdened their families with their behaviour.

Novels in glossy magazines such as *Quick* and *Stern* vaguely hinted at links between the Wehrmacht and SS crimes, portrayed the Nazis in the Wehrmacht as harmless, and described atrocities on the side of the Allies and partisans, but not on their own side.<sup>11</sup>

From 1957 onwards, the weekly *Landser* magazines, about life as a foot-soldier, appeared on every new stand for a total of 2,800 small-volume and 1,300 large-volume issues, until their publication was discontinued in 2013. Their titles were *Overrun by the Invasion*, *Fight until the Last Hour*, or *Parachutes over Crete*. They described war scenes in which good soldiers do their duty, perform great feats and defend the homeland. The war is hard and cruel, but nothing is said about reasons and backgrounds. In the 1950s and 1960s, the circulation was half a million per weekly issue.

Bestsellers were based on the same myth, e.g. *Strafbataillon 999* (Penal Battalion) by Heinz Konsalik (1959), in which even party members in the army were decent soldiers, while SS members were the bad guys.

In all these affirmative portrayals, in which the former Wehrmacht soldiers see themselves exonerated and appreciated, there is no discussion of the National Socialist regime, nor of the expulsion and murder of the Jews. It was not until the end of the 1950s that the senselessness of the war and the personal attitude and responsibility of the individual were addressed,<sup>12</sup> and for the first time mass shootings of Jews by the SS were depicted in a TV feature film.<sup>13</sup> But it was not until more than 20 years after the end of the war that the non-Jewish writer Alfred Andersch in 1967 described the events from a Jewish perspective in his novel *Efraim*.

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Peter Richel et al. (eds.) *Der Nationalsozialismus – die zweite Geschichte*, Munich C.H.Beck 2009, pp. 243–260.

11 'Harmlose Idealisten und draufgängerische Soldaten'. Militär und Krieg in den Illustriertenromanen der fünfziger Jahre. In Hannes Heer / Klaus Naumann (eds.) *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944*, Hamburg Hamburger Edition 1997, pp. 634–650.

12 Die Brücke, 1959; *Das Dritte Reich*, WDR/SDR 1960.

13 Das Tagebuch des Jürgen Wilms, NWRV-Fernsehen Köln 1960.



## The Struggle of the Second Generation to Name the Crime and the Perpetrators and to be Remembered

The second generation comprises those born between 1939 and 1948; a minority of about 30,000 made up the later student movement of 1968. They grew up in the post-war period with parents who responded to critical enquiries from their children with the terse stereotypes of the justifying narrative.

The past remained alive in the public eye through trials: the Ulm Einsatzgruppen trial in 1958 against police officers who were active at the time and some of whom continued to be active, who had murdered over 5,000 Jewish people, the Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961, and the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt from 1963 to 1968. The trials brought the Holocaust into focus and the fact that “the murderers were among us”. At the Nuremberg Trials, in addition to Nazi functionaries and some economic functionaries, doctors had also been convicted for their experiments on human beings, but the civil service apparatus, in particular the lawyers, was left out. The fact that hundreds of former Nazi judges and prosecutors were in office was a scandal that was only uncovered by a group of Social Democratic students in Berlin. In an exhibition entitled *Unpunished Nazi Justice*, they published incriminating material about one hundred people. However, politicians and the public perceived the exhibition as a scandal that threatened to disrupt peaceful coexistence with the murderers among us. The Social-Democratic Party SPD expelled the students; they were suspected of working for the GDR – a popular argument, also later against the student movement, to defame criticism as unjustified.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the exhibition hampered Willy Brandt’s election campaign.

The politicians wanted to avoid any legal dispute and instead offered incriminated lawyers the possibility to retire early while retaining their full salaries. 147 judges and prosecutors took advantage of this option. This policy of silence and financial compensation for perpetrators not only meant that not a single judge in the Federal Republic was legally convicted of judicial crimes committed in the Third Reich, but that the second generation got the impression that the defence against guilt favoured the “murderers among us”.

And in the population, the demand for an end became louder, favoured by the statute of limitations for murder after 20 years, in 1965. One had atoned enough, one could not talk about it endlessly. In several memorable parliamentary debates, on the other hand, the time limit was first extended twice, then lifted altogether in 1979. The parliamentary debate was memorable because of the political and moral level of the contributions, e.g. that of the Social Democrat Adolf Arndt:

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14 Kristina Meyer Der SDS und die “Ungesühnte Nazijustiz”. In Kristina Meyer *Die SPD und die NS-Vergangenheit 1945–1990*. Cöttingen Wallstein 2015, pp. 217–227.

The essentials were known. I had to tell the young people: If your natural mother lies on her deathbed and swears by God ... that she did not know, then I say to you: The mother just can't bring herself to say it, because it is too terrible to have known or to be able to know, but not to want to know. I know that I am partly to blame. Because you see, I didn't go out into the street and scream when I saw the Jews being taken away from our midst by the truckload. I didn't put on my yellow star and say: Me too! I can't say that I did enough. ... You can't say: I wasn't born yet, this heritage is none of my business. ... It's about not turning our backs on the mountain of guilt and disaster that lies behind us.<sup>15</sup>

The general elections of 1966, saw the former Nazi war judge Kiesinger become Federal Chancellor, which for many of the second generation was a consequence of the silence, denial and glossing over of the past, the complicity or even identity of members of the first generation with the murderers. This image was complemented in the mid-1960s by uncritical support for the USA's war in Vietnam and Israel's behaviour towards the Palestinians. Yesterday's accomplices were today's accomplices, and while they concealed their misdeeds of yesterday, they praised all the more their merits as representatives of the economic miracle today.

The narrative of the second generation described their parents' generation as insincere and opportunistic, characterised by authoritarianism, national arrogance and anti-Semitism, and materialistic thinking about success. This narrative was highly moralistic and promoted the alternative of solidarity, self-realisation and alternative models of life.

But given the scale of the crimes of the Nazi era and the menace of the Cold War, there were also violence-oriented reactions in which the differences between totalitarianism and democracy were seen only as a new façade of a late capitalist economy of exploitation and imperialism, so that an armed struggle for liberation was justified. One of the members of the terrorist organisation RAF, Karl-Heinz Dellwo, said much later in an interview: "When you start to realise these things, you also become aware that you don't like those people, that they actually embody everything you hate. You realise that you don't want to have anything to do with them and that if there's any prospect of creating a new, better society, these people must simply leave."<sup>16</sup> This narrative of hatred as the justification for extreme violence, with 34 murders, several kidnappings and numerous bank robberies, as well as a multitude of injured people, is marked by the same arrogance as that of the moral condemnation of how the first generation behaved in the face of a totalitarian system. The

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15 *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages*. 4. Wahlperiode. Stenografische Berichte Band 57 170. Sitzung vom 10. März 1965, pp. 8552/8553. (Translated by WH)

16 Karl-Heinz Dellwo / Gabriele Rollnik / Marek Seckar: It was impossible to live in this world... A conversation with Karl-Heinz Dellwo and Gabriele Rollnik, in: *Eurozine*, 15 Jan. 2014.

behaviour of the second generation would have been morally and politically impeccable.

With the screening in Germany of the American television series *Holocaust 1979*, not only did the victims come into view, but also Jewish life there. The victims became subjects. In the cities, something called the search for traces began, imaginary spaces of past Jewish life emerged. The Cologne artist Gunter Demnig began to lay “*stolpersteine*” (stumbling blocks) in the pavements in front of the homes of murdered Jewish fellow human beings, showing their name, date of birth and how, where and when they died. The prerequisite is that the current residents are in agreement. By 2018, 70,000 of these stones had been laid in Germany and 24 other European countries.<sup>17</sup> The murdered are given back their names and biographies, they are no longer numbers but people.

Overall, in the 1970s and 1980s, as the first generation grew older, there was a slow change in the focus of the second generation: from the perspective of the perpetrators to that of the victims, then to that of the bystanders. The question of the bystanders came to the fore because since the 1970s a broad civil society had emerged with numerous citizens’ initiatives and NGOs based on the autonomy and self-responsibility of the actors and whose values include taking social responsibility. This is where the previous discourses come in. When it came to the perpetrators and the victims, the question had been: What did you know? Why didn’t you help? Now that the first generation has retired and become grandparents, the discourse was applied to the present: How do I behave? How do we behave when neo-Nazis appear and when racist acts occur? The film *Schindler’s List* expresses the interest since the 1980s in the importance of bystanders. Here, as with the victims, it is about individuals, their destinies and responsibility.

Parallel to this change, there was a fierce academic controversy about the historicization of National Socialism, the so-called *Historikerstreit*. Four leading conservative historians of the first and second generation put forward theses in 1986 that provoked vehement response, their main opponent being Jürgen Habermas. They argued that Hitler had followed Asian models, the Soviet Gulags had set a precedent for Auschwitz (Nolte), today’s historian had to understand the perspective of the Wehrmacht soldiers and fleeing Germans of the time, in this respect one could not speak unreservedly of a liberation of Germany (Hillgruber), and Germany had become dangerously ahistorical (Stürmer). There is still no conclusive assessment of this dispute, but it can be said that these views have not prevailed in main-stream historiography.<sup>18</sup>

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17 <https://www.dw.com/de/ns-gedenkprojekt-z%C3%A4hlt-jetzt-70000-stolpersteine/a-45997346> (2022/10/3)

18 Rudolf Augstein et al. (ed.) *Historikerstreit Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, Munich Piper 1987.

Ten years later, when everyone had long since come to terms with the first generation's denial of guilt and silence, a group of historians comprehensively destroyed the myth of the 'innocent' Wehrmacht with a major exhibition entitled *Vernichtungskrieg. Criminal Power 1941 to 1944*, which had 900,000 visitors and was shown in numerous German cities from 1995 to 1999.<sup>19</sup> It had four main focuses: "Serbia. Partisan War 1941", "The 6th Army. On the way to Stalingrad. 1941 to 1942", "Belarus. Three years of occupation 1941 to 1944" and "The images of the post-war years". The narratives that legitimised the crimes were presented in three aspects: "the Red Army soldier" as the insidious Asian beast, "the partisan" as proof of the crimes of the others and "the Jew" as the "mastermind and profiteer of the events".<sup>20</sup>

The exhibition demonstrated numerous crimes committed by the Wehrmacht, with a shockingly high number of victims (5 million civilians, 1.5 million Jews, 3.5 million prisoners of war, more than all the victims of the SS combined) and provoked public discussions, as well as protests and counter-demonstrations by members of the Wehrmacht and right-wing radical organisations, with threats of violence and a bomb attack, controversies in the city parliaments and a debate in the Bundestag. Because some of the statements were too sweeping, implying a collective guilt of the entire Wehrmacht, the exhibition was revised and shown again from 2001 to 2004. The co-creator of the first exhibition Hannes Heer strongly criticised "the disappearance of the perpetrators",<sup>21</sup> because in the revised exhibition the names of individuals had been omitted in favour of events and structures.

Even more than at the time of the student movement, a fierce debate had broken out, but this time it was more factual, rather than ideological and moralising. But just as after the war, when the first generation declared that they had known nothing about the murder of the Jews, there was now a struggle to save the image of a decent Wehrmacht. The silent images, which at least partially proved the opposite, provoked a silent first generation. Accusation and defence were loud, but silent. There were still no conversations between the generations. Who wanted to tell of their errors, of being enthusiastic about Hitler in their youth? Who wanted to simply question the older generation and listen?

Even the writer Günter Grass, who liked to present himself as a left-wing, moralising public intellectual, only revealed in 2006 at the age of 79 that he had volunteered

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19 Hannes Heer et al. (eds.) *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944 Ausstellungskatalog*. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg Hamburger Edition, 1996. – See also Gehorsam bis zum Mord? Der verschwiegene Krieg der deutschen Wehrmacht – Fakten, Analysen, Debatte. In *ZEIT-Punkte* No. 3, 1995.

20 Hannes Heer / Ruth Wodak Kollektives Gedächtnis. Vergangenheitspolitik. Nationales Narrativ. Zur Konstruktion von Geschichtsbildern, in Hannes Heer et al. (eds.) *Wie Geschichte gemacht wird. Zur Konstruktion von Erinnerungen an Wehrmacht und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Wien Czernin 2003, p. 21.

21 Hannes Heer *Vom Verschwinden der Täter*, Berlin Aufbau 2004.

for the Wehrmacht as a 15-year-old and had been drafted into the Waffen-SS when he was 17. He had previously seen no way to talk about it without being tarnished.

## The Disappearance of the Perpetrators among the Third Generation

The disappearance of the perpetrators from the Wehrmacht exhibition corresponds paradoxically to the disappearance of the perpetrators among the third generation, the grandchildren. In the early 2000s, the social psychologist Harald Welzer wanted to know how the past is present in young people who have both rational factual knowledge and emotional family knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

The results of 40 group discussions in families are surprising. The Holocaust only occurs as an abstract disappearance of the Jews, it is, according to the authors of the study, empty speech as “a diction that shapes the intergenerational conversation about the Third Reich like no other. Actors – and these were mostly the perpetrators – remain vague figures, historical events are only described in outline, so that it remains unclear what it is actually about, and the events seem almost harmless.”<sup>23</sup> There is a great need to put the grandparents in a favourable light. Everyday conversations and feature film scenes dominate their own world of imagination, set pieces of narratives of Jewish fates such as escape and the threat of concentration camp imprisonment are used for the family history, and reproduced narratives of supposedly autobiographical experiences of the grandparents partly come from fictitious sources. Images of memories and imaginations, especially films and documentaries, flow into each other.<sup>24</sup> In 26 of the 40 families interviewed, there was a heroisation of the grandparents by the children, which was then reinforced by the grandchildren. 50% of the stories were victim stories, 15 per cent were stories of everyday resistance and heroism. In other words, two-thirds of the stories were about an attitude of rejection towards National Socialism. Nazis and Germans were two separate groups, i.e. the view of guilt defence since the end of the war, the alleged ignorance of the crimes, not only lives on unbroken in the third generation but is even intensified. According to a survey conducted in connection with this study in 2002 in Bielefeld among members of the third generation, 49 per cent overall (and 56 per cent of those with an Abitur or a university degree) believed that the attitude of their own relatives had been negative or quite negative towards National Socialism, 26 percent believed that their relatives had helped persecuted persons, and of those

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22 Harald Welzer et al. “*Opa war kein Nazi*”. *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 2002.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

24 Aleida Assmann: *op. cit.*, p. 148.

with university degrees 30 percent believed this, 13 per cent that they had resisted, and only one per cent that they had participated in crimes.

Family stories falsify events by excluding the uncomfortable from what is remembered, and by jointly shaping the past in conversation, whereby what is hinted at is added to by the grandchildren in their own interest.<sup>25</sup> “What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.”<sup>26</sup> The result: Grandpa was not a Nazi.

## Conclusion

This brief overview shows that the “three-generation memory” is not static and homogeneous, but moves and changes with the generations. Even if it seems as if there is a successful policy towards history in Germany today, with memorials, days of remembrance, speeches in parliament and corresponding teaching materials, it can be seen that family memory is different from written history and is of considerable importance. Even the dictatorial politics of history in the GDR could not change this, as Welzer’s study showed.

This overview also shows that the perception of the facts depends on the interests of the generations – first to the perpetrators, then to the victims, then to the spectators.

To take up the aspect of images that I mentioned above – the imageless defence against guilt. In the third generation, those who did not want to present images have consequently also completely disappeared from view. The criticism of the student movement was also imageless in its rationality, and the pictures of the Wehrmacht exhibition are mute photos of deeds, not narrative pictures.

The reason for this lies in a double message after 1945: anyone who reports positively about their life during the Hitler era is guilty. And Nazi propaganda is still dangerous, so it is not shown publicly; for a long time *Mein Kampf* was not available in German, and only recently has an academic version been published with a very detailed commentary; the films about euthanasia as well as the films of Leni Reifensahl are not shown, and colour films of Nazi marches were not shown for a long time.

Family memory has failed to open up to concrete stories as it does with regard to the individuality of individual victims. The Hungarian-Jewish writer and theatre director George Tabori declared:

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25 Ibid., p. 196.

26 Susan Sontag: *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Penguin Books, 2004, p. 76.

What must memory be like so that we can finally feel free? ... There is in this country, it seems to me, a great need ... to find factual reasons to explain these murders. I mean, these murders have become possible because of this very “objectivity” that turns people into objects. Objects are not there to be identified with, and when one no longer needs to identify with them, the way is open to destruction. What theatre could teach the sciences is that true memory is only possible through sensual remembering: it is impossible to come to terms with the past without reliving it through skin, nose, tongue, buttocks, feet and belly.<sup>27</sup>

Written in 2019. First published: *Verdad y narración: la lucha por la memoria en Alemania después del Holocausto*, in: Camila de Gamboa/Cristina Sánchez (eds.): *Cartografía del mal*, Bogotá: Ed. Siglo del Hombre 2019, pp. 231–249.

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27 George Tabori *Unterammergau oder die guten Deutschen*, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 1981, p. 201. (Translated by WH) – Cf. chapter 10 in this volume: Horror and Laughter – Arendt, Tabori, Borowski.

# **The Call of Responsibility**





## 6. Who is Capable of Acting? Some Thoughts on the Importance of Personality

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“The miracle that saves the world from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin.”

– *Hannah Arendt on ‘Action’*

### Non-action and the Dilemma of Action in the Contemporary World

Hannah Arendt makes an intriguing supposition, namely that often, when all political action has died away, as during the totalitarian domination of Eastern Europe after the Second World War, all of a sudden people start to act and initiate a new beginning. It happened in Hungary in 1956 when the miracle of unexpected action led to a whole revolution. Though the revolution was crushed, it showed that action and a new beginning were possible even under extremely difficult conditions. This was followed by the “Prague Spring” of 1968 and finally the peaceful revolution in Eastern Europe in 1989. All these new beginnings were inspired by the knowledge that beyond the totality of the factual world, of “real existing socialism”, there was another world, which was not identical to “real existing capitalism”. That new world consisted of an open orientation towards the future, and in the free decisions of its actors, but it also consisted in the conservation and recovery of the ‘suppressed and the replaced’.

In her theoretical essay on the Hungarian Revolution, Hannah Arendt describes with the help of an example she found in a newspaper what the persistence of the suppressed and the possibility of an alternative meant. This example deals with the Russian writer Boris Pasternak who was not killed under Stalin or forced into exile but nonetheless, as a form of protest, remained silent for decades. In 1946 he was invited to give a lecture in Moscow attended by “a huge crowd” although his name, after all the years of silence, was only known as a translator of Shakespeare and Goethe into Russian. He read some of his poems, but while reading an old poem, the sheet of paper slipped out of his hand.” Arendt then continues citing from the text of the newspaper: “At that moment a voice in the room continued to recite the poem by heart. From several corners of the room other voices were heard. And the recita-

tion of the interrupted text ended in a chorus.”<sup>1</sup> The suppressed and replaced had remained present the whole time.

Not only totalitarianism presents a challenge for the question as to whether or not independent thinking and action is possible – so too do our own times. Since the end of the bi-polar era and the Cold War, a vast transformation is circling the two poles: neo-liberalism on the one hand and terrorism on the other. Neo-liberalism, consisting of the withdrawal of the state, increased privatization of public services, increased public debt and the uncontrolled activities of banks and financial institutions<sup>2</sup>; terrorism, as a synonym for ethnic wars, declared by terrorist groups against whole populations or states to which those states respond and retaliate through asymmetric warfare and secret state and private surveillance programmes undertaken by intelligence agencies and business groups.

We are facing a dilemma, because the apparent conclusion is that there is no alternative, either in the conduct of finance as it pertains to crisis management of the global economy or of the conduct of the state regarding questions of national security. At the same time the criteria are lost by which we judge arguments and actions. Salman Rushdie asks who in our contemporary world can be regarded as a courageous politician? Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro as opponents of “imperialism”; or the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, who intervened militarily in Libya in order to support the insurgents against Gaddafi; the governor of the province of Punjab in Pakistan, who defended a Christian woman sentenced to death because of “blasphemy”; or the governor’s bodyguard who killed him and was hailed in court and showered with rose petals by the public?<sup>3</sup>

Any action in the tradition of Hungary in 1956 or Prague in 1968 seems to be not just risky but clearly dangerous, because of the possibility of failure. Whistleblowers in the United States defending freedom of information are persecuted, as are users of Twitter in the Arab world defending freedom of speech and religion. The general conclusion might be: do not risk anything, do not endanger yourself, and therefore, do not act.

Moreover, it seems as if in a constitutional state with more or less well-organized institutions everything should work on its own: the constitution and democratic institutions, regulating general issues and caring as much as possible for the enforcement of the laws that ensure justice. During the European crisis most governing

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1 In the German publication of Hannah Arendt: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution, in: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland: Meridian 1958: Die Ungarische Revolution und der totalitäre Imperialismus, in: *In der Gegenwart, Übungen im politischen Denken II*, Munich: Piper 2000, p. 98. (Translated by WH)

2 See Wolfgang Streeck *Gekaufte Zeit. Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2013.

3 Salman Rushdie Wir müssen unsere Stimme erheben, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 2 May 2013.

politicians argue using a slogan of Margaret Thatcher: 'There is no alternative', so opposing views are silenced, and the crisis continues.

In addition, there is a common attitude among politicians that they do not need to study politics and the experience of those who have acted in the past. Very different from Machiavelli, for example, who compared his own experiences with those compiled by the classical historian Livy in order to discover similarities and to draw conclusions. In a similar way, there is the widespread opinion among academics and the public that theories are created at desks nearly out of nothing, that they are developed by hard, logical work by specialists and groups of investigators at universities and in think tanks.

But the life and work of Hannah Arendt proves the opposite. Her own work was based on her experience as a Jew, refugee and political thinker and actor. She also took into consideration the experience of others as lived according to the circumstances of their own times. For example, shortly before her emigration she began to study the problems of assimilation with the example of the Jewess Rahel Varnhagen in the form of a history, which Varnhagen "could have told herself ... the description (following) the reflexions of Rahel with the best possible accuracy"<sup>4</sup> and that made any further interpretation unnecessary. In her book about totalitarianism Arendt describes the encounter of European colonialists with the inhabitants of Africa, drawing on Joseph Conrad's novella "Heart of Darkness" to trace the profound dismay and racism of the Europeans. And also the story about Pasternak's lecture plays a key role for Arendt in analyzing political phenomena.

In her seminar "Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century", Arendt exclusively used literary and autobiographical documents, quite unusual in a seminar on political science, to make accessible real historical events as a mechanism for enlarging their mentality and to help them to acquire the facility of judgement. Theory for Hannah Arendt meant understanding, not science.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Hannah Arendt *Rahel Varnhagen. Lebensgeschichte einer deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik*, Munich Piper 1981, p. 10–11.

5 In the notes for her seminar in 1965 Arendt asks at the end of her introduction: "What has this [the theory of the enlarged mentality, WH] to do with political theory? Distinction between theory and thought: Every event that is remembered at all is being thought about. The telling of a story is the appropriate way of thinking about it. Out of this comes Theory. Theory, made in the present, is like all present time between past and future – that is between remembrance and anticipation. Kafka's parable: The two forces acting upon man out of which he thinks and acts. This is not theory, but it certainly is the determination of the location of the theorists." Arendt: *Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century*, lectures, 1965, in: Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., sheet 023762. Published in parts, in Wolfgang Heuer / Irmela von der Lühe (eds.) *Dichterisch denken. Hannah Arendt und die Künste*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2007, pp. 213–223.

In her notes for the seminar “History of Political Theory” given at the University of California at Berkeley in 1955, she distinguished between authors and commentators. Concerning the classics of modern political thought; Hobbes, Locke and Montesquieu, Arendt was not interested in them as theorists but as thinkers. Experiences, according to Arendt, precede words and not vice versa. She was interested in the quality of those experiences and how this was reflected in their writings. She was quite sceptical regarding the field of political theory. Political theory, according to Arendt, moves between the experiences in history and the concepts of philosophy and becomes “a kind of meeting ground”<sup>6</sup> for disappointed philosophers or statesmen. Authors in the literal sense are those who enrich the world with their works because they move in the same world as we do, namely the “real world”, while commentators move in the world of books.

The authors are *auctores*, that is, (they) augment the world. We move in a world which is augmented by the authors. We cannot do without them, because they behave in an altogether different way from the commentators. The world in which the commentator moves is the world of books. This difference becomes visible in a person like Machiavelli. Machiavelli was interested in Italy, not in political theory, not even his own. Only the commentator is interested in political theory per se.<sup>7</sup>

While the author as political writer also loves the world, the commentator only loves political theory. That is not to say we do not need the latter. Rather, according to Arendt, “we need to keep in mind that when we move in the world with the commentator, strictly speaking, it is not the author’s world we inhabit, whereas when we read the author directly, we move in the same world as our own, but approached from a different corner.”<sup>8</sup>

In short, we are living in a world that is seemingly “without any alternatives” while there is always a possibility of action creating something new and unexpected. Such action requires “actors”, but if we cannot turn to the commentators and the futurologists and instead must turn to the *auctores* and their experiences, then the question is: Who exactly are these actors and where are they supposed to come from? And here we find in Hannah Arendt’s work descriptions of these actors, who are distinctive personalities (like the authors), but are not ‘individuals’ in the sense in which that term has come to be used. Because ‘an individual’ literally means the smallest, indivisible unit, while a personality is an actor playing their role in a world of interpersonal events. In what follows I would like to consider two aspects of the actor in

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6 Arendt: History of Political Thought, lectures, 1955, in: *Hannah Arendt Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., sheet 023943.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 023944.

more in detail: What is the difference between a “person” and an “individual”? And what does it mean to adopt a position and to be a judge?

### What is the Difference Between a “Person” and an “Individual”?

The special marks of a person are their visibility and distinctiveness, they do not get lost in the general mass. They become visible because of their twofold characteristics, which are interpersonal as well as independent. A person acts together with others, but also in relationship to others; they act together but also alone. In her text “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” Hannah Arendt describes *being a person* as the precondition for being able to resist evil. “Being a person” is for Arendt “distinguished from being merely human”. And if we follow her thesis of the inner dialogue as a dialogue between a “thinking I” and a “judging me”, then:

... we may now say that in this process of thought in which I actualize the specifically human difference of speech, I explicitly constitute myself a person, and I shall remain one to the extent that I am capable of such constitution ever again and anew. If this is what we commonly call personality, and it has nothing to do with gifts and intelligence, it is the simple, almost automatic result of thoughtfulness. To put it another way, in granting pardon, it is the person and not the crime that is forgiven; in rootless evil there is no person left whom one could ever forgive.<sup>9</sup>

Now, this inner dialogue does not need to be about or even depend on moral imperatives but rather only on the fact that “a mere human being” conducts an inner dialogue in order to be in accordance with themselves, and the very existence of that dialogue, irrespective of the subject, *already has a moral dimension*. “... it is almost a redundancy to speak about a moral personality”.<sup>10</sup> And Arendt includes a highly interesting aspect. The consequences of not thinking or engaging in this inner dialogue, means not only the loss of morality and the possible transgression of the border between civilization and barbarity but also the loss of artistic quality. “Insofar as thinking is an activity, it can be translated into products, into such things as poems or music or paintings. All things of this kind are actually thought-things, just as furniture and the objects of our daily use are rightly called use-objects”. Hannah Arendt then goes on to observe, when commenting on mass murderers, that

the point about these highly cultivated murderers is that there has been not a single one of them who wrote a poem worth remembering or a piece of music

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9 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 95.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

worth listening to or painted a picture that anybody would care to hang on his walls. More than thoughtfulness is needed to write a good poem or piece of music, or to paint a picture – you need special gifts. But no gifts will withstand the loss of integrity which you lose when you gave lost this most common capacity for thought and remembrance.<sup>11</sup>

This definition of personality refers to all human beings equally – to workers, academics, or politicians. The fact that moral and artistic quality rests in equal measure on independent thinking and on independent judgment is already visible in our everyday use of language whenever we speak of a “beautiful” or “ugly” gesture or figure of speech or of the “inner beauty” which a person possessing integrity shows by that integrity. These examples, according to Kant, are expressions of the harmony of the different powers of cognition both with regards to their inner proportions and the free coexistence of these powers and their mutual influence on one another.<sup>12</sup> It is a harmony which occurs between form and content as well as between ‘enlarged thought’ and reason, rather than being a purely rational judgment.<sup>13</sup>

Before Arendt studied Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgement, she referred to the “understanding heart” of King Solomon in the Bible. It comprises equally heart and mind. “Only an ‘understanding heart’, and not mere reflection or mere feeling, makes it bearable for us to live with other people, strangers forever, in the same world and makes it possible for them to bear with us.”<sup>14</sup> The fact that this proximity between ethics and aesthetics and the interplay between heart and mind can be defined only approximately is the price for freedom and for the possibilities of a person to act.

When we follow Arendt and her train of thought we find a whole tradition of thinking which is worth taking into consideration. It goes back to the discussions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century about taste as a power of cognition in a secular society increasingly oriented towards freedom. For example, Melchior Grimm, a more or less forgotten German illustrator, essayist and diplomat, wrote: “The condition of a pronounced and perfect taste is to have a sharp intellect, a sensitive soul and a righteous heart”.<sup>15</sup> Here taste not only involves aesthetic judgment but also moral judgment. In

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11 Ibid., p. 97.

12 See Markus Arnold Die harmonische Stimmung aufgeklärter Bürger. Zum Verhältnis von Politik und Ästhetik in Immanuel Kants “Kritik der Urteilskraft”, in *Kant-Studien*, 94, 2003, pp. 24–50.

13 Ibid., p. 32.

14 Hannah Arendt: Understanding and Politics, in: *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, New York: Schocken 1994, p. 322.

15 Melchior Grimm *Paris zündet die Lichter an. Literarische Korrespondenz*, Leipzig Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1977, p. 121 “Voraussetzung für einen ausgeprägten und vollendeten Geschmack ist, daß man einen scharfen Verstand, eine empfindende Seele und ein rechtschaffenes Herz hat.” He continues “Wenn Tugend und Schönheit nicht die sanfte Erregung

Grimm's trilogy all three elements are indispensable in their mutual conditionality. Reason can become inhuman without soul and heart; the sensitive soul can become apolitical due to an unchecked compassion; the righteous heart may be confused without reason. However, the era of investigations into the conditions for an independent judgment ended with Kant. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the Kantian "capacity to judge" was replaced by logic, ideologies and systems.

But there are exceptions such as the writer and journalist George Orwell. His works are marked by a hypothesis; namely that the decency inherent in the everyday life of normal people can resist the general loss of orientation in an age of ideology. In an essay on Charles Dickens he wrote: "His whole "message" is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: 'If men would behave decently the world would be decent' is not necessarily so shallow as it sounds."<sup>16</sup> Orwell tried to interpret what he called "common decency" as a compass not only of single persons but also of the social and political life of citizens. According to Orwell this common decency rests on general, practical everyday moral norms and habits. Common decency differs from explicit and rigid moral prescriptions of "the good human being" by its openness and flexibility. For Orwell it was not human dignity in an abstract way that had to be protected but the behaviour to which a society commits itself that was in need of defending. The decent life affords social regulations that consist of respect for others, the absence of domination or humiliation, and social, economic or cultural equality. The highest income should not be many times higher than the lowest. All laws should respect or support a decent life, as "the constituent power of ordinary lives".<sup>17</sup> Orwell, an early critic of totalitarianism, wrote that "In our country ... it is the liberals who fear liberty and the intellectuals who want to do dirt on the intellect."<sup>18</sup> That means, "the direct conscious attack on intellectual decency comes from the intellectuals themselves"<sup>19</sup>.

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in uns hervorrufen, die den Reiz und das Glück der edlen und empfänglichen Herzen ausmacht, wie könnte wir dann Geschmack besitzen, der doch nur durch dieses Gefühl zu urteilen vermag? Daraus ergibt sich, dass die weisesten Menschen auch am meisten Geschmack haben."

16 *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, London: Mariner Books 1968, Vol. I, p. 417.

17 Bruce Bégout: *De la décence ordinaire*, Paris: Editions Allia 2008, p. 88.

18 The freedom of the press. Unpublished preface to *Animal Farm*. *Ibid.*, p. 47. <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/the-freedom-of-the-press/> (2023.04.21).

19 Essays, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 70. – Also: "The thing that has frightened me about the modern intelligentsia is their inability to see that human society must be based in common decency, whatever the political and economic forms may be." op. cit., p. 531. – Robert Coles observes in Orwell a remarkable balance between concreteness and theory: "He himself had a sensibility that loved negotiating those two polarities, the concrete and the theoretical, and one wonders that he never lost his balance." (Georg Orwell's Sensibility, in: *Reflections on Amer-*



This aspect of decency refers to what for Arendt is the basis of all political action and independent judgment; the effort to recover in a political community the right middle ground and human scale that marks the place where civilization ends.

Like Hannah Arendt and George Orwell, Albert Camus stressed the importance of moderation but instead observed excess among Marxist intellectuals after WW II, among them Sartre, in his most provocative book *The Rebel*. Revolutionary errors, he declared, disregarded natural limits and in so doing betrayed human inviolability. The experience of modern revolutions shows that “revolutions when they have no limits other than historical effectiveness, mean endless slavery.”<sup>20</sup> For Camus it is the task of revolt to redefine the place of the right middle and human scale in a permanent critical confrontation with present conditions.

Herein lays the actuality of these three authors, Arendt, Orwell and Camus. Writing about totalitarianism they described the conditions of a decent society, which is now menaced not by revolts, or mass protests but on the contrary due to the destruction of politics and the common good by neo-liberalism.

## What Does it Mean to Adopt a Position and to Judge?

For Hannah Arendt, adopting a position and judging means three things: firstly, the necessity of what she called “being in the world”; secondly, freedom as “freedom for”, as inter-subjective, common freedom, inseparably connected to responsibility; thirdly, the formation of a community of judgment, which means the selection of those with whom we want to act and judge and who also serve as models.

On the first point, “to be in the world” means a clear change of perspective in the history of thinking in the modern age. Arendt no longer defines the world from the perspective of modern subjectivism, from an individual facing the masses, but from the *in-between* of people acting together. It is the standpoint of those who act or of spectators who are interested in judging action. Those who are not interested in the common world exclude themselves from this in-between. From the perspective of this common world, Arendt defines what unites people. It is not the reason, which we are proud of because it distinguishes us from animals, but rather what she calls an *enlarged mentality*. In her *Denktagebuch* (Thinking Diary) she wrote:

Because of the fact that not self-bound reason but only an enlarged mentality makes it possible ‘to think in the place of another’, it is not reason, but the en-

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ica, 1984. An Orwell Symposium, ed. by Robert Mulvihill, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press 1986, p. 52). It is not surprising that Orwell, faced with the political and social world he analysed, found a balance in gardening, see Rebecca Solnit: *Orwell's Roses*, London: Granta 2021.

20 Albert Camus: *The Rebel*, Penguin Classics 2000, p. 294.

larged mentality which forms the link between human beings. Against the *sense of self* fuelled by reason, by the *I-think*, one finds a *sense for the world*, fuelled by the others as common-sense (passive) and the enlarged mentality (active).<sup>21</sup>

From this interpersonal perspective follows the second aspect that freedom is to be understood as “freedom for”, as inter-subjective, common freedom, which is inseparably bound to the responsibility for everything that happens in the political community. This responsibility does not deal with moral or juridical guilt for one’s own actions but rather is the responsibility of someone who is “a responder”, who understands that the actions of all decide whether or not we live in a decent society. In her essay “Collective Responsibility” Arendt explained:

The vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellowmen, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community.<sup>22</sup>

This standpoint, from the perspective of interpersonal relations within a political community means that the faculty of judgment is inter-subjective, a common judgment. Here too, we encounter again the heritage of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, where Arendt in her essay “The Crisis in Culture” argues that taste possesses an organisational force of peculiar strength.

We all know very well how quickly people recognize each other, and how unequivocally they can feel that they belong to each other, when they discover a kinship in questions of what pleases and displeases. From the viewpoint of this experience, it is as though taste decides not only how the world is to look, but also who belongs together in it.”<sup>23</sup>

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- 21 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch, 1950–1973*, ed. by Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, Munich-Zurich Piper 2002, p. 570.
- 22 Hannah Arendt: Collective Responsibility, in: James W. Bernauer (ed.): *Amor Mundi*, Dordrecht: Springer 1987, p. 50.
- 23 Hannah Arendt: The Crisis in Culture. Its Social and its Political Significance. In: *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 220. (“We all know very well how quickly people recognize each other, and how unequivocally they can feel that they belong to each other, when they discover a kinship in questions of what pleases and displeases. From the viewpoint of this common experience, it is as though taste decides not only how the world is to look, but also who belongs together in it.”) Arendt calls it “quality-consciousness” (ibid.) and characterises it as “die Fähigkeit für die Evidenz des Schönen” (in the German variant of the same text “Kultur und Politik”, in *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Übungen im politischen Denken I*, ed. by Ursula Ludz, Munich-Zurich Piper 2000, p. 301).

This remark has been rejected by readers time and again as the expression of an elitist, aristocratic and therefore undemocratic attitude. However, such criticism overlooks the fact that Arendt was concerned not only with common judgment but also with “quality-consciousness”, the sense that “the truly beautiful (is) easily recognized”. It is not decisive *that* we judge together but *how* we judge. It is all about quality and also about a consciousness of quality through which the humanity of a society increases. Transferred to politics, it means to be able to identify and judge the quality of political wisdom and thus to contribute and to improve that political wisdom. It is also evident that ethics and aesthetic are closely tied together for Arendt. “This humanism ... has the task of arbitrating and mediating between the purely political and the purely fabricating activities”<sup>24</sup>, which “share the public space.”<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, personalities possessing the capacity for action and judgement have a big responsibility for the humanization of their societies. Therefore, it is not by chance that Arendt in her portraits of writers, politicians and scientists, which she wrote on various occasions and published in her book *Men in Dark Times* always came to speak about their personal qualities. For example, Lessing’s critical faculty fascinated her:

Criticism, in Lessing’s sense, is always taking sides for the world’s sake, understanding and judging everything in terms of its position in the world at any given time. Such a mentality can never give rise to a definite worldview which, once adopted, is immune to further experiences in the world because it has hitched itself firmly to one possible perspective.<sup>26</sup>

Arendt praised Rosa Luxemburg’s cultural background of an assimilated Jewish life in Poland characterized by excellent literary taste, independent moral concepts and the absence of social prejudices.<sup>27</sup>

And in an obituary for her friend Waldemar Gurian, Dean of the American University at Notre Dame, she praised his virtues in a very personal-political tone, which is completely unusual in an academic journal like *The Review of Politics*.

In this obituary, Arendt described his personal qualities, which take the place of political virtues. Among them the capacity for public friendship (rather than private friendship) based on a common responsibility for our destiny. He came as a stranger but “he had achieved what we all must: he had established his home in this world, and he had made himself at home on the earth through friendship.”<sup>28</sup>

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24 Ibid., p. 222.

25 Kultur und Politik, op. cit., p. 302.

26 Hannah Arendt: *Men in Dark Times*, San Diego, 1968, p. 7/8.

27 Ibid., p. 33f.

28 Ibid., p. 262.

She praised the fact that his “faithfulness to his friends, to everybody he had ever known, to everything he had ever liked, became so much the dominant note on which his life was tuned that one is tempted to say that the crime most alien to him is the crime of oblivion, perhaps one of the cardinal crimes in human relationships.”<sup>29</sup> She praised his humanity, which meant more than mere friendliness and gentleness and which makes us realize the error that

people daily and gladly (...) identify themselves wholly with what they do, proud of their intelligence or work or genius, and it is true that remarkable results can be the outcome of such identification. ... (But) true greatness of genius ... appears only where we sense behind the tangible and comprehensible product a being that remains greater and more mysterious because the work itself points to a person behind it whose existence can be neither exhausted nor fully revealed by whatever he may have the power to do.<sup>30</sup>

And finally, she praised his independent judgment,

an unerring sense for quality and relevance ... In the not frequent cases where men have possessed it and have chosen not to exchange it for more easily recognizable and acceptable values, it infallibly has led them far – far beyond conventions and established standards of society – and carried them directly into the dangers of a life that is no longer protected by the walls of objects and the supports of objective evaluations.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Gurian was simultaneously a non-conformist and a realist: “His whole spiritual existence was built on the decision never to conform and never to escape, which is only another way of saying that it was built on courage.”<sup>32</sup> “He was delighted when he could break down the(se) barriers of so-called civilized society, because he saw in them barriers between human souls.”<sup>33</sup>

Who would not like to live together with these people in our world?

Written in 2018. First published: Who is Capable of Performing Action? Some Thoughts on the Importance of Personality, in: *Belgrade Journal of Media and Communications*, 4/7, 2015, pp. 43–55.

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29 Ibid., p. 254.

30 Ibid., p. 257.

31 Ibid., p. 258.

32 Ibid., p. 261/262.

33 Ibid., p. 258.



## 7. The *Virtù* of the Statesman – Willy Brandt

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1989 marked the end of the Cold War that had prevailed since 1945. It also marked the end of Willy Brandt's peace policy, which, with its policy of small steps, peaceful coexistence and change through rapprochement, contributed significantly to overcoming the Cold War and the division of Europe. Since then, the situation in Europe and in the world has changed considerably. We have been living in a new era in which the European Union has successfully expanded, but on the other hand, has lost clarity about its self-image and the shaping of its future. The same applies to NATO, accompanied by a change in the political culture in many countries and by economic and geopolitical power shifts.

When this text was written, no one thought a Russian war against Ukraine was possible. Since then, the geopolitical constellations have intensified. In 2019, the Kim Dae-jung Foundation in South Korea invited me to speak about Willy Brandt's peace policy, and other guests spoke about Kim Dae-jung and Nelson Mandela in order to explore the possibilities of peacefully overcoming the division of Korea. Another event was attended by Philip Pettit, whose research on republicanism had inspired me to assess Willy Brandt's work from a republican perspective rather than a social democratic one, which in Germany is less civic and civil society-oriented than traditionally state-oriented and paternalistic.<sup>1</sup>

When we speak of Willy Brandt's great political merits against the background of the international situation, we realise that we live in a different era, that the constellations and the balance of power are different. We cannot stay in the past, but neither can we simply transfer the specific political actions of the past century to the situation today. So what can we do?

I would like to suggest that we take a closer look at two phenomena: firstly, at the special features of Willy Brandt's statesmanship and, secondly, at Willy Brandt as a person. Both aspects are exemplary for other eras and other circumstances.

The Italian statesman and thinker Niccolò Machiavelli in the Italian Renaissance believed that the way to learn from history is to identify political actions of exem-

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Pettit: *Republicanism: a theory of freedom and government*, Oxford University Press, USA, 1997; *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World*, London: Norton 2014.

plary validity. During the Renaissance, Machiavelli had for some time influenced the political fortunes of his home town of Florence. Later, in exile, he compared his own experience with that of political actors during the Roman Republic in his marvellous book *Discorsi*.

The fundamental insight that Machiavelli gained from his reflections is that the constellation of each action is determined by four basic conditions: concrete circumstances, opportunity, luck and, finally, the aptitude for action, the *virtù* (not to be confused with virtue or private virtuousness). Hence the concrete circumstances must first be studied thoroughly; the opportunity to act must be recognized at the right moment; luck, *fortuna*, which consists of unforeseen influences and events, must be favourable; finally all of this calls for *virtù*, that is, a master stroke. This kind of virtuous action requires a combination of courage, experience and wisdom, spontaneity and reflection, rationality and intuition. In sum this is what constitutes the art of political action. It is exposed to the possibility of success or failure in equal measure.

Machiavelli's writings are generally regarded as eulogies to the unscrupulous and amoral power politician who is concerned with nothing other than conquering power and defending it. But this interpretation completely overlooks the extent to which Machiavelli was a staunch defender of the Republic of Florence and the freedom of its active citizenship. He rejected the subjugation of his city to feudal, religious or moralizing rulers as much as the withdrawal of its citizens to their private lives. Freedom of the Republic demands political interest and an understanding of politics as acting in the interest of the common good.

Looking at Willy Brandt's politics from the aspect of virtuous actor places his image of man and society, his leadership qualities and his peace policy centre stage, and we will learn just how strongly he was committed to the republican interest in the common good.

## **Brandt's Image of Man and Society**

Under his birth name Herbert Frahm, Willy Brandt joined the small *Socialist Workers Party* SAP as a very young man at the end of the Weimar Republic. This small left-wing party had split off from the social democrats and the Stalinist communist party. When the Nazis took power, Brandt fled to Norway, worked there for the SAP, was stripped of his German citizenship, became a Norwegian citizen, travelled incognito to Berlin and Paris, fled to Sweden when German troops invaded Norway, and along with other resisters there joined the German Social Democratic Party at the end of the war. When he regained his German citizenship, he kept the pseudonym he had been using as a journalist and politician, Willy Brandt.

These years of political socialisation, both socialist and in illegality, had a profound impact on Willy Brandt – as an undogmatic left-winger whose basic values had always been freedom, justice and solidarity, and as a resister who was still being maligned as a traitor by the conservative majority in Germany twenty and thirty years after the war; the fact that he was illegitimate and came from a humble background was also used against him. Brandt was therefore an outsider in every respect. Not only did he have a perspective on the German and European situation after the war as an outsider, as a critic and nonconformist, but he also felt committed to politics and took responsibility for his country's past and its future, as well as for the situation in Europe.

When Brandt was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize following the first resounding success of his peace policy in 1971, he spoke of the values he stood for and the legacy he had inherited: ethical and social orientation towards Christianity, humanism and Kant's ideas on international law, and socialism in the form of social justice and a morally impeccable foreign policy. Among those whose legacy he stood for, he mentioned Gustav Stresemann, the German Foreign Minister who shared the Nobel Peace Prize after the First World War with French Foreign Minister Briand, following their agreement on the renunciation of violence between their countries. He also spoke of the German journalist and pacifist Carl von Ossietzky. During his exile in Norway, Brandt had persuaded the Nobel Prize Committee to award Ossietzky the Nobel Peace Prize in 1936 and thus rescue him from death at the hand of the Nazis. Brandt equally acknowledged the legacy of the German resistance, of which he himself was a part. In his Nobel Lecture he declared: "The German resistance fought and made sacrifices for decency, lawfulness and freedom. It preserved that Germany which I regard as my own and which has again fully become my country after the re-establishment of law and freedom."<sup>2</sup>

It was only when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971 that Brandt felt safe and recognized in Germany.

There was no room in Brandt's libertarian socialism for utopian social models. He saw people as varied, not homogeneous. It was not they who had to be changed, but the circumstances in which they lived. In a speech in 1949, he declared in the context of totalitarian forms of rule: "Freedom and life are one and the same. Without the guarantee of an individual legal sphere, without intellectual freedom, without the moral standards of values referring to personality, community and humanity, we are in danger of relapsing into barbarism. Only by saving the fundamental values of Western culture can we hope to ascend to higher forms of human coexistence."<sup>3</sup>

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2 Willy Brandt: *Nobel Lecture: Peace Policy in Our Time*, December 11, 1971 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1971/brandt/lecture> (2022/10/3)

3 Cf. Helga Grebing: *Willy Brandt. Der andere Deutsche*, Munich Fink 2008, p. 83. (All German quotations translated by me, WH)



A few years before his death, Brandt portrayed the Polish-German social democrat Rosa Luxemburg and noted approvingly that “for her ... the progress of mankind was conceivable only through democratic evolution, not through coercion, but through the participation of the masses, in whose spontaneous strength and creative spirit she believed”.<sup>4</sup> Party rule and professional revolutionaries, however, undermine a vibrant democracy of this kind, whereas open criticism and the freedom of press and assembly contribute to its reinforcement. Luxemburg’s declaration that freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently was no less topical for Brandt than it is for us in today’s world.

Brandt was already a resolute European in exile. “A good German”, he declared in his lecture in Oslo, “cannot be a nationalist. A good German knows that he cannot refuse a European calling. Through Europe, Germany returns to itself and to the constructive forces of its history. Our Europe, born of the experience of suffering and failure, is the imperative mission of reason.” Brandt thus ties in with the democratic, liberal tradition of the European nineteenth century, which knew nothing of the nationalism that led to the disasters of the twentieth century. In Brandt’s view, we are aware “that the nation state alone can no longer guarantee the existence and security of a people. Supranational groupings are also necessary for the good of the nation and its protection. Our patriotism is both a European and a global political task. Measured in terms of peace, the nation is no longer the highest of all goods.”<sup>5</sup>

Hence we see that Brandt’s vision from early on was both European and cosmopolitan, we see his concern for living conditions worldwide, as he explained in his speech in Oslo: “Europe must live up to its worldwide responsibility. This means co-responsibility for world peace, and it must also mean co-responsibility for justice towards the outside world, so that hunger and misery elsewhere can be overcome. Peace is something more than the absence of war, although some nations would be thankful for that alone today. A durable and equitable peace system requires equal development opportunities for all nations.”

For Brandt, democracy was not merely the formal regulation of a policy of majorities, but the enabling of social and cultural justice. As early as 1943, he wrote in his school graduation essay, “there is no such thing as political democracy on its own ... Genuine democracy includes social and cultural democracy”<sup>6</sup>. In a similar vein, he declared in 1973 that “freedom ... in our society ... can never be complete, as long as hundreds of thousands of children in our cities and conurbations are unable to thrive, but waste away in urban jungles. And there can be no justice as long as our tax system benefits the fittest. And solidarity can rapidly become a farce if we do

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4 Willy Brandt Rosa Luxemburg, in *Die Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, April 1989, Vol. 36, p. 352.

5 In Helga Grebing: *Willy Brandt*, op. cit., p. 110.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

not learn to apply it in a European and, where possible, global manner.”<sup>7</sup> In his first government declaration as Federal Chancellor in 1969, he advocated “daring more democracy”. This is based on the recognition that “people ... (want to) carry a certain amount of responsibility. In a factory this means not only having a say in major decisions, but also in humane working conditions, not simply becoming an appendage of the assembly line, but co-determining how to organize things in a better and more dignified way.”<sup>8</sup>

“The big debate in society is about the essentials of democracy,” he said. This debate does not exclude political dispute and factual discussions. It even takes these for granted so that a maximum of agreement can be reached in the broadest possible debate. And this broad debate will be more fruitful, the more the citizens participate, the more there is cooperation and joint decision-making”. According to Brandt “Democracy does not simply mean majority decision-making, but encompasses more: the protection of minorities; the exclusion of areas that cannot be voted on, now and in future; freedom of discussion and the opportunity to argue; a clear description of responsibilities”.<sup>9</sup>

Brandt’s values included something utterly uncommon among politicians, that is, praise for doubt. In Oslo he declared: “Young people often expect me to give an unqualified “Yes”, a clear “No”. But it has become impossible for me to believe in one, in the single truth, so I say to my young friends and to others who want to hear it: There are several truths, not merely the one truth which excludes all others. That is why I believe in diversity and hence in doubt. It is productive. It questions existing things. It can be strong enough to smash fossilized injustice. Doubt proved its worth during the resistance. It is tough enough to outlast defeats and to disillusion victors.”

He, the outsider, the active resistor, even has sympathy for cowardice: “I have never been able to understand this exaggerated contempt for cowardice,” he said. “Where does it say that people who are obliged to swim against the current are not allowed to be cowards?”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, he was aware of the importance of remaining steadfast in a minority position: “During my life I have seen many illusions develop and disappear; much confusion, escapism and simplification. In one place a sense of responsibility was lacking, in another imagination. I have also experienced what faith in one’s convictions, steadfastness and solidarity can mean. I know how moral strength can develop and emerge especially in times of great affliction.”<sup>11</sup>

7 Willy Brandt Rede in Bad Segeberg, 1 September 1973, in *Gesammelte Reden, Briefe und kleinere Schriften*, ed. by Helga Grebing et al. *Willy Brandt*. Berliner Ausgabe, vol. 7 Bonn Dietz-Verlag 2001, p. 454.

8 Willy Brandt Gespräch mit Rován, 22 August 1973, in op. cit., p. 438.

9 Willy Brandt Rede in Bad Segeberg, 1 September 1973, in op. cit., p. 451f.

10 Gunter Hofmann, *Willy Brandt – Portrait eines Aufklärers aus Deutschland*, Reinbek Rowohlt 1988, p. 11.

11 Willy Brandt: *Nobel Lecture*, op. cit.

Finally, and this touches on our peace policy topic, Brandt saw no justification for war, neither the "just war" of Christianity, nor, in the words of Clausewitz, as the continuation of politics by other means or as a last resort. "War is no longer the *ultima ratio* but rather the *ultima irratio*. Even if this is still not a generally held view," Brandt explained, "I personally understand a policy for peace as a genuine *Realpolitik* of this epoch." According to Brandt, no national interest can be separated from the overall responsibility for peace. In light of the possible nuclear self-destruction of all, coexistence has become *the* existential question.

## Brandt's Leadership Qualities

Willy Brandt was linguistically gifted and worked as a journalist in exile and later in Berlin. Occasional hesitation, imprecision of expression and ambiguous language, all repeatedly criticized by the political public, were by no means an indication of careless thinking, but rather an expression of open-minded thinking appropriate to the situation. In his portrayal of Rosa Luxemburg he explained that "knowledge of languages means cultural wealth, (and) of what great value it is to be at home in more than one language"<sup>12</sup>, but also how, conversely, "lack of realism and aggressive language can complement each other"<sup>13</sup>. In other words, taking note of reality and its linguistic nuances and varying perspectives protects us from unworldly simplifications and violence.

Brandt's in-depth analytical skills merged with his ability to think in broad contexts, as his detailed report on the Spanish Civil War demonstrated. His comrade in Swedish exile, the later Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, recalled his clarity, his sense of purpose and his comprehensive political knowledge, all of which placed him in a unique position. He was "the epitome of the political mind at that time and beyond that, a political leader". Another member of the resistance group described him as a "man with an immense international outlook ... prepared to sacrifice, with inner collection and harmony, focused on crushing Nazism, for democracy and peace"<sup>14</sup>. This means that taking note of a reality linguistically in its nuances and different perspectives prevents unworldly simplifications and violence. Brandt's breakthrough to a major political career was the result of his ability to take the right action at the right moment, in line with Machiavelli. But he did not do it to exploit the situation for his own career; that would be a misunderstood Machiavellianism, which Brandt

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12 Willy Brandt Rosa Luxemburg, op. cit., p. 348.

13 Willy Brandt op. cit., p. 352.

14 Cf. Einhart Lorenz *Willy Brandt. Deutscher-Europäer-Weltbürger*, Stuttgart Kohlhammer 2012, p. 64.

completely contradicted in his person and his actions. Rather, he felt both the opportunity and what had to be done, whereby he was moved by ‘compassion’: “In any case, the politics that moves me is not possible without being moved by the needs and the longings of the many, whom one cannot know at all. I want to be involved in decisions that secure peace and help people from the broad strata of the people to experience more justice.”<sup>15</sup>

The historian Helga Grebing attested to Brandt’s “extraordinary feeling for currents of the times and the course of social processes; he was someone who was able to develop far-reaching, long-term, rationally controlled ideas. Perhaps the charismatic way in which he conveyed this: cautious, floating, ambivalent, multi-layered, leaving things open and skilfully unclear, and often notoriously vague in the tenor of a strong ‘*Jain*’ (*Ja/nein*: yes and no, WH), contributed to either celebrating him as a visionary or criticising him, because one felt able to recognise the expression of weakening indecision in his behaviour.”<sup>16</sup>

The Spanish social democratic politician Felipe González attested Brandt a pronounced “sense of reality and possibility, (a) long-term thinking and sense of what is to come”.<sup>17</sup>

I would like to give two examples of his *virtù*, firstly his actions during the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, when Soviet tanks occupied the country and crushed the council organisations in city districts and factories.<sup>18</sup> Brandt lived in West Berlin, whose population led an everyday life on the borderline between the two political blocs of West and East; it was surrounded by the GDR and had had to endure Stalin’s blockade for eleven months in 1948/49. With a strong spirit of resistance, they had survived this blockade in freedom and now reacted particularly sensitively to the Soviet occupation of Hungary. Hundreds of thousands marched in front of West Berlin’s city hall. Two speakers from different parties tried to calm the demonstrators with helpless speeches. Then Brandt took to the podium and called for the severance of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and a boycott of all Soviet ships in German ports, promising to send a protest telegram to the UN. But that was not enough for the demonstrators, they made their way to the Soviet embassy in the eastern part of the city, which was on the other side of the Brandenburg Gate. Brandt was aware of the danger of bloodshed, as the demonstrators would be clashing with the armed East German VoPo police force. So Brandt jumped into a police loudspeaker van and put himself at the head of the demonstration procession. He managed to divert the demonstration to the memorial to the victims of

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15 Helga Grebing: *Willy Brandt*, op. cit., p. 89f.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

17 Einhard Lorentz: *Willy Brandt*, op. cit., p. 233.

18 See in the following Peter Merseburger: *Willy Brandt. 1913–1992. Visionär und Realist*, Stuttgart DVA 2002, p. 300f.

Stalinism. There he sang the Song of the Good Comrade, which has been sung at military funeral ceremonies since 1809. The collective singing calmed the demonstrators, who then dispersed. Twice more that night, Brandt used this method to calm down other groups of demonstrators who wanted to march to the Brandenburg Gate. Brandt wanted to keep the peace here as well as later on a large scale. This intervention paved the way for Brandt to become mayor of West Berlin.

The second example concerns his intervention in 1961 on the occasion of the construction of the Berlin Wall around West Berlin to stop the continuous flight of East Germans to the western part of the city. Again Brandt appeared as a staunch defender of his people, again he had to promise 300,000 demonstrators support and at the same time stop them from storming the Wall. “At that moment, he himself seems like a man who has been tested by suffering,” one historian explained in retrospect. “But he tells the people: I am one of you. But I am also more. I manage to act for you. That’s what marked him out in the historical situation.”<sup>19</sup> Brandt was campaigning as a candidate for Federal Chancellor at the time, but he immediately interrupted that campaign and was on hand when the Wall was built, while his opponent and incumbent Chancellor Adenauer continued his campaign unaffected and did not go to Berlin. At the rally in Berlin, Brandt explained that he had written a letter to US President Kennedy to show: I take your concerns seriously. I have addressed the head of the protecting power. “That was an oratorical achievement of the first order,” declared the journalist Merseburger, “Brandt has become a national figure in the Berlin crisis.”<sup>20</sup> According to diplomatic etiquette, Brandt was not really entitled to write to the President of the USA as mayor, and Kennedy was correspondingly disgruntled at first. But later Kennedy visited West Berlin, appeared together with Brandt and spoke his famous sentence: “All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words *‘Ich bin ein Berliner!’*”

With his determined attitude and the right action at the right time, Brandt had risen to the ranks of the most powerful international politicians.

## Brandt’s Peace Policy

Ever since his time in exile, peace had been at the core of Brandt’s actions – not peace at all costs, but in freedom, democracy and a united Europe. The division of Berlin, of Germany and of Europe could only be overcome in a joint effort. But how?

West German politics persisted in the non-recognition of post-war realities, i.e. non-recognition of the surrender of German territory to Poland and the Soviet

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19 Torsten Körner in Willy Brandt war “eine singuläre Persönlichkeit”, in *Berliner Morgenpost*, 18.12.2013.

20 Ibid.

Union. The East and West blocs were frozen. Then Brandt appeared. Similar to Kennedy in the USA, he emerged as the youthful, reformist alternative who, like Kennedy, surrounded himself with writers, artists and journalists. The situation demanded that the supposedly impossible be made possible.<sup>21</sup>

The core elements of this policy were as follows:

- 1) Not to give up the positions of freedom and security, but to offer the other side guarantees in order to initiate a process of *détente*. "Solving common problems," Brandt explained in Oslo, "means creating bonds and connections through meaningful cooperation between states across the borders of the blocs. This means transforming the conflict. This means breaking down barriers, real or imagined, at mutual, peaceful risk."
- 2) To do this, it is indispensable to get to know the other side in order to understand its motives, its fears and its actions in the best possible way.
- 3) Create trust through the credibility of one's own steps. The journalist Merseburger, like many others, was convinced that Brandt "could inspire confidence. I have rarely seen anyone who could establish so much contact with the masses through his speeches"<sup>22</sup>. The same applied to the trust that Brandt created between him and the Soviet head of state Leonid Brezhnev. In Oslo, Brandt said that transforming the conflict means doing away with real or supposed barriers, and "... building up confidence through practical arrangements. And this confidence may then become the new basis for the solution of long-standing problems. This opportunity can be Europe's opportunity in a world which, as has been proved, cannot be ruled by Washington or Moscow – or by Peking – alone." And such trust, of course, also had to be established between Brandt and West Germany on the one hand and the Western allies on the other.
- 4) The resulting balance between states and groups of states must be more than a balanced system of military means; it must give identities and cultures their space. "A Europe living in peace," Brandt said in Oslo, "calls for its members to be willing to listen to the arguments of others, for the struggle of convictions and interests will continue. Europe needs tolerance. It needs freedom of thought, not moral indifference."
- 5) Finally, the renunciation of violence must be complete, and the borders must be inviolable – which did not mean that Brandt had given up the goal of reunifying Germany, only that this could only be achieved peacefully and democratically with the consent of the European peoples.
- 6) Such a process cannot happen in any other way than in small steps, persistent offers of talks. The journalist Gunter Hofmann interpreted Brandt's position with

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21 Willy Brandt Im Gespräch mit Günter Gaus, op. cit.

22 Merseburger in Willy Brandt war "eine singuläre Persönlichkeit", in op. cit.

the following words: “If politics means dealing with public affairs, even in conflict, but nevertheless with a willingness to compromise, in a way that makes them understandable, if politics is understood as a piece of enlightenment work: then it takes place in the dialogue process. It is justified, explained, disputed, rejected. It is not enough to process it in files.”<sup>23</sup> It requires “the constant searching, groping, the readiness for new beginnings”<sup>24</sup>.

- 7) Only such a path, though often difficult, will lead to the goal. At the awarding of the honorary doctorate in 1965 at the New School in New York, Brandt declared: “In the life of the individual as well as in the life of nations, all too often the comfortable, the easier paths are taken, although the comfortable paths are not always the right ones. It is good to take the uncomfortable path, especially if it is the right one.”

The stages of this path were first the creation of opportunities for East and West Berliners to visit each other, then the recognition of Poland’s realigned western border, the non-violence agreements with Moscow and Warsaw, kneeling at the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto, the Basic Treaty with the German Democratic Republic, and so on.

What remains are his peace work and his personality, formative examples that tell us that what seemed impossible can become possible. The later chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Björn Engholm, remembered Brandt:

He was affectionate, but never used affection for populism. He did not expect more from others than he was willing and able to give himself. One to whom being was always worth more than appearances. He got by without pomp, without statesmanlike pomposity; the hollowness and mere pragmatism of many politicians were a horror to him. Instead of giving orders, Willy Brandt led. He was a gifted motivator to whom imperatives remained alien and who despised intrigue. He invited people to join in and think, not to follow him. Clever minds were brought on board and not booted out. ... What was ultimately his fascination? He was always hopeful. Perhaps we should say a visionary, who was no more a stranger to the world than he was unflinchingly willing to change it.<sup>25</sup>

In his farewell speech at the Congress of the *Socialist International* in 1992 he said: “Nothing happens by itself. Very little is permanent. Therefore – remember your

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23 Gunter Hofmann *Willy Brandt*, op. cit., p. 94.

24 Ibid., p. 96.

25 Björn Engholm Was die Größe von Willy Brandt ausmacht, in *Der Tagesspiegel*, 18 December 2013.

strength and that each era demands its own answers, and that you have to be up to them, if good is to be achieved".<sup>26</sup>

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the importance of republicanism and of cosmopolitanism which I already mentioned. As the example of Willy Brandt shows, republicanism differs from liberal democracy in active citizenship whose actions are oriented toward the common good, and its concept of freedom is characterized by a positive "freedom for" instead of the liberal, apolitical concept of "freedom from". And what seems particularly important is the fact that such action is by no means reserved for the statesman and his party alone, but on the contrary is also practiced by the citizenry. For a free society preserves its freedom only through lively participation, through an active civil society. So, we should add to the narrative of Willy Brandt's policy of *détente* the importance of an active citizenry. Brandt's policy would not have been successful without the civic movements in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Charter 77, citizens like the imprisoned writer and later first democratic president of Czechoslovakia Vaclav Havel, and the many demonstrations in 1989. The virtuoso statesman and the active society are mutually dependent.

As for cosmopolitanism, for Willy Brandt it meant above all *social* justice in North-South relations. We should expand this concept to include *political* cosmopolitanism, the recognition that we are all citizens of a common world. In the words of Hannah Arendt, this means that it is not nation-states and empires that correspond to our global human plurality, but open, unifying forms of organization such as federalism. According to Arendt, our human condition is based on plurality which is characterized by equality and diversity. Our equality makes it possible to speak to each other, but because of our diversity we need to make ourselves understood by each other. Such a plurality cannot realize itself when it is restricted by borders or ideologies.

In our times of political crises, this sounds utopian, but that is precisely why Willy Brandt can serve us as an example of courage: to make the impossible possible.

Written in 2019. First published in this volume.

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26 Willy Brandt Grusswort an SI-Kongress, 14 September 1992, in *Gesammelte Reden, Briefe und kleinere Schriften*, vol. 8 *Über Europa hinaus. Dritte Welt und Sozialistische Internationale*. Bearb. von Bernd Rother and Wolfgang Schmidt, op. cit., p. 515f.





## 8. When Telling the Truth Demands Courage

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Telling the truth can often place you in an uncomfortable minority position, exposed to the pressure of the majority. Standing up to this pressure requires courage. Therefore, courage is not only the virtue of political action, but also quite evidently the virtue of truth-telling. Telling an inconvenient truth is not only talk but at the same time an action.

To say what is, to set truth against lies or corruption, dissent against conformism, a scandal against the silence of an indifferent or a hostile majority, transparency against censorship, or diversity against dictatorship – all that requires civic courage, which may be interpreted as provocation or treason and does not find consent or admiration by the majority in the same way as the courage of soldiers, firemen and those practicing extreme sports. People prefer to talk about their unquestioned courage.

Telling the truth of facts is possible in two ways: as the action of courageous men at their workplace, in public or in politics, or as the narration of a spectator.

I analyse in more detail both these forms of truth-telling – first, the actor: I will present some examples of courageous truth-tellers in dictatorship and democracy and ask for the source of courage. I will then discuss two narratives about the same reality but from quite different perspectives: Arendt's report about the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, and Spielberg's "Schindler's List".

First, I shall present some people who told the truth in different ways and who by doing this acted courageously: people under the conditions of dictatorship in Eastern Europe before 1989, a whistle-blower in the EU administration in Brussels, and finally a politician fighting the Mafia in Italy.

### To Live in the Truth

First, the people under the conditions of dictatorship. I will start with a fictitious person in Vaclav Havel's exceptional manifesto "The Power of the Powerless"<sup>1</sup>, writ-

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1 Vaclav Havel: *The Power of the Powerless*, London: Hutchinson 1985, pp. 23–96.

ten in 1978. The German title calls this power: "An attempt to live in the Truth". This essay reflects the alienated life in "real socialism", a life in the lie as Havel calls it, and considers a strategy to defy this system and to overcome it. This reflection chooses a new way beyond the usual categories of public and private life. It is neither about a political opposition running the risk of ending in the same logic as its adversary, nor about the withdrawal from any political controversy into the niche of private life. It is about non-cooperation, the refusal of conformism.

Havel describes the example of the manager of a greengrocer's shop. Every year for May Day, the manager had to display the slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!" in his window between the onions and carrots. He no longer believed in the slogan, but did this every year, although on closer examination it turns out to be simply a symbolic act of submission to domination. When this slogan is stripped of its content, this act in fact meant: "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient."<sup>2</sup> The greengrocer did something which he considered in its content as completely senseless. The meaning of this act consisted in not getting into trouble with the authorities.

The same happened when those who ordered and controlled the display of these slogans marched past in a May Day demonstration. Few of them cared about the content, but all played their part so that this ritual went off without a hitch. "They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, *are* the system."<sup>3</sup>

Now, this system is challenged by the "aims of life", that is the tendency of life to move "toward plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short toward the fulfilment of its own freedom"<sup>4</sup>. What happens if this greengrocer simply follows his own aims in life? If he does not display the slogan anymore, because he no longer wants to ingratiate himself? If he does not go to vote in elections because he knows that he does not have a choice? Or if in assemblies he no longer says what he does not believe, but expresses his real opinions? Then there could be trouble<sup>5</sup>. But what is more important is that he breaks the rules of the game and finally has "disrupted the game as such"<sup>6</sup>. He will have transformed himself from an anonymous part of the system, someone who displays the signs sent to the shop, into a personality with his own face, own voice and own will.

Something is at work here that Arendt calls the Socratic morality, the inner dialogue of the two-in-one, the dialogue of a man who wants to live together with

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2 Ibid., p. 28.

3 Ibid., p. 31.

4 Ibid., p. 29.

5 Ibid., p. 39.

6 Ibid., p. 40.

himself and not with a liar. It is a “negative” morality, “the only working morality in borderline situations, that is, in times of crisis and emergency.”<sup>7</sup>

### To say what is

Havel’s ideal-typical person represents dissent and opposition as a cultural movement emerging in Eastern Europe. I also found this aim of life to plurality, diversity, and the fulfilment of its own freedom, in my research about the emergence of civic courage in oppositional people in the GDR.<sup>8</sup> They not only refused a life in the lie but also told the truth and provoked the disclosure and self-disclosure of the regime. Their main motives were freedom of movement and speech, recognition and justice. I will present four of them here.

A pupil, very active and rhetorically gifted, very much liked to organize the affairs of her class as a secretary of the communist youth organization “Free German Youth” (FDJ). More so than her classmates, she dared to ask inconvenient questions in the class of “citizens’ rights and duties” (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) and increasingly the others in the class expected her to ask critical questions. Growing up in an atheistic family she joined the peace movement of the Protestant Church out of curiosity and increasingly got into trouble with the state.

The manager of a small theatre organized discussions about taboos in the GDR such as fear or dying, and resisted the censorship demands of the city authorities. In a similar way, he spoke about inconvenient topics as a member of the party in political assemblies. Other colleagues supported him and sometimes they asked him to put forward their demands. During the communal election in 1989 he organized supervision of the polling stations and made public the massive fraud. He always liked to be at the centre of a big group of friends and like-minded people. Recognition was especially important for him.

An engineer was angry, even when still at school, about the phrases of the official party declarations and their representatives and about the required submission much as Havel’s greengrocer had experienced it. In 1968 he was working as a researcher at the university when East German troops took part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. He feigned illness to get out of having to supervise the student homes to report on any protests against the invasion. Only later as an engineer with a safe position did he feel strong enough to take revenge for all these humiliations.

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7 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in.: *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 106.

8 Wolfgang Heuer *Couragiertes Handeln*, Lüneburg Zu Klampen 2002; Wolfgang Heuer Zivilcourage und Habitus. Öffentlicher Mut in der DDR, in Gerd Meyer / Ulrich Dovermann, Siegfried Frech / Günther Gugel (eds.) *Zivilcourage lernen. Analysen – Modelle – Arbeitshilfen*, Stuttgart LPB 2004.

He studied political topics thoroughly to unmask the stupidity of party functionaries at assemblies of the employees. He also used the legal possibilities to present non-party members for works council elections.

A schoolteacher of “citizens’ rights and duties” acted in a very altruistic way. She refused to join the party, which was very unusual for a teacher with this political topic; she instead defended open debates with her pupils to make them ‘fit for life’, as she called it, and did not evade inconvenient discussions in the classroom, or the displeasure of her superiors.

Freedom of opinion and criticism, resistance against humiliation, search for recognition and the defence of the weak were her motives.

### To defend professional ethics

We find another form of being in accordance with oneself and justice in the second case, the action of whistle-blowers. Whistle-blowers make public the illegal practices of institutions or companies in which they are working. Among the better known are whistle-blowers are Daniel Ellsberg, who published the secret Pentagon Papers on the background of the Vietnam War, and Edward Snowden, who revealed the world-wide surveillance and spying practices of mainly American and British intelligence services, but also three who were nominated by *Time Magazine* as Persons of the Year 2002: Sharon Watkins, discovering the falsification of the balance sheet at Enron, Cynthia Cooper who discovered a similar deception at WorldCom, and Coleen Rowley who made known her complaints about the mismanagement at the FBI before 9/11.

The motives for whistleblowing are often similar to those of the employee of the EU administration in Brussels, the Dutchman Paul van Buitenen. Soon after he started his work as assistant auditor in 1995, he discovered corruption in the Leonardo vocational training programme under the commissioner Edith Cresson. His discovery began with a discrepancy about a laptop computer that had not been accounted for after the end of an EU-financed research programme. It went on with increasing numbers of documents proving deception totalling several billions of euros, including the beneficial treatment of the Mme Cresson’s dentist. The scandal was aggravated by the fact that at first the superiors did not take the complaints of Paul van Buitenen seriously, but he got more and more documents from colleagues in other departments and the affair finally ended with the resignation of the EU Commission after a long power struggle and a public debate in the European Parliament.

During the whole time, van Buitenen suffered insecurity, repression and anxiety, public defamation by his superiors and a 50 % reduction of his salary, the fear of the security company of the EU cooperating at that time with neo-Nazi groups, the siege of his house by the media, etc. He sought advice of his friends and became

a member of the Church to find consolation and strength against the power of the bureaucracy.<sup>9</sup>

Van Buitenen is an employee who takes his work seriously, the control of the spending, and does not tolerate corruption, as little as it may be. He is an inconvenient accountant, but not a cold bureaucrat, and less than ever an unconditional subordinate.

### To love the public or oneself

Finally, the third example, the former mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, who in the 1990s successfully managed to end the influence of the Mafia in his city. Its influence consisted in the control of politicians, public spending, contracts with waste-collection companies and water companies, and the provision of school buildings. The consequences had been the neglect of public spaces, the dereliction of the historical centre, the closing of cultural institutions, public silence, and many people killed. At the end of eight years of his government, the public works were again in the hand of companies free from the control of the Mafia, a part of the old centre was restored, the Teatro Massimo reopened, and nobody was shot anymore. The inhabitants had readopted the public spaces.

The reason for this astonishing change was not only the reestablishment of the public order but above all the mobilization of the population. Orlando won the power struggle not only because he intensified the police activities and criminal prosecution but also because he fought against the support and toleration of the Mafia. If he had relied solely on the legal system he would hardly have been successful so quickly. He had to act among the inhabitants which was much riskier and required much more courage. He appealed to the pride of the *palermitana* for their city and created a system of sponsorships for the reconstruction of Palermo. By his fearless actions for the democratization of the city, he gained so much recognition and support that the fight against Orlando seemed more and more unwinnable for the Mafia. Orlando's goal was to liberate the cultural identity of the Sicilians from the hegemony of the Mafia.<sup>10</sup>

Leoluca Orlando is similar the politicians praised by John F. Kennedy in the 1950s in his book *Profiles in Courage* as examples of political common sense and independent judgment. Kennedy contrasted them to contemporary populist politicians who were responsible in his opinion for the decline of public politics. He described eight

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9 Paul van Buitenen *Unbestechlich für Europa. Ein EU-Beamter kämpft gegen Misswirtschaft und Korruption*, Basel Brunnenverlag 1999. Wolfgang Heuer *Der Glockenläuter von Brüssel. Porträt des mutigen EU-Beamten Paul van Buitenen*, Radio Kultur, rbb 25 September 2004.

10 Leoluca Orlando *Ich sollte der nächste sein. Zivilcourage – die Chance gegen Korruption und Terror*, Freiburg Herder 2002.

senators in American history who distinguished themselves by their courageous behaviour towards their own party, their supporters, and the electorate. Whether their opinions were right or wrong, they had freshened their country with the necessary political life by fighting for their convictions and not acting out of opportunism.

Kennedy not only addressed his book to the politicians but also to the people, asking them to assume their unavoidable responsibility, “for in a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics, ‘holds office’; every one of us is in a position of responsibility; and, in the final analysis, the kind of government we get depends upon how we fulfil those responsibilities.”<sup>11</sup>

Where do we and these role models get the power to act in this way? Kennedy answers:

it was not because they ‘loved the public better than themselves’ (John Adams, WH). On the contrary it was precisely because they did *love themselves* – because each one’s need to maintain his own respect for himself was more important to him than his popularity with others – because his desire to win or maintain a reputation for integrity and courage was stronger than his desire to maintain his office – because his conscience, his personal standard of ethics, his integrity or morality ... was stronger than the pressures of public disapproval.<sup>12</sup>

And the historian Allen Nivens, advising Kennedy writing this book, alludes that a man without character may occasionally give fitful exhibitions of courage, but “moral courage is allied with the other traits which make up character: honesty, deep seriousness, a firm sense of principle, candour, resolution.”<sup>13</sup>

So, the answer is: To love oneself and the conscience, which is guided by a strong and straight character with firm moral norms.

Comparing the three forms of truth-telling, we can see that keeping one’s dignity against a life in the lie under dictatorship with its limitations and humiliations resembles the life in the truth of whistle-blowers. The latter do not want to be complicit with lies, corruption, fraud and violation of law because it would be against their dignity and in the case of van Buitenen their work ethic. Questions of conscience, moral criteria or character are not mentioned, but the defence of oneself and at the same time the relationship to others. The life in the truth is potentially a life shared with others, it is what Arendt calls the common world or also the truth in its diversity of perspectives because of the human plurality.

The priority Kennedy gives to the love of oneself excludes this inter-subjective perspective. His pleading for the duty of public responsibility and individual self-

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11 John F. Kennedy: *Profiles in Courage*, New York: Harper & Row 1961, p. 245.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 238/39.

13 Allen Nivens: Foreword, in: John F. Kennedy: *Profiles*, op. cit., p. xvii.

perfection is marked by a Christian, non-political idea of man. Arendt's inter-subjectivity in contrast offers a standpoint, which is neither the place of the liberal individual nor the place where John Adams asks to love the public better than oneself. It is the place of a common judgment and common action where we act as individuals and citizens, as spectators and actors. How much this place differs from our common concept of the lonely subject demonstrates Arendt's entry in her diary about reason and imagination: "Because it is not the self-bound reason but only the imagination which makes it possible to 'to think in the place of each other', it is not the reason but the imagination forming the bond between the men. Against the sense of oneself, the reason, living by the I think, stands the sense of the world, living from the others as common sense (passive) and as imagination (active)."<sup>14</sup>

Also, action in Arendt's definition differs from both Kennedy and Adams: for her it is not only about self-accordance and not about the plea for a higher esteem of the public but the need to share the world with others by action. Arendt called this the sheer delight to act, which she discovered in men in local associations, councils and similar spontaneous forms of organization. They correspond to what Tocqueville ascertained with regard to the French Revolution, "that a genuine love of freedom is ever quickened by the prospect of material rewards ... What has made so many men, since untold ages, stake their all on liberty is its intrinsic glamour, a fascination it has in itself, apart from all 'practical' considerations. For only in countries where it reigns can a man speak, live, and breathe freely, owing obedience to no authority save God and the laws of the land. The man who asks of freedom anything other than itself is born to be a slave."<sup>15</sup>

When truth-telling is dominated by moral and religious criteria or interests, the truth is exploited and finally destroyed. Therefore, again and again the distrust towards courageously acting persons: Aren't they dogmatic people or serving unknown, secret interests? Is van Buitenen not a strangely fanatic person? And why did the Mafia not kill Orlando?

## Telling the True Story

This leads us to the second part, the question how to narrate the truth. "Who says what is ... always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contin-

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14 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, eds. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, Munich Piper 2002, p. 570.

15 Alexis de Tocqueville: *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, Garden City N.Y.: Anchor Books/Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955, chap. III. 3, p. 168f.



gency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning.”<sup>16</sup> In this sense everyday life stories, reportage, historiography, and literature are very similar. There is no understanding without thinking and judging about truth and finding the right words for it.

Arendt’s report *Eichmann in Jerusalem* manifests two characteristics: it is first the product of a courageous thinking, what Arendt called “thinking without a banister”, analysing the specifically new of the totalitarian mass-murder organized in a bureaucratic way. And second, Arendt chose a corresponding form of narration, what Leora Bilsky rightly called a “counter-narrative”. After the publication of the report, a storm of protest arose against content and tone with consequences till today. It was the fiercest controversy ever about the Holocaust. Arendt was aware of writing inconvenient truths, and the campaign against her showed that she had hit the truth exactly.

### ***Eichmann in Jerusalem* – Arendt’s ‘Heartlessness’**

For Arendt, the trial “offers the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society – not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims.”<sup>17</sup> As Leora Bilsky explains in her essay “Between Justice and Politics. The Competition of Storytellers in the Eichmann Trial”<sup>18</sup>, the trial was about judging the events that led to different narrative forms. While the prosecutor Hausner split the history and only wanted to tell the classical Jewish history by concentrating on the stories of the victims to underline the importance of the state of Israel, Arendt concentrated on a story which included all facts. She wanted to prevent the emergence of holes in the collective memory by concealment or self-deception., Arendt did not aim at “a final judgment’ that would master the events once and for all.” Her book “was not meant to produce consensus but to set in motion a process of deliberation and public debate.”<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, Arendt wrote her counter-narrative, in Bilsky’s words “the story that was not told but should have been told in the courtroom.”<sup>20</sup> She concentrated on the

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16 Hannah Arendt: Truth and Politics, in: *Between Past and Future*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 257.

17 Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York 1963, p. 125f.

18 Leora Bilsky: Between Justice and Politics. The Competition of Storytellers in the Eichmann Trial, in: Steven E. Aschheim (ed.): *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2001.

19 Leora Bilsky: When Actor and Spectator Meet in the Courtroom: Reflections on Hannah Arendt’s Concept of Judgment, in: Ronald Beiner / Jennifer Nedelsky (eds.): *Judgment, imagination, and politics: themes from Kant and Arendt*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield 2001, p. 273.

20 Leora Bilsky: Between Justice and Politics, op. cit., p. 232.

moral, political, and juridical aspects of the trial, discussing them on several levels: the trial as a theatre with its own dynamics, the personality of the accused, his capacity to judge, his conscience and the deconstruction of the radical evil, the description of the course of events of the destruction of the Jews and the shortcomings of the court and the final speech in defence of the establishment of an international court of justice.

- *The trial as a theatre*: The trial not only took place in a building originally planned as a theatre, but it adopted inevitably the form of a play with all its actors and their interaction: the prosecutor, the accused, the judges, the witnesses, and the audience. The accused proved to be neither a conventional mass murder nor certifiably insane in his stereotype language and ridiculousness. The judges were old-fashioned and tried hard to understand the criminal and his crime. Finally, the audience in the often half-empty room consisted of “‘survivors’, with middle-aged and elderly people, immigrants from Europe, like myself, who knew by heart all there was to know.”<sup>21</sup>

Nothing corresponded to the common anticipation of a trial and the role the participants usually played. Arendt’s counter-narrative culminates in the statement that “it was precisely the play aspect of the trial that collapsed under the weight of the hair-raising atrocities.”<sup>22</sup> The accused no longer stood in the centre of the trial and in some respects “the lessons were superfluous, and in others positively misleading.”<sup>23</sup> At least the witness ‘KZetnik’ still had some theatrical character, because on being interrupted in his interminable testimonies he promptly fainted.

Finally, the witnesses were hardly able to contribute anything new to the trial, they were not able “to tell a story”<sup>24</sup>. An exception was Abba Kovner’s account of the rescuer Anton Schmidt, which appeared in Arendt’s strong image “like a sudden burst of light in the midst of impenetrable, unfathomable darkness”<sup>25</sup>.

- *The personality of the accused*: Eichmann as the main character of the trial proved at the same time to be an anti-personality which in all important aspects did not correspond to the image of a monstrous criminal. Remarkable was “his almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view”<sup>26</sup>, his language was bizarre, an “heroic fight with the German language”<sup>27</sup> mixing

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21 Ibid., p. 8.

22 Ibid., p. 8f.

23 Ibid., p. 10.

24 Ibid., p. 224.

25 Ibid., p. 231.

26 Ibid., p. 47f.

27 Ibid., p. 48.

metaphors and stringing together clichés. “The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*.”<sup>28</sup>

- *The description of the course of events of the destruction of the Jews*: The course of these events showed not only the details of the mass crimes but also the common moral collapse. When during the trial the role of the Jewish councils came up Arendt called it “undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story”<sup>29</sup>. She never asked why they did not resist – a question Arendt found “both foolish and cruel”<sup>30</sup> when posed by Judge Hausner. But her following sentence provoked an outrage: “The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had been really unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery, but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and half and six million people.”

### **Schindler’s List – the Courage of the Bystander**

Spielberg’s film differs in all essential aspects from Arendt’s “to say what is” and her judgment about the “totality of the moral collapse”. Spielberg does not need courage to tell the truth because it is the truth of the mainstream, and his truth differs essentially from Arendt’s.

In *Schindler’s List*, the main character, Oskar Schindler, a rescuer of his Jewish forced labourers, confronts the SS-man Amon Goeth, commander of a labour camp, both surrounded by other Nazi officers and the group of Jewish victims. Unlike Eichmann, Goeth personifies sadistic evil. He gives his lust to kill free rein and in the course of time shoots down more than 500 camp inmates. In their historical study *Remembrance in a Global Age: The Holocaust* studying the changes in the public discussion about the Holocaust in Israel, Germany and the United States, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider mention the difference between Eichmann and Goeth. Arendt emphasised that Eichmann was not Iago or Macbeth and had not decided like Richard III to become a bad man. “With this remark she wanted to depersonalize evil and place it in the system of totalitarianism. Spielberg brought the evil back again to the level of the individual. Goeth was Iago and decided to become a bad guy.”<sup>31</sup> Goeth was ruthless, brutal, arbitrary and corrupt; he accepted bribes. Alcohol, women and violence were his passions beyond any limits.

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28 Ibid., p. 49.

29 Ibid., p. 117.

30 Hannah Arendt: What Remains? The Language remains, in: Peter Baehr (ed.): *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, New York: Penguin Classics 2000, p. 15.

31 Daniel Levy / Natan Sznaider *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter Der Holocaust*, Frankfurt/M Suhrkamp 2007, p. 166.

Eichmann in contrast had no sadistic inclination and could hardly bear his visits in extermination camps, and he did not accept bribes. Though in Spielberg's film the interpretation of Goeth is historically correct, he does not represent the members of a totalitarian system. This system was dominated by ideology and party discipline excluding individual preferences and passions. It was based on rules and not on the absence of rules. What the film does not include is the fact that the SS arrested Goeth because of bribery and was about to bring him to court when the war ended. In a similar case, the former commander of Buchenwald, Karl Koch, was condemned to death and executed because of bribery. So, while the SS did not tolerate private enrichment, the Nazi system in Spielberg's movie appears as a system of unrestrained individualists.

But in the centre of the movie stands the figure of Schindler. A smart, amoral, self-made man, party member and bon vivant acting full of self-confidence. His strong point is his ability to present and commercialize his products, to corrupt influential people and to deal on the black market. After years of hope, he declares, he has finally become successful, but not with the help of good fortune but with the help of war. The war offers him the unexpected chance for the cheap takeover of a factory and the exploitation of cheap Jewish workforce. He comes into conflict with the SS who wants to deport his right-hand man, the accounting clerk. When the SS transports his workers into a labour camp, he can only keep them with the help of bribery, and only when other Jews ask him for help and call him a rescuer does he become aware of the fact that his workers are not only workforce but men and women. This evokes a strong humanity slumbering deep in his interior. In a moving talk he consoles Helene, the Jewish maid suffering under Goeth's untrammelled arbitrariness. And in a discussion with Goeth, Schindler explains that true power does not consist in the freedom to kill but in being able to kill but not doing it. For a short time Goeth actually hesitates to go on with his joyful killings. Schindler always tries to help where help is needed. So, he orders water to be sprayed over a deportation train waiting at the station to cool it down in the scorching summer sun. When the labour camp is going to be dissolved and the inmates are to be deported to Auschwitz he rescues again, this time by naming 1100 men and women on his famous list and transporting them to another factory in Czechoslovakia, where he starts to manufacture munitions. And once again he rescues with the help of bribery when the rescued women are transported to Auschwitz by mistake. Finally, in his new factory Schindler produces only defective munitions.

At the end of the story Schindler is bankrupt and confesses in a moving declaration to his workers that he had lived from slave labour and therefore would be pursued in the future. He leaves the decision to the security forces to liquidate the workers and become murderers or to let them free. He gives each worker clothes, vodka and cigarettes and regrets that he could not rescue more people.

The story shows how Schindler changes from an egoist to an altruist, from an exploiter to a rescuer. "What I have learned in that time more than any other thing," Spielberg declared after filming, "is the insight that a single person really and indeed can change things. A single person can – in a metaphorical sense – more was necessary, because he was a morally sound and deeply humane man. Bigger than the others, handsome and in smart suits, rhetorically predominant and morally prudent he acted with the posture of Superman. He is the incarnation of the American businessman putting his feet on his writing desk. "The war brings forth horrible things", he declares and means brutish behaviour. But the totalitarian domination, which for its part brought forth this war remains unmentioned.

The victims appear as a homogenous cultural and religious community, innocent and cultivated. The role of the *capo* is only touched on, the Jewish councils remain unmentioned.

### Decontextualizing the Story

*Schindler's List* deals with a narrative of the Jewish history, as did prosecutor Hausner during the Eichmann trial, but it is accompanied by a notable shift in perspective. We are no longer witnessing the totality of the moral collapse of the society but a pronounced egoism which makes use of war and the exploitation of the labour force, does not contradict a marked humanity ready for action in an emergency case. The distinction between right and wrong, good and evil works. "You can rescue, you only have to decide to do it."<sup>32</sup> This message clearly contradicts the threatening assumption of Arendt that we are facing the moral collapse of a whole society. Rescuers and victims are not affected by it. Similarly, the movie contradicts Arendt's assumption of depersonalization, of Eichmann's anti-personality. Arendt's theory of the banality of evil – often misunderstood as making evil harmless – is actually much more troubling than the radical evil of Goeth, which the Jerusalem judges would more readily have understood.

The troubling idea of a society being unable to judge adequately moral and political questions gives way for a clear confrontation between good and evil. The good ones who are not affected by totalitarianism in their capacity to judge confront the evil ones being succumbed to their unlimited passions and re able to put them into their place by reason and humanity.

Spielberg does not tell a counternarrative but on the contrary leads reality back to a safer world where the classical story of the fight between the protagonists of good and evil is still adequate. He follows the Aristotelian model of telling a story, which is still valid today and the recipe of almost all successful Hollywood films.

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32 Ibid., p. 167.

To sum up, we can say that though the story of the film is based on facts, Spielberg fundamentally changed the perspective, he removed the story from its historical context and its place – he decontextualized it. He also changed the personalities: rescuers and victims correspond to the actual common citizen in liberal democracies with their intact moral judgment facing a tyrannical domination gone wild. In this way the movie proves astonishingly contemporary. Levy and Sznajder declare that “Spielberg always maintained that the film deals with Bosnians in Serbia or with black Americans.” When black youngsters in Oakland made fun of the scene in “Schindler’s List” showing the frenzied hunting of Jews, Spielberg rushed there and “created a new course in the local high school called ‘The Human Holocaust: The Afro-American Experience’.”<sup>33</sup>

This decontextualizing involves a threefold change of perspective:

- Firstly the *emergence of the perspective of the witness* which the German post-war generations can identify with wholeheartedly. This explains the resounding success of the film in Germany. Levy and Sznajder summarize it as follows: “Schindler are all who want to rescue, Goeth are all who want to kill, and the Jews are the victims everywhere.”<sup>34</sup>
- Secondly, this allows a *universalization of the Holocaust*. The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington stands for this universalization. It gives the impression that the Holocaust is part of the American history; its exhibition starts with the liberation of the Jewish inmates of concentration camps by American troops.
- Furthermore, the Holocaust is not only an event of the past but a permanent threat, a warning of its possible recurrence. Therefore, the seriousness of the promise “Auschwitz never again” was put on the test bench in the cases of Bosnia, Kosovo and Ruanda and an obligation for all European countries since the Holocaust conference in Stockholm in 2000.
- Finally, the decontextualization corresponds to the *end of remembrance*. More or less, the generation of those involved in the events is not alive anymore. Hardly anybody still has personal experience of that time. This loss is not trivial and cannot be compensated for by information and knowledge. Because experiences are more than mere adventures and embedded deeper than rational knowledge. They are part of one’s orientation and knowledge bases which are shaped by an intersubjective everyday life, a so-called “conjunctive space of experience”<sup>35</sup>. This conjunctive space of experience, according to Karl Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, is the basis for understanding. The acquisition of history in the

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33 Ibid., p. 166.

34 Ibid., p. 164.

35 See Ralf Bohnsack *Qualitative Bild- und Videointerpretation. Die dokumentarische Methode*, Op-laden Barbara Budrich 2009, p. 130.

sense of understanding takes place on the basis of shared implicit knowledge bases. The presence of the conjunctive space of experience is much stronger, it shapes the image of the past and decontextualizes it. Therefore, the temptation was great for Spielberg to emphasise the supposed actuality of the story, so that in the movie we meet ourselves and not the others, we understand our world and not the world of totalitarianism. Arendt's conjunctive space of experience is shaped by totalitarianism, Spielberg's conjunctive space of experience is shaped by liberal democracy.

Written in 2012. First published: *When Telling the Truth Demands Courage*, in: *HA – The Journal of the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College*, 2012, pp. 81–95.

## 9. Sustainability – The Power of the ‘Unreasonable’

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The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself.

Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man

– George Bernard Shaw

This contribution is about business that is aware of its social significance and responsibility beyond the immediate business concerns, and it is about politics that demands this assumption of responsibility. It is about business and politics, and that includes political science, taking note of change and redefining the role in a changing world. The traditional triangle of politics, business and civil society needs to be redefined: politics is no longer merely institutionalised, representative politics, business is no longer the sector of production with an exclusively individual profit motive, and civil society is no longer the place solely of the socially critical activity of citizens. Politics, the economy and civil society in the 21st century interpenetrate each other in the face of the requirements of sustainability. Politics needs close contact with civil society, they both develop the framework conditions for sustainability, and business must become aware of its political and social responsibility, its corporate citizenship, and in this respect not only cooperate with civil society, but become part of it. Finally, anyone expecting theoretical expositions on questions of political philosophy should bear in mind Arendt’s remark that one should always be guided by experience so as not to end up with all kinds of (questionable) theory.<sup>1</sup>

I will examine in the following why, in view of the demands of ecology and sustainability, creative but sometimes unwieldy characters are necessary, whose actions are often considered unreasonable and who are often initially met with resistance or ridicule. To this end, I outline the basics of a new economy of sustainability, present the examples of the innovative Brazilian entrepreneurs’ association *Instituto Ethos* and “social business”, and then consider questions of ethics and responsibility

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1 Hannah Arendt: From an Interview with Roger Errera, in: *The New York Review of Books* 25 (1978–10–26), No. 16, p. 18.



and the extent to which politics, business and civil society should be thought of in a new context.

## The foundations of a new economy

Accidents such as that of the tanker *Exxon Valdez* in 1989, the 1984 *Union Carbide* disaster in Bhopal, India, with thousands of deaths, and the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident with an unknown number of long-term victims gave considerable impetus to the environmental movement.<sup>2</sup> It was further strengthened in 1987 by the report of the Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, which started a worldwide discussion on sustainable development, including issues such as human rights.

In the 1990s, social and environmental standards, codes of conduct for ethical behaviour, and also quality standards were developed in various industries and sectors in order to exclude risks to workers and consumers with regard to product quality. Since then, codes of conduct for quality improvement have been introduced in various sectors. For example, the *Forest Stewardship Council* was founded in 1993 in the global timber and forestry industry.

When the imminent demise of the Soviet Bloc in 1989, two conflicting movements clashed: a socio-environmental movement that demanded a clear and decisive change of course from politics and the economy, and a neo-liberal movement that, on the contrary, pursued an unhindered expansion of the old way of doing business and demanded further liberalisation in which politics, trade unions and civil society should withdraw. The UN with its Secretary General Kofi Annan intervened in the confrontation of these opposing tendencies and announced the founding of a *UN Global Compact* in 2000, which aimed at voluntary regulation of international economic relations. States, companies, and civil society organisations were called upon to commit themselves to ten internationally valid goals based on four crucial international agreements: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of the International Labour Organisation, the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the UN Convention against Corruption. This requires, according to the UN, an understanding that the principles are an integral part of a company's strategy and operations, and an open approach and dialogue with the company's shareholders.<sup>3</sup>

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2 See Pavan Sukhdev: *Corporation 2020: Transforming Business for Tomorrow's World*, Island Press 2012. Andrés Cózar, et.al.: Plastic debris in the open ocean, in: *PNAS*, 2014, pp. 1–6. Joel Bakan: *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, Free Press 2004.

3 United Nations Global Compact; <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc> (2022/10/3)

The UN thus acted as initiator and mediator, pushing for the enforcement of international state agreements in the face of the threat of their weakening, calling on companies to actively participate and commit themselves, and also including civil society in this new alliance of states and business. Those involved in this were called upon to establish regional networks. This marked a decisive change of orientation: politics cooperated with those companies that were aware of their socio-political role, and civil society was recognised as a conglomerate of citizens whose expertise and commitment is an indispensable part of politics, but also of business. By 2009, 7,000 participants worldwide had joined the *Global Compact*, including 5,000 companies. Since the *Global Compact* also sees itself as a multi-stakeholder network, research institutions, business and labour associations, and now 80 cities also participate.

For business enterprises, a threefold assessment of corporate activity, the “Triple Bottom Line”, was developed, which examines the economic, social and environmental sustainability. In the case of cities, it is the “Circles of Sustainability” elaborated in 2013, which assess urban activities on the basis of the social sectors of economy, environment, culture and politics and look at the interactions between them.<sup>4</sup> The term “triple bottom line” was popularised by John Elkington<sup>5</sup>; it not only means economically, socially and environmentally sustainable production, but also the departure from the exclusive orientation towards shareholders in favour of stakeholders, the interest groups to which a company has to answer: consumers, the public sector, the economy, trade unions and civil society organisations. In every responsible company, clear orientations should be developed on the basis of a mission, a vision, a code of conduct, a discursive infrastructure and consistent incentives and control mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>

At the heart of all these movements is the new image of a company committed to *corporate social responsibility*. The definitions of CSR are inconsistent: they range from a rather philanthropic idea of sponsoring and doing good for society to the idea of “governing a company of citizens” to a “corporate citizenship” of the whole company, according to which it sees itself as a responsible citizen or is even an active part of a not merely liberal but active citizenship in the classical republican sense.<sup>7</sup> Accord-

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4 Liam Magee et al.: Reframing social sustainability reporting: towards an engaged approach, in: *Environment, Development and Sustainability* (2013) 15: pp. 225–243.

5 John Elkington: *Cannibals with Forks. The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*, Capstone Publishing Ltd. 1997.

6 S. Thomas Maak / Nicola M. Pless: Responsible leadership in a stakeholder society: A relational perspective. In *Journal of Business Ethics*, 66 (1) 2006, pp. 99–115. – Thomas Maak / Peter Ulrich / Heiko Spitzbeck *Integre Unternehmensführung Ethische Orientierungswissen für die Wertschaftspraxis*. Stuttgart Schäffer-Poeschel 2007.

7 Brook Manville / Josiah Ober Beyond empowerment Building a company of citizens, in *Harvard Business Review*, 81,1, 2003, 48–53. – Klaus Schwab *Global Corporate Citizenship Working*

ingly, humanitarian projects are supported, educational projects with schools are developed or employees are given time off for social projects.

Whatever the self-definitions and orientations of CSR companies, they are first and foremost always voluntary commitments, with compliance made verifiable through a voluntary reporting system. It is about more than individual good deeds; it is about a gradual, voluntary change, first of all in attitudes and then increasingly in the entire way companies do business. For example, if it is a matter of offering free fruit to promote employee health without having talked about it with the employees, then this can be assessed as CSR 1.0. If this fruit basket is part of various integrated measures after consultation with the employees, it is CSR 2.0. If the promotion of organic fruit cultivation and regional economic transport is added and everything together represents integrated, proactive action, one can speak of CSR 3.0.<sup>8</sup>

Nestlé is working to reduce water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, waste and packaging materials, and to massively educate rural populations in its three core areas, water, environment, rural development and nutrition. In 2008, Danone, the international food company, started a restructuring process focusing on health, environment, social justice and education. A “Vice President for Sustainability & Shared Value Creation” has been assigned to the Chief Executive Officer and products are developed to promote healthy eating, depending on the market region and widespread nutritional deficits.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, NGOs are no longer recipients of donations, but partners in the same causes.

ISO standards such as SA 8000, the aim of which is to improve the working conditions of workers and also temporary workers, serve as an orientation for companies. This standard was created by the New York-based NGO *Social Accountability International* (SAI) specifically for transnational companies, based on the conventions of the *International Labour Organisation* (ILO) and the UN, as a minimum requirement for social and labour standards. Published in 2010 and developed by 90 countries and over 40 organisations from six different stakeholder groups chaired by Brazil and Sweden, the ISO 26000 standard is not intended to be a traditional certification, but to move companies from good intentions to good practice in the following areas: organisational governance, human rights, labour practices, the environment,

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with Governments and Civil Society, in *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2008. – André Habisch (ed.) *Handbuch Corporate Citizenship Corporate Social Responsibility für Manager*, Berlin, Heidelberg Springer 2007. – Thomas Maak *Die Wirtschaft der Bürgergesellschaft ethisch-politische Grundlagen einer Wirtschaftspraxis selbstbestimmter Bürger*, Bern-Stuttgart-Vienna Haupt 1999.

8 Andreas Schneider Reifegradmodell CSR – eine Begriffsklärung und -abgrenzung, in Andreas Schneider / René Schmidpeter (eds.) *Corporate Social Responsibility Verantwortungsvolle Unternehmensführung in Theorie und Praxis*, Berlin, Heidelberg Springer 2012, p. 36f.

9 Danone: *Sustainability Report*, 2012.

fair business and operating practices, consumer concerns, and community involvement and development.

The *UN Global Compact* and the *UN Environment Programme Financial Initiative* also created an instrument for the financial sector in 2006, the “Principles for Responsible Investment” (PRI)<sup>10</sup>. This involves a voluntary commitment by institutional investors to integrate environmental, social and governance-related aspects into the entire investment process and to report on them in a regular “Responsible Investment Transparency Report”. By the end of June 2011, more than 900 organisations had signed the PRI, regrettably still a minority. Nevertheless, in 2007, 17.6% of investments in Europe were invested in accordance with social and/or environmental criteria.

Concerning CSR, we not only find the combined recommendations and offers of the UN, but also those of the OECD, the European Union, intergovernmental organisations and internationally operating NGOs. These recommendations are mainly directed at transnational activities and offer certification systems, standards, guidelines and role models especially for organisational structures and supply chains. The aim of all these standard-setting activities is to gradually raise the level by popularising the idea of CSR. To this end, best practices are published and comparisons are made possible among companies, the media and consumers.

If CSR is to effectively guide all entrepreneurial activity in companies, then what is needed above all is integrity management, in which CSR is understood as a process in which sustainability standards and corresponding structures are implemented and compliance with the code of ethics, the introduction of accountability and incentive structures, the control of the supply chain and the type of marketing become the basis of everyday work in such a lively way that they are able to accompany the constant change and development of the company and eliminate the traditional contradiction between ethical conscience and entrepreneurial requirements.<sup>11</sup> Without such integration management, the individual elements of a CSR policy remain ineffective. For example, a code of ethics did not help the US energy company *Enron* with 22,000 employees when its balance sheets were continuously falsified and the company finally went bankrupt in 2001, but only after 500 *Enron* managers had received substantial bonuses shortly before the bankruptcy and the CEO received a severance payment of US\$ 300 million.<sup>12</sup>

Objections raised against CSR expressed the fear of loss of competition due to higher spending on social and environmental measures. From a traditional perspective, it is harmful for the company to pay adequate wages in other countries, to moni-

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10 <http://www.unpri.org/> (2022/10/3)

11 Thomas Maak / Peter Ulrich / Heiko Spitzack *Integre Unternehmensführung*, op. cit., p. 205f.

12 Malcolm S Salter: *Innovation Corrupted: The Origins and Legacy of Enron's Collapse*. Harvard University Press 2008.

tor to the supply chain and to bear externalisation costs. Similarly, it seems harmful not to use the usual bribes to gain advantages and secure lucrative contracts. Those who acted in this way simply appeared to be unreasonable, which is what the title of this essay alludes to. However, all this is only a short-term advantage. The fact that *Ikea* products were being made by children in Pakistan led to a scandal in Sweden in 1992. Since then, the company has made sure that such reports are not repeated, because consumers have become more sensitive to these issues. The report that Siemens Also negative for *Siemens* and the Brazilian politicians involved was that the company had gained advantages in the construction of the underground transport system in São Paulo by bribing local politicians. The consequence was a four-year ban on further government contracts in Brazil.

Corruption is part of the pathological behaviour of the old way of doing business. According to a report by the NGO *Global Financial Integrity* (GFI), corruption drains US\$ 10 from developing countries for every aid dollar provided, which amounted to about US\$ 900 billion in 2012 alone.<sup>13</sup> Illegal money transactions such as bribery, lobbying and money laundering are part of an ensemble that also includes impunity, violence and environmental damage. An effective fight against corruption is only possible with a concomitant change in corporate culture, political practices and civil society behaviour.

### The example of *Instituto Ethos* and social business

In Brazil, business enterprises have taken a very innovative path as members of the *Instituto Ethos*. Here, it is not individual companies that have introduced CSR programmes, but an association of entrepreneurs that has invited them to join the association and stand on a common platform. This association was founded in 1998 by Oded Grajew, co-owner of a toy factory, and other entrepreneurs such as Hélio Mattar, Ricardo Young, Emerson Kapaz, Sérgio Mindlin, Guilherme Peirão Leal, and Eduardo Capobianco. At the end of the dictatorship in 1985, they all felt that a democratic constitution does not automatically create democratic convictions and behaviour, but offers a formal framework that has to be filled with everyday democratic practice. This includes overcoming authoritarian or populist policies not only of the government and parties, but especially of the business federation FIESP, all of which could not offer a solution to the economic crisis, social injustice and justified distrust in the actions of the elite.

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13 Dev Kar / Brian LeBlanc: *Illicit Financial Flows from Developing Countries: 2002–2011*, December 2013. <http://www.gfintegrity.org/report/2013-global-report-illicit-financial-flows-from-developing-countries-2002-2011/>

That is why Grajew and some friends founded the alternative business association PNBE (*Pensamento Nacional das Bases Empresariais* – National Thinking of the Corporate Bases) in 1987. Its work and vague programmatic ideas went far beyond the activities of a traditional business association. In 1993, working groups were set up on the following priorities: Democracy and Citizenship, Environment, International Relations, São Paulo City Forum, Capital and Labour Forum, Political Statements and Economic Rights.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Grajew was involved in the founding of the *Fundação Abrinq pelos Direitos da Criança* (Abrinq Foundation for the Rights of Children) in 1990 and was its administrative head until 1998. This foundation campaigned for the rights of children in Brazil, 25 million of whom were then without education and regular meals and exposed to all kinds of violence, and 4 million of those under 14 had to work despite the ban on child labour. By 2015 the foundation had already managed to help more than 6 million children and young people.

Two things stand out about the establishment of this foundation that are characteristic of Grajew’s work: the involvement of several sectors of society and a pragmatic approach. The *Abrinq* Foundation, as an NGO, approached companies, for example, to publicly state on their trucks that they would not support child labour. “In the beginning, we didn’t have a clear perspective”, recalled the Foundation’s former chair Ana Maria Wilhelm. “We believed that with time we would learn. We had a verse that said: ‘Wanderer, there is no path, the path is made by walking.’ [From the poem “*Caminante no hay camino*” by Antonio Machado.] Today, when we look back, we can see that we were going in the right direction.”<sup>15</sup>

The PNBE had already laid the foundation for an economy in line with the “triple bottom line” and, beyond that, for social commitment. The *Instituto Ethos* is more or less oriented towards CSR 2.0. This association became a great success by 2015 with some 1,500 member companies, accounting for about one third of Brazil’s GDP. Its mission is to promote the self-commitment of companies to act responsibly and sustainably, respect the interests of stakeholders, support social development and uphold international human and labour rights, which are also valid in Brazil. This applies in particular to slave and child labour in agriculture and livestock farming, which is widespread in remote rural areas of Brazil, and in the production of charcoal, which is used for steel processing. This is combined with commitment to supply chain controls. For example, the meat that is sold in the supermarket passes from the haciendas to slaughterhouses and meat factories. Each of these stations is called

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14 Alvaro Bianchi: Crise e representação empresarial: o surgimento do pensamento nacional das bases empresariais, in: *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, Curitiba, 16 June 2001, pp. 123–142.

15 Fundação Abrinq de los Direitos da Criança: *Uma história de ação 1990–1997*. <https://www.livrosgratis.com.br/ler-livro-online-35680/fundacao-abrinq---uma-historia-de-acao-1990-1997> (2022/10/3)

upon to check the origin of the animals and the meat to ensure that no illegal practices have played a role. The commitment to these principles is voluntary. In case of violation of this commitment, *Instituto Ethos* relies on the educational effect of press reports and scandals. *Instituto Ethos* cooperates with NGOs and government agencies in all areas, including the fight against slave labour. From 1995 to 2011, more than 40,000 people were freed from slavery, and in 2014, 600 companies were on a “dirty list”<sup>16</sup>, which excluded them from public loans for two years, including two construction companies involved in building for the FIFA World Cup.

Less spectacular but no less important are other *Instituto Ethos* initiatives such as consultations on CSR issues, conferences at regional level, two weekly TV programmes as well as prizes for journalistic and university work on sustainability issues and annual international conferences to determine appropriate changes in focus.

Individual companies have made a far-reaching shift towards CSR 3.0, e.g. *Natura Cosmetics*, which was ranked second among the “Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations” according to *Corporate Knights 2013*<sup>17</sup>. The company pays attention to sustainability in all its activities. It draws on natural resources from Brazil and pays attention to the social consequences in the sourcing villages. It distributes the cosmetics through multipliers who are trained and paid accordingly. The packaging is taken back and recycled, and the goods are produced in a factory with good social standards regarding working conditions, kindergarten and a canteen with organic food. Co-president is Guilherme Leal, a co-founder of *Instituto Ethos*. Leal is a member of the Green Party and his company ranked 13th richest in Brazil and 463rd in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, reforms were made in the financial sector. In 2005, the ISE sustainability index was founded on the São Paulo stock exchange. Every year, based on an evaluation of extensive questionnaires on the sustainability policies of the respective companies, a decision is made as to which forty of them can be included in the ISE or remain a member. And indeed, in 2013 the *Bovespa index* had suffered a loss of 15 %, while in the same year the ISE index improved by 1.5 %. From 2005 to 2013, the *Bovespa index* had increased by 60 %, but the ISE index had increased by 140 %.<sup>19</sup>

Just like the *Instituto Ethos*, the ISE has no fixed criteria for what exactly is to be assessed as sustainable and social, or where the boundary lies. It is always about relative values, about the relationship of the companies to each other, about who is

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16 <http://reporterbrasil.org.br> (2022/10/3)

17 <https://www.corporateknights.com/issues/2013-01-billionaire-superheroes-issue/2013-global-100-results/> (2022/10/3)

18 O Globo 16/05/2010 – <http://oglobo.globo.com/politica/guilherme-leal-fundador-da-natura-a-dono-de-fortuna-de-us-21-bilhoes-3007476> (2022/10/3)

19 According to my calculations. WH

better than the others in relative terms. In the case of ISE, this determines whether a company is accepted or rejected; in the case of *Instituto Ethos*, this only serves to determine the progress of the sustainability policy of the members. In both cases, it is a process of continuous improvement, not regulation imposed from outside. Nevertheless, Oded Grajew and the management team of *Instituto Ethos* consider it indispensable that a process of acclimatisation should eventually be followed by government regulation.

Finally, *Instituto Ethos* was aware that consumers can also contribute to ensuring that products are produced sustainably and with respect for human rights. Thus, in 2001, the *Instituto Akatu pelo Consumo Consciente* (Akatu – Institute for Conscious Consumption) was founded, an NGO that provides comprehensive information on things like product manufacturing, water and energy, waste, sustainable use of money and credit, offering teaching materials and videos and occasionally, without naming names, the topic of wasting water in everyday life in a *telenovela*.

Anyone who sees the modest-looking Oded Grajew and thinks of the principle of patient persuasion, non-public criticism of affiliates, gradual improvement in quality and the practice of making a way, step by step, where there is not yet a way, can easily underestimate the determination that underlies these activities. *Instituto Ethos* made an exception once and publicly criticised *Petrobras* when the group persistently refused to comply with the required minimum standards. Criticism is also sharply voiced when policymakers retreat to non-binding declarations of intent. In 2012, when the member states of the “United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development” (Rio+20) only wanted to adopt non-binding statements, 33 international environmental experts, activists and politicians, including Grajew and Young from *Instituto Ethos*, published the statement “The Rio+20 we do not want”, which stated unequivocally:

The future that we want has commitment and action, not just promises. It has the urgency needed to reverse the social, environmental, and economic crisis, not postpone it. It has cooperation and is in tune with civil society and its aspirations, and not just the comfortable position of governments.<sup>20</sup>

When Grajew spoke with the editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique* in Paris, Sergio Ramonet, in 2001 about the *World Economic Forum*, which invites internationally active companies and representatives of politics to meet annually, they criticised the fact that civil society and the conspicuous social problems such as hunger, violence and exclusion were excluded. This was the birth of the *World Social Forum* and Grajew facilitated the first meetings in Porto Alegre. In a 2006 retrospective, Grajew stated:

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20 <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/rio-20-earth-summit-diary-21-june> (2022/10/3)



It is not a coincidence the existence of great resistance to war, obstruction of the constitution of free trade areas, advances in the reduction of several countries' debt, changes in the political status of several regions and countries, strengthening of environment agenda, amplifying the debate and the political support to the feminist agenda, advancement in the discussions and proposals for world governance, appearance of proposals to finance the development and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The new political process implemented in the organisation of the WSF resulted in the multiplication of uncountable local, national, regional and thematic forums. The oldest organizations became strengthened and networks were created. Hope was born again. The mass participation of young people is very encouraging. Another world is feasible.<sup>21</sup>

When *Instituto Ethos* had become a major NGO of entrepreneurs, Grajew thought it appropriate to devote himself to another cause: the civilisation of the megacity of São Paulo. Residents should become citizens, an urban citizenry that lives in a liveable city and fills it with its commitment. In 2007, he founded the *Movimento Nossa São Paulo* (today *Rede Nossa São Paulo*, Network Our São Paulo<sup>22</sup>) as an NGO with the aim of identifying all the city's weaknesses and suggesting changes to policy regarding the improvement of education for young people, the creation of jobs, the design of public space, the fight against violence, environmental protection, health care, public transport and the participation of the population. It is about creating a sustainable city as part of a growing movement of cities in Brazil that have created similar networks.

The model was the change that the Colombian city of Bogota experienced in the 1990s under its mayor Antanas Mockus. He had restructured the city's finances, popularised environmental protection measures and made public space accessible to the population again, thus significantly increasing the quality of life and improving the attitude of the population towards their city.<sup>23</sup> *Rede Nossa São Paulo* is supported by 600 companies, institutions and civil society organisations<sup>24</sup>. It collects data, conducts meetings with groups of the population and develops proposals for political measures up to draft laws. Likewise, a large survey was conducted on the well-being

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21 The World Social Forum (WSF): *Periodicity. A Note circulated in the WSF International Council*, 23/5/2006. <https://www.tni.org/en/article/report-from-the-international-council-of-the-world-social-forum> (2022/10/3)

22 <http://www.nossasaopaulo.org.br/> (2022/10/3)

23 Michael Humphrey: *Violence and Urban Governance in Neoliberal Cities in Latin America*, Global Cities Research Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne 2013.

24 <https://www.ethos.org.br/conteudo/apoiados/segundo-projeto-apoiado/> (2022/10/3)

of the population in the city, the same was done by the *Instituto Akatu pelo Consumo Consciente*.<sup>25</sup>

In a newspaper article, Grajew explains the peculiarities and differences between an NGO and the power games of politics. He does this to protect the NGOs and at the same time to civilise the ways of acting at the level of politics:

First, make demands that are in the public interest and do not make organisation-specific demands that can be harmful to the people. Secondly, avoid falling into a logic of power and distorting original goals of the organisation. The risk is to make decisions that primarily strengthen the power of one’s own organisation rather than the realisation of its goals. Thirdly, to create a coherent relationship between management, practices and actions on the one hand and the principles and values propagated on the other. “We must be the change we see in the world”, as Gandhi said. Fourthly, to follow and verify the actions of governments and legislators to see if they are fulfilling their electoral promises, if they are using public funds according to ethical standards and if they are improving the quality of public services and consequently the quality of life of the people. Finally, a totally impartial behaviour, because when an organisation associates itself with a political party, it loses its autonomy, independence and legitimacy *vis-à-vis* society and proceeds to act according to the same logic of power of these same parties.<sup>26</sup>

The interaction of *Instituto Ethos*, *Instituto Akatu* and *Rede Nossa São Paulo* makes it clear that the goal is not only environmental change but also a social change. What used to be the achievement of a social democratic welfare state in the times of an industrial labour society in Europe, which brought about a balance between labour and entrepreneurs and guaranteed state welfare, is now returning in the Brazilian model as a socio-environmental welfare society. There, in the face of a party state burdened by corruption, the tasks are distributed differently: the former driving social force of the trade unions now lies with the NGOs, and the duty to comply with the law is now strongly complemented by an active socio-environmental ethic. The highly state-centred welfare state is thus being replaced by a republican civil society. Whereas until now discussions about a political civil society from Machiavelli to Arendt have lacked the question of an equivalent at the economic and social level, answers are now being given in Brazil out of necessity and in a practical way. Politics, the economy and civil society are to relate to each other under the requirements of sustainability in a kind of new social contract.

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25 Pesquisa Akatu 2012. *Rumo à Sociedade do Bem-Estar: Assimilação e Perspectivas do Consumo Consciente no Brasil*.

26 Oded Grajew: A lógica do poder e a sociedade, in: *Folha de São Paulo*, 10 July 2014.

*Social business* or *social entrepreneurship* differs from the Brazilian example and the previous definitions of CSR. For them, profit is not the goal but the means, and they mostly operate where profit-oriented companies externalise costs and the framework conditions cause social inequality and injustice.

The term *social entrepreneur* was coined by Bill Drayton who, under the slogan “Everyone is a change maker”, wanted to find special innovators worldwide to solve social problems and support them in developing their solution concepts. To this end, he founded the organisation *Ashoka – Innovators for the Public* in 1980, providing financial support to social entrepreneurs for a number of years so that they can devote themselves exclusively to their common good. To date, over 4,000 people in 70 countries have been supported.<sup>27</sup> “More than half of *Ashoka* Fellows have succeeded in changing their country’s government policies in five years. That’s impact,” Drayton explained in 2011.<sup>28</sup>

Among those supported are the founder of *Wikipedia*, Jimmy Wales, and Muhammad Yunus, an economist in Bangladesh who developed the idea of microcredit and founded the *Grameen Bank* for this purpose. Yunus saw that the poor had no chance of escaping the cycle of poverty with or without credit. When the idea of microcredit was rejected by conventional banks, he founded his own bank as a social entrepreneur. His goals are to overcome poverty and promote sustainability and environmental awareness. To achieve this, he seeks investors who forgo dividends and profits. Profits are reinvested exclusively, and market wages are paid and good working conditions prevail in the projects supported. For the lenders, the motto is: Do it with pleasure.

Poor people are bonsai people. Their personal conditions are perfectly fine, but society never provided them with a good foundation on which to develop. If one wants to free the poor from their poverty, one only has to provide them with a suitable environment. Poverty will quickly disappear if the poor can unleash their energy and creativity.<sup>29</sup>

He concludes “One of the most effective lessons that life has taught me is the realisation that all human beings have tremendous creative and entrepreneurial potential.”<sup>30</sup>

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27 See the biographies of Ashoka Fellows in: David Bornstein: *How to Change the World. Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

28 “Es el momento de cambiar el sistema”, interview with *El País* on 23 October 2011 on the occasion of the award of the Premio Príncipe de Asturias de Cooperación Internacional 2011. (All translations of quotations by me, WH)

29 Muhammad Yunus: *Social Business. Von der Vision zur Tat*. Munich Hanser 2010, p. 9.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

The role models are setting an example. The founder of the *World Economic Forum*, Klaus Schwab, also founded the *Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship* together with his wife in 1998, which promotes 20–25 social entrepreneurs every year and has since created a network of 260 participants.<sup>31</sup> And other networks such as the *Skoll Foundation* have emerged that work in a similar way.<sup>32</sup>

Despite all these impressive initiatives and success stories, the desired changes are slow. There is still slave labour in Brazil, Rio+20 has not produced any significant results, and the global environmental record still looks disastrous. The *UN Global Compact* also has a rather passive membership and has achieved little in practical terms. It “remains a fringe movement despite its many thousands of participants. We are not yet mainstream and have not yet reached the tipping point. The most important thing for the *Global Compact* now is to reach a critical mass. This can only be done country by country, said Executive Director Georg Kell.<sup>33</sup>

## Freedom and responsibility

The traditional understanding of freedom and responsibility was a liberal understanding of individual freedom from external interventions and dependencies, it was a negative and passive understanding of freedom. Negative, because it was “freedom from”, passive, because all efforts were only aimed at securing one’s own freedom, not that of the political community. The same applies to the understanding of responsibility. It only referred to the immediate individual sphere of action and was very easily equated with legal or political guilt. Responsibility was also a term with negative connotations that was used in connection with mistakes, omissions or misdemeanours.

The socio-environmental activities and movements are changing both concepts in the direction of an active, positive concept of freedom and a civic understanding of responsibility. This is not about moralising, about subjecting individuals to a moral demarcation between what is permitted and what is forbidden, but about changing the relationships between people. It is no longer about the traditional, rather anonymous relationships between individuals and society, but about the intersubjective relationships between citizens. It is not individuals, but citizens who deal with each other, and society is no longer something anonymous, but the political-social space of the interpersonal arises in which people act with each other.

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31 <https://www.schwabfound.org/> (2022/10/3)

32 <https://skoll.org/> (2022/10/3)

33 Georg Kell: Der Global Compact wird zur transformativen Initiative, interview in: *global-compact Germany*, 2012, p. 28.

Instead of ego-based action with its virtues of healthy mistrust, assertiveness, taking advantage and secrecy, virtues apply in the shared space of the between, without which this space cannot be filled with intersubjective action: Trust, recognition, respect, transparency, cooperation and responsibility. In place of the unscrupulous manager comes the image of the “honest merchant”; in place of the society of anonymous individuals comes the image of the decent society; in place of the unrestrained exploitation of open spaces comes the protection and care of common goods, with their great economic potential; and in place of the exploitation of others comes the protection of human rights.<sup>34</sup> In this process, the anonymity and inhumanity of a society disappears to the extent that its members become visible as responsible actors: “Inhabited economy is economy that is controlled by recognisable human subjects; uninhabited economy is subject to invisible hands and mechanisms that exhibit systemic constraints and momentum. Human market economy is inhabited economy.”<sup>35</sup> Social wealth is no longer dependent on the individual intelligence quotient IQ, but on We-Q, on intersubjective intelligence.<sup>36</sup>

For Hannah Arendt, as a thinker of civil society, the concepts of freedom and responsibility were inseparable. Responsibility “is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community”<sup>37</sup>.

What Arendt thought for the political level, which after the events of totalitarianism is about the responsibility of individuals for their political thinking and actions in times of totalitarianism and likewise in democratic society, applies just as much to the thinking and actions of the stakeholders, of all actors.

Redefining the tasks of politics, the economy and civil society and the mutual relationship requires a new social contract. The social contracts of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau revolved around questions of political power, surrender, and protection, or power formation and participation. They were at the beginning of the modern era and sought ways for a modern, non-religious justification of political society, or in

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34 See Axel Honneth with his theory of mutual recognition, Avishai Margalit's *The decent society* (1990), the Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom and the discussion on the values of entrepreneurs in: Josef Wieland (ed.): *Handbuch Werte Management*, Hamburg: Murmann 2004.

35 Clemens Sedmak: CSR – eine humanistische Sichtweise, in: Andreas Schneider / René Schmidtpeter (eds.): *Corporate Social Responsibility*, op. cit., p. 197.

36 Cf. Vision-Summit 2015, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2015/november/vision-europe-summit-2015-neue-ideen-fuer-ein-soziales-europa> (2022/10/3)

37 Hannah Arendt: Collective Responsibility, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 158.

Rousseau’s case, for democratic legitimacy. Civil society, the economy or even sustainability played no role in this. Today, with the increasing interconnection of state, economy and civil society, a new social constellation is emerging that, in contrast to Hobbes and Locke, values the responsible participation of citizens and, in contrast to Rousseau and his abstractly formulated and totalitarian common will, defends plurality and concrete responsibility. In the face of these social contracts, the idea of freedom and responsibility must be expressed in a social concept of social justice, environmental sustainability and broad, participatory democracy.<sup>38</sup>

The sciences are lagging behind the developments. Political science is not actively taking note of the change in political-social groups and the interrelationships described here. In Europe, “multi-level governance” is only used as an analytical category to describe the complex decision-making processes involving civil society organisations at the level of the European Union. Rather, the environmental sciences speak of a new social contract, which, however, rather means an international sustainability pact.<sup>39</sup>

In economics, the chief executives are still typically expected to serve the interests of shareholders and they receive part of their salary in shares as an incentive. Sumantra Ghoshal, a lecturer at the UK and London Business School, stated that “by propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility”<sup>40</sup>. In economics, economic action is predominantly explained as causal or functional, and thus behaviourism and irresponsibility are taught; at the same time, morality and common sense are excluded.

Why do we not fundamentally rethink the corporate governance issue? Why don’t we actually acknowledge in our theories that companies survive and prosper when they simultaneously pay attention to the interests of customers, employees, shareholders, and perhaps even the communities in which they operate? ... The honest answer is because such a perspective cannot be elegantly modeled – the math does not exit. Such a theory would not readily yield sharp, testable propositions, nor would it provide simple, reductionist prescriptions. With such a premise, the pretence of knowledge could not be protected. Business could not be treated as a science, and we would have to fall back on the wisdom of

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38 The Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam, for example, is working on a Global Contract for Sustainability (GCS). – See also Allen L. White: *Is It Time to Rewrite the Social Contract?* Tellus Institute for a Great Transition, April 2007.

39 Cf. the research project “Global Contract for Sustainability (GCS)” of the *Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies* (IASS) in Potsdam, <https://www.iass-potsdam.de/en/2022/10/3>.

40 Sumantra Ghoshal: Bad Management Theories Are Destroying Good Management Practices, in: *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2005, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 76.

common sense that combines information on ‘what is’ with the imagination of ‘what ought to be’ to develop both a practical understanding of and some pragmatic prescriptions for ‘phenomena of organised complexity’ that the issue of corporate governance represents.<sup>41</sup>

According to Ghosal, most economic theories are characterised by a negative liberalism, according to which most people are opportunistic and selfish and therefore not trustworthy. Thinking in terms of the common good cannot be taught and practised under these conditions. But also in the legal and social sciences, which include political science, there is “a lack of reflection on the socio-political significance of social entrepreneurship and leaders of civil society”.<sup>42</sup>

Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom, who emphasised the importance of common goods for an ecological turnaround, was also sceptical about exclusively theoretical solutions:

Accordingly, a much more successful strategy is to strengthen people’s capacities for self-organisation and cooperation. After all, it is the users themselves who have the best insight into the concrete conditions on the ground. This approach makes more sense than looking for theoretically optimal institutional solutions.<sup>43</sup>

When someone like Philipp Lepenies works on a scientific critique of the modern concept of “development” and conducts investigations into the central perspective that has gripped everything since the Renaissance, the dubious definitions of poverty and the myth of GDP<sup>44</sup>, such innovative thinking is most likely to be possible outside the universities, where research directly involves the relevant, various social actors in a transdisciplinary process and the results are discussed with representatives of politics, business and civil society.<sup>45</sup> The first *Schools of Design Thinking* in Stanford and Potsdam, where innovative solutions for all areas of life are developed, operate in a similarly independent manner.<sup>46</sup>

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41 Ibid., p. 81.

42 André Habisch Gesellschaftliches Unternehmertum Blinder Fleck wirtschafts- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Gemeinwohltheorien, in Helga Hackenberg / Stefan Empter (eds) *Social Entrepreneurship – Social Business Für die Gesellschaft unternehmen*, Wiesbaden VS 2011, p. 61.

43 Elinor Ostrom: *What becomes more when we share. Vom gesellschaftlichen Wert der Gemeingüter*. Edited, revised and translated by Silke Helfrich, Munich: oekom verlag 2011, p. 30f.

44 Philipp Lepenies: *Art, Politics, and Development. How Linear Perspective Shaped Policies in the Western World*, Temple University Press 2013. – Gezählte Armut von den methodischen und politischen Tücken, die weltweite Armut erfassen zu wollen, in *Leviathan*, 2010, Heft 1, pp. 103–118. – *Die Macht der einen Zahl eine politische Geschichte des Bruttoinlandsprodukts*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2013.

45 Cf. the *Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies* (IASS) fn 37.

46 HPI School of Design Thinking, [http://www.hpi.uni-potsdam.de/d\\_school/home.html?L=1\(2022/10/3\)](http://www.hpi.uni-potsdam.de/d_school/home.html?L=1(2022/10/3))

## Leadership and the power of the unreasonable

Social engagement by entrepreneurs is nothing new. In the times of industrialisation in the 19th century in Europe, there were not only entrepreneurs who did not care about the miserable working and housing conditions of the working class, but also those who took their responsibility seriously and built housing and provided social security for their workers. This was based on the realisation that good products can only be created under good working conditions. The steelworks owner Alfred Krupp, for example, introduced hygiene controls in his factory, built a hospital and created a health, accident and pension insurance system in which half of the contributions were paid by the workers and half by the company. This system later became the model for Bismarck’s social insurance systems.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Krupp ensured the construction of primary, secondary and vocational schools as well as kindergartens. The engine of change, also in this respect, was the economy.

For Hilscher and Beckmann, there is something paradigmatic about the Krupp case, which lies in the problem and the solution of the conflict of different interests:

The *raison d’être* of social entrepreneurship is to take on the solution of commitment problems that have not yet been overcome – both within market contexts and in the not-for-profit sector, where the aim is to provide public goods through forms of organisation in civil society.<sup>48</sup>

And they conclude:

At its core, social entrepreneurship is not about a mere distribution of resources, but about investments in structures – investments that can be made by both private sector and civil society actors.<sup>49</sup>

The examples of the founders of the cooperative system in Germany show that politicians can also be socially innovative. Friedrich-Wilhelm Raiffeisen, who founded cooperative banks in response to the misery of the rural population in the mid-19th century, and Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, who set up craftsmen’s cooperatives so that craftsmen could remain competitive against the growing industry.

All successful companies were built up by personalities. The fact that they were initially ridiculed or even opposed shows the potential for creativity and change

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47 Cf. Stefan Hilscher / Markus Beckmann *Social Entrepreneurship und Ordnungspolitik Zur Rolle gesellschaftlicher Change Agents am Beispiel des Krupp’schen Wohlfahrtsprogramms*. Discussion Paper No. 2008–5 of the Chair of Business Ethics at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, ed. by Ingo Pies, Halle 2008. Also in *ORDO – Jahrbuch für die Ordnung von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* 60/2009, pp. 435–461.

48 *Ibid.*, (discussion paper), p. 14.

49 *Ibid.*



in their projects. Leadership does not extend to leadership by managers who, as Ghoshan criticised, have a causal or functional understanding of society, but to an active creative power. CSR scholar John Elkington saw this as the power of the unreasonable.<sup>50</sup> According to him, they ignore the obvious, are oriented towards the social long-term, are unqualified because they have not studied economics, and do not think linearly like managers.<sup>51</sup>

Krupp, Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch all faced opposition. When Yunus tried to convince traditional banks in Bangladesh to give microloans to the poor, they turned him down. Poor people are unreliable, and you can't earn anything on micro-credit. So he had to start his own bank. Bill Drayton has heard about this resistance from almost all *Ashoka* fellows:

First, convince yourself that you can do it. Many will tell you the opposite, so it's better to ignore them kindly. Second, have ideas that change the world. I know that the last two years have been a nightmare for Spain, but the best companies are born in times of crisis. It's the moment to change the system; if you change the rules, the rules can't stop you.<sup>52</sup>

Oded Grajew responds calmly with a quote from Gandhi: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, and then you win." Besides good ideas and the feeling that they can be realised, great perseverance is needed. Grajew recalls Bertolt Brecht, who wrote: "The weak do not fight. The stronger ones fight for maybe an hour. Those who are even stronger fight for many years. But the strongest fight all their lives. These are indispensable."<sup>53</sup>

This endurance is strengthened by the defence of humanistic, republican values. Thus, Yunus quotes Gandhi's critique of the "basic evils of our time" with their content-less values: "Wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, business without morality, science without humanity, religion without sacrifice, politics without principles."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, actions must be consistent with the principles and values propagated: "We must be the world we want', as Gandhi said," explains Grajew.<sup>55</sup>

It is leaders who decide about the weal and woe of a company.

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50 John Elkington: *The Power of Unreasonable People: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Markets That Change the World*, Harvard Business Review Press 2008.

51 Ibid., p. 22.

52 Bill Drayton, in *El Pais*, op. cit.

53 Oded Grajew: *The World Social Forum (WSF): Periodicity*, op. cit.

54 Mahatma Gandhi: Young India on October 22, 1925, in: *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol. 33: 25 September, 1925 – 10 February, 1926, 2nd, rev. ed, New Delhi 2000, p. 135.

55 Oded Grajew, in: *A lógica do poder e a sociedade*, op. cit.

Purely individualistic and lateralistic values coupled with hunger for power and grandiosity as well as greed for money and personal profits can produce leaders like Ken Lay, Jeffrey Skilling and Andrew Fastow at *Enron* or Bernie Ebbers at *WorldCom*. These leaders are responsible for the collapse of whole organisations, destroying economic and social value and severely affecting the life and work of thousands of stakeholders.<sup>56</sup>

Leaders can also change their attitudes through protests and the educational work of NGOs, or simply by reading a book. Ray Anderson, owner of the *Interface Inc.* factory that makes carpet tiles was inspired by environmentalist and publicist Paul Hawken’s radical book *The Ecology of Commerce*<sup>57</sup> and he set out to transform his company into a leading sustainable manufacturing company in the US within 15 years, with the goal of achieving “Mission Zero” by 2020.<sup>58</sup>

And there are entrepreneurs who, as radical environmentalists and defenders of human rights, appear as if by chance in the world of entrepreneurs without losing their radicalism. Anita Roddick, for example, who built up the global *Body Shop* retail chain. The first small cosmetics shop was a little different from usual. It was based on a very personal contact with the customers, a socio-politically conscious purchase of raw materials from indigenous communities and was accompanied by human rights and environmental campaigns and campaigns in support of feminism and against the prevailing beauty ideal. Two things that seemed so unrelated, selling cosmetics and political campaigning, developed an unexpected momentum thanks to the founder’s drive. “The realisation that working for *The Body Shop* meant more than stocking shelves or selling soap inspired unbridled pride and enthusiasm,” she wrote in her memoirs.<sup>59</sup> She felt like an outsider and equipped with a fair amount of indignation.

When the advocates of globalisation disregard human rights on behalf of their idle shareholders, I take it personally. When the environment suffers damage because of the short-term interests of big business, I take it personally. When one gradually gets the impression that the sell-out of our planet is not far off, I take it personally.<sup>60</sup>

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56 Stephen B. Young: *Principled-Based Leadership*, in: Thomas Maak / Nicola M. Pless (eds.): *Responsible Leadership*, London: Routledge 2005, p. 187.

57 Paul Hawken: *The Ecology of Commerce. A Declaration of Sustainability*, Harper Collins 1993.

58 See Ray Anderson: *Mid-Course Correction: Toward a Sustainable Enterprise. The Interface Model*. Chelsea Green Publishing, 1998. – *Confessions of a Radical Industrialist: Profits, People, Purpose: Doing Business by Respecting the Earth*, St. Martin’s Press 2010.

59 Anita Roddick: *The Body Shop Story. Die Vision einer außergewöhnlichen Unternehmerin*, Munich Econ 2001, p. 222.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

And she was curious about the diversity of opinions, practical experiences and adventures. “I had never set out to become an entrepreneur, didn’t even know the word and wasn’t interested in its definition ... I have never read a book on economics or business theory and will continue to do so. It’s not the theory that interests and fascinates me – what keeps me going is the doing.”<sup>61</sup>

When Anita Roddick died unexpectedly, John Elkington wrote:

To crack the genetic code of the business phenomenon that was Anita Roddick is a bold undertaking. Her uniqueness resists it, yet no business leader was more in and of the world and therefore is more worthy of study. Here then is an effort to distil her business style into ten rules of what might be called ‘outsider capitalism’.<sup>62</sup>

He summarised the essential imperatives of her actions as follows: “Be an outsider, be outraged and outrageous, be radical, be early, be principled, be personal, be accessible, be ubiquitous, be funny and be unruly.” He added: “A favourite saying of hers was: ‘If you think you’re too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room.’”<sup>63</sup>

Far be it from me to draw up any typology of the eco-social leader. The examples show how different personal characteristics are and how varied the eco-social leaders are. What they have in common, however, is their commitment and their desire to act. It is always people who act, not systems, companies or states. What Arendt wrote about spontaneous political action applies to them, and we recognise this in civil movements, but not only there, also in the economy and politics. “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice.”<sup>64</sup>

The manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression. The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a ‘character’ in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.<sup>65</sup>

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61 Ibid., pp. 61- 63.

62 John Elkington: Anita Roddick: outsider rules, in: *Open democracy*, 24 September 2007. [https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/anita\\_roddick\\_outsider\\_rules](https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/anita_roddick_outsider_rules) (2022/10/3)

63 Ibid.

64 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago 1958, p. 159.

65 Ibid., p 161.

The greater the diversity of these people and the more stories we hear, the more we are encouraged to take up their example.

Written in 2015. First published: El poder de los insensatos. Libertad y responsabilidad para una economía sustentable. In: Ángela Sierra González (ed.): *Discursos políticos, identidades y nuevos paradigmas de gobernanza en América Latina*, Barcelona: Laertes 2015, pp. 81–111.



# **Images and Emotions**



## 10. Horror and Laughter – Arendt, Tabori, Borowski

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In her essay entitled “Social Science and Concentration Camps”<sup>1</sup>, Hannah Arendt wrote that social scientists and historical scholars found it almost impossible to grasp the essence of totalitarian concentration camps, since they assumed our actions are always guided by more or less familiar motives and utilitarian goals. This, however, was not the case with concentration camps. Everything was unreal, incomparable, “as though it took place on another planet.”<sup>2</sup> Detention and killing were not based on guilt, the perpetrators feared responsibility more than death, there was a “terrible docility with which all people went to their certain death under camp conditions as well as the surprising small percentage of suicides”<sup>3</sup>. and neither the Ten Commandments nor the criminal codes provided suitable punishment. The recurring attempts to explain the Holocaust with anti-Semitism rather than totalitarianism – as seen in the biography *Eichmann before Jerusalem*<sup>4</sup> – are merely efforts to find a utilitarian and thus comforting explanation, i.e. to give the Holocaust a traditional pre-totalitarian meaning. For Arendt, however, reports from survivors show a world without meaning. Neither the murder itself nor its dimensions were unprecedented but rather “the ideological nonsense which caused them, the mechanization of their execution, and the careful and calculated establishment of a world of the dying in which nothing any longer made sense.”<sup>5</sup>

This leads to two questions: how can we grasp senselessness, “worldlessness”? And what does it mean for something to be unprecedented? Are not events such as the First World War unprecedented and thus in terms of motives and utilitarian goals understandable but avoidable? The answer to the first question refers to understanding and representation, the answer to the second question broaches the

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1 Hannah Arendt: Social Science and Concentration Camps, in: *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken 1994.

2 Ibid., p. 242.

3 Ibid.

4 Bettina Stangneth: *Eichmann before Jerusalem – The unexamined life of a mass murderer*, Vintage, London 2016.

5 Hannah Arendt: Social Science and Concentration Camps, op. cit., p. 243.



fundamental problem of science, which deals with the complexity of events and actions but cannot handle the unprecedented.

## Thinking poetically

It seems that the traditional social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, and political science, have a problem with the fact that they want to explain something that escapes science. Regardless of any reduced claim to universality, science means that its results are objective, generally valid and verifiable. It claims to be able to explain the research object. This still holds true despite recognition that science is constructed and influenced by the standpoint of the observer, as well as by social relations, power games, and gender. It nonetheless remains science, the task of which is to explain. But what happens when the key characteristic of the Holocaust is the absence of motives and utilitarian goals? What if the event, as Arendt claims, cannot be explained?

Arendt drew two conclusions from this. The first concerns her method of exposure. Her research on totalitarianism is compiled from a series of essays she wrote in exile, initially in Paris on the Jewish question in modern Europe, and later in the United States on colonialism and imperialism. Following her knowledge of the Holocaust these were supplemented by studies on total domination. *Elements and Origins of Total Domination* was the (German) title she gave to this collection – an approach to the emergence and particularities of total domination: a phenomenon absent of causality or inevitability, but rather something she compared to a process of crystallization.

The second conclusion consists of a clear distinction between knowledge and understanding. In her essay “Understanding and Politics” she wrote:

Knowledge and understanding are not the same, but they are interrelated. Understanding is based on knowledge and knowledge cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding. Preliminary understanding denounces totalitarianism as tyranny and has decided that our fight against it is a fight for freedom. ... Preliminary understanding ... no matter how rudimentary and even irrelevant it may ultimately prove to be, will certainly more effectively prevent people from joining a totalitarian movement than the most reliable information, the most perceptive political analysis, or the most comprehensive accumulated knowledge. Understanding precedes and succeeds knowledge. Preliminary understanding, which is at the basis of all knowledge, and true understanding, which transcends it, have this in common: They make knowledge meaningful.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Hannah Arendt: Understanding and Politics, in: *Essays in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 310/11.

Consequently, the scientist can only illuminate, but neither prove nor disprove uncritical preliminary understanding. Should he use the results of his research for political purposes, he loses common sense, “which alone will guide him securely through the labyrinth of his own knowledge.” And if he wants to make his knowledge meaningful,

he must become very humble again and listen closely to the popular language, in which words like ‘totalitarianism’ are daily used as political clichés and misused as catchwords, in order to re-establish contact between knowledge and understanding.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding is therefore close to judgement on the basis of common sense, which Arendt later described as judgement on the basis of ‘enlarged mentality’ in the style of Kant. In a footnote to her essay she added:

It seems quite doubtful that this kind of comprehensive knowledge, which is not yet understanding and does not deal with the essence of totalitarianism, can be produced by organized research. The chances are great that the relevant data will get buried in an avalanche of statistics or observations on the one hand and evaluation on the other, neither of which tells us anything about historical conditions and political aspirations. Only the sources themselves talk – documents, speeches, reports, and the like.<sup>8</sup>

This makes it evident that Arendt does not reject scientific knowledge. She distinctly ascertains, however, that the basis of our orientation is not science but common sense. Not only does such judgement contain several points of view, but narratives also have the ability to create meaning, understanding. This is not the result of argumentation, but of experience, of an example that is more universally memorable. So eye-witness reports and accounts of experience should be added to documents, speeches, and factual reports.

And here we come to a second limitation of science – understanding through literature, which Arendt sees as an equally valid albeit fictitious form of recounted experience (for instance Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* as an account of the colonial experience of Europeans in unknown Africa and Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd* as the narrated experience of the impossibility of an absolute Good).

The question here is to what extent can we characterise Arendt’s way of thinking and writing as poetic thinking? I will try to answer this question with the help of her writings but also by comparing it to artistic representations of the Holocaust by author and theatre director George Tabori, and the writer Tadeusz Borowski, who wrote stories about his experience in Auschwitz.

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7 Ibid., p. 311.

8 Ibid., p. 324.

George Tabori was born in Budapest in 1914 and emigrated to London via Vienna and Prague. He worked in theatre and film in Great Britain and the United States in the 1950s, among others with Brecht, Hitchcock and Kazan. From 1969, he lived in Germany and wrote novels and plays, among them *Mein Kampf*, *The Cannibals* and *My Mother's Courage*. He worked at the Burgtheater in Vienna and the Berliner Ensemble in Berlin until his death in 2007.

Tadeusz Borowski was born in 1922 in Zhytomyr, in the Ukrainian SSR, and belonged to a large Polish minority. He moved to Warsaw at the age of ten, finished school in an underground *lyceum* and studied at an underground university. He was arrested in 1943 and deported to Auschwitz, where he survived as a paramedic at the camp hospital and later survived the concentration camp in Dachau. He wrote haunting documentary stories such as *We Were in Auschwitz* and *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. After the war he published *The World of Stone* and became a member of the communist Polish Workers Party. He committed suicide in 1951.

I would now like to discuss in more detail the following aspects in Arendt, Tabori and Borowski:

- Being addressed by events, the intersubjective position of the citizen and the basis for an experience perspective,
- The role of engagement and emotions in the process of understanding and the correspondence between content and speech,
- Being aware that what is really at stake cannot be put into words.

### **Being addressed by events, the intersubjective position of the citizen and the basis for an experience perspective**

Arendt spoke of the danger of the scientist getting lost in his theories and of the need to uphold a relationship with the world, with experience. For Arendt, as for Heidegger, the starting point is truth, the event to be considered, not the outcome of a scientific theory or method in search of truth. Centre stage is not subsumption but distinction, the perception of the new. Dialogue, not logic, is the companion on the road to understanding.

In art the artist responds to their awareness of being addressed. In his essay *Eye and Mind*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty mentions a comment made by the artist André Marchand on Paul Klee's feelings:

In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me. ... I was there, listening. ... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it."

And Merleau-Ponty goes on to say:

There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted.<sup>9</sup>

Psychologist Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz, attempts a similar reversal of subject and object. In his analysis of the conditions of life, death and survival in a concentration camp he wrote:

We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that *it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us*. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life – daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.<sup>10</sup>

Arendt defines responsibility as a response to the challenges human beings are exposed to in a community. At the same time she dissolves subject and object into intersubjectivity, or more precisely inter-humanity, into the mutual relationship between human beings as actors and as sufferers, from which the place of freedom, politics and power emerges. All of this disappears once subjects or objects become predominant and destroy the realm of the in-between, replacing it with domination, violence, sovereignty or silence.

Arendt deduces from this responsibility the need to examine events and phenomena in their particularity, not to subordinate the particular to the general but to distinguish them in the Aristotelian way that A is not B. The same applies to Eichmann and Hitler. Arendt does not make a simple distinction between guilty perpetrators and innocent victims, but examines each experience. For example, the shock white colonists experienced in strange black Africa, one that increased their racism and need for colonial subjugation; or man's loss of orientation in a disintegrating class society and the search for ideological orientation; or the seduction of ideological thinking that gives some kind of order to a complex reality in line with the formula two and two are four; or the experience of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, where one of the worst criminals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned out to be an assiduous bureaucrat; or, finally, the tragic experience of the Jewish councils in countries occupied by Nazi Germany, who wanted to prevent the worst by collaborating, but ultimately facilitated deportation. All of these are understandable but momentous

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9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1965, p. 167.

10 Viktor Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning*, Boston: Beacon Press 2006, p. 77.

errors of judgement that make total domination and its goals possible. This does not blur the distinction between perpetrators and victims, but it does show how easily worldliness, common sense and the capacity to judge can be lost.

George Tabori's plays about the Holocaust make more drastic statements than Arendt. They are grotesque, the laughter of the audience sticks in their throats. While Arendt declared that all sense of justice was turned upside down under total domination and that completely innocent people were persecuted and killed, Tabori criticises the false conclusion that the latter were superhuman noble victims. On the contrary, they were normal human beings with strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices; they were not only victims, but were also actors. In *The Cannibals* a man who dies accidentally in a quarrel in a concentration camp is cooked and eaten by his hungry cell mates. The cell mates are fathers and sons, are both victims and free men, contemporaries and later-born. The play depicts the extermination camp and, at the same time, is a critical reflection of the past. When a Kapo (a prisoner functionary) orders the men to eat the dead body, only two obey. The others refuse despite their extreme hunger and are sent to the gas chamber.

The messages in this play are multi-layered. "There are times," Tabori said, "when the most human and most violent act consists of the simple refusal to be forced to do something: although starving, not to eat."

The attitudes and emotions of the inmates show that there are no innocent victims. When one of the sons asks his father: What did you do during the war? he replies:

Oh, I always had fantastic dreams of moral excellence, some sort of exorbitant admiration – and fear. On the other hand, evil is the only thing that is genuine and authentic, isn't it? ... I followed orders. Everyone followed orders. The best of us have a Führer in our blood. And these poor souls were only obeying orders, too. What orders or whose orders I can't say, but my God, they had more discipline than the whole damned Wehrmacht together. Oh, I was terrified of them, even though I had been in Dresden when the bombing started. I didn't mind that, it was a fight among murderers, evil conversing with evil. I saw the ruins and burned children, and I screamed at the bombers: you stupid assholes, you're no better than I am! Yes, my son, I felt at home in Dresden.<sup>11</sup>

It is "a play", Tabori explained,

that is neither documentation nor accusation, but a Black Mass inhabited by the demons of my own ego in an attempt to liberate myself and others in the grip of this nightmare. There are taboos that need destroying if we are not to choke

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11 George Tabori *Unterammergau oder die guten Deutschen*, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 1981, p. 132/33.

on them. ... Plays have to do with playing and this alone is blasphemy for those whose regressive spirit constantly demands impeccable heroes and innocent victims, those who want to deny the theatre its primal function, namely to produce fear and mercy, and in a mythical ceremonial way to create the community on the basis of which everything that is holy can be mocked, if only to discover what is still valid.<sup>12</sup>

What has become impossible after Auschwitz is not so much the poem,” said Tabori, alluding to Adorno, “but sentimentality or even reverence.”<sup>13</sup> Tadeusz Borowski’s stories about Auschwitz are comprehensive descriptions of the moral abyss in this hell. They do not avert the gaze, they conceal nothing. They are almost unbearable because the reader has no good human being, no moral valuation at their side. The reader is as solitary as the inmates of the concentration camps. In his book *The Captive Mind*, Czeslaw Milosz characterizes Borowski as a nihilist because of his ethical passion.

The human species is naked in his stories, stripped of those tendencies toward good which last only so long as the habit of civilization lasts. But the habit of civilization is fragile; a sudden change in circumstances, and humanity reverts to its primeval savagery.<sup>14</sup>

Borowski is not an indifferent observer, but relates as a foreman, sometimes as a Kapo. The fight for survival takes centre stage, deceit, theft, indifference to the fate of the others, and short-term alliances for personal benefit. Work at the ramp is popular because the prisoners unloading the trains on arrival can snatch food from those who are immediately sent to the gas chamber.

The heaps grow. Suitcases, bundles, blankets, coats, handbags that open as they fall, spilling coins, gold, watches; mountains of bread pile up at the exits, heaps of marmalade, jams, masses of meat, sausages; sugar spills on the gravel. Trucks, loaded with people, start up with a deafening roar and drive off amidst the wailing and screaming of the women separated from their children, and the stupefied silence of the men left behind. ... The train has been emptied. ... In the corners amid human excrement and abandoned wrist-watches lie squashed, trampled infants, naked little monsters with enormous heads and bloated bellies. We carry them out like chickens, holding several in each hand. ... ‘Take them, for God’s sake!’ I explode as the women run from me in horror, covering their eyes. ... ‘Don’t take them to the trucks, pass them on to the women,’ says the S.S. man, lighting a cigarette. ... I am furious, simply furious with these people – furious because I

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12 Ibid., p. 37.

13 Ibid., p. 38.

14 Czeslaw Milosz: *The Captive Mind*, New York: Knopf 1953, p. 122.

must be there because of them. I feel no pity. I am not sorry they're going to the gas chamber.<sup>15</sup>

In the story "A Day in Harmence" Borowski describes the everyday traps that can be fatal. A German guard, for example, who offers him bread if he comes to get it. If a prisoner did this, however, he would be crossing a borderline. The guard could happily shoot him and collect three extra days off and five Reichsmark. Another guard hears him talking about the recent liberation of Kiev. He is suspected of being a member of a secret organisation and can only save his life by bribing the guard with his watch. Then he discovers the soap that was stolen from him and denounces the prisoner at the next opportunity. The Kapo is known for his ruthless discipline. In another concentration camp he had his own son hanged for theft.

In the meantime, the prisoners are working on senseless construction sites, the sun is burning, the soup is watery, they collapse with exhaustion, and while a group of prisoners play football, the deported are murdered: "I came back with the ball and threw it into the game. A corner. Between two corner kicks three thousand people were gassed behind me."<sup>16</sup>

These are only some of numerous examples of the importance of concrete events, the intersubjective standpoint and the experience perspective in the works of Arendt, Tabori and Borowski. People are not objects of observation but actors, and these actors trace their behaviour and experiences with the help of examples. This is not about a moral discussion, but about understanding what happens. "Decisive is not good or evil among the Jews but their dying; the historical persecution"<sup>17</sup>, said Tabori. And there are no collectives, only individuals. In reply to the outraged question of her friend Gershom Scholem, who having read her book on the Eichmann court case, had asked her if she did not love the Jewish people, Arendt said she could only love her friends, not an entire people. Tabori said much the same: "Since love, like truth, must be concrete, the lover can't work with abstractions. I do not love 'Germany', the word is like a map, useful and informative, but not touchable." When one day as a boy he told his father what he had learned at school, namely that all Romanians were gay, his father declared,

that it is a time of hideous nationalism where human beings are reified with some sort of *Die-da-Isms* (i.e. those-there-isms WH) that makes it easier to annihilate them. First of all, not all Romanians are gay. Secondly, it wouldn't matter even if they were. And thirdly, there was no such thing as 'the Romanians'. Ever since

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15 Tadeusz Borowski *Bei uns in Auschwitz*, Munich Piper 1963, pp. 117–20. English in: This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, <http://fullreads.com/literature/this-way-for-the-gas-ladies-and-gentlemen/4/>

16 *Ibid.*, p. 187f.

17 George Tabori *Unterammergau oder die guten Deutschen*, op. cit., p. 25.

I have found it difficult not to meet a person on a one-to-one basis; I could not put Faust, Kleist, Heine, Böll, the list is endless, with Himmler into one Teutonic basket, just because they are all called Heinrich.<sup>18</sup>

### The role of engagement and emotions in the process of understanding and the correspondence between contents and speech

Emotions are taken for granted in the arts, but not in science. The scientist disappears behind the position of objectivity, the universality of which would be destroyed if emotion were to enter the picture.

It is well known that Arendt stood by her emotions. When political scientist Eric Voegelin accused her of breaking the rules of historiography in her book on totalitarianism by not writing *sine ira et studio*, she replied that conditions such as the extreme poverty of the English miners in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not be portrayed without indignation.

If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities. For to arouse indignation is one of the qualities of excessive poverty insofar as poverty occurs among human beings.<sup>19</sup>

The abhorrent and the emotional constitute part of the essential; there must be an adequate and responsible relationship between form and content. This has nothing to do with sentimentality or moralising, but with the fact that these events took place in the midst of human society.

To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be “objective”, but to condone them; and such condoning cannot be changed by a condemnation which the author may feel duty bound to add but which remains unrelated to the description itself.<sup>20</sup>

Analysis serves understanding, and understanding is a form of judgement. Hence Arendt can also use the metaphor “hell” to characterise Auschwitz, which is what Voegelin criticised:

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18 George Tabori *Bett und Bühne Über das Theater und das Leben*. Essays, Artikel, Polemiken Berlin Wagenbach 2007, p. 23.

19 Hannah Arendt A Reply to Eric Voegelin, in *Essays in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 403.

20 Ibid., p. 404.



In this sense I think that a description of the camps as Hell on earth is more “objective”, that is, more adequate to their essence than statements of a purely sociological or psychological nature.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, Arendt laughed heartily when she read the police reports on Eichmann's interrogation. “I do not know how many times I laughed – laughed out loud!”<sup>22</sup> Her laughter expresses the discrepancy between Eichmann's deeds and the quality of his evidence, it is an act of insight, or as Arendt said, a passion of thinking. This is why she emphasised the laughter of the writer and thinker Lessing in her portrait of him in *Men in Dark Times*, boasting the independence of his thinking. “Anger, and above all Lessing's kind of anger, reveals and exposes the world in the same way as Lessing's kind of laughter ... seeks to bring about reconciliation with the world.”<sup>23</sup> Arendt holds the view along with Bertolt Brecht, that Hitler, like Eichmann, was a ridiculous figure: “The great political criminals must be exposed, especially to laughter. They are certainly not great political criminals, but people who committed great political crimes, which is something entirely different.”<sup>24</sup> Arendt defended her method with the help of other writers.

For Tabori the oneness of content, presentation and emotions has enormous significance for the theatre as well as for science and everyday life.

How must memory be so that that we can finally feel free? ... In this country there is, I think, a huge need ... to find objective reasons for these murders. I believe that what made these murders possible was precisely this ‘objectiveness’ that transforms human beings into objects. Objects are not there to be identified with and if there is no longer a need to identify, the path to destruction is near. What theatre can teach the sciences is that true memory is only possible with sensual remembering: it is impossible to let go of the past without reliving it with skin, nose, tongue, behind, feet and stomach. Historians speak of six million murders, a statement as meaningless as garbage. When we think of it as murder six million times we come back to Shylock's pound of flesh ... The gas chambers were a deliberate method of desexualising murder, but on closer examination the naked pile of human beings left behind reveals itself to be not dirt but a pyramid of lovers. Their distorted faces and their tortured embraces are the holders of their secret. Who would want to touch, taste, kiss this secret?<sup>25</sup>

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21 Ibid., p. 404.

22 Hannah Arendt: “What remains? The Language Remains”: A Conversation with Günter Gaus, in: *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. ed. by Peter Baehr, New York: Penguin Classics 2000, p. 15.

23 Hannah Arendt: On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing, in: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World 1968, p. 6.

24 Bertolt Brecht *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 17, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 1976, p. 1180.

25 George Tabori *Unterammergau oder die guten Deutschen*, op. cit., p. 201/02.

Tabori's plays are full of humour, grotesqueness and wit. "A good joke is never funny, it is always about a catastrophe." Thus, in the play *Mein Kampf*, which deals with Hitler in a hostel for the homeless in Vienna when he made an application to the academy of fine arts. A Jewish man takes care of him, his meals, proper clothes and a coat to keep him warm in the winter.

But it was not yet the Hitler we would come to know later on but a poor devil, a young lad trying to make his way in Vienna as an artist. ... What would have happened if a Jew and a young Hitler had met each other, what would have come of this relationship?<sup>26</sup>

Jokes are not popular in bourgeois theatre:

Laughter, even when it sticks in your throat, is *a priori* suspicious, an inferior pleasure to be enjoyed by inferior races only. ... I do not believe that laughter is of less worth than crying or thinking. It is a healthy reaction."<sup>27</sup>

It is obvious that the lack of emotion in Borowski's stories about Auschwitz, his meticulous description of things as they are, coupled with a perfect style à la Hemingway, provokes strong emotions. Borowski's style mirrors the content:

Look at how original the world is that we live in: there are so few people in Europe who have never killed another human being. And how few people there are with no desire to kill each other!"<sup>28</sup>

## The awareness that what is really at stake cannot be put into words

We can come to terms with what the words meaningless and unprecedented signify by understanding them, not by explaining them. Plays and stories about Auschwitz describe events, they do not explain them, but they help us to understand them. Nor do they explain the ethical alternative, but we understand it. What is really at stake is not put into words.

Although Arendt explains totalitarianism as a new form of domination in the Montesquieu sense, and the role of ideology, the function of extermination camps and the dehumanisation of the victims, she does not discover why this form of government came into existence, just as she cannot explain why spontaneous action takes place, what the secret pleasure of action is, and what it means that the sense of action lies in its performance. In the same way Arendt's work circles around the unnameable, in other words, understanding. This is why on several occasions

26 George Tabori *Bett und Bühne*, op. cit., p. 67.

27 Ibid., p. 155.

28 Tadeusz Borowski *Bei uns in Auschwitz*, op. cit., p. 161.

she offered a seminar dealing with a practical exercise in “enlarged mentality” as the precondition for independent judgement, exclusively using novels and autobiographies. It also explains that her book on totalitarianism “does not belong to any school and hardly uses any of the officially recognised or officially controversial instruments”.<sup>29</sup> What makes our understanding today so difficult is the fact that Arendt, in her own words, “failed to explain the particular method which I came to use, and to account for a rather unusual approach ... to the whole field of political and historical sciences as such.”<sup>30</sup> What all the three authors have in common is their sense of responsibility vis-à-vis the world. Arendt is anarchic in the face of the prevailing political, social and scientific norms and behaviour, and critical of ruling opinions. Here she not only subordinates science to understanding, but also concludes from the necessities of understanding that science must facilitate understanding, in other words the understanding of facts and events. This is why she explains in her reply to Voegelin that unlike him, she had little interest in the relationship he mentioned between liberalism, positivism or pragmatism and totalitarianism:

I think what separates my approach from Professor Voegelin’s is that I proceed from facts and events instead of intellectual affinities and influences.<sup>31</sup>

This not only brings Arendt close to theatre and literature but also to the public, the community of committed spectators, of citizens, as she describes them in her essays on political judgement.

Written in 2015. First published: *Horror and Laughter. At the Limits of Political Science*, in: Zoran Kurelic (ed.): *Violence, Art, and Politics*, Zagreb: Politička misao 2015, pp. 62–75.

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29 Hannah Arendt: A Reply to Eric Voegelin, op. cit., p. 78.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 80.

## 11. Cause or Intention? Justifying Crime

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We are familiar with the question “Why” and the variety of possible answers: sensible reasons, justifications, arguments, excuses. Why is torture not allowed in a free, civilized society? Why do young men and women in European countries join the “Islamic State”? Why didn’t I write this text in a clearer and more understandable way?

Our answers usually address two separate areas: the area of the mind or psychology, which deals with intentions and inner motivations that agents themselves are often unaware of, and the area of logic or political theory and possibly philosophy, all of which are concerned with rational justifications for our actions, sustained by socio-political, moral and religious motives.

These two methods of explanation regard each other with scepticism: the psychological approach holds logical motivation to be a later rationalization of psychological motives, while the rational approach maintains that psychological motives are apolitical. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that both methods have their justification, that there are indeed intentions and justifications, emotional and rational motives, drives and convictions. It is not uncommon for these argument-based justifications to be ideologically framed, as in the case of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century, or the “Islamic State”. My question is: what is the relationship between these two spheres? The search for an answer constantly leads to new questions. We will learn that the traditional dichotomy between *ratio* and *emotio* in science and politics is an unsatisfactory one that can rarely be achieved.

We begin with the distinction between motivation and justification, two phenomena assigned respectively to emotion and reason. In this context, I will refer to Alfred Schütz and a key aspect of his interpretive sociology, that is, the difference between the *in order to* of an action, which refers to its intention, and the *because* that alludes to its justification. I will then examine the relationship between intention and justification in three separate political constellations: firstly, during the final era of socialism in Czechoslovakia, when the dissident, writer, and later democratically elected president Vaclav Havel spoke of the power of “the intentions of life”. Secondly, in the course of generating ideologically based domination such as totalitarianism, where Arendt explored the interaction between intention and ideology. And thirdly, the re-occurrence of interaction between intention and ideology as practised by the

European supporters of the “Islamic State”. When we look closely at these constellations, we will not only see that reason and emotion are linked inextricably, but also that intentions and justifications are both driven by emotion

### Because or in order to

The interaction between thinking and action, and between the individual and society affects three areas – knowledge, socialization and interests – all of which have long been interpreted from an essentialist and dichotomous perspective as a contrast between the autonomous individual and the group, the individual and society, freedom and necessity, emotion and reason, and finally between sociology and history. Bourdieu dissolved these distinctions plausibly with his concept of *habitus* and *fields*: *habitus* as classic individual actions, as the “incorporated social” with its permanent and transferable systems of perception, assessment and action,<sup>1</sup> and *fields* as habitually structured systems of objective relationships in the form of things, mechanisms and realities, which in turn structure *habitus*. Bourdieu not only set aside the false antinomy of sociology and social psychology, but also that of sociology and history.<sup>2</sup>

This theory of a relational world of *habitus* and *fields* is rooted in the definition of *because* and *in order to*. The author of this distinction is Alfred Schütz, the founder of phenomenological or interpretive sociology, whose work on the *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932) continues to influence interpretive sociology. Schütz sees the *because* and *in order to* motives as interrelated: “I cannot understand a social thing without reducing it to the human activity which has created it and, beyond it, without referring this human activity to the motives out of which it springs.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time, these motives cover “two different categories which have to be well distinguished: the *in-order-to* motive and the *because* motive. The former refers to the future and is identical with the object or purpose for the realization of which the action itself is a means ... The latter refers to the past and may be called its reason or cause. ... Thus the action is determined by the project including the *in-order-to* motive.”<sup>4</sup> The agent is fully aware of the *in order to* motive (Schütz’s example: the perpetrator committed the crime in order to acquire the victim’s money); the motive contains the meaning as known by the agent and recognized by the observers so as

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1 Pierre Bourdieu / Loic J.D. Wacquant: *Reflexive Anthropologie*, Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1996, p. 160.

2 Ibid.

3 Alfred Schütz: The Social World and the Theory of Social Action, in: *Social Research*, 27/2, 1960, p. 211.

4 Ibid., p. 212.

to understand the action. In contrast, the *because* motive underlies the concrete design of the action in the past and is only accessible to both agent and observer by means of reflection (the perpetrator acts in this way because he comes from a difficult background). The *because* motives correspond to the social personality, the *in order to* motives to the specific intention.

I would like to suggest here a slightly different meaning for the *because* motive and not merely define it as the object of reflection from the observer perspective, but rather as an instrument of justification with the help of arguments from the agent. We will then see how justification is also part of the agent's own construction of meaning, which, by the way, corresponds to Schütz and Bourdieu's assumption that all forms of expression related to action also belong to the construction of meaning.

Let us now turn to the relationship between intention and justification in the three different constellations, beginning with the role of the "intentions of life" in Vaclav Havel.

## Intention and justification

### The "Intentions of Life"

Vaclav Havel presents an incisive example in his existential-philosophical essay "The Power of the Powerless" (1978).<sup>5</sup> It refers to May Day in a socialist country. As every year, a greengrocer hangs up a banner with the slogan "Workers of the world, unite". He no longer believes in the content of the sentence or the notion of May Day but hangs up the banner all the same. What can we read from this action? Essentially it demonstrates that the greengrocer is a conformist. But the full meaning in a nutshell is: "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient."<sup>6</sup> With this act the greengrocer both confirms and makes the system, he is the system.

According to Havel there are two intentions attached to this conflict: the intention of the system to increasingly expand its power and control, and the intention of life, which "in its essence, moves toward plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short, toward the fulfilment of its own freedom"<sup>7</sup> The sphere of ideology and justification is of no importance to Havel. He sees the

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5 Václav Havel, et al.: *The Power of the Powerless*. Citizens against the state in central-eastern Europe, ed. by John Keane, London, Hutchinson 1985. – The example is presented in chapter 8 of this volume as a strategy of truth-telling, see: When Telling the Truth Demands Courage.

6 Havel, *ibid.*, p. 28.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

real confrontation between the two intentions. If the greengrocer were to follow the intention of life, the system would be shaken, that is, if he refused to hang up the banner or take part in elections that “he knows are a farce”, if he were to start saying what he thinks at meetings and find “the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support”<sup>8</sup>.

In Havel’s description the justification for action plays merely a subordinate role. The greengrocer acts as he thinks best. On the other hand, justification in this context plays a major role in the actions of the dictatorial state, namely, as an all-inclusive ideology that regulates power, domination and submission in all areas of life and with this omnipresence separates people from their autonomy and their feelings.

But I was talking about opposite intentions, those of life and those of the system. What is the relationship between a justifying ideology and these intentions? In Havel’s view, what distinguishes the totalitarian system from traditional dictatorships is the inclusion of as many people as possible. “By pulling everyone into its power structure, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone an instrument of a mutual totality, the auto-totally of society. Everyone ... is in fact involved and enslaved, not only the greengrocers but also the prime ministers.”<sup>9</sup> The intentions of all of them are those of conformism and diametrically opposed to the intentions of life. Now the ideology is an apparent reference to the world, which, on the one hand, leads people to believe they are personalities with “identity, ... dignity, and ... morality”<sup>10</sup>, but at the same time prevents them from being precisely that. “It is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo.”<sup>11</sup> The ideology and its *because* motives justify the system.

Havel distinguishes between the intentions of life and the politics of dissent. His aim is to give as much space and depth as possible to the intention of life and its delegitimizing process. According to Havel, it is the many, often insignificant, actions like “little boats, tossed by the waves but always bobbing back as visible messengers of living within the truth”<sup>12</sup> that are more effective and thus of greater depth than dissident actions, that allow a society to grow, whose independent life increasingly embraces all of its sectors and creates an independent cultural sphere. This movement, based on the intentions of a free life, is stronger than the world of dissidents, who are obliged to justify their deeds with arguments and programmes and thus move in the system’s arena of ideologies and rational arguments, ultimately confining themselves to it.

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8 Ibid., p. 39.

9 Ibid., p. 37.

10 Ibid., p. 28.

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Ibid., p. 65.

And yet, it is justification and its rationality that counts, not intention and its emotionality. The greengrocer might respond to the question “Why?” and the expectation of a *because* motive with: “I’m fed up with it, I want to get away from this forced circus, I want to say what I think is right.” The system would respond with: “That’s not a reason, that’s an expression of poisonous bourgeois liberalism” and, based on the pillar of rational justification, call the greengrocer to order.

Havel’s fictitious example is situated in a period when ideology had greatly lost its power of organization and legitimacy. Just how fragile such ideological justifications are in general is evident in the development of armed conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War, when the ideology had not yet encompassed and organized the whole of society. The republican side defended the freedom and humanity of the republic against the rebels backed by Hitler and Mussolini. But the longer the civil war lasted, the more the combatants abandoned their human values, and in terms of action the more violence became an end in itself. What the conservative writer George Bernanos observed in this context on the fascist side was witnessed by the philosopher Simone Weil on the republican side, which included Communists, Trotskyists and other ideological groups. Weil wrote in a letter to Bernanos: “The point is the attitude towards murder ... Never once ... did I hear anyone express, even in private intimacy, any repulsion or disgust or even disapproval of useless bloodshed ... As soon as men know that they can kill without fear of punishment or blame, they kill; or at least they encourage killers with approving smiles ... The very purpose of the whole struggle is soon lost in an atmosphere of this sort.”<sup>13</sup> See also her remarks on the Trojan War, where she shows that bringing Helen home was merely an excuse to wage war and that warriors are empty souls who not only live in a world of abstract concepts, but also conjure up the attendant emotions. Arendt warned against a similar path in protest movements, claiming that “the danger of violence ... will always be that the means overwhelm the end. If goals are not achieved rapidly, the result will be not merely be defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic.”<sup>14</sup> Here, the exercise of violence is the *because* motive. If humanism is merely a component of the *because* motive, of a rational argument or an ideological justification, it soon becomes meaningless. Israeli historian Raanan Rein mentions Jewish volunteers, commenting that adventure played a major role in this context:

It is clear that there were also other motivations that attracted adventurous young men to leave for Spain. Most of the volunteers from Palestine were single men in their twenties who had never set foot in Spain before. But such

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13 Simone Weil: To George Bernanos (1938), in: *Seventy Letters. Personal and Intellectual Windows on a Thinker*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock 1965, pp. 107/108.

14 Hannah Arendt: On Violence, in: *Crises of the Republic*, Harcourt, Brace & Company 1972, p. 177.



youthful, adventurous motivations, boredom or personal problems at home, are usually not mentioned in interviews with veterans of the International Brigades. Armed with retrospective information on all that took place during the Spanish Civil War, WWII, and under the Francoist dictatorship, these people prefer to emphasize only the ideological motivation of fighting Fascism.<sup>15</sup>

But can we speak here of an intention of life as defined positively by Havel or is it on the contrary of a purely negative nature? It seems that different intentions are being evoked here, depending on the concrete circumstances. The manipulation of reality introduced and controlled by the state conjures up the longing for a life in truth, while the violence of war, the threat to life and the loss of comrades arouse a desire for revenge and the annihilation of all enemies.

But are rational arguments and ideologies free of emotion?

I will attempt to find an answer in the second historical constellation

### The intentions of ideology

Unlike the final stage of total domination as described by Havel, Arendt deals with the emergence of this form of rule. She examines the phenomena of intention, justification and ideology. In the third part of her book on the origins of totalitarianism, she explores the complex relationship between totalitarian leadership and the masses, the function of ideology as a novel type of worldview, and the expectations of the masses. This ideology differs from the manifold worldviews of the nineteenth century, since it no longer operates on the basis of worldview perspectives and, therefore, of prejudice. Instead, it frees itself of all connections to the world and moves self-referentially in a purely logical frame devoid of contradiction. The core of this logic is 'in for a penny, in for a pound'. Consequently, the logic of cleansing and the Stalinist show trials can be interpreted as follows: given that Marxist-Leninist ideology sees the continued existence of bourgeois elements during the dictatorship of the proletariat, it seems logical that these also prevail within the Communist Party.

In the same way that the worldview detached itself from the world, state violence in its totalitarian form detached itself from its reference to the world. Worldviews were replaced by ideology and violence by terror. "Terror ... is only in the last instance of its development a mere form of government. In order to establish a totalitarian regime, terror must be presented as an instrument for carrying out a specific ideology; and that ideology must have won the adherence of many, and even a majority, before terror can be stabilized."<sup>16</sup>

15 Raanan Rein: A Belated Inclusion: Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and Their Place in the Israeli National Narrative, in: *Israel Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2012, p. 28.

16 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Chicago: Meridian 1958, p. 6.

Prior to the seizure of power, it is the task of propaganda to establish a world of lies where people rediscover themselves, in this case the uprooting of the masses and their disorientation following the decline of the class society. The fact that the masses are ready for anything is beneficial to propaganda. “The masses’ escape from reality is a verdict against the world in which they are forced to live and in which they cannot exist, ...”<sup>17</sup> Arendt speaks of a revolt against the meaning of reality as a result of their atomization. Since the masses no longer believe in the reality of the visible world and refuse to rely on their own controllable experiences, that is, have no confidence in their five senses, they depend entirely on their imagination, with the help of which they “are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations.”<sup>18</sup> Far more than explanations of what the propagandists pretend to do are their own expectations “that they have discovered the hidden forces that will bring them good fortune in the chain of fatality”<sup>19</sup>. “Infallibility” takes precedence over content, not because of superior intelligence but of “the striking success of posing as a mere interpreting agent of predictable forces”<sup>20</sup>. Advantageous to mass expectations is the fact that totalitarian propaganda, as Siegfried Kracauer explains in a posthumous manuscript on the topic, leaves no room for anything else. The aim of totalitarian propaganda is “total occupation of the zone of spontaneity, the zone where opinions are formed ... In order to block the source of opinion making, propaganda must make the question disappear”<sup>21</sup> (Kracauer, 2013: 50f.) Questions merely create confusion, clarity creates security. The greater the *sense* of personal abandonment and hopelessness, the stronger the trust in these natural forces and the more effective the strategy of counteracting the alleged Jewish world conspiracy with a similar aim: world domination. The propaganda of action replaces the sense of utter helplessness with that of unlimited power.

So, before the totalitarian movement seizes power, the hearts and minds of the masses are won over in the following order: first emotions and intentions, and then the rational level with its corresponding propagandistic justifications.

In 1955, four years after publication of her book on totalitarianism, Arendt added a chapter with a systematic analysis of “Ideology and Terror: a novel form of government”, linking it to Montesquieu’s government theory. Here, Arendt underlines what she sees as the major, constitutive significance of the interaction between ideology and terror with reference to the emergence of totalitarianism as a concrete form of government.

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17 Ibid., p. 352.

18 Ibid., p. 353.

19 Ibid., p. 345.

20 Ibid., p. 349.

21 Siegfried Kracauer *Totalitäre Propaganda*, Berlin Suhrkamp, 2013, p. 50/51. (translated by WH)

Remarkable in this context is Arendt's perception that the further we penetrate into the interior of the organization, the less meaningful is the ideological *content*. There are no more refutations by an external reality, there is no longer a need to fight in the interests of fiction. The elite formations understand that the statement "all Jews are inferior, means, all Jews should be killed."<sup>22</sup> The way into this interior landscape is through the gates of the front organizations. They "surround the movements' membership with a protective wall. ... the front organizations not only isolate the members but offer them a semblance of outside normalcy which wards off the impact of true reality more effectively than mere indoctrination."<sup>23</sup>

Six years later, Arendt witnessed Eichmann in Jerusalem. In her book about the trial, ideology plays a very minor role. Arendt explained that she only dealt with topics beyond those associated with the trial, such as the history of the Jewish people in the diaspora or the behaviour of the German or other peoples or the "ideologies of the time"<sup>24</sup> if they were relevant to the trial itself. But even when Arendt speaks of ideology, it is of no real importance. In one case, she mentions Himmler's speech to police and SS officers of high rank. According to Arendt, Himmler primed them for mass murder with the help of a psychological trick rather than with ideology. He called upon the greatness of the deeds and spoke of battles that future generations would not have to fight. He appealed to their morality and spoke of the value of remaining decent. Finally, with psychological skill he nipped compassion in the bud before it could arise: not "what horrible things I did to people!" but "what horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!"<sup>25</sup>

In her essay on "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" written in 1945, Arendt had observed in this context that the "good *paterfamilias* who does not betray his wife and anxiously seeks to secure a decent future for his children ... has consciously built up his newest terror organization."<sup>26</sup>

In another context, Arendt deals with the role of ideology in relation to Eichmann himself. In an interview with Joachim Fest she explained her theory on Eichmann's thoughtlessness. He was neither a criminal nor a sadist, nor was he mentally disturbed. We therefore have to "look for his defect" in his indifference, his thoughtlessness. Thoughtlessness in this case does not imply that Eichmann was unable to think or was not an excellent organizer. But he did not think critically or humanely.

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22 Hannah Arendt: *Origins*, op. cit., p. 385.

23 Ibid., p. 366.

24 Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Viking, revised and enlarged version 1965, p. 286.

25 Ibid., p. 106.

26 Hannah Arendt: *Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility*, in: *Essays in Understanding*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company 1994, p. 128.

His way of thinking was instrumental. Once he departed from this level, he could no longer cope in the world and grasped at clichés and inappropriate images, all of which proved that his capacity to judge was seriously impaired.

Conspicuous in her analyses of the totalitarian ideology and Eichmann's way of thinking is Arendt's lack of interest in content, such as race theories or the distinction between Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism. Instead, she focused on their function. She responds to the question of why propaganda and ideology succeed with a reference to the masses, their world of experience and their resultant intention: to escape from despair and disorientation. When the totalitarian movement collapsed with the end of the war, propaganda, too, collapsed. The reason for this lies in the utter fictitiousness and erosion of its ideological arguments for justification. "Totalitarian politics – far from being simply anti-semitic or racist or imperialist or communist – use and abuse their own ideological and political elements until the real basis of factual reality, from which the ideologies originally derived their strength and their propaganda value has almost vanished – the reality of the class struggle, for instance, or the interest conflicts between Jews and their neighbors – have all but disappeared."<sup>27</sup> This explains the ease with which Nazis and their supporters became liberal democrats following the demise of totalitarianism.

So, propaganda was successful because it spoke of the intention to maintain freedom and security in a new world. Ideology as a rational way of thinking gave this intention a direction. Reasonable explanations, justifications and arguments are effective, not because they are rational, but because they move in the world of emotions, transport emotions and respond to emotions.

Examining Arendt's analysis of anti-semitism in her book on totalitarianism and the assimilation attempts of Rahel Varnhagen with regard to the role of intentions and justifications would go beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>28</sup> Suffice it to say that the book's description of various Jewish, aristocratic and anti-semitic milieus is based on the analysis of intentions and constellations, and that her biography of Rahel Varnhagen, written prior to her study on anti-semitism, presents a series of failed attempts by Varnhagen to find herself: the renunciation of worldliness and the use of reflection and conformism as flight. Finally, Varnhagen recognised that discovering her own identity was a prerequisite to finding her place in society. It would be interesting to interpret judgments made in this context as the realization of intentions rather than justifications.

The study of other events in politics strongly based on ideology and with the same importance attached to intention and justification, such as Mao's reasons for

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27 Hannah Arendt: *Origins*, op. cit., p. xv.

28 Hannah Arendt: *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewess*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 2000.

launching the Cultural Revolution in order to remain in power, could be a stimulating exercise.<sup>29</sup>

### In order to and because – motives in radical Salafism

The third possible ideological justification presented here can be found in the reasons why young European men join the ranks of the “Islamic State”. The ideology involved is fundamentalist Salafism, one that demands adherence to the rules of a form of Islam claimed to be primal and authentic. This in turn is based on irreconcilable confrontation with unbelievers or infidels and the erection of a worldwide Caliphate.

The rare biographical analyses available give insights into intentions and justifications in the manner of Alfred Schütz. In his book *I was a Salafist. My time in the Islamic parallel world*<sup>30</sup>. Dominic Musa Schmitz, a German, recounts that he, a lazy, selfish and unstable young man without direction, was an outsider at school, in search of his own identity and a drug abuser. When he came into contact with the Salafists, he felt he was being taken seriously for the first time in his life. He joined the group and found that the world had a simple structure: the good and the bad, a single binding truth based on peaceful, harmonious ideas – he later became more radical – the prerogative of the religious leader’s interpretation, the competition between these followers during their studies of the Quran and its “correct” interpretation, and the responsible task of proselytizing among other interested young men. Schmitz felt that he had finally found his place in the world. The acceptance he experienced, however, had an ulterior motive. It demanded in return that he distance himself more and more from the non-Salafist environment. As the group came closer to the “Islamic State”, Musa felt more uncomfortable with the growing importance of violence and, after a considerable inner struggle, left the group.

Islamic scholar Lamyia Kaddor, who lives in Germany, reports similar experiences. She observed vast emotional deficits, the search for identity, the desire to abandon the old way of life – an aspect that not only refers to Salafists, but equally applies to young people belonging to the extreme right or left – and the strong significance of being accepted and of belonging to a group. The ideological treatment of new members in the group has the aim of complete separation from the non-Salafist environment. This occurs by means of black and white thinking, clothes and language, and the narrative of suffering fellow believers that paves the way for alleged resistance and violence. The commitment to joining the war in the Middle East is

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29 Frank Dikötter: *The Cultural Revolution. A People's History 1962–1976*, London e.a.l.: Bloomsbury 2016.

30 Dominic Musa Schmitz *Ich war ein Salafist. Meine Zeit in der islamistischen Parallelwelt*, Berlin Econ 2016.

the result of group pressure and the emotional power of the leaders rather than the individual's own decision.<sup>31</sup>

The emotional deficits in their lives drive these young people to look for alternatives. The contents of the ideology clearly plays a less important role in this mission than the sense of acceptance and of belonging. The journalist Scott Anderson met many people in Arab countries over a long period, among them almost two dozen DAESH fighters. Only one of them declared to have joined for religious reasons. The others had done so for more superficial reasons such as money, glory or friends. Anderson found similar reasons among unhappy youngsters belonging to gangs in the United States, and members of drug gangs in Mexico.<sup>32</sup>

In his comprehensive study *The Age of Anger*, Pankaj Mishra comes to a far more disturbing conclusion in terms of the global political situation.<sup>33</sup> He focuses our attention on global changes, with deregulation, uprooting and migration, on the one hand, and the delegitimization of the grand narratives of Nationalism, Marxism and Liberalism, on the other. These are replaced by new narratives with various forms of self-description as victims, with feelings of resentment and acts of terrorism that in Mishra's view resemble the anarchic terrorism that prevailed prior to 1914, both in its form and its justifications. He not only describes parallels between the anarchy of the nineteenth century and the terrorism of the twenty-first century that followed the respective upheavals and modernization, but also new radical tendencies that command majorities. Politicians like Modi in India revise history and combine nationalism with a revolutionary futurism. Modi "understands that resonant sentiments, images and symbols rather than rational arguments or accurate history galvanize isolated individuals."<sup>34</sup> Counteracting the seduction of young people in Germany by Islamist groups via their weapon of acceptance seems easy in comparison to the seductive power of resentment, machismo and new emotional narratives in other regions of the world.

Mishra refers in this context to an appeal Arendt made in her tribute to Karl Jaspers: "If the solidarity of mankind is to be based on something more solid than the justified fear of man's demonic capacities, if the new universal neighborship of all countries is to result in something more promising than a tremendous increase in mutual hatred and a somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else, then a process of mutual understanding and progressing self-clarification on a

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31 Lamy Kaddor *Zum Töten bereit. Warum deutsche Jugendliche in den Dschihad ziehen*, Munich/Berlin Piper 2015.

32 Scott Anderson: *Fractured Lands: How the Arab World Came Apart*, New York: Anchor Books 2017.

33 Pankaj Mishra: *Age of Anger. A History of the Present*, London: Allen Lane 2017.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 269.

gigantic scale must take place.”<sup>35</sup> This requires the renunciation “of sovereignty for the sake of a world-wide federated political structure” and as a prerequisite for this the renunciation, “not of one’s own tradition and national past, but of the binding authority and universal validity which tradition and past have always claimed”<sup>36</sup>

When we now ask about the life intentions of these young people, we see their priority over rational arguments. According to the results of recent forensic investigations, the perpetrators frequently show personality disorders and feel the need to overcome their insecurity with spectacular acts.<sup>37</sup>

It can be identified in all three examples that ideological justifications and orientations are effective only when they are based on emotional intentions, thereby limiting their refutation at the level of argument. It is therefore vital to liberate the intentions of life from their alienation, from a life lived in fear and lies.

## Pathologies in modernity

Arendt rightly indicated that the elements and origins of totalitarianism lie in the non-totalitarian world and will not simply disappear when totalitarianism has ceased to be. The old lack of orientation accompanies people like a faithful shadow when they enter a liberal, democratic market society, a society that has its own way of shaping the prevailing emotions and reasons. In *The Pathology of Normalcy* published in 1953, social psychologist Erich Fromm analysed three levels of “alienation”: the alienation of people from themselves, from each other as relational beings, and from the environment. This alienation is accompanied by a tendency towards narcissism, destruction and lack of empathy. It manifests itself in a process of abstraction and removal from things, in the perception of fellow human beings in a language stripped of emotion, and in the reduction of the intersubjective world of emotion to a selfish sentimentality and widespread boredom. It is also expressed in alienation from all things political through anonymity, isolation and the sense of vulnerability in a faceless society and, finally, in alienation from thinking and the sciences.

Of particular interest for our topic here is the fact that

Psychoanalysis can show that ideologies are the products of certain desires, innate tendencies, interests and needs, which – for the most part not consciously –

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35 Hannah Arendt: Karl Jaspers. Citizen of the World, in: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1970, p. 84. – See also chapter 17 in this volume: Elements of Cosmopolitanism – and its Handicaps.

36 Arendt: *Men in Dark Time*, op. cit.: p. 93.

37 Jerome Endrass et al. Der Weg zum (terroristischen) Attentäter Gewalt legitimieren, um Gewalt auszuüben” in *Kriminalistik*, 5, 2015, pp. 328–334.

appear as 'rationalizations' in the form of ideology. ... It can show that the impact of an 'idea' is essentially based on its unconscious content that appeals to certain impulses, in other words, it is the type and strength of the libidinal sounding board of a society or class that determines the social impact of ideologies.<sup>38</sup>

In an empirical study of workers and employees in the Weimar Republic in 1929, the results of which were first published in 1980, Fromm found that revolutionary confessions did not coincide with revolutionary aspirations: only fifteen per cent of more than six hundred members of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties interviewed indicated that their revolutionary thinking had in fact a libidinal structure. Twenty-five per cent were reliable but not ardent supporters. Fromm later recognized, thanks to his investigation, why no significant resistance from left-wing workers and employees against Hitler's seizure of power could have been expected. On the contrary, sympathies prevailed and numerous party members switched to the NSDAP.<sup>39</sup>

In *The Betrayal of the Self*, Swiss psychologist Arno Gruen speaks of a paradox that sees how "the inner struggle to maintain one's own autonomy" – a primary value in liberal society – "can express itself in desperate conformism, submission and self-destructive behaviour"<sup>40</sup>. The vulnerability and self-contempt inherent in this paradox paves the way for hostility, malice and sadism.<sup>41</sup> And attempts at liberation from this subservience and helplessness can lead to a new form of submission and frequently to the milieu of terrorism.<sup>42</sup> According to Gruen, abstract ideas not only prevent the access to emotions, but also serve to deny the destructive that is designed to serve a superior reality, such as progress or maintaining peace. Abstraction and depersonalization go hand in hand in this process.<sup>43</sup> In Arendt's view, abstract thinking can be closely compared to the inhumanity of abstract emotions<sup>44</sup> and an understanding is only possible if we judge independently with an enlarged thought,

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38 Erich Fromm *Über Methode und Aufgabe einer Analytischen Sozialpsychologie. Bemerkungen über Psychoanalyse und historischen Materialismus* (1932), in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1 (Analytische Sozialpsychologie), Stuttgart Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1980, p. 51f. (translated by WH)

39 Erich Fromm *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches. Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung*, edited by Wolfgang Bonß, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 3 (Empirische Untersuchungen zum Gesellschafts-Charakter), Stuttgart Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1981, p. 190.

40 Arno Gruen *Der Verrat am Selbst. Die Angst vor Autonomie bei Mann und Frau*, Munich dtv 1986, p.28. (translated by WH)

41 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 49f.

44 Hannah Arendt: Foreword in: J. Glenn Gray: *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. New York: Harcourt 1959.



which, according to Arendt, is in the biblical language of King Solomon “the understanding heart”, something that is as “far removed from sentimentality as it is from paperwork”<sup>45</sup>.

Finally, Fromm sees fanaticism as a phenomenon of alienation characterized by the fact that the totalitarian fanatic deadens all humanity within himself and feels nothing. He projects any sense of humanity onto the party as its epitome. The party is an idol that demands total compliance and “allows him to experience a strange burning passion, which could perhaps more accurately be called cold passion”, or conversely “burning ice”<sup>46</sup>.

Here, we reach a point where it is difficult to find a comprehensible explanation for the intentions of fanatics. We are dealing with people who are paranoid. In his study on Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and the poetics of National Socialism<sup>47</sup>, literary scholar Albrecht Koschorke describes how pathologizing the world is set in motion, how social tension or a collective state of excitement is combined with a reservoir of cultural concepts and images to create an explosive mixture. The principal actors are “trigger personalities”, revolutionary leaders and modern dictators in the history of nationalism in the twentieth century, who “mainly come from a conspiratorial milieu, where bohemia, criminality and ideological radicalism combine to an amalgam that is difficult to penetrate”<sup>48</sup>. Koschorke sees them as “liminal”. They exceed thresholds and “are mentally driven beyond the confines of normalcy, advance into zones where for the most part the boundary between visionary farsightedness and madness is blurred”<sup>49</sup>. These figures appear time and again. They belong to the partly academic precarity, and we meet them in the French Revolution as Jacobins and also in the National Socialist movement.

What the population impressed most, apart from “the flush of words”, was the fact that propagandists did not stop at words but accompanied these with deeds, with organized violence. “The we-group ... includes all those who find it uplifting to mock their opponents beaten to a pulp and thus to eliminate once and for all any form of protest.” This terror also served “to conceal from their followers and victims alike the hidden idiocy of self-appointed leaders, who attempt to compensate their lack of legitimate authority with megalomania.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, exposing this idiocy was

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45 Hannah Arendt: *Essays in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 322

46 Erich Fromm *Das Unbewusste und die psychoanalytische Praxis* (1959), in *Gesellschaft und Seele*, Weinheim Beltz Verlag 1992, p. 128/29

47 Albrecht Koschorke *Adolf Hitlers Mein Kampf. Zur Poetik des Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin Matthes & Seitz 2016.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 63f.

an element of works by Brecht, Arendt and Tabori.<sup>51</sup> Every society has these trigger characters; “many channels lead from the liminal to the ordinary world; the border between the two is permeable and unstable”. “We must be aware of the fragile nature of this normalcy, not because of the vague similarity between the abnormal and the insane but because of – terrible though it may sound – their appearance in moments of extreme social tension.”<sup>52</sup>

In his book on paranoia, Italian psychoanalyst Luigi Zoja outlines its classic features – feelings of inferiority, megalomania and envy, conspiracy theories and self-deception. According to Zoja, “paranoia is, so to speak, the most anti-psychological of all mental illnesses, since it is the only way of thinking that completely obliterates self-criticism in its activity. Paranoid thinking is both logical and impossible, coherent and contradictory, humane and inhumane. It is a tragic mask that does not, however, conceal the face of a hero but a radically insecure being who also deceives himself.”<sup>53</sup> As history has shown time and again, the paranoid individual effectively destabilizes and mobilizes the population with a dangerous cocktail of emotionally and rationally based threat scenarios. It goes without saying that emotions also play a major role in confronting intentions, for example those implied in conspiracy theories.<sup>54</sup>

It is conspicuous that Havel, Arendt, Fromm and Gruen are not only theorists but also socio-political practitioners who pursue life’s non-alienated intentions in their relationship with fellow human beings.

To add one more example: Arendt saw the writing of her book on the origins of totalitarianism as a form of understanding that cannot occur *sine ira et studio* and thus as contradicting conventional scientific rules, especially those of historians. Criticised for this by her colleague Eric Voegelin, Arendt responded with a reference to the wretchedness of British miners at the beginning of the industrial revolution and the necessary unity of reason and emotion: “If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities. ... This has nothing to do with sentimentality or moralizing ... To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be ‘objective’, but to condone them.”<sup>55</sup> In a new foreword to *The Origins of Total-*

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51 Wolfgang Heuer: Horror and Laughter. At the Limits of Political Science, in: Zoran Kurelic (ed.): *Violence, Art and Politics*, Zagreb: Politicka Misao 2015. – See also chapter 10 in this volume: Horror and Laughter – Arendt, Tabori, Borowski.

52 Albrecht Koschorke *Adolf Hitlers Mein Kampf*, op. cit., p. 29.

53 Luigi Zoja: *Paranoia*. La locura que hace la historia, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica 2013, p. 37. (Translated by WH)

54 Michael Butter “*Nichts ist wie es scheint*”. *Über Verschwörungstheorien*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2018.

55 Hannah Arendt: Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding*. op. cit., p. 404f. – See the role of emotions also in chapter 12 of this volume: Facing the War: Arendt and Habermas.

itarianism, Arendt explained that shortly after World War Two it was impossible to write *sine ira et studio* due to the “mood of those years”<sup>56</sup>.

In her *Denktagebuch* she noted: “Only when poverty is made ‘objective’, i.e. de-humanized, i.e. dissociated from public life, i.e. ripped from its context of human solidarity, i.e. denaturalized (bared of its, of poverty’s peculiar nature) can you arrive at the insane claim of ethical neutrality.”<sup>57</sup> “Absence of emotions neither causes nor promotes rationality. ... In order to respond reasonably one must first of all be ‘moved’, and the opposite of emotional is not ‘rational’, whatever that may mean, but either the inability to be moved – usually a pathological phenomenon, or sentimentality, which is a perversion of feeling.”<sup>58</sup> And after everything we have seen up to now, the rationality of emotional coldness, “objectivity”, is by no means free of emotional intention.

## The end of the dichotomy

Looking back at the sketchy description of the constellation of reason and emotion, it now seems that not only are intentions guided by emotion and enjoy priority over rational justifications, but that reason itself serves emotion. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio supports this contention. His experimental findings seriously question the modern separation of reason and emotion. His conclusion goes against Descartes but with Spinoza and thus against modern schools of thought, such as utilitarianism, Marxism and liberalism from Kant to Habermas and Rawls, which separate reason from emotion. Damasio found that the body perceives emotions almost unconsciously. These are transformed into feelings by the brain and only then, although not always, are they examined by reason. According to Damasio, emotions in the body and feelings in the brain serve as the basis for homeostasis, a functional balance within the organism’s economy. Allowing our actions to be guided solely by reason would take much longer and, even if feelings are excluded, would prove to be impossible. “Because the brain is the body’s captive audience, feelings are winners among equals. And since what comes first constitutes a frame of reference for what comes after, feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense.”<sup>59</sup>

Against this background, a shift in political sciences towards the ties between reason and emotion would be desirable. Because, in Damasio’s words, “we wouldn’t

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56 Hannah Arendt: *Origins*, op. cit., p. xxiii.

57 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, Munich Piper 2002, 8 Mai 1951, p. 89.

58 Hannah Arendt: *On Violence*, op. cit, p. 161.

59 Antonio R. Damasio: *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, New York: Penguin Books 1994, p. 159f.

have music, art, religion, science, technology, economics, politics, justice, or moral philosophy without the impelling force of feelings.”<sup>60</sup> Thinking in all its forms, rhetoric, metaphors and rational decisions are only possible with the indispensable share of feelings. We are thus reverting to pre-modern insights, such as those of the so-called moralists like La Rochefoucauld, who observed: “Self-interest speaks all manner of tongues and plays all manner of parts, even that of disinterestedness.”<sup>61</sup> Or Montaigne, whose observation can be applied to the fighters of the ‘Islamic State’: “If anyone should sift out of the army, even the average loyalist army, those who march in it from the pure zeal of affection for religion ... he could not make up one complete company of men-at-arms out of them.”<sup>62</sup> And similarly, philosopher David Hume wrote: “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”<sup>63</sup> And: “And as reasoning is not the source, whence either disputant derives his tenets; it is in vain to expect that any logic, which speaks not to the affections, will ever engage him to embrace sounder principles.”<sup>64</sup>

In other words, reason is only accessible when emotions have been touched.

This necessary dissolution of the dichotomy of body and mind, of emotion and reason poses a huge challenge for the political and historical sciences and their methods.

Given the limited scope of this essay, suffice it to say that Havel and Arendt’s cognitive methods are also primarily shaped by their emotions. Although influenced by existentialism and phenomenology, Havel declared that he thoroughly enjoyed reading “the essays of these authors, despite my somewhat superficial knowledge of this field. I was more impressed by the atmosphere of this thinking than by specific theories, concepts, conclusions, etc. ... So, for a long time my attitude was similar to the attitude we have to art.”<sup>65</sup> Writing from prison, Havel explained that he was reading about Kafka, and that he had

always harboured a feeling ... that I somehow understand Kafka better than others, not because I can claim a deeper intellectual insight into his work, but because of an intensely personal and existential understanding of experience that borders on spiritual kinship. (I have never much held with theoretical ‘interpretations’ of Kafka; immensely more important for me was the quite trivial ‘pre-

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60 Antonio R. Damasio: *Interview in MIT Review*, 17 June 2014.

61 La Rochefoucauld: *The Moral Maxims and Reflections*, 1665, 39.

62 Michel de Montaigne: Apology for Raymond Sebond, in: *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, ed. Donald M. Frame, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1965, p. 323.

63 David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, part III, 1738.

64 David Hume: *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, section I, 1751.

65 Václav Havel: *Briefe an Olga*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1984, p. 74 (translated by WH).

theoretical' certainty, as it were, that he was 'right' and that what he writes is 'exactly how it is').<sup>66</sup>

This necessary dissolution of the dichotomy of body and mind, *emotio* and *ratio* poses a great challenge to the methods of political science and history, which must seek answers to the questions of what we oppose to the "pathology of normality of contemporary man", the temptations of paranoia, the feelings of envy, resentment and indifference inherent in democracy, and what the 'history of ideas' tells us about them.

Written in 2019. First published: Warum? – Weil..., oder Um zu ..." Einige Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Vernunft und Emotionen in der Politik und von Intuition und Rechtfertigung beim Gebrauch von Ideologien, in Philipp Mattern et al. (eds.) *Abschied vom Unzeitgemäßen? Politische Ideengeschichte im Widerstreit*. Festschrift für Klaus Roth. Marburg Bund demokratischer Wissenschaftler\*innen 2019, pp. 211–231.

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66 Václav Havel: *Letters to Olga*, Henry Holt & Co, New York 1989, p. 126.

## 12. Facing War Arendt and Habermas

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Ukraine 2022: a democratic, forward-looking country where most citizens live in peace. Like us, they do everything possible for a good life: Education, future plans and hobbies, with friends and family, with social engagement and political elections, with material goods and dreams. In the midst of this peace, a huge army marches into the country and from one day to the next begins to destroy neighbourhoods, entire villages, human lives, all dreams. Their goal: dissolution of the nation, extinction of culture, annihilation of the population.

How do we outsiders talk about it, how do we analyse the events? Objectively, scientifically, objectively? *Sine ira et studio*, which Voegelin missed in Arendt's supposedly historical book about total domination? Without the supposedly ironic tone that later readers of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* found unbearable? "Let us suppose," Arendt replied,

that the historian is confronted with excessive poverty in a society of great wealth, such as the poverty of the British working classes during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. The natural human reaction to such conditions is one of anger and indignation because these conditions are against the dignity of man. If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities. For to arouse indignation is one of the qualities of excessive poverty insofar as poverty occurs among human beings.<sup>1</sup>

And in her private notes she noted: "Only when poverty has been made 'objective', i.e. dehumanised, i.e. taken out of the context of public life, i.e. out of the context of human solidarity, i.e. denatured (stripped of its, poverty's, intrinsic nature), does one arrive at the imbecilic demand of freedom from value (*Wertfreiheit*, WH)."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Hannah Arendt: A Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company 1994, p. 403.

2 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, Munich Piper 2002, p. 89. See also in this volume: Beyond the Academic and Intellectual Worlds.

To understand the phenomenon of poverty in its social context and thus as inhumane and as unjust justifiably leads to anger, indignation and violence, says Arendt in *On Violence*. But to “cure man” of these emotions “would mean nothing less than to dehumanize or emasculate him... In order to respond reasonably one must first of all be ‘moved’, and the opposite of emotional is not ‘rational’, whatever that may mean, but either the inability to be moved, usually a pathological phenomenon, or sentimentality, which is a perversion of feeling.”<sup>3</sup>

This responsiveness of the mind and the ability to be moved has only been addressed in the sciences since the Emotional Turn.<sup>4</sup> It is about the admission that reason and feeling, mind and body are not separated in the Cartesian way, but on the contrary work together monistically, are inseparable, as Spinoza explained. A scientist cannot switch off his feelings at all; every text, no matter how factual and endeavouring objective, therefore inevitably has its emotional imprint. If, instead of reflecting them in his research, he tries to suppress them with all his might, he only runs the risk of falling into the callousness mentioned by Arendt. However, coldness of feeling does not mean absence of feelings, but only the predominance of cold feelings. And even more: the scientist negates the social context, the injustice and the resulting appeal to abolish it.

The role that being moved plays in political judgement is shown by on the one hand by Arendt’s commitment during the Second World War to saving the Jewish people, on the other by Habermas’ disengagement with regard to saving the Ukrainian people. In the following, I will first discuss Arendt’s strongly emotional argumentation with regard to Hitler’s war against the Jews, then Habermas’s “reasonable” position towards the war against Ukraine, and finally the political-scientific difference between Arendt and Habermas, which I would like to exemplify with Arendt’s essay on power and Habermas’s criticism of it.

## Arendt’s Jewish War

In a column in the German-Jewish newspaper *Aufbau* in New York in 1941, Arendt campaigned for the establishment and recognition of a Jewish army of its own against Hitler and Nazi Germany and commented on resolutions passed by Jewish

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3 Hannah Arendt: *On Violence*, in: *Crises of the Republic*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1972, p. 161.

4 Bradley Robinson / Mel Kutner: Spinoza and the Affective Turn: A Return to the Philosophical Origins of Affect, In: *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2019, Vol. 25(2), pp. 111–117. – Brian Massumi: *Politics of Affect*. Thomas Szanto / Jan Slaby, Political Emotions. In: Thomas Szanto / Hilge Landweer (eds.): *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotions*, New York 2020, pp. 478–494. – Jan Slaby / Christian von Scheve (eds.): *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, London, New York: Routledge 2019, pp. 109–118.

organisations. Her tone is rhetorically excellent, polemical, mobilising, decisive and clear; for an army of one's own in order to save the Jewish people, to be able to appear as equals to other peoples, to gain self-confidence and to shed the status and feelings of inferiority of an oppressed people. As a result of Hitler's invasion of various countries, all European peoples had become pariahs and, according to Arendt, Jewish destiny would not be decided in Palestine but in Europe. "A Jewish army is not utopian if the Jews of all countries demand it and are prepared to volunteer for it." This is because "an old and very contemporary Zionist proverb says that freedom is no gift. *Freedom is also not a prize for suffering endured.* One truth that is unfamiliar to the Jewish people, though they are beginning to learn it, is that *you can only defend yourself as the person you are attacked as.*"<sup>5</sup> Such autonomy is inevitable, because "just as in life friendship is distorted and ruined by fixation on a person, so too in politics the unconditional identification of one's own cause with the cause of another distorts and ruins an alliance."<sup>6</sup>

This requires liberation from bureaucratic Zionists and apolitical plutocrats. "Only the people themselves, young and old, poor and rich, men and women, can reshape public opinion, which today is against us. *For only the people themselves are strong enough for a true alliance.*"<sup>7</sup> "Historically, the misfortune of the Jewish people ... has been that the parvenu has been more important than the pariah; that Rothschild was more representative than Heine."<sup>8</sup> Now that all European nations have become pariah peoples, "our fate has turned out to be no special fate, for the first time not a special fate, our struggle for the first time a special fate, for the first time our struggle is identical with Europe's struggle for freedom."<sup>9</sup>

A Jewish army should only be formed by working men "who reach for weapons only if they are forced to in extreme emergency. Militarists and people who find value in battle and war per se fighting and war have no place in such an army. Modern soldiers are 'civilians in uniform' and can justify their being given the right to kill ... only because they are forced to do so in order to defend the fruits of their labor and the meaning of their civilian life. out to defend these fruits of their labor and the meaning of their civilian life. ... The horrible readiness to kill ... (and) also the readiness to die" can only exist "when you know for certain why you are fighting, and only when you are a full-fledged citizen of the community that embodies that 'why'".<sup>10</sup> Arendt wants nothing to do with the Jewish revisionists, who since 1927 "as anti-

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5 Hannah Arendt: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, p. 137.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, p. 145.



British nationalists, as anti-Arab terrorists and as strikebreakers” and altogether as “well-known fascists” who presume to claim a leadership role for ‘free Jews’<sup>11</sup>.

In this situation, four Jewish institutes worked out peace plans in 1942, whose authors Arendt criticised as follows: “Scholars are remarkable people, and we have had some very sad experiences with them in recent years. At some point, when they fell prey to the dominance of positivism, they became ‘unpolitical’; for the sake of pure correctness they forgot what truth is, and frivolously separated themselves from the cause of freedom and justice. Ever since, they have been prepared to offer a helping hand to every political system.”<sup>12</sup> And to a similarly unreal degree as the demand of a group of intellectuals in Germany for a ceasefire in Ukraine as soon as possible<sup>13</sup>, these scholars criticised by Arendt proposed a participation of the Jewish people directly in a peace conference. “But so far, no people has come up with the idea of trying to replace participation in a war with *dreaming* in advance about participation in a peace conference. This is a scholarly idea, and we like to hope that our scholars will not succeed in turning a ‘people of the book’ into a people of papers.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Jewish partisans are greeted stormily by Arendt. “Honor and glory are new words in the political vocabulary of our people”<sup>15</sup>, who can rely on other underground movements and also the non-Jewish civilian population. “Fear and hope, these two archenemies of Jewish politics” lost their power because European Jews “have gone through so many hells that no one else can still instill fear in them and who have been fooled by so many vain hopes that they will not be duped by anyone else.”<sup>16</sup> The time is past when “feeble-minded” intellectuals declared life to be the highest of goods and thus created a slave mentality; “... no one is more easily murdered than a slave”.<sup>17</sup>

Arendt quotes a report according to which the whole ghetto had worked on the preparations for the uprising. Everyone knew that the coming war would only end in military defeat and would therefore lead to physical extermination. “Everyone knew,” the report said, “that the passive death of Jews had created no new values; it had been meaningless; but that death, with weapons in hand can bring new values into the life of the Jewish people.”<sup>18</sup> For the future and coming battles, Arendt wishes to keep the struggle of a young Jewish partisan in memory as a heroine, not a

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11 Ibid., p. 148.

12 Ibid., p. 153.

13 Ceasefire now! In: *Die Zeit*, 29 June 2022.

14 Hannah Arendt: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p. 153.

15 Ibid., p. 199.

16 Ibid., p. 215.

17 Ibid., p. 163.

18 Ibid., p. 217.

martyr, “and as often as possible, as if in some old religious exercise, to recapitulate the stages of the battle for the Warsaw Ghetto”.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, for Arendt, looking at the past, the certainty remains that with a Jewish army many Jews would have been saved from death.

## Habermas looks at Ukraine

A contrast to Arendt’s pathos of resistance and self-confidence can hardly be more strongly presented in content and rhetoric than by Habermas in his guest article “War and Indignation” in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 29 April 2022. Certainly, Arendt had felt directly affected by Hitler’s war against the Jews, even though she lived in safe exile in the USA. But she underlined just as clearly that the fate of the Jews depended on that of the peoples of Europe: on their solidarity, on their recognition of the Jews as an equal people, on the common victory over Hitler’s Germany and on a common new post-war order. The Russian attack on Ukraine is undoubtedly aimed at European values, the defence of which begins in Ukraine, but it is equally aimed at the Ukrainian people. In this respect, we, like Habermas, are directly affected by the war. But Habermas does not address this European perspective; he confines himself to the national framework of Germany and has settled into the role of spectator.

Quite differently from Arendt, his main concern is to bring the emotions that worry him under control. To this end, he presents an example of how reasonable communication should lead to the formation of rational opinion and emotion control. “The rational background,” he writes, “against which these emotions are swelling up around the country [in the face of deaths, war crimes, and the urgent desire to do something about it, WH] is the obvious partisanship against Putin...” But while a more differentiated approach was emerging among the governments of the Western alliance of states “a strident, media-fuelled debate has erupted in Germany over the type and extent of military assistance the country should supply to hard-pressed Ukraine”. The demands of innocently harassed Ukraine, “which unhesitatingly turns the political misjudgements and mis-directed policies of previous German governments into moral blackmail, are as understandable as the emotions, empathy and need to help that they trigger in all of us are self-evident. And yet I am bothered by the self-assurance with which the morally indignant accusers in Germany are going after a reflective and restrained federal government”. Habermas sees a risk threshold which has once again been thrust into the spotlight by “Sergey Lavrov’s renewed threat of a potential nuclear escalation”. “The dilemma that compels the West to weigh the risks between two evils – a defeat of Ukraine or the escalation of a limited conflict into a third world war – is obvious.” Since “a

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19 Ibid., p. 219.

war against a nuclear power can no longer be ‘won’ in any reasonable sense, ... (the) threatened side... cannot end the in any case intolerable destruction of military applications of force by victory, but at best only with a compromise that allows both sides to save face.” Since Putin decides “when the West crosses the threshold defined by international law, ... the indeterminacy of this decision leaves no room for risky speculation.” Therefore, the war must be ended as soon as possible, even if not with sacrifice of a politically free existence on the altar of mere survival.

To this end, it is necessary to bring emotions under control. The “morally indignant accusers” described by 93-year-old Habermas are, he notes, a generation younger, “those ... who have been brought up to be sensitive in normative questions, who do not hide their emotions and ... act with credible gestures and a confessional rhetoric”. They think in categories of victory and defeat, whereas Habermas’ generation had lived “post-heroically” for a long time in Cold War Western Europe under the nuclear shield of the USA and entrusted the tasks of defence to professional armies. For this younger generation, Zelensky’s video address to the German Bundestag only resulted in “emotional confusion; confusion between immediate approval, sheer understanding for the position of the other and necessary self-respect”. “Certainly”, Habermas concludes, “there can be no moral judgments without moral feelings, but the generalizing judgment is also a correction to the limited scope of emotions stimulated by proximity”.

Habermas sees Ukraine and the West on the defensive and the emotions attached to the resistance struggle as the greatest obstacle to a ceasefire. Fear and hope resonate in this rational discourse, not good emotional guides to political action, as Arendt reminds us and Aristotle already knew. And Habermas’ thesis that emotions are feelings stimulated from close quarters with a “limited scope” was practically refuted by Arendt.

Historian Timothy Snyder, a profound expert on Ukrainian history, accuses Habermas of ignorance of the Ukrainian experience, postcolonial discourse and post-World War II history.<sup>20</sup> Habermas fails to mention that the Ukrainian case is a struggle for existence, and “he makes no effort in his text to identify Ukrainian rationality”. Instead, Habermas repeats and endorses Russian propaganda about the risk of nuclear war and warns against cornering Putin – an unfounded assumption when Russian troops can retreat to Russia and Putin can create his own virtual realities thanks to his control of the media. In this way, Habermas helps “to move part of German public opinion towards the proposition that Ukraine cannot win the war. ... If it is believed, it tends to make an actual nuclear war more likely.” Moreover, if nuclear weapons make their owner invincible, this is “amounts to propaganda

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20 Timothy Snyder: Germans have been involved in the war, chiefly on the wrong side, in: *FAS* 27 June 2022. <https://www.faz.net/-gg5-asmiu>

for nuclear proliferation". And what Habermas did not mention, of course, was the victories over the nuclear powers USA in Vietnam and Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Snyder's reference to the persistent colonialist attitude is also significant. Ukraine was always seen as a province of Russia, Hitler wanted to make it a German colony, and German troops murdered more Ukrainians than Russians and the largest proportion of Eastern European Jews there without the German population being aware of it. "But readers of Habermas were not asked ... to inquire whether as Germans they might bear responsibility towards Ukraine." And responsibility includes listening, especially as a former colonial power in Ukraine. Habermas, after all, speaks of peaceful conflict solutions after the Second World War, notwithstanding the wars of decolonisation. Their lesson is that an empire must lose a colonial war "if it is to cease to be an empire".

Thus what Habermas has done is "to direct German discourse away from the realities of (the) past and the possibilities of the present and towards national self-regard. In so doing, he has delayed German reckonings with the past, wasted time when important decisions need to be taken, and helped bring Germany to the threshold of another moral collapse."

## Violence and power

The fact that we also encounter this simultaneously emotional and politically restrained attitude in Habermas' critique of Arendt's essay on power and violence makes it clear how closely *ratio* and *emotio* are connected and therefore how each reveals itself in the other. Before we come to Arendt's differentiation of war, violence and power, we should note her impressive commitment to research. Her statement of a rupture of tradition is not a dispassionate affair, on the contrary. "We are only too familiar with the recurring outbursts of passionate exasperation with reason, thought, and rational discourse which are the natural relations of men who know from their own experiences that thought and reality have parted company."<sup>21</sup>

This passion is thus also at the origin of the definition of power and cannot be overlooked in her writings *On Revolution*, *The Promise of Politics*, and *On Violence*. Arendt defines power only by means of the distinction with violence and assigns it to the basic forms of activity: acting, producing and working. In the unfinished fragment of an "Introduction to Politics", which was abandoned in favour of *The Human Condition*, Arendt establishes a connection between production and destruction in a chapter on the question of war: "In the destruction of the world, nothing is destroyed except a structure made by human hands, and the brute force required for

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21 Hannah Arendt: The Gap between Past and Future, in: *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 6.

it corresponds precisely to the violence necessarily inherent in all human productive processes. ... What men produce can in turn be destroyed by men; what they destroy can also be rebuilt. The ability to destroy and the ability to produce stand in balance, one with the other."<sup>22</sup> The background to this statement is the assumption that war is politics by other means and, as Kant stated, no actions may be committed that later make a peace agreement impossible.

While this is still the case with total war, it is different with the atomic bomb, which not only mobilises processes of the universe, but can lead to the total destruction of man and nature, that is, of the world that came into being through action. It is interesting to read how Arendt, after this initial description, seamlessly glances at the Trojan War, appreciates Homer's poetic and historical-remembering subsequent rescue of the destroyed and slain, then progresses to the *polis* and its transformation of violence into competition and its circumscribed space of freedom, and finally arrives at the Roman meaning of contract and alliance. Homer and Rome make it clear why there must be no war of annihilation in politics: because it annihilates plurality, that is, reality. "If a people or nation, or even just some specific human group, which offers a unique view of the world arising from its particular position in the world... is annihilated, it is not merely that a people or a nation or a given number of individuals perish, but rather that a portion of our common world is destroyed.... Annihilation is therefore not just tantamount to the end of a world; it also takes the annihilator with it."<sup>23</sup>

This fast-track through the annihilations of the present and the ancient world serves to unfold the meaning of a saving plurality, in the context of the 20th century as a balancing act between war and revolution. In *On Revolution* in the early 1960s, Arendt states that two extremes confront each other: the danger of total annihilation through war and "the hope for the emancipation of all mankind through revolution".<sup>24</sup> Both war and revolution are linked by violence, which is why wars so easily turn into revolutions and why the latter so easily unleash wars.<sup>25</sup> This also explains why revolutions like the French fail because, thanks to poverty, the violence of liberation takes the place of action and prevents the formation of power to found the new. Freedom presupposes freedom from poverty and fear.<sup>26</sup>

This close constellation of annihilation and liberation, which already challenged Arendt's commitment in the 1940s, also returns in *The Human Condition* and even

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22 Hannah Arendt: Introduction into Politics, in: *The Promise of Politics*, New York: Schocken 2005, p.154.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

24 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 11.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

26 Hannah Arendt: The Freedom to be Free. The Conditions and Meaning of Revolution, in: *Thinking Without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 378.

*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, precisely also in *On Violence*. In this essay, she describes the experience of a violent century, which led to a prominent role of violence in liberation theories, general political theoretical confusion and violent radicalisation of parts of the student movement (“There is an element of running amok on the part of these bomb-throwing children.”<sup>27</sup>) Yet it is precisely “the function ... of all action, as distinguished from mere behavior, to interrupt what otherwise would have proceeded automatically and therefore predictably.”<sup>28</sup>

In view of this meaning of violence, Arendt underlines the importance of power as the human capacity “not just to act but to act in concert”.<sup>29</sup> To this formation of power, Arendt famously adds Montesquieu’s strengthening of power through its division and the Founding Fathers’ federal division of power.

This does not happen without emotions. On the contrary, the concept of power, like that of violence, is explained with emotions and the metaphors that transport them. For example, the French Revolution with the irresistibility of a movement that could no longer be controlled by human power, “as irresistible as the motions of stars ... a revolutionary torrent current, on whose rushing waves the actors were borne and carried away until its undertow sucked them from the surface and they perished together with their foes, the agents of the counter-revolution. Or Robespierre’s tempest and mighty current, which was nourished by the crimes of tyranny on one side and the progress of liberty on the other, constantly increased in rapidity and violence.”<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, the observation that the idea of freedom and the actual experience of a new beginning were closely interwoven, which Vergil’s Fourth Eclogue praises as “birth as such, the arrival of a new generation, the great saving event or ‘miracle’ which will redeem mankind time and again ... the belief that the world’s potential salvation lies in the very fact that the human species regenerates itself constantly and forever.”<sup>31</sup> If this new beginning is successful, then the “meaning of revolution is the actualization of one of the greatest and most elementary human potentialities, the unequalled experience of *being* free to make a new beginning, from which comes the pride of having opened the world to a *Novus Ordo Saeclorum*.”<sup>32</sup> Or, as far as forms of rule are concerned, according to Arendt:

one should add the latest and perhaps most formidable form of such dominion: bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither

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27 Hannah Arendt: Thoughts on Politics and Revolution. A Commentary, in: *Crisis of the Republic*, op. cit., p. 207.

28 Ibid., p. 132f.

29 Ibid., p. 143.

30 Hannah Arendt: The Freedom to be Free, op. cit., p. 380.

31 Ibid., p. 383.

32 Ibid., p. 384.

one of the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, in which no human being, neither the one nor the few, neither the best nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule by Nobody. ... It is this state of affairs, making it impossible to localize responsibility and to identify the enemy, that is among the most potent accuses of the current worldwide rebellious unrest, its chaotic nature, and its dangerous tendency to get out of control and to run amuck.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, the young generation of the student movement is “unusually courageous, they have a desire to act and also, at least in countries with a political tradition, some experience in doing so and have a stock of confidence, not yet exhausted, in the possibility of changing the world through action.”<sup>34</sup>

This sharp juxtaposition of politics as ossified bureaucracy and politics as the desire for action can particularly sensitively identify activities in which action is displaced by making. There are numerous remarks on this in Arendt's *Denktagebuch*, e.g. “that I can only be an author in producing”, while intersubjective action and the resulting history know no author.<sup>35</sup> Or the remark: “Logic speaks to no one and talks about nothing. Thus it prepares violence”.<sup>36</sup> Or: “The tyranny of reason in us, the compulsion of compulsive reasoning, is in truth a ‘mastery of itself’. ... The real counter-principle against this compulsion is the beginning”.<sup>37</sup>

For Habermas, this is too bold and too emotional and thus not realistically thought through.<sup>38</sup> What is not realistic is what he calls the “unimpaired intersubjectivity” in Arendt's theory with its elements of communication, appearance space, plurality and reference fabric of human affairs. In his view, the formation of power cannot be an end in itself, since “if it no longer thought of as a potential for realizing goals ... for what can it be used?”<sup>39</sup>. He systematises Arendt's manifestations of power in orders that protect liberty, resistance against forces that threaten political liberty, and those revolutionary actions that found new institutions of liberty. “Is such a concept scientifically useful? Is it at all suited to descriptive purposes?” he asks, indirectly answering in the negative. For Arendt leaves out all strategic elements as manufacture and violence from politics, as well as the administrative political relations to economy and society, and finally cannot grasp phenomena of

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33 Ibid., p. 137f.

34 Ibid., p. 19.

35 Hannah Arendt: *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 470; also *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Meridian 1958, p. 164.

36 Ibid., p. 345.

37 Ibid., p. 157.

38 Jürgen Habermas: *Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power*, *Social Research*, Vol. 44, No. 1.

39 Ibid., p. 6.

structural violence.<sup>40</sup> Her orientation towards the Aristotelian concept of *praxis* and *poiesis* and the strict dichotomies such as that between politics and society make her “the victim of a concept of politics that is inapplicable to modern conditions ...” She adopts a curious perspective “a state which is relieved of the administrative processing of social problems; a politics which is cleansed of socio-economic issues; an institutionalisation of public liberty which is independent of the organisation of public wealth; a radical democracy which inhibits its liberating efficacy just at the boundaries where political oppression ceases, and social repression begins – this path is unimaginable for any modern society.”<sup>41</sup>

Habermas and Arendt offer two quite different perspectives on politics and society. Habermas presents the clearly “injured” intersubjectivity of a kind of power formation that is structurally restricted by communication barriers, and Arendt the ever-renewed power formation that breaks through the automatic processes of political and administrative action. For Habermas, Arendt’s reference to councils is insignificant and not an occasion to reflect on the possibilities of a participatory civil society. Arendt and Jaspers appear to him as “intrepid radical democrats” with an elitist mentality<sup>42</sup>, who with their closeness to an imaginary republicanism do not fit in with his liberal, social democratic world, which is not interested in change but in the conditions of its stability.

A look at Habermas’ figurative-emotional language shows acceptance of the limitations of free communication, which is wounded and weak. “(T)he realm of praxis is highly unstable and in need of protection”, “political institutions ... must ... protect the vulnerable structures of intersubjectivity against deformation”, in the context in which it stands a thesis of Arendt’s “reads a bit too smoothly; it is not a result of well-balanced investigations”<sup>43</sup>, which is apparently supposed to characterise Habermas’ essay. Well-balanced, then, is the use of bureaucratic terms such as the “output of state apparatus” or the “stronger input of rather un-specific support”<sup>44</sup>.

In this critique, Arendt appears as an author who struggles with ideas and concepts. She “insists” on something, “has not checked her thesis”, “stylises” the image of the Greek *polis*, “forms” rigid conceptual dichotomies, insists “rightly”, “tracks down”, “reveals”, “takes” politics out of the references, cannot “grasp” phenomena of structural violence, “resists” and tries to “capture”. Then at one time she represents a “peculiar connection”, at another time a “peculiar perspective”, sees the French Revolution in a “dim light”, but also becomes a “victim”, and a circumstance “prompts

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40 Ibid., p. 16.

41 Ibid., p. 14f.

42 Ibid., p. 11.

43 Ibid., p. 13.

44 Ibid., p. 19.



her”, or an outdated term “deters her”. A good thing Arendt spared us reviews of this kind.

There are a number of convincing objections to Habermas’ theory of emotionless deliberation<sup>45</sup>, a theory that has no place for emotions. The role of emotions in the writings of Habermas himself have not yet been addressed, in my opinion.

As far as fear and adaptation are concerned in Habermas’ two texts, there is an astonishing closeness to Leo Strauss, who, despite many similarities in biography and interests with Arendt, argued quite differently from her for the distraction of the politically unreliable people with ‘bread and games’ and recommended that the philosopher should only tell the truth to the ruler. Arendt was quite different: she advocated the widest possible opening of the political space for the unfolding of human plurality, in which philosophers and politicians appear like other people and, together with them, fill this space with life and defend it. Strauss appears fearful, Arendt courageous. And Habermas? He does not trust Arendt and Ukraine and has allowed himself to be impressed by Putin’s threatening gestures and, with regard to power, has come to terms with its limitedness through structural violence.

## Life

Finally, I would like to take a brief look at a state of action that Arendt mentions several times. It is the increase in the intensity of life during the war. It characterises the experience of the French writer and resistance fighter René Char, who with others at the end of the war regretted being thrown back into the “weightless irrelevance of their personal affairs”<sup>46</sup>. Arendt interprets this as the experience of being “visited for the first time in their lives by an apparition of freedom” during the war in a state of nakedness where all masks had fallen. The reason for this is that they, the resistance fighters, had become actors, challengers who had taken the initiative and created a public space between themselves.

Arendt finds something similar in the war experiences of her friend, the philosopher Glenn Gray, who describes them through diary entries as an American soldier in Italy during the Second World War in the book *The Warriors*, which was published only 20 years later. “On the surface of it, this is a book about ‘*homo furens*’ and ‘*homo sapiens*’,” Arendt writes in her preface, “but in fact it is about life and death, love, friendship, and comradeship, about courage and recklessness, about sensitivity and

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45 Florian Weber Unterkühlter Diskurs, Zum Verhältnis von Emotion und Deliberation bei Jürgen Habermas, in Felix Heidenreich / Gary S. Schaal *Politische Theorie und Emotionen*, Baden-Baden 2012, pp. 199–217.

46 Hannah Arendt: *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 3.

the ‘surge of vitality’, about ‘inhuman cruelty’ and ‘superhuman kindness’<sup>47</sup>. It is a book that strengthens resistance to war “while not denying the realities and by not just warning us but making us understand why ‘there is in many today as great a fear of a sterile and unexciting peace as of a great war’<sup>48</sup> Gray quotes the remark of a French woman: “Anything is better than to have nothing at all happen day after day.” Arendt comments on this by saying, “Could boredom be more terrifying than all the war’s terrors?”<sup>49</sup>

This reveals a hitherto largely overlooked aspect of emotionality in Arendt’s thought, which is inseparable from action. The strict conceptual distinction Arendt makes in *The Human Condition* between working, producing and acting, necessities of life and freedom, as well as between nature and the interpersonal world, can lead to the erroneous assumption that nature, work and necessities of life are for Arendt only the negative flip side of culture, action and freedom. In fact, however, she sketches the panorama of a biologically given *conditio humana*, which is characterised by birth and death as well as plurality. People are therefore always conditioned by nature. Work serves to satisfy the necessities of life, politics has, among other things, the task of “securing the process of life”<sup>50</sup>, and freedom is only possible when people are free from fear and material need. Only those who are free from both need and fear are able to feel a passion for public liberty, “to develop within themselves that *goût* or taste for *liberté* and the peculiar taste for *égalité* or equality that *liberté* carries within it.”<sup>51</sup>

Fear, passion, taste and the feelings of friendship and comradeship, courage and recklessness, sensitivity and the ‘surges of liveliness’ described in Glenn Gray not only indicate that feelings play an indispensable role in all judgements and actions, but that they also take on very different forms depending on circumstances and attitudes, for example when it comes to a passion for public freedom or for private happiness. The fact that Arendt reflected only fragmentarily on her views about feelings in politics, but conceded them their place without any problems, and that Habermas wants to limit them suspiciously, makes clear the deficits that characterise the topic of politics and feelings in relation to the actions and thoughts of *citizens* who are also *philosophers*.

Written in 2023. First published: Arendt, Habermas und der Krieg, in *ZfP Zeitschrift für Politik*, Jg. 70, Heft 1, 2023, pp. 3–16.

47 Hannah Arendt: Introduction to J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors*, in: *Thinking without a Banister*, op. cit., p. 319.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., p. 320.

50 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 549.

51 Hannah Arendt: *The Freedom to Be Free*, op. cit., p. 378.



# Federations



## 13. Federalism – A Hidden Treasure

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The great and, in the long run, perhaps the greatest American innovation in politics as such was the consistent abolition of sovereignty within the body politic of the republic, the insight that in the realm of human affairs sovereignty and tyranny are the same.

– *Arendt*, On Revolution

The undermining of the European model of the welfare state, the crisis of the international financial markets and the emergence of populist movements prompted the former French resistance fighter Stéphane Hessel to publish his pamphlet *Indignez-vous*<sup>1</sup>, in which he gave a reminder of the legacy of the French Resistance in the Second World War and called for protest against the ills of our time. The legacy of the French Resistance means not only indignation and commitment, but above all the action of citizens, the orientation towards the common good and the social justice of the welfare state. At the time of the greatest crisis in the history of the European Union, it is crucial to remember this Europe.

And something else is inextricably linked to Europe as soon as one starts talking about the European Union: its federalist character, which is not only a historical response to the painful history of nation-state violence, but is not even conceivable without its resolute rejection of the nation-state. Federalism opens up a wide spectrum of political discussions and experiences, involving the questions of sovereignty or union, representation and/or action, rule or power, separation of state, politics and nation, and a corresponding notion of positive freedom. Is there a federative thinking that can develop a similar strength to counter nationalist thinking? Is there a federal narrative that can rival the nation-state in expressiveness and emotion?

The following considerations should make us aware that the existence of federalism is by no means self-evident and that its qualities are not exhausted in the

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1 Stéphane Hessel: *Indignez-vous!* Montpellier: Maison d'édition Indigène 2010.

free movement of people and goods. But what do they consist of?<sup>2</sup> To answer this question, we will turn to the legacy of the French Resistance. Arendt's critique of the pitfalls of nation-state thinking and action, the alternative of federalism and, finally, selected examples of federation plans whose failure promoted nation-state violence.

## Remember Europe

Remembering means narrating in order to understand, Hannah Arendt explained. But at the same time, she meant that narration must not stop at the act of telling and retelling but must go on to naming the essential. As she wrote in *On Revolution*,

For if it is true that all thought begins with remembrance, it is also true that no remembrance remains secure unless it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptual notions within which it can further exercise itself. Experiences and even the stories which grow out of what men do and endure, of happenings and events, sink back into the futility inherent in the living word and the living deed unless they are talked about over and over again.<sup>3</sup>

If there is anything that Europe can be accused of, it is the fact that it is not aware of its own political founding history, that this history was not conceptualised and therefore does not belong to Europe's political and philosophical self-awareness. There was a lack of awareness that the inheritance was left to us by no by a testament as Arendt quoted the French poet and Resistance fighter René Char<sup>4</sup>, concluding that our age had to redefine the foundations of the political.

In this recollection, it is necessary to conceptualise two phenomena: first, the *Résistance* - not as a moral declaration of innocence in the face of collaboration with the occupying power, but as the seed of a new form of government, a new social contract; and second, *federalism* - not as a technocratic instrument of intergovernmental relations, but as an integral federalism that combines the political-institutional form of power-sharing with the principle of existential, intersubjective relations and builds federalism from the communities, the local citizenry.

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2 Multiple discussion rounds by the author together with Fred Dewey and Jeremiah Day in Berlin in 2011 and 2012 in view of the financial crisis under the title "What was Europe" revealed the widespread lack of reflection on the federated Europe. Cf. also Robert Menasse, who wanted to write a novel about a typical Eurocrat in Brussels and, contrary to expectations, met convinced Europeans: *Der europäische Landbote. Die Wut der Bürger und der Friede Europas*, Vienna Zsolnay Verlag 2012, or Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who saw the monster Brussels and *disenfranchisement* in his essay *Sanftes Monster Brüssel oder Die Entmündigung Europas*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2011.

3 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, London: Penguin Books 1990, p. 220.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 215 and 281.

## The first part of the legacy: *Résistance* yes, but no new form of state of the Councils

On closer examination, the resistance to Nazi Germany in various European countries proves to be a republican movement in which power-building on the one hand and federation on the other were closely linked. While the direct democratic forms of organisation disappeared again with the resistance organisations at the end of the war, their goal of a united Europe, the federation, remained clear. The federation that then developed, however, did not correspond to the ideas of the Resistance. The republican formation of power was suppressed and eliminated after the end of the war by the power politics of the liberal-authoritarian parties.

Arendt pointed out that spontaneous political action always leads to council-like forms of organisation: to the *local associations* in the colonies of North America, the political associations at the beginning of the French Revolution, or the councils during the Hungarian uprising.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, remarkable spontaneous resistance organisations emerged during the Second World War, such as *Libérer et Fédérer* in France, one of the strongest of the resistance groups, which united revolutionary Marxists, syndicalists of the Proudhon school of thought and Christian socialists<sup>6</sup> and advocated an economic and political upheaval of the French central state towards decentralisation and social justice, the nationalisation of basic industries, the transfer of large enterprises into the hands of

councils elected by the assembly of workers and technicians ..., the organisation of a new political framework through the election of councils of the different enterprises, institutions, establishments expressing the various other activities and collective functions ... Federation of these councils on the communal, departmental, regional and national level in connection with a representation of the people established on the basis of universal suffrage and the civil equality of both sexes (and) the integration of France into the United States of Europe<sup>7</sup>.

Arendt was enthusiastic about the *Résistance*. She wrote to Jaspers in 1946:

All of a sudden, there is a new type of person cropping up in all the European countries, a type that is simply European without any European nationalism. I knew an Italian like that. And Camus belongs to that type too. They are at home everywhere They don't even have to know the language very well. Sartre is, by contrast, much too typically a Frenchman, much too literary, in a way too talented,

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5 See James Maldoon: The Lost Treasure of Arendt's Council System, in: *Critical Horizon, A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*, 12/3, 2011, pp. 396–417.

6 Cf. Louis Clair (pseud. Lewis Coser): The France of Tomorrow. What the French Underground Wants, in: *Politics*, Sept. 1944, p. 229.

7 Ibid.



too ambitious. This is something new for me. Before this war I hardly ever saw people like this. It's as if the common experience of fascism, if people really had it, instantly brought about something in them that had previously been only an idealistic program without any reality to it.<sup>8</sup>

When Arendt met Henri Frenay, one of the important activists of the resistance group *Combat* along with Camus, in Paris in 1952, she wrote to her husband Heinrich Blücher:

The only one who could have seized power after the Libération – and did not do so out of decency and stupidity, but is by no means stupid, but precise and intelligent, ... is a modern man and really ought to be doing politics, instead of fussing around in this lost Federalist European juice shop. I liked him very much ...<sup>9</sup>

In her essay “Parties, Movements, and Classes”, Arendt emphasised in autumn 1945 that with the Popular Front and the *Résistance*, two movements had emerged that had nothing to do with the disastrous communist and fascist movements. “The Résistance ... took over not only the principle of proclaiming the people (and not solely classes) the subject of politics, but it inherited the new political enthusiasm which was expressed in the revival of such fundamental concepts of political life as justice, liberty, human dignity and basic responsibilities of the citizen.”<sup>10</sup> In this way, and with their orientation towards a federated Europe and interest in each other in order to create a “unity without uniformity”, they distinguished themselves from the parties shaped by classes and economic interests.

In Italy, *Giustizia e Libertà* and the *Partito d'Azione* group had formed, whose members included the later senator Norberto Bobbio, Arendt's friend Nicola Chiaromonte, Primo Levi and the later president Carlo Ciampi. One of the activists, the Italian writer Luigi Meneghello, described the fundamental problem of the theoretical cluelessness of the Resistance in his autobiographical novel about a student resistance group in northern Italy, *The Little Masters*:

It would have been easy to start a revolution then. Of course, we would have been annihilated soon, at least the first push and then the second and third. But Italy would have felt the taste of what it must mean to renew itself from the bottom up ... It would have been enough to know the texts, but we did not know them<sup>11</sup>,

The undogmatic left-wing American sociologist Lewis Coser, who had optimistically reported on the strength of the *Résistance* in the journal *Politics* as late as 1944, ex-

8 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence 1926–1969*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1992, p. 66.

9 Hannah Arendt / Heinrich Blücher *Briefe 1936–1968*, Munich 1996, p. 256.

10 Hannah Arendt: *Parties, Movements, and Classes*, in: *Partisan Review* 12/4 (Fall 1945), p. 511.

11 Luigi Meneghello *Die kleinen Meister*, Berlin 1990, p. 46.

plained two years later that the failure was due among other things to the lack of political theory.<sup>12</sup>

The French Resistance therefore did not find the strength to transform itself into a political movement, but created a vacuum that the political parties occupied. De Gaulle, on the one hand, skilfully adapted to the underground's demands for democracy and, together with the Allies, set his sights on quick elections with an exhausted population. The French Communist Party, on the other hand, had already turned against sympathies for an alleged “superstate” of Europe during occupation period and called on the Résistance to stand up first and foremost for the “independence of France and the restoration of its grandeur”<sup>13</sup>. Arendt noted: “The resistance movement waited for the liberation but believed that it would be liberated in order to choose free(ly) and establish a new order of things. This did not come true. Chief factor: Communism. The terrible massacre in France”<sup>14</sup>, by which Arendt meant the summary executions of collaborators.

Later she explained:

The tragedy began not when the liberation of the country as a whole ruined, almost automatically, the small hidden islands of freedom that were doomed anyhow, but when it turned out that there was no mind to inherit and to question, to think about and to remember. The point of the matter is that the “completion”, which indeed every enacted event must have in the mind of those who then are to tell the story and to convey its meaning, eluded them; after the deed; and without this thinking completion after the act, without the articulation accomplished by remembrance, there simply was no story left that could be told.<sup>15</sup>

This made it easier for those intellectuals in France who almost professionally created consciousness to participate in the creation of a Gaullist-communist legend.<sup>16</sup> These legends also contained the betrayal of incorruptible freedom and justice. Camus, in his 1953 address “Bread and Freedom” at the St. Etienne Labour Exchange, lamented the division of these intellectuals into partisans of the East or the West. This betrayal is expressed in the confusion of language, in which the lack of freedom and injustice in one's own camp is justified by referring to those in the other camp. For example, the Franco dictatorship is defended by referring to the dictatorship in Poland, and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> Camus' long isolation in the French intellectual public

12 Louis Clair: Why the Resistance failed, in *Politics* 4, April 1946, p. 117.

13 Central Committee of the Communist Party: Remarks 1944, in: Walter Lippens (ed.): *Europa-Föderationspläne der Widerstandsbewegungen 1940–1945*, Munich: Oldenbourg 1968, p. 240.

14 Hannah Arendt: *Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century*, lectures 1965, in: Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., sheet 023762.

15 Hannah Arendt: *Between Past and Future*, New York: Viking Press, 1961, p. 6.

16 Charles Benfredj: *Henri Frenay, la mémoire volée*, Paris: Dualpha 2003.

17 Albert Camus: *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1961, p. 92.

sphere represented nothing other than the victory of lies and the failure of impartial judgement, the rule of mirages. And it was only in the 1980s that the French philosopher Edgar Morin began to take an interest in Europe and wrote *Penser l'Europe*<sup>18</sup>.

### The second part of the legacy: Federalism

The second aspect of republican power-building, federalism, has also been reduced to a liberal, nation-state concept and thus distorted. The numerous writings on “integral federalism” by authors such as Alexandre Marc or Silvio Trentin, both leading theoretical minds of *Libérer et Fédérer*, have been all but forgotten. Integral federalism is directed outwards and inwards, it unites two federalist movements: outwards against a nation-state imperialism for a federal pacifism, and inwards against centralist forms of state, against “Jacobin centralism”, for a federal democracy.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, integral federalism is based on two sources, the existential-philosophical personalism and Proudhon’s conceptions of society.<sup>20</sup>

The term personalism was coined in the early 1930s by members of the *Ordre Nouveau* movement in France, who sought a third way between liberalism and Marxism, between the individual and the collective subject. “Neither individualists nor collectivists, we are personalists”, they declared in their “Manifesto” in 1931. They rejected parliamentarism and elections, considered a system of councils, advocated the abolition of the nation state and declared municipalities to be elementary places of human life from which a federation was to be built from the bottom up and Europe finally became imaginable as a federation of federations. This was to eliminate centralism and sovereignty thinking and assign to the state the responsibility for unavoidable administrative tasks. It was thus not about federalism as decentralisation, in which there is still a centre, but rather a new formation with a “retarding centralization”<sup>21</sup>. All this could only be realised through a “necessary revolution”, as Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu explained in 1933 in their book of this name.<sup>22</sup> This revolution would have to focus on people as persons in their interpersonal relationships. The Swiss Denis de Rougemont summarised the concept of the person as follows: “Man is thus at once free and committed, at once autonomous and in solidarity. He lives in the tension between the two poles: the particular and the general; between the two responsibilities: his vocation and the city; between the two loves: love of self

18 Edgar Morin: *Penser l'Europe*, Paris: Gallimard 1987.

19 Cf. Norberto Bobbio: Introduzione, in: Silvio Trentin: *Federalismo e Libertá. Scritti teorici 1935–1943*, Venice 1987.

20 Cf. P. J. Proudhon: *Du principe fédératif et de la nécessité de reconstituer le parti de la révolution*, Paris 1863.

21 Lutz Roemheld: *Integraler Föderalismus. Modell für Europa*, Munich Vögel 1977, vol. 1, p. 109. Cf. Bernard Voyenne: *Histoire de l'idée fédéraliste*, 3 vols, Paris: Presses d'Europe 1973, 1976, 1981.

22 Robert Aron / Arnaud Dandieu: *La révolution nécessaire*, Paris: Grasset 1933.

and love of neighbour. They are all indissoluble. This man, who lives in tension, creative debate and permanent dialogue, is the *person*.”<sup>23</sup> From these personal relations, according to the view of *Ordre Nouveau*, federal structures are created in the economy, society and politics. The liberal confrontation between the individual and society thus becomes obsolete. Reality in general is neither substance nor fluidity, but exists only in social relations. Hence the concept of integral federalism, which goes far beyond administrative-political federalism and focuses on people in the reality of their lives. A small part of this current, however, misunderstood Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany as the establishment of a new order in their sense and congratulated him.<sup>24</sup> Personalism and integral federalism therefore also require a basis in the rule of law.

This personalism was inspired by the existential philosophical concepts of Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers and William Stern. It rejected the one-sided rationalism of Descartes and Husserl’s intentionalism in favour of a holistic view of the human being. Mind must be seen in its interplay with the body, reason with its intertwining with the passions. Against all monism, personalism advocated unity in diversity, the balance between universalism and particularism, and the creative character of conflict. It was taken up equally by social-critical, liberal and Christian movements, the latter including the founder of the journal *Esprit*, Emmanuel Mounier, whose writings on personalism are the only ones still known.<sup>25</sup> For some thinkers, such as Alexandre Marc and Silvio Trentin, Proudhon was of great importance, but also Charles Peguy, George Sorel, Simone Weil, and George Bernanos. After the Second World War, Marc and Aron wrote in their book *Principes du Fédéralisme* that liberal society with its centralist state structures continued to harbour totalitarian tendencies<sup>26</sup>, democratic institutions were being reduced, private and state economic interests had an overwhelming preponderance, and there was an increasing tendency to resort to the state to solve problems. With its structural reforms, integral federalism could help regenerate democracy, destroy the “feudal” structure of the economy and limit state functions to the utmost.<sup>27</sup> To this end, the authors presented concrete plans of a federal construction from below, which aimed neither at a close union nor a merely loose alliance, but “consists in the constantly readjusted balance between the autonomy of the regions and their union, ... in the

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23 Denis de Rougemont: *L'attitude fédéraliste*, in: *L'Europe en jeu*, Neuchâtel: La Baconnière 1948, p. 61. (Translated by WH)

24 Undine Ruge *Die Erfindung des "Europa der Regionen". Kritische Ideengeschichte eines konservativen Konzepts*, Frankfurt/M. – New York Campus 2003, p. 78.

25 Emmanuel Mounier: *Le Personnalisme*, Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France 1949; *Écrits sur le personnalisme*, préface de Paul Ricoeur, Paris: Le Seuil 2000.

26 Robert Aron, /Alexandre Marc: *Principes du Fédéralisme*, Paris: Le Portulan 1948, pp. 24–33.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 103f.

constant merging of these two forces of opposing orientation".<sup>28</sup> They understood their contributions as part of a "historical current of ideas that was in an epochal confrontation with liberalism and socialism"<sup>29</sup>. Proudhon appeared to be a helpful precursor here, because after the 1848 revolution he turned away from an anarchism that strictly negated the state and saw federalism as a way of reducing the state to a realistic minimum while democratising the economy. For him, federalism represented a form of supreme law that alone was capable of resolving the opposition between authority and freedom in a way that preserved both.<sup>30</sup> But what this should look like in concrete terms he hardly answered.

In addition to these thinkers, Denis de Rougemont's writings on the *Politique de la Personne* in 1946 and his numerous writings on Europe, in which he made significant contributions, were important. For example, he emphasised that a federal structure from below develops slowly from individuals, groups and communities and not from the state, preserves diversity and complexity, and does not have a minority problem.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, De Rougemont pointed out that in nation states, fatherland, state, nation and language were always put into one or confused, as in the Versailles Treaties after the First World War. These are quite different levels: Emotions, ideology, administration and culture.<sup>32</sup> A federal structure cannot be based on a single political characteristic such as common history, geography, language, tradition or economy, but only on "spaces of participation of the citizen in public life formed by bunches of municipalities"<sup>33</sup>. These communities "do not claim absolute sovereignty ... but (seek), on the contrary ... to be able, by virtue of their solidarity, their complementarity, or ... their 'subsidiarity' in their self-understanding."<sup>34</sup> His concept of a "Europe of the regions" therefore contradicts the idea of regions forming ethnic units.

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28 Ibid., p. 67. (Translated by WH).

29 Lutz Roemheld *Integrativer Föderalismus*, op. cit., p. 245.

30 Yves Simon points out in "A Note on Proudhon's Federalism": "The political problem', Proudhon wrote, 'reduced to its simplest expression, consists of finding the equilibrium between two contrary elements, authority and liberty. ... To balance two opposing forces means subjecting them to a law which, by making them respect each other, brings them into accordance. But where can we get this new element, superior to both authority and liberty, and mutually acceptable to both as the arbiter of their relationship? We get it from the contract, which not only confers rights to its parties but applies equally to both of them.'" In: *Publius*, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1973, p. 26.

31 Denis de Rougemont: Speech at the congress of the Union des Fédéralistes Européens, in: *Ecrits sur l'Europe*, vol. 1, Paris: Différence 1994, pp. 35–38.

32 Ibid., p. 223f.

33 Denis de Rougemont: The Motto of Regionalism: No Freedom without Responsibility!, in: op. cit., vol. 2, p. 850.

34 Ibid., p. 851.

After the Second World War, Marc and De Rougemont became involved in the European federalist movement. They still set the course in the 1950s, but it was foreseeable that they were losing the race with the nation states that were gaining strength again and therefore also an intergovernmental federalism. De Gaulle was not only an opponent of the *Résistance's* racial-democratic elements, but also of its integral federalism. While Frenay and other members of the *Résistance* had already spoken out during the war in favour of Germany's unrestricted inclusion in the new Europe, De Gaulle still found it difficult after the war to abandon the doctrine of German's economic weakening as a precondition for peace. That non-communist Europe came out in favour of federalism was a great advance over the nationalist or pan-European past. But Churchill, De Gaulle, Adenauer and Paul-Henri Spaak, the founding fathers of Europe, advocated a state federalism, not a social one of civil societies. With the formation of the "European Coal and Steel Community", the path of a technocratic economic unit to European monetary union began, accompanied, in the words of Habermas, by an "intergovernmental erosion" of democracy through the predominance of an "executive federalism",<sup>35</sup> a development that integral federalists had always feared.

### **Arendt's hidden dialogue with integral federalism**

The similarities between Arendt's thinking and that of the integral federalists are unmistakable. Arendt, too, criticised the weakness of liberalism with its understanding of negative freedom based on a concept of sovereign nation-states, securing rule through political representation and minority problems, and developed the third way of a republicanism supported by active citizens. Going further than the integral federalists, Arendt defines these persons not only as sovereign individuals who are part of social relations, but replaces the modern concept of subjectivity altogether with that of inter-subjectivism. From the standpoint of this inter-subjectivism, we perceive ourselves as persons through intersubjective relations and define political phenomena such as freedom and power, violence and authority not as entities but as forms of relations. Arendt also defines political judgement as equally intersubjective as the consideration of real or imagined other opinions, as extended thinking in which judgements are no longer subjective, as when I do not take these other opinions into account. "The validity of such judgements would be neither objective and universal nor subjective, dependent on personal whim, but intersubjective or representative."<sup>36</sup> Arendt thus contributes an important aspect to the relationship

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35 Jürgen Habermas *Zur Verfassung Europas. Ein Essay*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011.

36 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions on Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 141.

between personalism and federalism, a quasi-anthropologically grounded federal intersubjectivity that ranges from the dialogue of the self, thinking with itself, to the intersubjective plurality of agents and the intersubjectively judging spectators in the public sphere, through to the federation as the structure of living plural, political relations.

For Arendt, this image of man also includes the responsibility of the person, a responsibility that, according to Arendt, everyone bears not only for their own deeds, but also for those of the other actors in a community, so to speak as the price of freedom of action.<sup>37</sup> What some of the integral federalists have adopted from Catholic social teaching, the dignity of the person, the principle of subsidiarity, common good orientation and solidarity, is defined by Arendt in terms of existential philosophy and at the same time politically.

In this way, federalism also appears in a double way, even more so than defined by the integral federalists, as a fundamental principle of dialogue, plurality and intersubjectivity on the one hand, and as a political organising principle on the other. As much as Arendt advocates the political institutions of the separation of powers and praises the discussions of the founding fathers of the USA, she emphasises the political vitality of these institutions in the sense of power sharing and at the same time distances herself from the parliamentarism of political parties; she sides with direct democracy. In her book *On Revolution*, she points out that self-organisation and federation are closely linked. Thus, “when the French capital under siege by the Prussian army ‘spontaneously reorganized itself into a miniature federal body’, which then formed the nucleus for the Parisian Commune government in the spring of 1871”<sup>38</sup>, which contained within itself “the germs, the first feeble beginnings of a new type of political organisation”<sup>39</sup>. Among the Founding Fathers of the United States, only Jefferson wanted to build the republic on these councils and he envisaged a system of councils from the local level up to the Union level. He thought that the “absence of such a subdivision of the country constituted a vital threat to the very existence of the republic.”<sup>40</sup> If the basis of freedom is the constitution of a public space, says Arendt, “then the elementary republics of the wards, the only tangible place where everyone could be free, actually were the end of the great republic whose chief purpose in domestic affairs should have been to provide the people with such places of freedom and to protect them.”<sup>41</sup>

The associated abolition of the separation of people into rulers and ruled was reversed by the parliamentary system of representation.

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37 Cf. chapter 6 in this volume: Who is Capable of Acting?

38 Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 262.

39 Ibid., p. 244.

40 Ibid., p. 249.

41 Ibid., p. 255.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Arendt had written a memorandum on the minority question in Paris, which stated the failure of all minority policies “because of the existent and abiding fact of state sovereignty”<sup>42</sup> and saw the only chance for the Jewish people “in a new European federal system”<sup>43</sup>. And after the war, she campaigned – albeit unsuccessfully – with the *Ihud* (Unity) organisation against the establishment of a state of Israel for a bi-national confederation of Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>44</sup>

The above-mentioned problems show that remembering Europe proves to be much more difficult than merely retelling the history of the French Resistance. From the perspective of Arendt and the integral federalists, the existing federalism within the United States and Europe appears as a state federalism with a considerable democratic deficit. The United States is a traditional sovereign nation state, and Europe also behaves towards migrants and refugees like a nation state, or even more like a union of nation states. Integral federalism, on the other hand, knows no final external border. In the current times of crisis, the memory of Europe’s origins hardly plays a role in appeals for European unity. Explaining why the European federation is defensible, apart from the conveniences of travel and the common currency, is difficult for many because the political philosophy of federalism is largely unknown and integral federalism has hardly been updated in the last thirty years. When the *Occupy Wall Street* movement argued that social injustice finds its parallel in a particular constitutional injustice, they unwittingly highlighted, similarly to the integral federalists, the close connection between political and social democracy. However, this short-lived movement did not contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of this statement.

## The traps of the nation-state

But let us return to the nation states. The weakening of welfare states and social justice not only leads European social democracy into an existential crisis, but at the same time increases the attractiveness of the other traditional frame of reference, the nation state.<sup>45</sup> If this change emerges so reflexively and without further consideration, it means that the theory and practice of the nation state are omnipresent,

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42 Hannah Arendt: *The Minority Question*, in: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, p. 127.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

44 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin: *Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine*, in: Steven E. Aschheim (ed.): *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2001, pp. 165–180.

45 Cf. the study on poverty and nationalist political orientation in contemporary France by Didier Eribon: *Rückkehr nach Reims*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2016.



while the theory and practice of federalism as its opposite seem to play only a minor role.

At schools and universities the theorists of the sovereign nation state, Bodin, Hobbes, and Rousseau, sometimes also Carl Schmitt, are read as classics, but not De Rougemont, Marc, or Arendt. Yet they are classics for no other reason than that we declare them to be such.

Historically, there are two traditions of state organisation: the sovereign nation-state, and the federation in the form of the federal state, confederation of states or corresponding mixtures. As Foucault has convincingly described, the nation-state is the consequence of a modern growth of population and technical progress which necessitated the replacement of feudal administration of territories by the administration of populations. It is a historical form of state that is not the ultimate wisdom, but an adequate form for a certain state of technology and population development. The idea of sovereignty was introduced in the face of initial resistance with the help of the well-known ecclesiastical concept of the integrity of the Virgin Mary. State sovereignty symbolically reduces the diverse polity to the image of a woman, *Hollandia*, *Helvetia* or *Venezia*, defended by the corresponding male regents.<sup>46</sup>

For decades now, the globalisation of technology, mobility, spatiality and temporality has made the factual and historical limitations of the nation state clear. The nation state is therefore not the only possible form of state organisation; rather, there has always been the second tradition, even if it was disregarded and inferior for long stretches. One thinks of Roman alliance politics, or the medieval Holy Roman Empire, which existed until Napoleon's wars of expansion in 1806, and in whose sphere constitutionalists such as Althusius, Hugo and also Leibniz thought in categories of federation and not of the nation state. It is also noteworthy that they therefore clearly distanced themselves from Bodin and Hobbes, in part as their contemporaries.<sup>47</sup>

In view of these two traditions, the provocative question "Have we read the wrong authors?" posed by the Canadian political scientist Thomas Hüglin becomes understandable.<sup>48</sup> The nation-state is thus a temporally and factually limited phe-

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46 Cf. Thomas Maissen *Wie die Jungfrau zum Staat kam*, in *Ruperto Carola* 1/2006, *Forschungsmagazin der Universität Heidelberg*. <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/presse/ruca/ruca06-1/wie.html>, and Thomas Maissen *Die Geburt der Republic. Staatsverständnis und Repräsentation in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft*, Göttingen 2006, ch. III. 9 Die Schöpfung der Helvetia in Malerei und Dichtung, pp. 253–277.

47 Philip Beeley: Leibniz and Hobbes, in: Brandon C. Look: *The Continuum Companion to Leibniz*, London-New York 2011, pp. 32–50. Patrick Riley: Three Seventeenth Century German Theorists of Federalism: Althusius, Hugo and Leibniz, in: *Publius* 6, No. 3 (1976), pp. 7–42.

48 Thomas O. Hüglin: Have we read the wrong authors? On the Relevance of Johannes Althusius as a Political Theorist, in: *Studies in Political Thought*, vol. 1 (1992), pp. 75–93, also in: *Rechtstheorie*, Beiheft 16, 1997, pp. 219–240.

nomenon, and as such Hannah Arendt also criticised it, without underestimating its continuing presence.

### Nation-state and sovereignty

Arendt's critique is based on a qualitative distinction between people, state and nation. The people is the population living in a political community, the state is the institutions of politics and administration, and the nation is a cultural-historical commonality of a certain population group. This distinction clearly shows the separation of politics and culture, citizenship and cultural belonging. According to Arendt, the modern era had to solve the following problem: How to reconcile political freedom and cultural difference? Hobbes and Rousseau saw the solution in the unity of people, state and nation based on sovereignty – in Hobbes in the form of the people welded together into the Leviathan under the leadership of the sovereign, and in Rousseau in the form of the *volonté générale* of the sovereign people identical with the nation. In Hobbes, the people should allow themselves to be subjugated by the sovereign for reasons of security, in Rousseau by themselves out of insight into necessity. In Hobbes, this opens the door to tyranny, in Rousseau to anti-cosmopolitanism and xenophobia.

In 1963, in a radio discussion on the relationship between the nation-state and democracy, Arendt presented the following theses on some one hundred and fifty years of the practical experiences made with sovereignty and the nation-state:

Firstly, the nation-state popular sovereignty introduced above all with the French Revolution showed much less stability than was thought, because the tendency of “the nation, that is, the people politically emancipated by the nation-state, showed very early on a fatal tendency to cede its sovereignty to dictators and leaders of all kinds”, which means that this people has always been sceptical of the party system that corresponds to this nation-state and that this party system has “in many cases and always with the consent of broad masses of the people ended with the establishment of a party dictatorship and the abolition of precisely the specifically democratic institutions of the nation-state”. Concern for democratic action in the public sphere always took a back seat, so that “dictators could count on the national sentiment of the peoples they had (disenfranchised)”.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, in the nation state, national affiliation takes precedence over democracy, because the nation has conquered the state. In this context, even under dictatorships, basic civil rights such as representation of interests and freedom of the press can certainly be granted, but not the active participation of the people in decisions on public affairs.

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49 Hannah Arendt: Nation State and Democracy (1963), in: *Thinking Without a Banister. Essays in Understanding 1953 – 1975*. New York: Schocken 2018 p. 255.

Thirdly, the basis of the European nation state, the “trinity of people – territory – and state”, which was also questioned by Weber and Jellinek, leads to the homogenisation of the people, with the alternative: forced assimilation or exclusion, and in the case of the continued existence of national minorities, to so-called “minority rights”, which, according to Arendt, were rightly regarded by the minorities only as “minor rights”.<sup>50</sup>

Fourthly, the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the Habsburg monarchy led to a plethora of minorities without rights, whose precarious situation Arendt saw in her book as one of the origins of total rule.

Fifthly and finally, Arendt declared that “the nation-state’s notion of sovereignty, which in any case comes from absolutism, is a dangerous megalomania. With today’s transport and population conditions, the xenophobia typical of the nation-state is so provincial that a culture with a consciously national orientation is liable to sink down very quickly to the level of folklore and *Heimat* kitsch.”<sup>51</sup>

From all this, Arendt concluded:

Just as today we are faced everywhere in foreign policy with the question of how we can arrange the intercourse of states among themselves and with each other in such a way that war is ruled out as the *ultima ratio* of negotiations, so today we are faced everywhere in domestic policy with the problem of how we can reorganise and divide modern mass society in such a way that it can come to a free formation of opinion, to a reasonable dispute of opinions and thus to an active co-responsibility in public affairs for the individual. Nationalism in its egocentric narrow-mindedness and the nation-state in its essential inability to legitimately transcend its own borders are probably the worst possible prerequisites for this.<sup>52</sup>

As we can see, the problem with sovereignty is that rather than limiting democracy it limits freedom. Again, we are dealing with familiar terms that need a new definition. Democracy is about majority rule and majority decision-making, which can be used to suppress minorities – we currently see this in various forms of “illiberal democracy” and autocracy, where the popular will is mobilised against republican institutions and freedoms. Freedom is about freedom of expression and movement and the possibility of participation for all. Arendt provides a philosophical-anthropological justification for this – sovereignty is not synonymous with freedom because it contradicts human plurality.

If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency

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50 Ibid., p. 258.

51 Ibid., p. 261.

52 Ibid.

and mastership is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men inhabit the earth ... All the recommendations the tradition has to offer to overcome the condition of non-sovereignty and win an untouchable integrity of the human person amount to a compensation for the intrinsic “weakness” of plurality.<sup>53</sup>

Freedom implies the existence of plurality and intersubjectivity, while sovereignty is not merely directed at ourselves in the sense of freedom from domination by others, that is, in the sense of self-rule, but, Arendt concludes, above all, it is also inescapably directed at others “as arbitrary domination of all others”.<sup>54</sup> Hence she concluded: “The famous sovereignty of political bodies has always been an illusion, which, moreover, can be maintained only by the instruments of violence, that is, with essentially non-political means. ... If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce.”<sup>55</sup>

But how is this freedom to be practised and preserved if the prerequisite for it is the renunciation of sovereignty, when in all our liberal democracies we refer to the people as the sovereign, in the singular, significantly, who show themselves in the elections and on whose behalf their representatives act?<sup>56</sup>

It is not only the “rupture of tradition” in the 20th century which culminated in the Holocaust and led Arendt to examine the entire tradition of political-philosophical thought for the weaknesses that led to this rupture. Her exile in the USA also encouraged her to take note of a different experience than the European one

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53 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press 1958, p. 210.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 211

55 Hannah Arendt: “What is Freedom?” In: *Between Past and Future*. op. cit., p. 164f.

56 The democratic slogan in 1989 “We are the people” was directed against the GDR leadership’s claim to represent the people without allowing political plurality, while the same slogan, used after German unification by right-wing populists, conversely fights political and cultural plurality.

with Hobbes and Rousseau.<sup>57</sup> What Pocock called the “Machiavellian moment”<sup>58</sup>, the bridge of republican thought between Florence in the 15th century and Philadelphia in the 18th century, unfortunately bypassing Europe, encouraged Arendt to discover a different foundation of freedom that at the same time cast a different light on familiar political phenomena such as domination, power, violence and authority, and described a “hidden tradition” of spontaneous forms of organisation of political action and political institutions of freedom.

Arendt’s politically important book *On Revolution* receives insufficient recognition. Dissertations in recent years that critically examine the phenomenon and theories of sovereignty, comparing Arendt and Hobbes, do not penetrate to the republican, federalist alternative in whose tradition Arendt also placed herself precisely vis-à-vis Hobbes.<sup>59</sup> “... the great and, in the long run, perhaps the greatest American innovation in politics as such was the consistent abolition of sovereignty within the body politic of the republic, the insight that in the realm of human affairs sovereignty and tyranny are the same.”<sup>60</sup>

We will look at how power can be formed without sovereignty below in the context of the founding of the USA.

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- 57 This is connected to her critique of the philosophical tradition and the following confrontation in her thinking diary in July 1955. “Arendt defines the political there in several opposites (Arendt will reflect on this several times, especially in the lectures edited from her estate, *Was ist Politik?*, edited by Ursula Ludz, Munich: Piper 1993), which I am paraphrasing because of their density and the Greek interpolations, so as not to reduce the complexity. Firstly, as the public as opposed to the private (polis vs. house) but also as polyarchy vs. monarchy, as opinion as opposed to idea, as being seen and heard as opposed to being with oneself; secondly, as plurality as opposed to singularity, as well as living/acting together and talking together as opposed to the one, namely pure contemplation and pure perception; thirdly, as *vita activa* as opposed to *vita contemplativa* and finally, fourthly, as the social as opposed to the intimate, as securing the life of the ‘sex’ as opposed to the life of the individual, as community vs. individual. (Cf. *Denktagebuch 1950 to 1973*, ed. by Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, Munich Zurich Piper 2002, pp. 535f.)” Harald Bluhm Arendts Plato – unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Denktagebuches, in *HannahArendt.net*, vol. 8, issue 1, 2016. (Translated by WH)
- 58 J. G. A. Pocock: *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1975.
- 59 Jonathan Havercroft: *Captives of Sovereignty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011; Daniel Loick: *Kritik der Souveränität*, Frankfurt/M. – New York: Campus 2012; Rainer Miehle: *Jenseits und diesseits der Herrschaft. Thomas Hobbes’ Political Philosophy in the Judgment of Hannah Arendt*, Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz 2015.
- 60 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 153.

## Power without sovereignty

In *On Revolution*, Arendt compared the French Revolution with the founding of the USA in terms of the course of the two phases of a successful revolution, liberation and the founding of freedom. In France, the founding of freedom failed in the terror and subsequent dictatorship of Napoleon, while in the USA it was realised in the founding of a federal republic. The importance of this connection between liberation and the founding of freedom and how little it is usually taken into account is shown by the revolutionary events in the 20th century, where liberation movements and liberation struggles were celebrated, such as in Cuba, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Cambodia and Nicaragua, but which then gave rise to dictatorships instead of freedom, often in the style of the French Revolution. The course of the Arab rebellion in the Middle East a few years ago again proved the inevitability of this necessary double step of liberation and the establishment of freedom. It only succeeded in Tunisia, but in Egypt we experienced the moment when the liberation process froze in Tahrir Square and failed to establish a new freedom.

In contrast, the establishment of freedom in the North American colonies was able to succeed because they were not subject to the aggravating conditions pertaining in France: there was no absolute monarchy but only a limited one that did not lead to excesses, there was longstanding political experience through institutions of self-government rather than politically inexperienced salon revolutionaries, and there was no poverty whose radicalisation would have led to a loss of political control as in France.

The decisive lessons and experiences for Arendt in the American colonies lie in the redefinition of the source of law and the origin of power, which were entirely different from the absolute sovereign as the supposed successor of Pope and Bishop. For Arendt, “in the language of political theory, he was not a successor but a usurper, despite all the new theories about sovereignty and the divine rights of princes.”<sup>61</sup>

Specifically, according to Arendt, the process of founding freedom involved the following:

First, at the very beginning of colonial settlement, it was the experience of a kind of power formation in the form of the Treaty of the Passengers of the *Mayflower*, based on plurality, free from sovereignty and pre-political religious or philosophical justifications, and based on the principle of making a contract, promising and keeping a promise.

Arendt contrasts this mutual type of political society or consociation of free and equal citizens with the well-known social contracts of Hobbes and Rousseau, both of which are based on the surrender of power to the ruler.

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61 Ibid., p. 160.

In other words, the mutual contract where power is constituted by means of promise contains *in nuce* both the republican principle, according to which power resides in the people, and where a “mutual subjection” makes of rulership an absurdity— “if the people be governors, who shall be governed?”— and the federal principle, the principle of “a Commonwealth for increase” (as Harrington called his utopian Oceana), according to which constituted political bodies can combine and enter into lasting alliances without losing their identity.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, there was no problem with the legitimacy of constitution-making, that is, with the *pouvoir constituant* so often discussed in the context of the French Revolution.

The delegates to the provincial congresses or popular conventions which drafted the constitutions for state governments had derived their authority from a number of subordinate, duly authorized bodies – districts, counties, townships; to preserve these bodies unimpaired in their power was to preserve the source of their own authority intact.<sup>63</sup>

Thirdly, these elements of power formation provide stability in the face of a future “in the ocean of future uncertainty where the unpredictable may break in from all sides”<sup>64</sup>. It is remarkable how Arendt compares political action to the rules of language, which is not a mechanism of inevitability but is based on experience and draws orientation from it:

The grammar of action: that action is the only human faculty that demands a plurality of men; and the syntax of power: that power is the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related, combine in the act of foundation by virtue of the making and the keeping of promises, which, in the realm of politics, may well be the highest human faculty.<sup>65</sup>

And fourthly, this formation of power and world is a *sui generis* federal principle that existed in the North American colonies even before the founding fathers read Montesquieu and discussed the separation of powers and the federal structure of a great state, with districts, counties and municipalities. “Not only was a federal system the sole alternative to the nation-state principle; it was also the only way not to be trapped in the vicious circle of *pouvoir constituant* and *pouvoir constitué*.”<sup>66</sup> Federalism is thus not only an organisational form for sharing power, but also for building power

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62 Ibid., p. 171.

63 Ibid., p. 165.

64 Ibid., p. 175.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., p. 166.

and stabilising power and freedom. Strengthening power through the division of power, as Montesquieu called it, concerns not only the division of power in the narrower sense of the legislature, executive and jurisdiction, but also the division of the political community into politically self-governing units. Thus, potential sovereignty is also divided and thus deprived of its destructive, anti-pluralistic power.

The distinction between power, violence, force and strength described by Arendt in her essay “On Violence” and the definition of power as a phenomenon that arises through joint action seems to many colleagues, at least in Germany, to be too ideal-typical and too incompatible with our world. It has therefore been sorted in as one among various forms of power and occasionally compared with Foucault’s quite different definition of omnipresent power.<sup>67</sup> However, this obscures the view of the necessary discussion on the foundations of an alternative to the nation state and sovereignty that Arendt had in mind.

I would like to add two aspects to this brief overview of Arendt’s *On Revolution*. The first concerns the dynamisation of the process of power formation beyond the sphere of the surrender of power by the ruled to their rulers. Politics is not an administrative action, but a constantly new, spontaneous action whose organisational forms are associations – whether townhall assemblies in the North American colonies, societies at the beginning of the French Revolution, councils at the beginning of the Russian Revolution and in Hungary in 1956, or citizens’ initiatives and non-governmental organisations today. “These new bodies politic really were ‘political societies’, and their great importance for the future lay in the formation of a political realm that enjoyed power and was entitled to claim rights without possessing or claiming sovereignty.”<sup>68</sup>

The second aspect concerns the strict distinction between law and power, between the institutional framework that makes action possible and at the same time restricts it in favour of the freedom of action of all against the dictatorial desire of a majority, and the volatile action itself. It is the rule of law that makes the formation of power possible; the republic makes the unfolding of a non-sovereign democracy possible. “The American revolutionary insistence on the distinction between a republic and a democracy or majority rule hinges on the radical separation of law and power, with clearly recognized different origins, different legitimations, and different spheres of application”<sup>69</sup> The current constitutional crisis in Poland is an exam-

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67 Gerhard Göhler Macht, in Gerhard Göhler / Mattias Iser / Ina Kerner (eds.) *Politische Theorie. 25 umkämpfte Begriffe zur Einführung*, Wiesbaden Springer 2011, pp. 224–240; Rainer Forst *Normativität und Macht – Zur Analyse sozialer Rechtfertigungsordnungen*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2015. For Habermas critique of Arendt’s concept of power, see chapter 12 in this volume: Facing the War. Arendt and Habermas.

68 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 168.

69 Ibid., p. 166.



ple of how power wants to subjugate fundamental laws and thus limit freedom by democratic means.

What is remarkable, for Arendt and also for us, is that the American revolutionaries did not follow any theory, but put their experiences and those of the classics in the foreground. Thus Arendt quotes one of them, John Dickinson, who declared that “experience must our only guide. Reason may mislead us”<sup>70</sup>. The Founding Fathers’ written discussions of the separation of powers, *checks and balances* and the constitutional measures necessary to stabilise the republic, published in the *Federalist Papers*, have become a republican classic of the first rank in political science. And yet Arendt is right that what was new has nowhere found an intellectual and conceptual expression adequate to it. What Arendt analysed in terms of power and mutual obligations and promises has never been theoretically preserved by the revolutionaries and their heirs. “... if it is indisputable that book-learning and thinking in concepts, indeed of a very high calibre, erected the framework of the American republic, it is no less true that this interest in political thought and theory dried up almost immediately after the task had been achieved.”<sup>71</sup>, she noted with disappointment.

### The failure of federal plans and the consequences

Despite the numerous federal structures worldwide, it is astonishing how few conceptual points of orientation have been elaborated as the foundations of federalism. Arendt’s approach to this topic is the most developed, but it has found little favour not only among political scientists, but also among sociologists and historians. In 1965, for example, the historian Eric Hobsbawm noted “a certain lack of interest in mere fact” and the impossibility “of meaningful dialogue between her and those interested in actual revolutions”<sup>72</sup>, whereas, in contrast, a jurist such as the US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas could agree unreservedly with Arendt’s theses.<sup>73</sup>

It now seems, as Arendt noted from the two revolutions, that the cultural and political habits in which a revolution takes place strongly influence the spirit and course of that revolution. Favourable conditions like those in North America also prevailed in the Holy Roman Empire, which included the provinces of the Netherlands and cantons of Switzerland. It is no wonder that federalist ideas were discussed in the context of these two countries.

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70 Ibid., p. 169.

71 Ibid., p. 219.

72 E. J. Hobsbawm, Review, in: *History and Theory*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1965, p. 255.

73 William O. Douglas: The Guts of Freedom, in: *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 January 1962.

The Calvinist state theorist and politician Althusius developed his corporatist state theory in the quasi-autonomous city of Emden and in a lively exchange with the neighbouring Netherlands, with a con-social, community-oriented state and social theory built from the bottom up, a theory that stems from his environment and political experience.<sup>74</sup> In this context, the usual discussion in research as to whether Althusius' conceptions of society belong more to the Middle Ages or more to the modern era is less interesting than the federal conceptions developed in his ideas, which go back to Thomas Aquinas in terms of subsidiarity and open the way to the modern republic in their orientation towards the treaty system. As stated in an essay by Charles S. McCoy, Althusius "held ... that 'the rights of sovereignty' belong to 'the realm, or to the commonwealth and people' in a covenanted order, and that the 'supreme magistrate is the steward, administrator, and overseer of these rights' as granted by covenant. He can therefore be deposed."<sup>75</sup> It would be worthwhile to examine other examples of historical federal structures or elements and their theoretical reflection, such as Otto Bauer's and Karl Renner's treatment of the nationality question in the Habsburg Empire or tolerance in the Ottoman Empire at the time of Ali Pasha and nation-state oppression in modern Turkey.<sup>76</sup>

Three examples show the extent to which an unfavourable cultural climate and political mistakes cause the chances of federal foundations to fail and war and violence are associated with the nation-state solution: The founding of the state of Israel and Arendt's support for the concept of a binational state; the Algerian struggle for independence and Albert Camus' proposal for an Algerian-French confederation instead of the formation of an Algerian nation-state; and thirdly, the attempt by West African politicians to seek a West African-French confederation instead of nation-state decolonisation. None of the three goals were realised; they were considered naïve or colonialist and reactionary.

## A binational Palestine

The project of a binational, Arab-Jewish federal state was advanced by a small Jewish organisation called *Ihud* (Union) led by Judah L. Magnes, a representative of Amer-

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74 Cf. Giuseppe Duso / Werner Krawietz / Dieter Wyduckel (eds.) *Konsens und Konsoziation in der politischen Theorie des frühen Föderalismus*. Foreword by Dieter Wyduckel, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1997.

75 Charles S. McCoy: The Lost Tradition? In *Publius*, vol. 31, no 2, 2001, p. 13.

76 Cf. Peter Riesbeck *Sozialdemokratie und Minderheitenrecht. Der Beitrag der österreichischen Sozialdemokraten Otto Bauer und Karl Renner zum internationalen Minderheitenrecht*, Saarbrücken Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik 1996; Rasim Marz *Ali Pascha – Europas vergessener Staatsmann*, Berlin Frank & Timme 2016; Kahraman Solmaz *Krise, Macht und Gewalt. Hannah Arendt and Turkey's Constitutional Crises from the Late Ottoman Period to the Present*, Baden-Baden: Nomos 2016.

ican Reform Judaism and rector of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the religious philosopher Martin Buber. In the crucial years between the end of the Second World War and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, Arendt was briefly involved in the activities of the *Ihud*. Magnes, Buber and Arendt had different motivations for advocating a federation, but these did not weaken the joint activities; on the contrary, they strengthened them.

Magnes, described by Scholem as “a role model of internal courage” because he wanted to be a “free man” and refused to be “intimidated by the public”,<sup>77</sup> was concerned with the security and freedom of a future Jewish community in Palestine, and he considered it possible only within the framework of coexistence and cooperation between Jews and Arabs. As an American citizen and member of American liberal Jewry, he was familiar with the federal practice of the USA, which he described in 1909 as a “republic of nationalities”<sup>78</sup>, and it was therefore natural for him to draw on this example. Magnes was a co-founder of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1925, of which he became rector. In the 1920s he founded the organisation *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace), which proposed a binational solution but met with no response, and then in 1942, together with Martin Buber, he founded *Ihud*. The name “Union” was meant to recall Lincoln’s defence of American unity against the secessionist Southern states.<sup>79</sup> The group had less than a hundred members, so it was vanishingly small compared to the large Jewish organisation.

From a philosophical and theological point of view, Buber had developed the dialogical relationship of the I-Thou as a principle of interpersonal communication and mutual respect and transferred it to the relationship between Jews and Arabs. In a speech on the occasion of the XII. Zionist Congress in Carlsbad in 1921, he had warned against nationalism as the fruit of the French Revolution and an expression of the loneliness of modern man, who as a reaction to this would unite with others in a group egoism.<sup>80</sup> In 1926, in his essay “On the Jewish-Arab Question”, he pleaded for “service to the foreign population of the country for the sake of the community that is to become; union of interests, but also promotion of their special interests, in order to make them feel the desirability and possibility of union of interests, but beyond this purpose, for the sake of their welfare as a member of the community that is to become.”<sup>81</sup> In 1938, he fled from Nazi Germany to Jerusalem and met Magnes.

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77 According to Daniel P. Kotzin: *Judah L. Magnes. An American Jewish Nonconformist*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010, p. 2.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 282.

80 Martin Buber Nationalismus, in *Zion als Ziel und als Aufgabe*, Berlin Schocken 1936.

81 Martin Buber Zur jüdisch-arabischen Frage, in *Ein Land und zwei Völker*, herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, Berlin Jüdischer Verlag 2018, p. 100.

Hannah Arendt had spoken for the first time in 1940 from a political standpoint on the future of the Jewish people and, in view of the failure of European minority policy since the end of the First World War, had stated that there was no longer any possibility of assimilation in the European nation states and that there was therefore a future for the Jewish minority only in a new federal system of Europe, a “commonwealth of European nations with a parliament of its own”<sup>82</sup>, in which there would no longer be the equation of nation and territory with a simultaneous division of the people into an enclosed one on the ground of this territory and an excluded one outside this territory. Not only Palestine, according to Arendt, but the entire Middle East could only be held by a united Europe.<sup>83</sup>

Arendt was close to Zionism because it meant independent political action by the Jewish people, although she was more impressed by Bernard Lazare’s rebellious attitude than by the statesmanship of a Theodor Herzl or Chaim Weizmann. Herzl, moreover, meant to her the escape from anti-Semitism, the exploitation of anti-Semitism to facilitate emigration and the establishment of her own state. Lazare, on the other hand, impressed her because of his mobilisation of the people against their enemies, the search for comrades-in-arms and the goal of emancipation as a people and a nation.<sup>84</sup> Arendt considered Zionism to be a legacy of “two typical nineteenth century European political ideologies – socialism and nationalism”<sup>85</sup>, which had lost its social revolutionary élan and now pursued not only national but also chauvinist goals.<sup>86</sup>

This tendency intensified when, in view of the incipient extermination of the Jews by Hitler’s Germany, the majority of the extraordinary Zionist congress, the Biltmore Conference, decided in 1942, under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, to found a Jewish state in which the Palestinian Arabs, as the majority of the population, were to be given minority status. Arendt, on the other hand, advocated an expanded concept of her idea of a European federation, namely the inclusion of Palestine as a Jewish settlement area in this federation.<sup>87</sup> She opposed Judah L. Magnes’ proposal of a binational state because it was not a federation, but an undefined union of nation states, in which the Jewish people would inevitably receive a minority status that would virtually provoke conflicts, as the disastrous history of sovereign nation states and of state structures of different minorities with minority rights in Europe had shown. A federation was not an arbitrary union of nation states, but an association with institutions through which no individual

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82 Hannah Arendt: *The Minority Question*, op. cit., p. 130.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

84 Hannah Arendt: Herzl and Lazare, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p. 339.

85 Hannah Arendt: Zionism reconsidered, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p. 348.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 351.

87 Hannah Arendt: *The Crisis of Zionism*, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p. 184.

state could exercise dominance over other member states. Such a federation was first realised by the United States.<sup>88</sup> “A genuine federation is made up of different, clearly identifiable nationalities or other political elements that together form the state. National conflicts can be solved within such a federation only because the unsolvable minority-majority problem has ceased to exist.”<sup>89</sup>

According to Arendt, the results of the 1944 meeting of the American branch of the *World Zionist Organization* in Atlantic City represented a negative turning point, because now all of Palestine was claimed for a Jewish state and the Arab population was no longer mentioned. This presented them with the choice of emigration or second-class citizenship. In Arendt’s view, this plan ultimately rendered the Arab population superfluous, not excluding massacres such as those that actually took place later in Deir Yassin, Jaffa and Haifa, which Arendt condemned.<sup>90</sup> She also clairvoyantly stated that such a development “will inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew-hatred; the anti-Semitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers in that region but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences”.<sup>91</sup>

In 1946, Buber and Magnes, with Arendt’s support, submitted to the *Anglo-American Palestine Commission* their ideas of a state that was already binational because of the natural rights of the Arabs and the historical rights of the Jews, and whose establishment was to be preceded by control by international trustees during the drafting of a constitution. The tensions that undoubtedly existed between Jews and Arabs were to be overcome through the everyday practice of cooperation at various levels.<sup>92</sup>

Magnes and Buber made a brilliant impression, not least as personalities.<sup>93</sup> But the British government and the Zionist organisations in the USA were not at all convinced by their plans. In 1947, after a year of inaction, the matter was turned over to the UN. Faced with the unwillingness of Jewish and Arab leaders to cooperate, the chairman of the *UN Special Committee on Palestine* finally declared: “If you cannot bring about the necessary cooperation, I think the (binational) scheme will fail.”<sup>94</sup> At the end of 1947, the UN decided on partition. In order to save the idea of a federation, Arendt worked actively with Judah L. Magnes and the *Ihud*. In May 1948, Magnes succeeded in meeting the American President Truman, who declared: “Dr Magnes, we

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88 Hannah Arendt: Can the Jewish-Arab Question be Solved? In: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p. 196.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

90 Hannah Arendt: Zionism reconsidered, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., pp. 367, 370.

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 343–45.

92 Martin Buber et al.: *Palestine. A Bi-national State*, New York: *Ihud* 1946.

93 According to Daniel P. Kotzin, op. cit, p. 304.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 311.

won't give up! We shall hang on to this until we find a way. That is our duty."<sup>95</sup> But Truman remained inactive, and shortly afterwards the state of Israel was founded.

In 1950, Arendt spoke out for the last time on the problem of establishing a state in her essay "Peace or Armistice in the Middle East?"<sup>96</sup> with a long analysis of the mistakes and failures, which can be summarised in the following two points:

Firstly, both sides, the Jewish and the Arab, were completely blind in their mutual perception; they proceeded in an exclusionary and nationalistic manner from their own history and the resulting own claims; the "feeling of complete strangeness" prevailed towards the neighbours due to the lack of economic interdependence<sup>97</sup>, and both sides were incapable of realistically assessing the other, basing themselves on Central European, nationalist ideologies.

Secondly, the mandate period meant an education in irresponsibility, in which the respective interests of the Jews and Arabs were cultivated, and the overall context was lost sight of. The British did nothing that would have brought the peoples closer together, so as not to foster alliances against themselves. One can add that the UN Committee on Palestine and Truman also made no effort towards rapprochement.

There were also exceptions on both sides. But corresponding positive proposals failed repeatedly due to majority conditions, including the proposal in 1948 by Israel's first UN envoy Abba Eban to establish a Middle East League in which "Turkey, Christian Lebanon, Israel and Iran would be united as partners of an Arab world in a non-aggression alliance with mutual defence and economic cooperation".<sup>98</sup>

Arendt's conclusion in the face of the failure of a federal state was: "The necessity of Jewish-Arab understanding can be proved by objective factors; its possibility is almost entirely a matter of subjective political wisdom and personalities".<sup>99</sup> The lack of political wisdom was also due to the fact that only those immigrants who had experience with the concept of federalism, i.e. those who came from the United States, and to some extent also from Germany, could relate to it, but not those who came from Eastern Europe.

## A French-Algerian Federation

In the case of the Algerian-French ideas of federation, we are not dealing with a small group and little support, but with just one person, namely Albert Camus, who re-

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95 Ibid., p. 316.

96 Hannah Arendt: Peace or Armistice in the Middle East? In: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., pp. 423–450.

97 Ibid., p. 430f.

98 Ibid., p. 446.

99 Ibid., p. 439.

ceived practically no support, but kept hoping for support in view of his public reputation.

Camus, who called himself African several times, was born in Algeria and was connected to the fate of this country throughout his life. His writings revolved around his experiences with poverty and nature, around the “Mediterranean light” and “Mediterranean thinking”. Algeria was home for him, Paris always remained a kind of exile. He belonged to the large minority of immigrants from France, but also Italy, Spain and Malta, only a small proportion of whom were colonists and eighty per cent of whom were wage earners and small traders. The majority population consisted of 8.5 million Arabs. Since 1848, the country had been an integral part of French territory, i.e. not a colony, although administered with colonial methods, and the inhabitants were French citizens, but only citizens of French origin also had full civil rights in Algeria.

Camus first encountered the federal idea in Kabylia, the poorest region of Algeria, about which he was the first to write a harrowing reportage in 1939. There Camus got to know the Douar communities and was very impressed by their system of democratic, federal self-government, because in his view, “a kind of small federal republic could emerge from it according to the principles of a true democracy”<sup>100</sup>. In 1943, a group of Algerians published a declaration under the title “*Les Amis du Manifeste et de la liberté*” in which they demanded the end of colonialism and the recognition of Algeria as a state with its own constitution, but at the same time proposed a federal system linked to France.<sup>101</sup> The idea of federalism was thus in the air.<sup>102</sup>

On the other hand, the relationship between Algeria and France was marked by increasing violence. On 8 May 1945, VE Day at the end of the Second World War, the French administration suppressed a peaceful demonstration for more independence rights in Sétif, and in 1954 the FLN began a war of liberation in which it became more and more radicalised ideologically, with violence escalating on both sides. Camus’ stance was clear: he was against all violence, and he was against the concept of freedom through national independence. Against all violence meant that for him there could be no argument in favour of sacrificing innocent people, “*aucune cause ne justifie la mort d’un innocent*”<sup>103</sup>. He condemned repression and terrorism in equal

100 Albert Camus: Quand la démocratie remplacera le caïdat, in: *Alger-Républicain*, le 13 juin 1939.

101 Manifeste du peuple algérien, in: Claude Collot et Jean-Robert Henry: *Le mouvement national algérien. Textes 1912–1954*. Préface de Ahmed Mabiou, Paris: Editions L’Harmattan 1978, pp. 155–165.

102 There is a long tradition of French plans for Europe, which included southern Europe and occasionally also the Mediterranean countries, but were mainly geopolitically oriented and do not seem to have influenced Camus, see Wolf Lepenies: *Die Macht am Mittelmeer. Französische Träume von einem anderen Europa*, Munich Carl Hanser 2016.

103 Albert Camus *Essais*, Paris Gallimard 1965, p. 993.

measure, which did not please the intellectuals in Paris, especially Sartre. Sartre excused the massacre of three hundred men, women and children in Melouza in 1957 by the FLN, saying: “Who could blame the FLN for violence, when for years it was at the mercy of the French army’s repression, torture and massacres? It is inevitable that the revolutionary party also kills some of its members. I consider this a historical necessity against which we can do nothing.”<sup>104</sup>

Regarding the goal of national independence, Camus explained that it was “a conception springing solely from emotion. There has never yet been an Algerian nation. The Jews, the Turks, the Greeks, the Italians, the Berbers would have just as much right to claim the direction of that virtual nation.”<sup>105</sup>

The concept of national independence is by definition based on the determination of a leading nation called exclusively to rule or, in Arendt’s words, to conquer the state. The anti-democratic attitude feared by Arendt in nation states was present in the FLN from the beginning, inseparable from its nationalism. The founding of independent Algeria meant the exclusion of the minority in Kabylia. Their rights had to be fought for laboriously over decades. The Algerian writer Boualem Sansal is therefore not afraid to compare the FLN with the NSDAP in his novel *Le Village de l’Allemand ou Le Journal des frères Schiller*, published in 2008, looking back on the violence of the 1990s; the protagonist figured out that fundamentalist Islam and Nazism “c’était du pareil au même”.<sup>106</sup>

The federalist ideas developed by Camus explicitly oppose “the regime of centralisation and abstract individualism that emerged from 1789”<sup>107</sup> and include a federation uniting France and the French overseas territories with the Mediterranean as the hub and Algiers as the “federal capital” and seat of the “federal parliament”, a federation that would “one day merge with an eventually united Europe”.<sup>108</sup>

But Camus failed in his attempt to find support for his ideas in the political arena. Moreover, in the 1956 French elections, the proponents of the idea of Europe lost and the communists and right-wing Poujadists received greater support than before.

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104 See Michel Onfray *Im Namen der Freiheit Leben und Philosophie des Albert Camus*, Munich Albrecht Knaus 2013.

105 Albert Camus: Algeria 1958, In: *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, op. cit., p. 145.

106 Boualem Sansal: *Le village de l’Allemand ou Le journal des frères Schiller*, Paris: Gallimard folio 2008, p. 147, see also p. 75. Other Algerian writers are also somewhat close to Camus, see Christiane Achour: *Camus dans la presse algérienne des années 1985–2005*, in: Agnès Spiquel / Alain Schaffner (eds.): *Albert Camus: l’exigence morale – Hommage à Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi*, Paris: Editions Le Manuscrit 2006, pp. 141–161.

107 Albert Camus “Das neue Algerien”, in *Fragen der Zeit*, Reinbek Rowohlt 1977, p. 193. (Translated by WH)

108 Albert Camus: *L’avenir algérien*, in: *L’Express*, 23 July 1955.



Camus' federalist ideas were closely linked to his libertarian views of politics and morality and the rejection of violence and camp thinking. Michel Onfray sees in Camus a clear juxtaposition of the Mediterranean attitude to life and the political philosophy of the North, of Plotinus and Sade, of the Sansculots and Robespierre, of Proudhon and Marx, of the syndicalist Pelloutier and Lenin, as well as of the Commune of Paris and the Russian Revolution.<sup>109</sup> His commitment against the death penalty, his interventions for detainees in Algeria and declarations such as "justice without mercy is little more than inhumanity"<sup>110</sup> are, like his novels and plays, committed to a concrete humanity. His plea for the creation of a federation is based on the insight that the world needs a reordering after the Second World War.<sup>111</sup> Like Arendt, Camus belonged to a minority that advocated humanity and a libertarian civil society in opposition to liberalism and communism. Camus hoped for the emergence of cross-national "communities of thought"<sup>112</sup>, which he planned to found in Europe in the late 1940s as "liaison groups" and across continents as "Europe-America groups". But these plans failed, perhaps they were too much ahead of their time.<sup>113</sup>

Camus was heavily criticised for his rejection of the national liberation struggle and national independence. Raymond Aron called him a "well-meaning colonialist" Edward Said called him an unconscious colonialist<sup>114</sup>; nobody in France could do anything with his federal idea. Nation and violence were the reference points that included any kind of human rights violations and their justification on both sides, regardless of class and education.

## A West African Federation

Only recently has the process of decolonisation in Francophone West Africa between 1945 and 1960 been critically examined with regard to possible alternatives to what actually happened.<sup>115</sup> It is emphasised that nation-building is not the only alterna-

109 Michel Onfray *Im Namen der Freiheit*, op. cit., p. 406.

110 Albert Camus *Weder Opfer noch Henker. Über eine neue Weltordnung*, Zurich Diogenes 1996, p. 38. (Translated by WH)

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., p. 28.

113 See Gregory D. Sumner: *Dwight Macdonald and the Politics Circle*. The Challenge of Cosmopolitan Democracy, Cornell University 1996, p. 192f.

114 In Michel Onfray: *Im Namen der Freiheit*, op. cit., p. 410, and Edward Said: Albert Camus, ou l'inconscient colonial, in: *Le Monde diplomatique*, Nov. 2000.

115 Frederick Cooper: *Africa in the World, Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State*, Boston: Harvard University Press 2014. Frederick Cooper: Alternatives to Nationalism in French West Africa, 1945–60, in: Marc Frey / Jost Dülfer (eds.): *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, pp. 110–137. Gary Wilder: *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*, Durham N.C.: Duke University Press 2015.

tive to colonialism, but rather embodies a fatal development in the course of which the alternative of a federal structure was also discussed among African politicians. The fact that this alternative was not mentioned later is related to a justifying historiography on both sides, France and the former dependent territories.

After the end of the Second World War, a new constitution was enacted in France in 1946 with the establishment of the Fourth Republic, according to which the colonies were given minor powers of representation and participation in two chambers of a newly created “Union Française”. In the totality of this Union, there were territories with six different legal forms such as mandates, protectorates, “old” colonies in the Caribbean and “new” ones in Africa, as well as state territories such as France and Algeria with correspondingly different and unclear statements on citizenship rights and with a neither federal nor unitarist structure. Here in our context, only the West African “new” colonies are of interest. Their inhabitants were not French citizens, but only “subjects”.<sup>116</sup>

Already when the new constitution was being drafted in France, the African politicians involved, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal, pushed for greater representation and a greater say. This was linked to demands for equalisation of social rights to the welfare state standards in France (equal wages and pensions, 40-hour week, paid holidays, full access to jobs in the public service, etc.), which was also conceded by France after a general strike in 1952.

A large group of African politicians who had joined together to form the “*Mouvement des Indépendants de l’Outre Mer*” called for political emancipation and “economic and social democracy” in 1953<sup>117</sup>, but at the same time warned that the “temptation of narrow nationalisms represents a grave danger in a world in which independence risks being only an illusion”.<sup>118</sup> This illusion refers to economic dependencies. Moreover, a national independence of the small West African markets would only lead to a balkanisation of the region. Regarding ethnic and cultural diversity, Senegalese activist Mamadou Dia said: “It is necessary that in the final analysis the imperialist conception of the nation-state give way to the modern conception of the multinational state.”<sup>119</sup>

Further developments were characterised by a struggle for more political equality of the West African countries and a corresponding federal structure, whereby the alternative of federation or national independence became increasingly clear.

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116 Apart from the Quatre Communes in Senegal, whose inhabitants had French citizenship but made up less than ten percent of Senegal’s population. Cf. Mamadou Diouf: Les Quatre Communes, histoire d’une assimilation particulière, in: *Histoire du Sénégal: le modèle islamo-wolof et ses périphéries*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose 2001, pp. 135–156.

117 Frederick Cooper: *Alternatives to Nationalism*, op. cit. p. 110.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid., p. 111.

De Gaulle clearly rejected the Africans' demand for the universal election of representatives to the second chamber and for legislative and executive autonomy for the colonies in the new constitution of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The African heads of state were now represented in an executive council with regular consultations by the French president and were otherwise faced with the clear alternative of either accepting this arrangement or secession. Senghor tried unsuccessfully to counter the secessionist considerations now growing in West Africa with a plea for the formation of an African community as the first step and then the formation of a Franco-African confederation in the second step. A federation was eventually formed temporarily between Senegal and French Sudan, now Mali. The extent to which nation-state thinking prevailed in France is shown by the declaration in 1959, pushed through by France in the Executive Council and hardly discussed by the members, that a federative unit could only have a single, common nationality.<sup>120</sup>

Senghor and most other state leaders did not want to equate nation and state; they had recognised the danger that such a structure would inevitably lead to the exclusion of minorities. They may also have realised that a nation-state structure does not have enough of a decisive power-sharing function and thus the danger of autocratic rule is greater. The reality of this fear was demonstrated by Senghor in Senegal and Sékou Touré in Guinea, who, as heads of state of their independent nation-states, have themselves succumbed to the temptation of abuse of power and repression. Côte d'Ivoire, which had strictly rejected an external federation, suffered a long civil war decades later due to the lack of an internal federation.

Mamadou Dia would express his "profound and sad conviction of committing one of those major historical errors that can inflect the destiny of a people".<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

Why did all these projects fail? Three reasons seem decisive to me:

Firstly, in all these cases, federalism as a concept of power sharing with simultaneous power strengthening (Montesquieu) has not been sufficiently known, although Althusius, Montesquieu, Rousseau, the Founding Fathers of the USA, and Proudhon spoke extensively about it, and Switzerland and the USA convey positive experiences. Federalism has at least as important and indispensable a function as the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches; only the two together lead to stability and the extensive freedom of political participation mentioned by Arendt.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>121</sup> See Frederick Cooper: *Africa in the World*, op. cit., p. 80.

Secondly, understanding federalism means at the same time recognising the weaknesses of nation states with their supposed strengths of sovereignty and homogeneity. In all cases, the majority was under the illusion that power through sovereignty and homogeneity was particularly strong, indeed that power had to be backed up by force and that when disputes came to a head, only force would help to achieve this power. Nation-state thinking is based on bipolar thinking with a tendency towards fantasies of omnipotence and therefore includes the violence of excluding all those towards whom the nation asserts its sovereignty externally and homogeneity internally. This involves not only the violence of anti-colonial nationalism, but also the violence of anti-federal nationalism, as in the case of Yugoslavia, where the intentions to exercise violent domination were unmistakable.

Thirdly, federalism is more than a mere constitutional construction, far more than a means of forming large markets in the face of external competition, as expressed in West Africa or often in the context of the European Union's position vis-à-vis the United States and China. For Camus and especially Arendt, federalism is part of a humanistic understanding of the world of dialogue, plurality and intersubjectivity in action and judgement. The essential political elements of federalism<sup>122</sup> such as democracy in small political units, autonomy (not sovereignty) of the individual units and levels, power structure from the bottom up and unity in diversity are not only political elements. They are part of the human condition. It is therefore necessary to discover federalism not only as a political-institutional principle, but also as an existential principle of inter-humanity. Thus, Montesquieu's concept of strengthening power through power-sharing represents not only an institutional but also an interpersonal relationship, as does Arendt's definition of political phenomena.

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has pointed out that Arendt drew an analogy between the political-republican and the mental realms. "She imagined a kind of republic of the mental faculties. In the mental republic, no faculty was to be dominant. No faculty was to be sovereign or invoke the sovereignty of the mind as a whole under its leadership. Thinking, Willing and Judging were to be a system of checks and balances: a senate, an executive, and a court."<sup>123</sup> The federal as a phenomenon of human conditionality, I would add, is revealed in Arendt's description of plurality as sameness and diversity, of intersubjective relations of acting and judging, and of mutual binding through promises. In these federal relations, there is not only no place for sovereignty and violence, but also no place for abstract, objective, logical

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122 Carl J. Friedrich *Politik als Prozess der Gemeinschaftsbildung*, in *Föderalismus Weltordnung durch Konsens*, Köln-Opladen Westdeutscher Verlag 1970, pp. 434–454.

123 Jerome Kohn / Elisabeth Young-Bruehl: *Critique de la souveraineté et de l'État-nation*, in: Anne Kupiec et al. (eds.): *Hannah Arendt. Crises de l'état-nation. Pensées alternatives*, Paris: Sens & Tonka 2007, p. 295.

thinking and reasoning. In contrast, the Kantian extended mode of thinking, which for Arendt is the basis of all judgement while taking into account as many different points of view as possible, embodies the federal principle.

It follows from these observations to question the common dyadic way of thinking that underlies the widespread dualistic juxtapositions of sovereignty and dependency, majorities and minorities, inclusion and exclusion, people and stranger. Federal thinking is complex, characterised at least by triads such as the separation of powers or the judicial or moderating function, or by an understanding of plurality that goes beyond this, such as consensual governance in Switzerland, the Arendtian concept of plurality and Kantian extended judgement.

It also follows, in my opinion, to consider the importance of our ways of imagining. What do we see when we talk about Europe and the European Union, about Brussels, about refugees? Do we see “streams” or “waves”, and “bureaucrats”? What do we see when we speak of Poles, Greeks, English, or Spaniards? Do we see people, do we see federated people? Our mostly uncritical images need to be questioned. This also concerns the way we see our society – as an anonymous society of passers-by and consumers, as a vertical society of rulers and ruled, or as a horizontal civil society. These are not imaginings devoid of reality, but rather shifts in perspective and focus based on arguments and judgements and the civic desire to act emphasised by Arendt. If we look at the possibilities, then councils and federalism appear as hidden treasures to be unearthed.

Written in 2016. First published: *Föderationen – Hannah Arendts politische Grammatik des Gründens*, Hannover Arendt-Haus (Leinebögen 5) 2016.

## 14. Bridge and Border – Queering Europe

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The crisis of Europe – of the economy, of the Euro, of migration, of terrorism – can lead to simple and crude thinking: I instead of the others, identity instead of plurality, nation instead of federation, exclusion instead of inclusion, friend against foe. Federal Europe is a federation of nation states with nation-state thinking and the claim to appear sovereign as a community to the outside world and, at times of crisis, to each other. The contradiction of nation and federation structurally underlies the European Union both internally and externally – in its organisational form, in the spectre of a monstrous European bureaucracy repeatedly stoked by national politicians, and in the general opinion of the European populations.

In the face of the nationalist 19th and 20th centuries, of catastrophic wars and genocides, a European peaceful federation seems something entirely new. It is easy to overlook the long history of a kind of European federalism in the shape of the Holy Roman Empire from the 10th century until its dissolution in 1806 during the Napoleonic Wars. A largely peaceful federal structure, a heritage that should encourage us in our efforts to live together peacefully in Europe.

I would like to discuss two aspects in the following: firstly, what does it mean to return to the simple and crude thinking of nationalism? What does it consist of? I start from the assumption that, like all thinking, this is based on figurative ideas and can therefore be analysed through an examination of these images. Conversely, this means that thinking of federalism, which I would like to call complex thinking, is also based on figurative ideas and metaphors and can accordingly be described more precisely. The question is therefore, to what extent is this thinking developed in its figurativeness?

Secondly, I would like to further illuminate federal thinking as complex thinking, as found in a few federalist thinkers such as Hannah Arendt or Denis de Rougemont. To answer the question of how this complexity can be preserved and made more clearly visual and conceptualised in order to mitigate the structural contradiction of nation and federation, I would like to draw on Cynthia Weber's study *Queer International Relations*.<sup>1</sup> My thesis is that this contradiction will only be mitigated if

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1 Cynthia Weber: *Queer International Relations*, Oxford University Press 2016.

the recognition of diversity is advanced, if the metaphors of the bridge as a linear connection of European citizens and the border as inclusion and exclusion are replaced by a Queering of Europe. Only a queer way of thinking of the And/Or instead of the Either/Or will do justice to the essence of a federal plurality that has yet to unfold.

To this end, I will first briefly address the issues of imagery, then name various federal ways of thinking and finally present the thesis of a Queering Europe.

### **Making an image / a concept – deconstructing the concept**

The linguistic engagement with reality is inescapably linked to the use of images and metaphors. Not only do we “get a picture” of a certain situation, e.g. the refugees in the winter of 2015/16 who crossed European borders, but we also perceive reality from a certain perspective. The Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin pointed out how differently a farmer and a (presumably urban) walker perceive the same landscape. The one as a working field, the other as an aesthetic field. Their perspectives shape their perception of reality (and, as prejudices, influence the judgements based on them).<sup>2</sup> Refugees who are crossing the borders for months on end can, depending on the viewer's perspective, be seen as a wave, a torrent, an invasion and a mass of faceless individuals, or as uprooted individuals in need of protection, as people with faces marked by their experiences. It is the change of perspective, the consideration of many perspectives, that Kant and Arendt declare to be the condition of reasonable judgement, in order to escape prejudice, the reduced view of the world through a single perspective, and to come as close as possible to factual reality. What is given short shrift in the discussion of this enlarged power of judgement is the interplay with the emotional world in which the images are embedded. Those who are already afraid of strangers see the arriving refugees as a supposedly hostile mass. The reduction of fear and a change of image accompany each other, but they can also increase to hysteria and hatred of all foreigners and their supporters in politics and civil society. Whoever then, contrary to expectations, gets to know one of these strangers as a person with a face and a destiny, initially tries to integrate them into their own image world as an exception.

In his study “Fictional expectations and the crisis of contemporary capitalism” Jens Beckert describes the extent to which these images generally guide action, including in the economy. He characterises entrepreneurial action as the “formation of ideas of future relations”, on which actors base their behaviour as if these actually described causal relationships, noting that according to Niklas Luhmann, represen-

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2 Kurt Lewin *Kriegslandschaft* (1917). *Gestalt Theory*, vol. 31, no. 3–4, 2009, pp. 253–262.

tations of the future involve a “doubling of reality.”<sup>3</sup> This is a process that also applies to politics, in which the lie, according to Arendt, also occasionally appears particularly attractive to actors as an instrument of fictional expectations.

The metaphor of language, according to Gadamer, precedes conceptuality and takes over its leadership.<sup>4</sup> But only when the image is transformed into a conceptuality – the body of the people, the do-gooders, the lying press – does the fleeting figurative impression stick, transformed into a stable image. Similarly, in a different context, Arendt regretted that the discussion on the formation of the United States of America did not lead to a conceptual version of the new form of government, despite the debate of the founding fathers in the Federalist Papers. “For if it is true that all thought begins with remembrance, it is also true that no remembrance remains secure unless it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptual notions within which it can further exercise itself.”<sup>5</sup>

In times of crisis, complex ways of thinking seem to offer many people no security. Simple, clear and quick solutions are demanded, whose mental foundations are dichotomously based on pairs of opposites and offer clear alternatives: us or them, friend or foe, sovereignty or foreign determination. According to Rudolf Stichweh, the foreign is already spoken of “where no secure routines of processing and dealing with them are available”.<sup>6</sup> The fact that this initial uncertainty leads so quickly to dichotomous thinking is also related to the logocentrism Derrida criticised, which is based on categorical distinctions such as cause and effect, either/or, health and illness, man and woman, day and night – thinking that we take so much for granted that a critique of it seems like questioning thinking itself. There is practically no research on the question of the dangers of dichotomous thinking, what alternatives there might be to it, and whether there is a federalist way of thinking as opposed to a nationalist way of thinking.

In contrast to dichotomous or dyadic thinking, however, there are a plethora of triadic concepts that contradict the dyads in such a way that the focus is not on separation but on the mutual relation of the elements to one another – the three political powers that reinforce and at the same time control each other. To name a few: the judge or moderator and the two parties to a dispute; perpetrator, victim and bystander; liberty, equality and fraternity; politics, economics and civil society; spirit, body and soul in the Bible; Hegel’s thesis, antithesis and synthesis; Arendt’s

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3 Jens Beckert: Fictional expectations and the crisis of contemporary capitalism, economic sociology. perspectives and conversations, in: *Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2016, p. 40. See also Jens Beckert: *Imagined Futures. Fictional Expectations and Capitalist Dynamics*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2016.

4 Hans-Georg Gadamer *Kleine Schriften I, Philosophie, Hermeneutik*, Tübingen Mohr (Siebeck) 1967.

5 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 220.

6 Rudolf Stichweh *Der Fremde. Studien zu Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2010.



description of activities as working, making and doing; the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; or sun, moon and stars. Arendt's beautiful image: "Love burns, pierces like lightning the between, that is, the world-space, between people. This is only possible with two people. If the third person joins in, space is immediately restored"<sup>7</sup>, makes the difference between individuality, duality and plurality clear. In all triads, distinction takes place, but not an exclusionary opposition. The triad creates common places and common components, a plurality of independent magnitudes that only acquire their magnitude in the entanglement with each other. Hence Arendt's distinction between plurality and duality in relation to action; in the latter, both doers of good works and criminals act precisely in non-public ways, not with others but for or against them, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Unlike triads that seek to level differences, such as the conflation of "one people, one realm, one leader", or Carl Schmitt's mere juxtaposition of aesthetics, morality and politics to assert the opposition of friend and foe as the field of "the political" in analogy to the dyads Beautiful and Ugly and Good and Evil. These triads actually serve dyadic thinking.

As important as it is to transform images into concepts, it is no less important to deconstruct concepts in order to uncover their temporality. Since the studies of Benedict Anderson and others, we have known about the historical conditionality of the modern concept of the nation, an enormously effective narrative which, with a corresponding historicism created in the 19th century, gave the nation a veneer of inevitability and immutability. This included the fusion of nation, people, language and culture with the help of symbols, songs and narratives, which shaped the ideas and conceptualisations in such a lasting way that even today, after 60 years of federalisation efforts in Europe, the constitutional separation of *ethnos* and *demos*, politics and culture as well as state and nation is blurred again and again. People continue to think in terms of the nation, and federalism is hardly "understood".

### Is there a federalist mindset?

Before I address this question following the reflections on triadic thinking, I would like to take a brief look at the iconography of Europe and the European Union. Is it capable of placing its own narratives and symbols alongside the heroic figures and symbols of the nation states, such as Marianne or Germania, the Field of Blackbirds, or Andreas Hofer, and historicising them? If it is true that our judgements and actions are guided by an image-constructing perception of reality, then what do we see when we speak of Europe, to what extent is this seeing shaped in a federal way, and could a different terminology emerge from it rather than the fuzzy "Brussels".

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7 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, Munich Piper 2002, p. 372f. (Translated by WH)

8 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday 1958, p. 160.

Finding answers to these questions would be the task of a cultural-scientific-empirical investigation, which of course cannot be done here. Instead, I want to take a brief look at some images of Europe. First, that of the legendary *Rütli* oath in Switzerland, created at the end of the 15th century, with which the three cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden concluded a covenant, a triad that stands at the origin of federal Switzerland.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 1



In the 16th century, the popular anthropomorphic image of Europe was in the form of a queen.<sup>10</sup> In the 17th century, among allegories, also the representation of the European countries as a group of persons by Charles Le Brun on the *Grand Staircase of Envoys* (1674–1678) in Versailles. In the 19th century, the unity of Europe faded with the differences and polemics of the nation states and was accordingly mainly represented by caricatures.

What iconography can we now expect from a cooperative, federal Europe? The depressing answer is nothing worth mentioning. The banknotes of the euro show gates and windows on the front and bridges on the back, each from a different period

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- 9 Edgar Bierende points to the triple number and its emphasis on the “harmonious unison, the equality of the allies” from the *Rütli* oath to the handshake of the “big three” at the Potsdam Conference in 1945. See Edgar Bierende Bündnis. In Uwe Fleckner / Martin Warnke / Hendrik Ziegler (eds.) *Handbuch der politischen Ikonographie*, vol. 1, Munich C. H. Beck 2011, pp. 193–200.
- 10 Dietrich Erben Anthropomorphe Europa-Karten des 16. Jahrhunderts. Medialität, Ikonographie und Formtypus, in Ingrid Baumgärtner / Martina Stercken (eds.) *Herrschaft verorten. Politische Kartographie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Zurich Chronos Verlag 2012, pp. 99–124.

of art history. According to this, Europe means mobility, not more. The scenes depicted are deserted, Europeans are absent. Do they exist at all? The cultural-historical objects look like museum pieces. Is a reference to the historical heritage enough?

The importance of figurative-symbolic narratives in the introduction of new ways of seeing political references and concepts is illustrated by the example of the concept of sovereignty. In his illuminating essay “*Wie die Jungfrau zum Staat kam*” (How the Virgin Came to the State), Thomas Maissen demonstrates that the new concept of state sovereignty initially met with unanimous rejection in the early modern period and could only be introduced gradually with the help of images that linked the new with the recognised old. A very popular Christian motif was used for this purpose: the Virgin Mary, in the midst of her *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden), which had been depicted many times since the High Middle Ages. The state entity as a virgin. “Only those who can keep their political body intact are sovereign”, is the message.<sup>11</sup> This was also true in the preservation of the independence of the Netherlands before the Peace of Westphalia, depicted in an engraving by Crispijn van de Passe Junior, in which a French and a Spanish nobleman vainly court Hollandia.

Figure 2



11 Thomas Maissen *Wie die Jungfrau zum Staat kam*. In *Ruperto Carola* 1, 2006. <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/presse/ruca/rucao6-1/wie.html>. (11/1/2022). Also *Die Geburt der Republic Staatsverständnis und Repräsentation in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft*, Göttingen Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht Verlag 2006.

The message here was: “The sovereign and neutral Netherlands does not get involved with the great powers – certainly not in a marriage”<sup>12</sup>. Europe is always a woman to be protected by men, to whom on one occasion a man like Louis XV presents peace in the form of an olive branch, and on another occasion the war of men so afflicts her that she is completely confused.

The emergence of the new European federalism of our time has nothing like this. In 2004, the year of the fifth and largest EU enlargement, the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas was commissioned by the EU to give it a “new face” (“The image of Europe”). The result was rather embarrassing: a circus tent in the European national colours, a barcode in the same colours as a proposal for a new European flag, and the design of an EU passport with lifeless icons in the style of the works of the logical positivist Otto Neurath of the 1920s, who invented symbolic forms for numbers and wordless signposts.<sup>13</sup>

In the absence of convincing figurative-metaphorical representations, we can only conclude that federalism is not “conceived”. And indeed, there is no political-philosophical study of federalism that could rival and replace the validity of Bodin’s or Hobbes’ theories of sovereignty. This is not only due to the strong consensus that the theory of sovereignty still enjoys, but also to the insufficient development of a theory of federalism. It will only become strong if, like the theory of sovereignty, it is not only related to politics and the nation, but also encompasses the understanding of society and the individual. In the modern era, the sovereignty of the state corresponds to the autonomy of the subject; both are part of the basic equipment of a modern understanding of politics, the individual and science. In contrast, the theories of intersubjectivity have hardly been associated with federalism.

One possible way to overcome the European crisis and promote federalist thinking, along with institutional reform, is through a far-reaching and admittedly long-term change of perspective on human existence. What do we see when we look at Europe in terms of an imagined future?

Hannah Arendt’s view is not against the autonomous subject and state sovereignty, rather her gaze goes in another direction, into a space shaped by the plurality of interdependent subjects, in who’s active intersubjectivity political phenomena such as power, violence, freedom, or politics become visible. We find this active, interdependent plurality at all crucial points in her work and in her description of human existence – in individual thought and judgement, in the extended mode of thought and community of judgemental spectators, in political action, in the distinction between power and violence, and civil disobedience and

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12 Ibid.

13 Leila Hadji-Abdou, et al. *Europäische Bildpolitiken. Politische Bildanalyse am Beispiel der EU-Politik*, Stuttgart UTB 2009.

the exercise of conscience, in her reflections on a federal future for Israel and Palestine, in the abolition of any minority status in a federation, and in the description of the American founding fathers' path to the establishment of a republic based on the division of powers and a federal republic.

These elements and perspectives need to be developed further. What does the plurality of non-autonomous or non-sovereign subjects mean? Does it help them to act out of responsibility for the common concerns and existence of this space? What is the significance of Arendt's declaration against subjectivism and universalism in political judgement when she notes about the extended mode of thinking: "The validity of such judgements would be neither *objective* and universal, nor subjective, depending on personal whim, but intersubjective or *representative*"<sup>14</sup>? And on the state level: to what extent should the federation also be carried by a federal idea in foreign policy, aware of the dangers if the federation reverts to the old thinking of sovereignty in foreign policy and *vis-à-vis* its neighbours, rather than promoting, for example, a Mediterranean Union, as Arendt envisaged to resolve the tensions in the Middle East?<sup>15</sup>

In this context, it is also worth studying the writings of the Swiss federalist Denis de Rougemont and the Frenchman Alexandre Marc, who combine federalism with an ethic of personalism, personal responsibility, tolerance and preservation of differences, renunciation of hegemony and rejection of all forms of ideologies, love of complexity, a sense of paradox and far-reaching decentralisation of what they called an integral federalism based very much on subsidiarity.<sup>16</sup>

Helpful for the development of such an image of federalism is also the deconstruction of the image of the border as a place of inclusion and exclusion and the development of a new view, together with Derrida and others, of the border as a place of transition, and this not only in the sense of an illegal parallel world from the perspective of sovereignty but as a borderland from the perspective of federalism in a twofold sense, the changing physical border space in the duality of federalism of commonality and distinction and the place of thinking.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 141.

15 Hannah Arendt: Can the Jewish-Arab Question be Solved? In: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, pp. 193–198.

16 Bruno Ackermann: *Denis de Rougemont. De la personne à l'Europe*, Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme 2000.

17 Cf. Gloria Anzaldúa: *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books 1987. Jacques Derrida: *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992.

Derrida was not a thinker of federalism, but his rejection of thinking in identities is essential to federalist thinking.<sup>18</sup> It is only surpassed by a complete absence of identities in Chinese thought, which François Jullien has elaborated in his juxtapositions of classical Chinese and Greek philosophers. With so called “diversions via China”, Jullien wants to offer a far-reaching change of perspective, which as de-territorialisation creates the necessary distance to be able to look at the “unthought”, i.e. the unreflected presuppositions of European philosophical thought and thinking in general. In his comparison of classical Chinese and Greek thought, Jullien presents the divergent, not the different, which would only lead us to new determinations of identity. It would be paradoxical to “identify” the deviant in Chinese thought as identities analogous to our concepts of heaven and earth, subject and object, health and disease. These concepts have no identity in Chinese, but are entangled in indissoluble interrelations and processes of change and can only be “grasped” in this way.<sup>19</sup>

An example of how these opposites are intertwined in Chinese thought can be found in Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* in the poetic-philosophical description of the constitutive role of nothingness for the function of objects:

Though thirty spokes may form the wheel,  
it is the hole within the hub  
which gives the wheel utility.  
It is not the clay the potter throws,  
which gives the pot its usefulness,  
but the space within the shape,  
from which the pot is made.  
Without a door, the room cannot be entered,  
and without windows it is dark.  
Such is the utility of non-existence.<sup>20</sup>

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18 “What is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself.” (Derrida: *The Other Heading*, op. cit., p. 19 Marquard’s sceptical philosophy is also based on a division of powers in politics and similarly on a plurality of generality claims, history(s), coincidences and determinisms. Cf. Odo Marquard Sola divisione individuum. Betrachtungen über Individuum und Gewaltenteilung. In *Individuum und Gewaltenteilung. Philosophische Studien*. Stuttgart Reclam 2004, pp. 68–90. – Also Lob des Polytheismus, in *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen*, Stuttgart Reclam 1981, pp. 91–116.

19 François Jullien Hinterfragen wir – ausgehend von der Exterritorialität des Chinesischen – erneut die europäische Entstehung des Politischen. In *Kommune*, 1, 2001, pp. v-xii. – On Chinese philosophy see Lutz Geldsetzer / Hong Han-ding *Grundlagen der chinesischen Philosophie*. Stuttgart: Reclam 1998.

20 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*, New York: Penguin 1963. Lin Yutang (trans), chapter 11: The Utility of Non-existence.

In classical Chinese thought, there are no a priori entities such as the true, the good and the just, virtue and will, which inspire what Jullien calls model formations with ideal forms on which, as in Europe since Plato, “the political” is founded. Taking a look at this divergent view, which consists in regulation instead of modelling and ritual instead of law, could open up a far-reaching critical discussion of self-evident entities in politics and political science. Hannah Arendt, in her own way, defined political concepts as phenomena rather than identities, phenomena that arise exclusively in interpersonal relations. An example is her study *On Violence*, in which she dissolved two such supposed entities and re-described them in their transitions.<sup>21</sup> Arendt was in the European intellectual tradition, but she was unmistakably involved in its deconstruction.

Today, according to Jullien, thinking in models and entities is declining in Europe, which is largely free of discourses, constructions and beliefs, i.e. rather unnoticed, and creates space for two things: for a critical reflection on this history of ideas and ideals and, secondly, for preserving what is helpful in the sense of tracking down resources in a world that is no longer about creating cultural identities.<sup>22</sup>

## Queering Europe

We have seen how federalism and federalist thinking stand in opposition to sovereignty and identity and how an institutional-political establishment of federalism alone cannot overcome a way of thinking about identity and sovereignty that is also related to the individual. The British political scientist Cynthia Weber offers reflections on a queering of the field of international relations that are very interesting for federalist thinking, especially at the level of narration, imagery and conceptualisation.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Cf. e.g.: “Textbook instructions on ‘how to make a revolution’ in a step-by-step progression from dissent to conspiracy, from resistance to armed uprising, are all based on the mistaken notion that revolutions are ‘made’. In a contest of violence against violence the superiority of the government has always been absolute; but this superiority lasts only as long as the power structure of the government is intact – that is, as long as commands are obeyed and the army or police forces are prepared to use their weapons. When this is no longer the case, the situation changes abruptly. Not only is the rebellion not put down, but the arms themselves change hands – sometimes, as in the Hungarian revolution, within a few hours.” (Hannah Arendt: *On Violence*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1969, p. 48)

22 François Jullien: *Il n’y a pas d’identité culturelle*, Paris: Éd. de l’Herne, 2016.

23 Cynthia Weber: Queer International Relations. From Queer to Queer IR. In: *International Studies Review*, 6, 2014, pp. 596–622. Also: *Queer International Relations*, Oxford University Press 2016.

Queer means the deviation of persons, actions and things from the norm and is used today primarily to designate an unfinished diversity of different forms of sexual orientation. Common to this diversity is the rejection of heteronormative labels and identity ascriptions, the freedom of self-determination and self-designation, and equal rights.

From this perspective, it follows from the traditional view that “statecraft is mancraft”<sup>24</sup>. Not only have all political terms been defined from a traditional masculine perspective, but are at the same time based on sovereignty, regardless of whether they are terms as such as state, nationalism, intervention, hegemony and empire, or mutually exclusive pairs of opposites such as civilisation or barbarism, security or danger, peace or war, national or international, and order or anarchy. With the interpretive sovereignty through mancraft and the methodological and dichotomous ‘either/or’, a double exclusion of all possible other forms of politics and relations takes place.

Queer scholarship does not counter these definitions with its own definitions of identity, but describes how power dominates gender and sexuality in terms of their normalisation and perversion, how, according to Weber, the creation of sexualised orders of international relations is based on a developmental biological understanding whose foundations include notions of race, disability, classification and gender, and which is accompanied by specific codifications and arrangements of time, space and desire.<sup>25</sup> Independent of Weber’s investigation, we have already seen above the seemingly self-evident sexualisation of the concept of sovereignty in the early modern period.

The thesis that Weber plausibly unfolds states that the international relations of Europe or the West to the so-called developing countries resemble the national relations to homosexuals. There are countries capable of development and countries incapable of development and, analogously, homosexuals capable of development and perverted homosexuals, a view that was biologically asserted in the 19th century. For Freud, for example, homosexuality was an unfinished transitory stage. Today, as a matter of course, a similar distinction is made among migrants between desirable refugees and undesirable single men. The political homeland and the private home, the private family are, according to Weber, inseparable in the theoretical constructions of International Relations.

Can this queer deconstruction, only briefly outlined here, contribute to answering the question of how federalist thinking can overcome an inherent nationalism and how a narrative can emerge for this purpose? The strength of queer critiques lies in the development of Derrida’s deconstruction of identity, Foucault’s critique of

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24 Cynthia Weber: *Queer International Relations*, op. cit. p. 96.

25 Ibid. In the e-book edition. pn.1439.



power, and feminism. The critique of previous notions of sex, gender, race, geopolitics, development and religious and secular authorities that emerges in the process affects political and private space alike. Arendt's political federalism, which removes the tension between minorities and majorities and ends the nation's control over the state, and her interpersonal federalism of shared acting and judging plurality come close to overcoming sovereignty and identity in queer critiques. The further convergence of the thinkers mentioned here would be very fruitful.

As for the narrative, Weber cites a wonderful narrative of a queer Europe with which I would like to finish: the winner of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest Tom Neuwirth/Conchita Wurst, the bearded Austrian drag queen.

Figure 3



With Conchita (= little shell) and Wurst, Tom Neuwirth created an art figure with a sexualised name and the invented story of a Colombian woman who grew up with her father Alfred Knack von Wurst in Germany, thus also uniting the contradictions of development and being developed. Neuwirth/Wurst is/are border figures like the unwanted migrants, he/she/they “do not want to be one being or the other”, but they are in the place of transgression, he/she/they transgress it and at the same time do not transgress it. His/her song *Rise Like a Phoenix* is highly symbolic. The images of

the controlled border and the bridge, often mentioned in the EU, do not apply here, because the border is an Either/Or and the bridge is an And, while the borderland as a state unites the And/Or.<sup>26</sup> This borderland concerns not only sexual orientation, but also race, geopolitics and the thinking of nothing/something. Weber explains, “The queer logic of statecraft allows us to assess how queer-plural figures can order, reorder, or disorder regional or international politics’ singular understanding of sovereignty, on which these orders have depended since at least the Treaty of Westphalia.”<sup>27</sup>

With Neuwirth/Wurst there is an image and a narrative whose meaning was immediately clear to everyone, and which was therefore immediately a matter of dispute. It is the deserted bridges on the euro banknotes that, after Neuwirth/Wurst’s appearance, reveal that it is precisely here, at the crucial point, that emptiness reigns. It seems as if Europe should be reconstructed from Borderland, where Arendt, Derrida, Weber, Neuwirth/Wurst and Jullien, but also Camus and many other are at home. And from there, all the fields become visible in which the emancipatory idea of federalism is undermined in everyday practice.

### Picture credits

The Rütli Oath. Woodcut. In Stumpf, Johannes Gemeiner loblicher Eydgnoschafft Stetten, Landen und Völckeren Chronick würdiger Thaaten Beschreybung hierinn wirt auch die Gelegenheit der gantzen Europe, jtem ein kurtzvergriffene Chronica Germaniae oder Teutschlands, in sonders aber ein fleysige Histori [...]. Getruckt Zürych in der Eydgnoschafft bey Christoffel Froschouer, 1548. Zentralbibliothek Zürich, AW 40 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-5076> / Public Domain Mark

Crispijn van de Passe. Publicity for the Dutch Virgin, ca. 1647. In Thomas Maissen *Wie die Jungfrau zum Staat kam*. In *Ruperto Carola* 1. 2006.

Conchita Wurst (Thomas Neuwirth), Dancing Stars on 21 March 2014. Wikimedia Commons (2022/11/27).

Written in 2019. First published: *Bridge and Border – Queering Europe* in: Christian Kupke, et al. (eds.): *Leute zuRecht machen*, Berlin: Parodos 2019, pp. 91–106.

26 In this context, Weber refers to the role of the and/or in Roland Barthes: *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1976, and in: *S/Z: An Essay* (1975), New York: Hill and Wang 1975; “To miss the plurality of codes is to censor the work of the discourse: non-decidability defines a *praxis*, the performance of the narrator.” (Roland Barthes: *S/Z*, p. 77) See also Barthes: *The Androgyny*, in: *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France* (1977–1978), New York: Columbia University Press 2005, pp. 186–195.

27 Cynthia Weber, op. cit., 3798.



## 15. Rights Without Space – The Existence of a Transnational Minority

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The following remarks put up for discussion the unresolved contradictions between nation and state, society and politics, cultural diversity and the rule of law. Even though we live in times after the violent outbreaks of nationalism and national imperialisms, we are still in a period where minorities in majority societies are exposed to these contradictions. Moreover, the resurgence of nationalist movements and the election of nationalist governments in Europe over the past five years has shown the strength of nation-state thinking and the instability of the gains of federalist institutions and thinking. I would argue that although there are civil and minority rights in Europe – unlike after the First World War, as described by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in the chapter “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of Rights of Man”<sup>1</sup> – there is a lack of a republican attitude to these rights both on the side of the majorities and the side of the minorities. I would like to illustrate this with the example of the most precarious minority, the Sinti and Roma in Europe.

### The persecution of a minority

When we speak of minorities in Europe, we think of the Basques in Spain, the Welsh in Great Britain, the Danes in Germany, or religious minorities such as Jews and Muslims. The largest minority in Europe, however, are the Sinti and Roma with about twelve million members in all European states. They differ from all other minorities in the following aspects:

- they do not have a national territory in which they are mainly domiciled;
- they did not have their own representative bodies until the 1970s;
- they have more than 50 languages, some of which are very different from each other;

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1 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland: Meridian 1958, pp. 267–302.

- they are for the most part sedentary, but family groups are often spread over several countries and therefore require great mobility;
- they are among the poorest in the respective countries; the literacy rates are still comparatively low, although in South-Eastern Europe, there has been an increase in literacy rates. Of the Roma in Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, at least 80 per cent or more can read and write.<sup>2</sup> Vocational advancement is still practically impossible, health care is inadequate and life expectancy is therefore significantly lower than that of the majority societies surrounding them;
- Sinti and Roma have no political and no social lobby, but encounter overwhelming rejection, discrimination and violence everywhere;
- they are practically invisible; those who manage social advancement often hide their origins for fear of being discriminated against, unless they are well-known musicians such as Django Reinhardt;
- this invisibility creates space for false images: romanticising, literary images, e.g. Carmen, the untameable, dangerously beautiful gypsy in Prosper Mérimée's novella, or demonising images in which the term 'gypsy' is equated with criminality, vagabondism and living in squalor.

These particularities make the Sinti and Roma a difficult minority to grasp under the norms that apply in modern nation states. In their case, *demos* and nation completely fall apart; they are citizens of the respective nation states and at the same time, through their family ties, in part residents of several states, and their oral traditions deprive them of visibility through their own literature and historiography.

With the emergence of nation states, the modern era tried to exclude minorities or force them into the new structures of work and citizenship. To be either a citizen or stateless was the alternative. What Hannah Arendt described in her analysis of the twentieth century as the new phenomenon of statelessness of minorities in new nation states and refugees across Europe applies to the mode of existence of the Sinti and Roma in modern Europe as a whole: "Stateless people are the latest phenomenon in recent history. None of the categories, none of the legal arrangements that arose out of the spirit of the nineteenth century applies to them. They have been excluded both from the national life of their countries and from the class struggle of their societies. They are neither minorities nor proletarians. They stand outside all law."<sup>3</sup>

Measures have also been taken across Europe against the minorities of Sinti and Roma living throughout Europe – from England to France, Germany and the King-

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2 Cf. Sabine Homberg Die Europäische Union – eine Solidargemeinschaft auch für Roma? in Anne Broden / Paul Mecheril (eds.) *Solidarität in der Migrationsgesellschaft*, Bielefeld transcript Verlag 2014, pp. 167–194.

3 Hannah Arendt: Active Patience. In: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, p. 140.

dom of Bohemia to Spain and Portugal. In a first phase since the 17th century, Sinti and Roma were to be forcibly excluded from territorial states. It was believed that the state order to murder them at any time, wherever they were found on state territory, would suffice for this. Thus in 1661 with the decree of Johann Georg II, Elector of Saxony, in 1721 under Emperor Charles VI in Austria-Hungary, in 1726 under Carlos IV in Spain, in 1727 in Bern in Switzerland, and in 1728 in Mainz in Germany. Under Louis XIV, Sinti and Roma were banished to the French galleys.

However, since expulsion by threat of death did not bring about any lasting success, a second phase relied on forced assimilation. In 1761, in the Age of Enlightenment, Maria Theresa, ruler of Austria and Hungary, ordered the settlement of Roma and the transformation of their way of life. Their mobility was restricted, they had to settle as peasants, were not allowed to speak their language, were no longer allowed to intermarry and had to watch as all children over the age of five were taken away from their families and given to non-Roma families to raise. In Germany, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Sinti and Roma were subjected to total population control, registered by name and forced to settle by not being granted a business permit without a permanent residence.

In a third phase, Nazi Germany attempted to murder all Sinti and Roma in an organised genocide. In the process, 500,000 people perished. At that moment, according to Arendt, “all European nations have become pariah peoples, all are forced to take up the struggle anew for freedom and equality. For the first time our fate has turned out not to be a special fate, for the first time our struggle is identical with Europe’s struggle for freedom.”<sup>4</sup> But no one in Europe felt connected to the Sinti and Roma in a struggle for freedom at that time. While after the Second World War claims against Germany because of the Holocaust against the Jews were represented by the state of Israel, Sinti and Roma had no representative bodies. In Germany, the same authority as before the war remained unchallenged for their control. The official explanation for the murder of the 500,000 Sinti and Roma continued to be: criminality, not racism and genocide, so that compensation was only paid in ten percent of cases.<sup>5</sup>

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, a fourth phase of the majority societies’ policy towards the Sinti and Roma begins: for the first time, their recognition as a transnational nation and at the same time a national minority. i.e. legal recognition as equal citizens. However, this recognition is accompanied by pogroms and anti-gypsy state measures. To name just a few examples:

- After the collapse of communist rule in Romania, about 30 mob arson attacks were carried out against Roma communities until the mid-1990s. Hundreds of

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4 Ibid., p. 141.

5 See Jean-Pierre Liégeois: *Roma in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe 2007, pp. 103–134.

houses were burnt down and several people were lynched. A total of eleven people died. In the Czech city of Usti nad Labem, citizens built a wall around houses inhabited by Sinti and Roma. The UN recorded 133 racially motivated crimes against Roma and Africans in the Czech Republic in 1998. According to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), eleven Roma have been killed for racist reasons in the Czech Republic in the past ten years, and a further nineteen murders are suspected to have a racist background. Between 2008 and 2012, according to the ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre), 120 serious attacks against Sinti and Roma were registered in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria, i.e. arsons and armed attacks resulting in death. In Hungary, right-wing radicals provocatively patrolled villages with a majority Sinti and Roma population. The well-known anti-Semitic journalist Tsolt Bayer wrote in the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Hirlap*: “These Roma are animals, and they behave like animals. ... They are incapable of human communication. ... These animals shouldn't be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved – immediately and regardless of the method.”<sup>6</sup>

- In the Czech Republic, after Slovakia seceded in 1993, the new constitution denied citizenship to Sinti and Roma originally from Slovakia; Sinti and Roma children were educated in special schools.
- In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, about one hundred Roma women were sterilised without being informed about the procedures, a case of multiple discrimination.<sup>7</sup> In Romania, fifty per cent of the population voted in favour of compulsory birth control for Roma in 2005.<sup>8</sup>

The European Union had to react to these forms of violence, some of which were extreme.

## Europe reacts

Politically, after centuries of tragic but fortunately failed attempts at forced assimilation and extermination, the decline of nation-state sovereignty in Europe means that for the first time there is a realistic prospect of a place of their own for the Sinti and Roma as a transnational nation and at the same time a recognised national minority. However, there is as yet no example of what such a construction must

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6 Bayer's anti-Roma rant draws fire, CEU Democracy Institute, 17 January 2013. <https://cmds.ceu.edu/article/2013-01-17/bayer%E2%80%99s-anti-roma-rant-draws-fire> (2022/10/3)

7 Amnesty International: *Report 2010 Czech Republic*, 2010.

8 Costel Bercus: The Situation of Roma in Romania. In Max Matter (ed.) *Die Situation der Roma und Sinti nach der EU-Osterweiterung*, Göttingen V&R unipress, 2005, p. 29.

look like politically and legally in order to guarantee inclusion, security, participation and self-determination. Regrettably, there has also been practically no political-theoretical discussion of this to date. In the literature on transnational citizenship, migration, multiculturalism. etc., this minority is simply missing, for example in Bauböck, Brubaker, Benža or Kymlicka.<sup>9</sup> And Agamben's famous *Homo Sacer*, who can be killed with impunity, distorts reality. We are not all outside the law, as Agamben suggests, but the Sinti and Roma have been in their history. Agamben does not even mention them.

In the following, I will first list those points that have changed positively in the meantime and those that reveal a contradiction of formal justice and structural violence, in order to conclude by presenting approaches for possible changes.

Since the end of the Cold War, numerous steps have been taken to create inclusion and security at the political and legal level and to enable participation and self-determination. A great deal has been achieved from the point of view of formal justice. For example, in 1979 the UN recognised the Roma and Sinti as a nation, and in 1993 the "International Romani Union" was given the status of a special UN adviser. From 1989 onwards, the EU began to address the social concerns of Roma and Sinti, and later the EU, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE intensified contacts with Sinti and Roma. In 2004, Roma organisations founded the "European Roma and Travellers Forum" (ERTF), which advises the Council of Europe. The OSCE established the "Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues" in the "Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights", which has been in charge of monitoring the impact of European and national legislation and policies on Sinti and Roma since 1998, and the EU established an "Inter-departmental Commission and Steering Group on Roma".<sup>10</sup> In 1995, an EU standing group developed "Guiding principles for improving the situation of Roma", and the Council of Europe and the OSCE agreed on binding guidelines for the protection of minorities. All legislation within the EU is committed to the directives against discrimination and for equal treatment and freedom of movement. Finally, to overcome poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, EUR 347 billion was allocated by the Structural and Cohesion Funds from 2007 to 2014. These measures are supported by policy coordination and learning processes in such crucial fields as social inclusion, employment, healthcare and education.

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9 Rainer Bauböck: *Transnational Citizenship. Membership and Rights in International Migration*. Aldershot: Edward Elgar Pub. 1994. Roger Brubaker: *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996. Mojmír Benža: Ethnic Composition of Present Day Europe, in: *Human Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 3–14. 1997. Will Kymlicka: National Minorities in Post-Communist Europe: The Role of International Norms and European Integration. In: Zoltan Barany / Robert G. / Moser (eds.): *Ethnic Politics after Communism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2005, pp. 191–217.

10 Aidan McGarry: *Who Speaks for Roma? Political Representation of a Transnational Minority*. New York London: Continuum 2010.



A further escalation of riots and pogroms has so far been prevented by the EU imposing conditions on the new accession countries without which they could not have become members: Recognition of the Roma as a national minority, establishment of government commissioner offices, compliance with all human and civil rights.

But the situation has improved only slightly.

## Contradiction of formal justice and structural violence

The discriminatory attitude of the populations in Europe remains practically the same. Since Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004, the situation of civil and human rights has worsened, without the European institutions being able to intervene ineffectively.

The implementation of decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in favour of Sinti and Roma, such as in the case of reparation for damages suffered as a result of the pogroms in Romania or in the case of school segregation in Greece, Croatia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, remains extremely deficient.<sup>11</sup>

The joint declaration of a "Roma Decade of Inclusion" 2005–2015 signed in 2005 by the governments of the countries with the greatest social problems – Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia – has not gone beyond drawing up general plans to eliminate discrimination and promote inclusion.

The increased influx of Roma families from Kosovo, Bulgaria and Romania into Western Europe has led to unlawful reactions: in 2008, three Italian regions declared a state of emergency in order to be able to act against Roma "nomad camps" with the help of extraordinary powers to combat disasters. One of these camps was set on fire by a mob and its inhabitants were evicted without any legal consequences.<sup>12</sup> The Berlusconi government then wanted to register all Roma and Sinti – including children – in a database with biometric data, which led to a unanimous rejection by the European Parliament.

When France was confronted with the entry of more than eight thousand Roma from Romania and Bulgaria Roma in 2010, President Sarkozy not only expelled them, which massively violated the right to free movement within the EU, but he also wanted to deprive immigrant French people of their citizenship in the future under certain conditions, which is incompatible with European laws.

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11 István Haller: The Mendacious Government: Implementation of the Romanian Pogrom Judgments. In: *Roma Rights Quarterly*, 7(1) 2010: pp. 23–28.

12 Elisabetta Vivaldi: The Wind of Intolerance. *Pogrom, Journal for Threatened Peoples*, 254, 3/2009, pp. 36–39.

When more Roma families from Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia came to Germany in 2012, some city administrations reacted with alarmism. The German government then confronted Serbia, which is not a member of the EU, with the alternative of either withholding further Roma who were willing to leave the country or again facing a visa requirement to enter Germany. Since the government of Serbia hopes for EU membership, it is prepared to make concessions at the expense of the Roma. In general, according to a survey, more than eighty percent of Sinti and Roma living in Germany have suffered discrimination, and more than half feel “intimidated” and “badly treated or discriminated against” when dealing with authorities<sup>13</sup>.

These examples indicate that a persistent struggle is needed to defend and enforce formal justice throughout the EU. However, they still say nothing about structural violence, which means social structures such as norms, values, institutions and power relations that condition coercive social relations, rather than not direct physical violence.<sup>14</sup> Unlike Foucault, whose description of these very structures gives the struggle for justice, recognition and equality little chance of success, a critical-practical examination of the components of structural violence not only promotes awareness of the forms of everyday discrimination, but also promotes a change in everyday practice in favour of personal and social recognition and self-representation of minorities.

What path should the Sinti and Roma follow according to the European institutions? How open is this path actually, or to what extent are the parameters of assimilation into the majority society already fixed from the outset? If, despite the monitoring of the OSCE, national laws harm Sinti and Roma interests by increasingly restricting the right to roam, i.e. nomadic freedom of movement, as for example the land ownership laws in Great Britain and Ireland? Which norms and values, what linear development of the minority into the majority society shape the support programmes for Sinti and Roma in employment, education, health and housing, as well as in the desired cooperation with minority organisations? How ethnocentric do the teaching contents remain? And above all: to what extent are all these programmes characterised by a welfarism that starts from norms and values of assimilation and in attitude and choice of words from an attitude of superiority pushes the recipients of welfare into the passivity of the “disadvantaged” and “deprived” and “socially underprivileged”?<sup>15</sup>

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13 Daniel Strauss: *Ten Results of the Education Study and Recommendations*, RomnoKher 2011.

14 Johan Galtung: *Structural Violence. Contributions to Peace and Conflict Research*. Reinbek: Rowohlt 1982.

15 Jean-Pierre Liégeois: *Roma in Europe*, op. cit., p. 196.

## Empowerment

It is striking,

- that all funding programmes at best speak of “empowerment”, i.e. becoming active as an assisted minority;
- that the reports of the European authorities are increasingly devoted to addressing cultural differences, neglecting social and economic problems;
- that, as in research, there is no conceptual, theoretical clarity vis-à-vis the political place of this minority in the European institutions;
- Finally, it is noticeable that Roma organisations should be active partners in all measures, but support measures are treated almost exclusively from the point of view of technical feasibility within the existing institutional framework.<sup>16</sup>

In her analysis of the situation of the Jews in Germany in modern times, Hannah Arendt criticised the illusionary hope of the Jewish minority for assimilation as a political and legal gift from the majority society.<sup>17</sup> The reason for this illusion was the apolitical tradition of seeing themselves only as a cultural and religious minority. In Arendt’s view, the immigrants from the Eastern European *shtetl* were particularly apolitical. The situation of the Roma today is not very different. Even though the “International Roma Union” has existed since the 1970s, and the “European Roma Rights Centre” since 1993 as an association of European Roma NGOs, political awareness, commitment both to their own group and to the many other Sinti and Roma communities is still underdeveloped.

To represent oneself politically and not to be represented formally and with little determination by the majority society requires four things.

Firstly, to be, in Arendt’s words, rebellious pariahs, that is, to be self-confident, to actively speak out as a person and no longer be visible as an inaudible individual or at best a cliché. For example, by publicly professing to be Roma, as Romnia Cristiana Grigore did in the *New York Times* in 2010: “Pride in being Roma liberates the Gypsy in me. It expresses itself through the full range of emotions. It gives me courage and empowers me: I see no limits to developing my potential and performing at the highest level.”<sup>18</sup> Many Roma living in European majority societies hide

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16 Martin Kovats: The emergence of European Roma policy. In: Will Guy (ed.): *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press. 2001, p. 102f.

17 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins*, op. cit., part one: Antisemitism.

18 Cristiana Grigore: Bringing Out the Gypsy in Me, in: *New York Times*, 2 November 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/opinion/03iht-edgrigore.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/opinion/03iht-edgrigore.html?_r=0). (2022/10/3)

their identity. Hannah Arendt, in her essay “We Refugees”<sup>19</sup> and in her remarks on plurality and action, gave a political-philosophical explanation for the fact that self-awareness, a mutually recognising plurality, freedom and responsibility and active judgement are the conditions for a humane society. Developing this is not only the task of minorities, but of all citizens. This requires a change of perspective, to see the world from the point of view of others and to perceive with heart and mind the ever-present segregation of others, as it constantly happens in everyday language, at the workplace, in kindergartens, schools and restaurants.

Secondly, representing oneself politically requires critical interaction, not only criticism of the majority society, but also criticism of minority behaviour. “It is very difficult to be a friend of an oppressed people,” Arendt explained from the point of view that a non-Jew would take.

It is doubly difficult when one has never been one of the oppressed. It is very sad to learn that every slave has a tendency to dream of owning slaves, and that the oppressed masses... learn the language of freedom only slowly and with difficulty.... The friend of the oppressed will always need that great confidence in our fellow men which teaches us to laugh, the calm courage that makes untiring protest easy, and a casual detachment from those baneful, bloody alternatives that always seems so appropriate wherever there are oppressors and oppressed. ... Friends of the oppressed will always end up in conflicts with the oppressed themselves. Every great friend of the Jews has had trouble with the Jews – and it is in these very conflicts that the Jewish people have been able to tell their genuine friends from false patrons.<sup>20</sup>

This critical dialogue does not exist, the language of clichés still prevails. Even self-critical voices are hardly heard.

Thirdly, it is necessary to determine the location of the minority – not the social one of city peripheries, closed doors and police controls, but the political one at the European level: as a national minority, as citizens of their respective countries and as European citizens and nation without territory. What representative bodies the Sinti and Roma need in their respective states and in Europe, how much, conversely, European courts need the support of Roma NGOs, how they can use European institutions for their emancipation in their respective states, and how they themselves can fight for access to education and prosperity, all this depends on the fourth point.

Seyla Benhabib recommends this with regard to migrants in the form of a democratic iteration with “complex processes of public argument, deliberations, and exchange through which universalist rights, claims, and principles are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned, throughout legal and

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19 Hannah Arendt: We Refugees. In: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., pp. 264–274.

20 Hannah Arendt: Pro Paul Tillich, In: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p.168f.

political institutions, as well as in the associations of civil society<sup>21</sup>, in order to find the way to concretise what it means to be a European nation and national minority.

Whatever the conditions of this iteration and whatever path it will take, one thing is certain: there will only be an equal place for a partner if in the process all participants take their places again.

## New places

Taking the places anew, however, means more than friendliness. In view of the concrete problems of the Sinti and Roma in Europe, one should not forget that the differences between state and nation and society and politics mentioned at the beginning concern the core of all minority problems. With the emergence of the modern nation-states, European peoples transformed themselves into nations, endowed themselves with an identity and a fitting historiography, and thus at the same time tried to eliminate everything that was not fitting.<sup>22</sup> It was in this sense that the French Revolution created the unified and indivisible nation. The nation conquered the state, and scholars like Max Weber and Georg Jellinek posited the trinity of state territory, state people and state power as the hallmark of the European nation state. For Arendt, this results in a subordination of democracy to the nation, “a disastrous tendency of the nation-state to sacrifice actual political freedom for the sake of national interests, and to force people into a unanimous, uniform public opinion in dictatorships of the most divergent kind and provenance.”<sup>23</sup> Democracy as “the right for all people to participate in public affairs and to appear in the public realm and make their themselves heard”<sup>24</sup>, can only be realised in a limited way. “Real democracy – and this is perhaps the decisive point in this context – where the centralization of power of the nation-state has been broken, and replaced with the diffusion of power into the many power centres of a federal system.”<sup>25</sup> This applies not only to the federal division of power within a state structure, but also to the relations between states. The European federation is a response to two centuries of partly devastating actions by nation states, because nation cannot be thought of without sovereignty, without arbitrariness and without nationalism and wars. What Arendt proposes refers to another tradition in Europe, that of federal thinking, which is

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21 Seyla Benhabib: *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Residents and, Citizens*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press 2004, p. 179.

22 Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso 1983.

23 Hannah Arendt: Nation-state and Democracy, in: *Thinking Without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 260.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 261.

about more than administrative or cultural-political problems, including more than the elimination of structural causes for wars. This tradition includes Switzerland, the Founding Fathers of the USA, thinkers such as Althusius and Montesquieu, Albert Camus and the co-founders of a federal Europe, who pleaded for a Europe of regions, and precisely Hannah Arendt, for whom the chance of a federation lies in overcoming the division into majorities and minorities.<sup>26</sup>

A broad field opens up here that seems to go beyond the problems of the Sinti and Roma. Conversely, however, it seems to me that the status of this minority will only be satisfactory if it is thought of from a European perspective. We would do well to think of Europe's freedom in terms of its unsolved problems in order to be able to permanently reduce the constant temptations of nationalism, racism and violence.

Written in 2007. First published: Rechte ohne Raum. Der Fall der transnationalen Minderheit der Sinti und Roma in Europa, In Wolfram Stender (ed.) *Konstellationen des Antiziganismus. Theoretische Grundlagen, empirische Forschung und Vorschläge für die Praxis*, Wiesbaden Springer 2016, pp. 267–279.

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26 Cf. chapter 13 in this volume: Federalism – A Hidden Treasure.



## 16. Europe and its Refugees: Arendt on the Politicization of Minorities

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In January 1940, a few months before her internment in France, Hannah Arendt wrote in a very distinct and programmatic letter to her friend Erich Cohn-Bendit: “All politics dealing with minorities, and not just with the Jews, have foundered on the existent and abiding fact of state sovereignty.” Because

... as early as the Russian mass emigrations – at the latest by 1923–24, ... we can observe the emergence of a new class of people in Europe, the *stateless*. If one regards the European history as the development of the European nation-state, or as the development of European peoples into nation-states, then these people, the stateless, are the most important product of recent history. Since 1920, almost all European states have sheltered great masses of people who have no right of residence or consular protection of any sort – modern pariahs. ...

The inability to absorb these masses of people clearly demonstrates that the fact of assimilation has lost its crucial significance. There is no longer any such thing as assimilation in Europe – nation-states have grown too developed and too old. There is no longer any assimilation for Jews either. The chance of assimilation during the nineteenth century ... was based in a reorganization of peoples that arose out of the French Revolution, and in their development as nations. This process has now come to an end. No one else can be included. In fact, we now have the process in reverse: the addition of great masses of people and their degradation to pariahs.

Although they are Europeans, these pariahs are isolated from all specifically national interest. They are the first to have an interest in pan-European politics ...<sup>1</sup>

Under these conditions, Arendt wrote, minority rights are completely inadequate, and can only mean cultural autonomy. “Culture without politics – that is, without history and a national context – becomes vapid folkloristics and *Volk*-barbarism.”<sup>2</sup>

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1 Hannah Arendt: The Minority Question, in: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, p. 127f.

2 Ibid., p. 128f.



Hannah Arendt's letter culminates in a plea for a new European federal system: "I do not think it is utopian to hope for the possibility of a commonwealth of European nations with a parliament of its own",<sup>3</sup> where the Jewish people would also be recognized and represented as a European nation.

This letter could be described as Arendt's political manifesto and is reflected in the rest of her work. In Part Two of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she presents a more detailed analysis of what she calls the decline of the nation state and the end of the rights of man, and the emergence of the nation of minorities and the stateless people. Her letter already contains the idea of a federation as an alternative to the sovereign nation state, an idea she was encouraged in by her encounter with the United States, which was to become her second country of exile. The letter also includes a move towards political action. Minorities and the stateless, those deprived of their rights, the insecure and the faceless, all victims stepping out of the darkness of lawlessness and facelessness into the light of politics: as pariahs they become actors. During the 1930s, Hannah Arendt finished her book on Rahel Varnhagen's failed attempts at assimilation, describing the latter's conscious rejection of assimilation and her decision to live the life of a pariah. In 1943, she also published a moving article in the *Menorah Journal* entitled "We Refugees", in which she pleaded that refugees demonstrate political self-confidence as pariahs. A year later "The Hidden Tradition" appeared, promoting the pariah rebellion as the sole chance of survival.

These texts undoubtedly refer to the specific situation after the First World War, which saw the emergence of vast numbers of stateless people and refugees following the dissolution of the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman Empires. It was at this time that totalitarian movements, particularly Germany's, began to look for a 'final solution' to their insecure existence. Although the situation in Europe is now different – after all we have the federal Europe so favoured by Arendt and, like her, are aware of the importance of the right to have rights – the threat to free societies arising from unsolved problems and their aggravation still prevails today. I will first address these dangers and then discuss the significance of Arendt's shift in perspective from victim to acting pariah. Arendt discusses both topics politically, making it politicization of minorities in a twofold sense.

## I.

The dangers emanating from unsolved political problems affected first and foremost the stateless and the refugees themselves. Following her analysis in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt was able to analyse a fatal process in retrospect, which she summarized in a seminar on statelessness in Berkeley in 1955 as follows:

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3 Ibid., p. 130.

When the number of refugees and stateless people swelled, the European politicians first tried to do justice to their ambiguous status by issuing refugee passports, the so-called Nansen passports, supervised by the League of Nations. When it turned out that the refugees were not temporary but permanent, this passport lost its validity. The politicians now chose to ignore the problem by cancelling the distinction between refugees and stateless people and discontinuing refugee aid of any kind. As a consequence the now exclusively stateless people were declared “undesirable”.<sup>4</sup>

Defining the stateless as ‘refugees’ was invested with the hope that the right to asylum would come into effect, and that charity organizations would look after the refugees. According to Arendt, however, the right to asylum lost its validity for two reasons: first of all there were too many refugees and secondly, they could not be recognized as refugees because they were not persecuted. The charitable solution did not work either because it had no judicial significance, “Charity is no right, charity should only come after justice is done. ... To throw them into the lap of charity organizations meant practically: They are completely rightless: No right to live in the sense (of) no business to be on the earth.” Arendt emphasized that there was no ill will involved. The politicians looked for solutions within the framework of national sovereignty: naturalization, repatriation or expulsion. However, even within this framework they were unable to act, since mass naturalization would obviously have put excessive demands on the institutions – Arendt quotes the example of 45,000 Armenians in Greece in 1936 – and repatriation was impossible because the countries of origin usually refused to take back the refugees. Finally, expulsion was also out of the question because the stateless could not simply be deported. Internment camps were erected as a result, or worse, concentration camps.

What characterizes stateless people? They differ from criminals in terms of national law and from enemies in war time in terms of international law. What happens to criminals results from a deliberate act and is not at all outside the law. On the contrary, they can rely on the law. All police action towards them is bound by law and even their punishment is a right that is in accordance with the law. As Arendt states, imprisonment and food are not given out of charity but is a right. With stateless people it is the other way round. They are outside the law. Not their activities but their mere existence provokes state action.

The main problem for the countries that host stateless people consists in “the spread of lawlessness”, that is, in unlawful action towards those living under lawless conditions. The fact that the police and not the law is responsible for them alters the

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4 Hannah Arendt: Statelessness, Berkeley 1955, unpublished, in: *The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress*, Washington DC., <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1105601307/2023.7.3>

character of the police. By overstepping the limits of an executor of laws and becoming legislator and executor at the same time, the police “rules over people, acquires subjects, becomes a state within the state, a kind of Kingdom”. By finally erecting concentration camps the police even acquires a form of territory.

At this point at the latest the issue of human rights becomes critical, that is, when nationality and civil rights no longer protect people against state and police whims. But there was no international institution to limit national sovereignty. Lawlessness, arbitrariness and finally extermination were at the end of a creeping decline that began with political helplessness in a system of nation-state sovereignty. Arendt drew the conclusion from this experience that a reversed human right was required: everyone should be protected from birth by inalienable rights, “an internationally guaranteed right to citizenship”. Without this, “more and more people will no longer be human with regard to their legal status, will no longer have a place within humanity”.

Therefore the system of nation states turned out to be incapable of solving the fate of minorities, refugees, and stateless people in a humane manner. The European dimension of streams of refugees required a European answer. Arendt gave an answer: a European political answer in the shape of a federation, which would make it possible to offer other nations without a fixed territory a place in the community of nations. National Socialism had a different answer, namely the folkish Europeanizing of nations and subordination to the Third Reich. Arendt pleaded for the dissolution of the unity of nation, territory and state, on which the modern nation states were based, in favour of a state in the sense of a political space with political citizenship. According to Arendt there was always an inherent danger in the nation state of the nation overtaking the state – as *volonté générale*, as democratic populism or as a folkish, today ethnic movement.

## II.

Before coming to the changed situation today – the globalizing of refugees and the question of a European response – I would like to examine the second aspect mentioned above, i.e. the politicization of the refugees, not only of their status but of their thoughts and actions. Ten years after her escape from Germany and two years after she fled from France, Arendt described the behaviour of the refugees around her in an extremely bitter and ironic tone in her essay “We Refugees”. Ironic because Arendt describes almost as a caricature the eager efforts of the refugees to assimilate, to become indistinguishable, to forget the past and solve everything individually. Her irony lets them speak for themselves: “We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice, and we denied that our situation had

anything to do with 'so-called Jewish problems'.<sup>5</sup> At the same time the tone is bitter because Arendt herself belongs to the We, to these refugees, which is why she criticizes their attitude so vehemently. She knew that together with their flight into exile they had lost their identity and that no disguise could help, but only a political reaction.

Her politics came to be about transcending particular identities, a politics prompted by her experiences of exile in New York. ... This war more than anything the emotional center of Hannah Arendt's politics: the exile obliged to transcend dreams of home, *Gemeinschaft*, or religious destiny. The problem of politics was how people who could count on nothing, who could not *inherit*, might therefore invent the conditions of their own and their common lives. No identity can be recovered; therefore, turn outward.<sup>6</sup>

These refugees, Arendt writes, have lost their language and thus the naturalness of their reactions, the simplicity of their gestures, the unaffected expression of their feelings. They left their relatives in Polish ghettos and their best friends were killed in concentration camps – which was nothing more than a rupture in the continuity of their private lives. They followed the instruction to forget everything more rapidly than could ever have been imagined. In order to forget more efficiently they avoid any allusion to concentration camps or internment. “But sometimes I imagine that at least nightly we think of our dead or we remember the poems we once loved (...) In daylight, of course, we become only ‘technically’ enemy aliens”<sup>7</sup>. Neither do they talk to other refugees about their experiences or their suffering. And when the present can no longer overshadow the past or optimism the suffering, they commit suicide without even leaving a note.

And as if this were not enough they feel humiliated if they are saved and degraded when they are helped. They “fight like madmen for private existences with individual destinies”. And to give their new insecure existence some form of stability they refer to the marvellous existence they once had and lost.

The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles. ... During seven years we played the ridiculous game of trying to be Frenchmen – at least, prospective citizens; but at the beginning of the war we were interned as *boches* all the same. In the

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5 Hannah Arendt: We Refugees, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., p. 264,

6 Richard Sennett: *The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities*, New York-London 1990, p. 133f.

7 Hannah Arendt: We Refugees, op. cit., p. 266.

meantime, however, most of us had indeed become such loyal Frenchmen that we could not even criticize a French governmental order ...<sup>8</sup>

There is general confusion, as Arendt calls it, about these Ulysses-like wanderers who have no idea who they are because they have developed the perfect obsession of disclaiming any kind of identity. But what are they to do? Should they recall their Jewishness and proclaim it in public? That would mean exposing themselves

... to the fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings. I can hardly imagine an attitude more dangerous, since we actually live in a world in which human beings as such have ceased to exist for quite a while; since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed; since passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income tax receipts, are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction.<sup>9</sup>

Fleeing the danger of this bare life into the costume of another culture, into a mere facade and facelessness, leads to mental suffering that can end in suicide. There is, however, an alternative: the pariah who does not hide and who does not expose himself helplessly to merely being human, but who is “conscious” and acts consciously. He belongs in Arendt’s words to the “hidden tradition” behind the visible tradition of the parvenus, along with Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Bernard Lazare, and Franz Kafka. Not that they are more protected by their consciousness. On the contrary. “... it is equally true that the very few among us who have tried to get along without all these tricks and jokes of adjustment and assimilation have paid a much higher price than they could afford: they jeopardized the few chances even outlaws are given in a topsy-turvy world.”<sup>10</sup>

But this consciousness, which requires so much courage as soon as it becomes practical, is the precondition for refugees to become actors instead of passive victims. It is not primarily about political goals and programmes but about an attitude and strength that expresses itself in human qualities. “Conscious pariahs” distinguish themselves by “the ‘Jewish heart’, humanity, humor and disinterested intelligence”, while upstarts and parvenus are characterized by “tactlessness, political stupidity, inferiority complexes and money-grubbing”<sup>11</sup>.

Arendt’s high esteem for these pariahs is evident in the unusual obituary she wrote in 1954 for her friend Waldemar Gurian. A Russian Jew originally from St. Petersburg, Gurian was a Catholic convert and highly respected as a leading academic

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8 Ibid., p. 270.

9 Ibid., p. 273.

10 Ibid., p. 273f.

11 Ibid., p. 274.

figure in political Catholicism and on totalitarianism. He was an important representative of Jewish emigration in the USA, worked as a political scientist and author, and became dean of the university of Notre Dame. Arendt's obituary was published in *The Review of Politics*, which Waldemar Gurian had previously edited. It testifies to her interest in the *who* of the man rather than the *what* of his scientific qualities.

The same portrait is read here and in chapter 6 from different perspectives: once as the description of a man of integrity, outward-looking, who can be imagined as a public-spirited citizen on whose presence the prosperity of a republican society depends, and here as a pariah and member of an ethnic minority who turns down the supposedly attractive career as a parvenu and decides to fight for equality.

On the one hand, we read Gurian as the Who, the One who reveals himself in action, which is possible for all people and means freedom and worldliness. The other time we read Gurian as acting in an oppressed and threatened minority, in which rebellious action brings freedom and worldliness to the minority.

In both, we find a high degree of integrity and humanity. This double role means that the rebellious pariah brings humanity to the majority society, or at least offers it. Arendt's plea for a federal Europe is the institutional side of humanity, in which the distinction between majority and minority becomes superfluous. The two figures of the pariah melt into one of the conscious citizen.

Arendt admired Gurian's ability for friendship, declaring that he had come as a stranger but: "He had achieved what we all must: he had his home in this world and he had made himself at home on the earth through friendship".<sup>12</sup>

She praised his "faithfulness to his friends, to everybody he had ever known, to everything he had ever liked, became so much the dominant note on which his life was tuned that one is tempted to say that the crime most alien to him was the crime of oblivion, perhaps one of the cardinal crimes in human relationships".<sup>13</sup>

She commended his humanity that consisted of more than pure friendliness and kindness.

(W)e are inclined to identify ourselves with what we make and do, and frequently forget that it remains the greatest prerogative of every man to be essentially and forever more than anything he can produce or achieve, not only to remain, after each work and achievement, the not yet exhausted, sheer inexhaustible source of further achievements, but to be in his very essence beyond all of them, untouchable and unlimited by them.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Hannah Arendt: Waldemar Gurian, in: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World 1968, p. 262.

13 Ibid., p. 254.

14 Ibid., p. 257.

He is one of the rare people Arendt knew who “remained completely free of middle-class concepts of achievement” and had “thus a picture of mankind”.<sup>15</sup>

And finally, Arendt paid tribute to his ability to judge independently, and an unerring sense for quality and relevance, which may sound like nothing

And yet, in the not frequent cases where men have possessed it and have chosen not to exchange it for more easily recognizable and acceptable values, it infallibly has led them far – far beyond conventions and established standards of society – and carried them directly into the dangers of a life that is no longer protected by the walls of objects and the supports of objective evaluations.<sup>16</sup>

Hence Gurian was at the same time both a non-conformist and a realist. “His whole spiritual existence was built on the decision never to conform and never to escape, which is only another way of saying that it was built on courage.”<sup>17</sup>

He was delighted when he could break down these barriers of so-called civilized society, because he saw in them barriers between human souls. At the source of this delight were innocence and courage, innocence all the more captivating as it occurred in a man who was so extremely well versed in the ways of the world, and who therefore needed all the courage he could muster to keep his original innocence alive and intact. He was a very courageous man.<sup>18</sup>

They are not the only ones who are politically active, of course; but Arendt rejects the nationalism of the various Zionist organizations. She admired the “conscious pariahs”, not because they were morally more sound but because they represented what Arendt would later call worldliness and interest in a common world, and because they focused on the creation of power and the opening of a political space and not the use of tacit violence and the definition of politics as a means of fabrication. Therefore, Arendt can argue that “refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples – if they keep their identity.”<sup>19</sup>

### III.

Let us take another look at the participant scenarios presented by Arendt and consider the significance of her descriptions and analyses for today. First of all, there

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15 Hannah Arendt / Kurt Blumenfeld “... *in keinem Besitz verwurzelt*”. Briefwechsel, Hamburg: Rotbuch 1995, p. 52.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 257f.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 261/262.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 258/259.

19 Hannah Arendt: *We Refugees*, op. cit., p. 274.

are the politicians of more or less democratic states, who, caught up in the categories of the nation state, were unable to help the refugees and thus contributed to the erosion of these states. This issue is not merely a problem for the refugees themselves but also for those who deal with it. Today Arendt's European federation is reality, but now the refugees come from countries outside Europe. It is now no longer an inner-European but a global phenomenon. As a result of this confrontation between inside and outside, between inclusion and exclusion, the European federation is transformed into a nation state. The number of migrants is growing steadily; turning them away from Europe has already been declared a priority and a permanent task of European *realpolitik*. Similar to Arendt's time, today the European Union and the UN are eager to reduce the number of approved refugees because they do not consider themselves responsible. Almost as in battle, migrants are beaten back at the trenches of the European stronghold. Europe is planning internment camps in North Africa, not unlike how Australia interns migrants on islands off the coast. Regardless of whether camps are being constructed within or outside of Europe or whether the police is on the verge of becoming a state within the state, the world-making idea of a federation is clearly drowning in world-excluding, nation-state, administrative thinking. Politics as administration represents both a pre- and post-totalitarian threat to freedom. Saskia Sassen describes these dangers similarly to Arendt:

These developments raise two issues. One concerns the old trade-off between policies that criminalize what may not intrinsically be a criminal act in the name of controlling a somewhat untenable situation; this in turn raises the incentives for genuinely criminal actors to promote the forbidden activity. A familiar instance of this trade-off concerns the marijuana control policy.

Likewise, "the fact that these people lack the proper documents for entry is easily represented in policy and media circles as exempting us from any responsibility as societies for these deaths".<sup>20</sup>

Arendt describes refugees who not only fled from persecutors and adverse conditions, but also from themselves. The same is happening today to African migrants, who are sometimes on the move for years from south West Africa to the Spanish border, from one country to the next, caught and sent back time and again, betrayed, blackmailed and robbed by facilitators and policemen. These are the redundants of chaotic societies such as that of Nigeria or the failed states of Liberia or Ivory Coast. They begin their odyssey as bare human beings in the hope of surviving it. Their destination, Europe, is the utopia that will rid them of an unneeded and unseen existence.

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20 Saskia Sassen: Is this the way to go? Handling immigration in a global era, in: *Stanford Agora: An Online Journal of Legal Perspectives*, Vol. 4, 2003, p.1f.



Finally, there is Arendt's avant-garde, which consists of individual pariahs who are not organized. The German journalist Klaus Brinkbäumer, who accompanied refugees on their journey through Africa, writes that the refugees are "electrical engineers, doctors, and teachers, educated, witty, unemployed and poor, that's why they try their luck. Those who leave are rarely old – it is the young, the strong, the creative, the courageous who leave."<sup>21</sup> Arendt did not explain the notion of avant-garde in greater detail. Authors like Brinkbäumer generally emphasize that refugees constitute the more flexible and more educated parts of the population. Arendt, on the other hand, speaks of refugees who "keep their identity". Undoubtedly, the notion of avant-garde is drawn from the vocabulary of her husband, Heinrich Blücher. Both substituted the ideological avant-garde with the avant-garde of the independent pariahs, those who think for themselves. The humanity Arendt describes in Waldemar Gurian is not pure enthusiasm but existential in the sense of worldliness, of being related to this world. For Arendt this sense of avant-garde is indispensable to refugees if they are to take their affairs into their own hands. In other words, she indicates that what is required is not refugee policies but political action by the refugees, and that politics should be a matter for the citizens themselves.

Two political concepts are in direct confrontation here. On the one hand, the assumed *realpolitik* of administrative refugee management that is crippling Europe with its anti-policy and its thinking in categories of camps, borders and governmentality. This concept (developed by Foucault) recognizes politics merely as a planning process and migrants as anonymous figures. It involves the mistake of defining politics as a planning unit, with logical arguments and bureaucratic enforcement, where policies is implemented by the few and suffered by the many. Here, we are confronted with what Arendt considers to be a fundamental obstacle to our understanding of politics since the Antiquity, i.e. the problem of domination, of politics as the domination of the few over the many, even in democracy.

On the other hand, there is Arendt's concept of the politics of subjects who make the opening of political space possible by their action. It is these subjects rather than professional politicians who are inclined to bring about new action. When Arendt speaks of the miracle and spontaneity of action, she does not do so from the romantic perspective of councils and Greek polis but from her experience of the potential in those who act or are able to act. It implies the view that the rationality of political planning is always limited, that spontaneous action not only occurs again and again but that politics is merely part of this action, of surprises and events. This sheds new light on the significance of the demonstrations by illegal immigrants in the USA in 2006, and on NGOs and migration organizations.

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21 Klaus Brinkbäumer *Der Traum vom Leben. Eine afrikanische Odyssee*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 2006, p. 171.

So, Arendt's perspective looks at both sides, at Europe and at migrants. Politicization consists in the search for a common judicial frame and for those who can act together in our world as conscious pariahs and as citizens. It is the perspective of the "in-between" that constitutes the common world. And if this common world does not exist, then Arendt's perspective is one of resistance and change, of a new or re-founding of the common world.

The "in-between" forms a bridge, a political concept of cosmopolitanism, as Ian Buruma wrote.<sup>22</sup> Instead of the weak concept of tolerance and the liberal concept of negative freedom we should look for those who, like Arendt, belong to this sort of avant-garde that bridges the abyss between nations.

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22 Ian Buruma Gezelligheid genügt nicht. Wie der Multikulturalismus zu retten ist, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, No. 259, /November 2006, p. 35.



# **From Plurality to Cosmos**



## 17. Elements of Cosmopolitanism – and its Handicaps

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Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we have long since found ourselves in a new world of strife with the decline of the United States, the expansionism of China, the new imperialist policy of Russia, the European Union's search for orientation, hybrid, digital, state forms of aggression, anti-democratic populism and, last but not least and already recognised as a fundamental problem for more than 30 years, climate change. This makes it clear that democracy and the republic are by no means invulnerable, that peace does not take care of itself, and that the rapidly increasing globalisation of the movement of goods, information and labour by no means necessarily entails cosmopolitanism. This is rather promoted by Putin's ethno-imperial war against Ukraine, whose steadfast population and multicultural history brings to mind the fact that cosmopolitanism is a cultural and political practice that does not have to encompass the whole world, but already exists in the local or regional.

It is the republican component of our liberal democracies, the practice of civil society, the institutions of power formation, separation of powers and rule of law that enable a cosmopolitan perspective. Strengthening them is the answer to the multiple threats. In the following, I would like to present a path of thought that takes up core elements of Hannah Arendt's republican thought and places them in a cosmopolitan context. These are the quasi-anthropological, strongly valorised understanding of *plurality*, which at the same time underlies all other elements; the plurality of *judgement*, which implies a cosmopolitan dimension; plural, spontaneous action with the appropriate institutional form of *councils* and a correspondingly plural power-forming institutionalisation in the form of the separation of powers and *federalism*; and finally our *relationship to nature*. Such a fundamental understanding of plurality can no longer be limited to the political sphere, but proves to be the common principle in nature and *polis*. This means that plurality characterises both the anthropological and the natural realm.

Nature and *polis* are furthermore components of the one cosmos, so that plurality shapes not only the common existence of humans and nature, but also the mutual relations between them. It follows that the positive preservation and development of nature on the part of humans under the concept of sustainability not only concerns the relationship of humans to nature, but also the self-relationship within the

human polis. The preservation and development of plurality in nature and polis ultimately strengthen common well-being and stability.

Arendt's writings offer numerous references to the human relationship to nature<sup>1</sup> and suggest a far-reaching change of perspective with regard to the concept of plurality and the other phenomena already mentioned, as well as with regard to the traditional human-nature duality, towards a view of the community of cosmos and republic.<sup>2</sup> Thus, judgement, action and the corresponding institutional forms of enabling and preserving them can be thought not only in spatially limited forms, but at the same time also cosmopolitan ones.

The Arendtian perspective and its concepts not only offer analyses of the crisis and traditions of the 20th century on the one hand and a redefinition of the positive conditions of human existence and politics on the other, but also clarify the proximity between world and 'worldlessness', plurality and conformism, judging and concluding, to perform action and producing, etc. Although Arendt described the hell of the Nazi death camps and the miracle of action as two opposing extremes, she resisted the temptation to idealise in positive opposition and to mitigate these risky proximities through a closed system of thought, as it were, by offering a reassuring intellectual security. It would only lead to an essentialist view and limit, if not abolish, plurality. It was therefore in Arendt's interest to explore the everyday conditions of the erosion of civilisation and the transition to barbarism, the elements and origins of total domination that led to these borderlands, and also exist after total domination, let us think of modern labour society and the liberal concepts of freedom, power and domination. Some dangers will be named in the following in order to keep the difficulties of a change of perspective in mind.

## Plurality and the Retreat into Oneself

Arendt's concept of plurality includes several essential aspects that distinguish a civic, active plurality from a more passive liberal one: first, the simultaneous existence of *sameness and diversity*, then the importance of the *person* and its characterisation by means of the distinction between the *who* and the *what* of a person, and finally two other aspects: the location of the person not in subjectivity but *intersubjectivity* in the midst of plural relations, and the importance of *responsibility*.

The first aspect, the existence of *equality and diversity in plurality*, concerns the fundamental starting point for determining thought, action and judgement. Equality

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1 See *HannahArendt.net*, 11/1, 2021, "Nature and Politics". <https://www.hannaharendt.net/cindex.php/han/issue/view/19> (2022/10/3).

2 See chapter 20 in this volume: The Encounter of *republic* and *cosmos*: Arendt and Humboldt.

and diversity in plurality means that communication is possible, but at the same time necessary. In Arendt's words:

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough. the needs and necessities which are the same for all and which always remain identical.<sup>3</sup>

Maintaining the characteristics of equality and diversity and their relationship to each other is a tightrope walk; if they are alienated from each other, equality is lost, understanding is no longer possible and the world appears as a labyrinth; if they are brought into line, diversity is suppressed and the world turns into a desert. It is one of the fundamental temptations in politics to interchange equality and diversity in order to establish domination: to grant political equality to only a few 'different' people, the elite or oligarchy, and to level out social diversity through conformism and oppression.

If we go back to the elements and origins of total domination, we encounter even more profound questionings of plurality that were not intellectual conceits but corresponded to people's experiences. Let's take the removal from the world and alienation from the world of modern times mentioned by Arendt, to which Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* reacted as a retreat to the individual self<sup>4</sup> and, thanks to changed forms of work and social structures, developed ever further into a self-centred individualism up to the present day.

In this context, Arendt understands the alienation from the world not only as a scientific process, but as an overall cultural process in which the natural sciences influenced the prevailing views in religion, philosophy, historiography and political theory. Thus, she notes "the almost too precise congruity of modern man's world alienation with the subjectivism of modern philosophy"<sup>5</sup> – from the doubts of Descartes through Hobbes and English sensualism, empiricism and pragmatism to the existentialism and positivism of the 20th century – accompanied by a retreat of people to their selves. So, it was not mere ideas about world alienation that moved the philosophers, but tangible events, inventions and discoveries to which they reacted in their thinking with doubts, axiomatic conclusions and a "catastrophic loss of judgement"<sup>6</sup>.

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3 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday 1958, p. 155f.

4 *Ibid.*, ch. 38.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

6 Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, in *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft*, Munich-Zurich Piper 2000, p. 68.



Or let's take the colonisation of Africa, the "phantom world of the black continent"<sup>7</sup>, as the experiential space of those settlers who, as exiles from Europe, found the African population so alien that they contributed two elements to the later totalitarian way of thinking: mob and race. As always, the literature provides vivid details of this experiential space. In the case of Africa, Joseph Conrad describes Mr. Kurtz (presumably the German Carl Peters) as "hollow to the core" "reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity and cruel without courage."<sup>8</sup> The settlers, according to Arendt, did not live in any political space, but nomadically like the natives, whom they identify only as a race: "One did not murder a human being when one slew a native, but a shadow in whose living reality one could not believe anyway, and one did not act into a world, but into a mere play of shadows".<sup>9</sup>

Or, finally, let us look at the loss of orientation of the people in the Weimar Republic, who, according to Arendt, were looking for a banister in the face of the dissolution of class society and gratefully trusted in logical coherence and unity with those leaders who, even more important than ideology, gave the impression that they knew how to intervene in world events. In the full development of total domination over the outside and inside of people, any residue of plurality is lost.<sup>10</sup> Eichmann was an exemplary representative of the complete loss of plurality and thus of the world, a functionary of this movement, careerist, conformist in following orders, free of empathy and imagination, and even more, free of thinking and therefore speaking only in clichés. He was one of the many representatives of a simple way of crossing borders, practitioners of what Arendt called the banality of evil.

The forms of negation of plurality through conformism, slavery, exploitation or simply through a utilitarian taking of people as a means to an end, through elitism and ideology or through the delusion of wanting to create the new human being are almost endless.

The second aspect of plurality concerns Arendt's *characterisation of the person* by means of the distinction between the *who* and the *what* of a person. The *who* of this person is always revealed when "the unique shape of his or her body and the no less unique sound of the voice appear"<sup>11</sup>. The *what* of the person differs from this with its "qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings"<sup>12</sup>, which are largely subject to our control, in contrast to the appearance of the *who*, which is difficult to control.

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7 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland: Meridian 1958, p. 186.

8 Ibid., p. 189.

9 In Hannah Arendt *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*, Munich Piper 1986, p. 315. (My translation WH)

10 See chapter 4 in this volume: "Ice cold". The Way to Totalitarianism.

11 In the German edition, Hannah Arendt: *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, Munich: Piper 1981, p. 169.

12 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, *ibid.*, p. 159

Despite the activities that Arendt does not usually personalise, such as action or power, she mentions the special role of people on three occasions: Waldemar Gurian, whose unique humanity she praises in the obituary of her friend in a political science journal – more than his scholarly merits,<sup>13</sup> the readers of Boris Pasternak’s banned writings in Moscow at the end of the Stalin era, who, after years of the poet’s silence, recited his poems by heart at a first public reading, when the reciting poet’s manuscript fell to the floor,<sup>14</sup> and finally the soldier Anton Schmidt, whose rescue of persecuted Jews, when told at the Eichmann trial, seemed theatrical, “those two minutes ... were like a sudden burst of light in the midst of impenetrable, unfathomable darkness ...”<sup>15</sup>. They all appear not as their what, as a scientist, audience or soldier, but as their who, as the embodiment of humanity.

The third aspect of Arendt’s plurality concerns an equally indispensable characteristic, *intersubjectivity*. If the interplay of sameness and diversity is preserved, two forms of reference emerge, which Arendt describes *spatially* as the in-between of political phenomena and *structurally* as the reticularity of the actors’ references. The fact that political concepts such as freedom, civil disobedience, authority and power only arise *between* people and can therefore be understood intersubjectively frees the concept of power, for example, from its traditional identification with domination, thus strengthening the possibility of the existence of a strong citizenry and at the same time its sensitivity to forms of restriction of plurality.

The fourth aspect of plurality concerns the meaning of *responsibility*. Arendt described responsibility as the indispensable flip side of freedom. To the extent that the recognition of plurality enables freedom of action, this freedom must respect and protect the plurality that presupposes it.<sup>16</sup> When we speak of the common good in this context, we do not primarily mean social well-being, but political, intersubjective plurality, freedom and justice and the exercise of political and social responsibility.

The aspects listed here are essential components of a republican concept of plurality, which with all its implications is not only a challenge for politicians and parties, but for the whole political community. This includes not only the civically engaged, but also the economically active entrepreneurs who take responsibility for their actions towards employees, consumers and the environment, practising corporate social responsibility.<sup>17</sup> Responsibility is thus an integral part of freedom: it is

13 Hannah Arendt: Waldemar Gurian. In: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1968, pp. 310–323.

14 Hannah Arendt Die Ungarische Revolution und der totalitäre Imperialismus, in *In der Gegenwart*, Munich Piper 2000, p. 97f.

15 Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, New York: The Viking Press 1965, p. 231.

16 Hannah Arendt: *Collective Responsibility*, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, pp. 147f.

17 See chapter 9 in this volume: Sustainability – The Power of the “Unreasonable”.

speaking and acting in the sense of responding, for Arendt the positively meant flip side of freedom, the responsibility for the consequences of free action and speaking.

## Plurality of Judgement and the Search for Banisters

It is not surprising that the importance of plurality shapes not only Arendt's concept of action, but also that of judgement. Arendt's recourse to Kant's thesis of the "enlarged mentality", which consists of judging in the place of every other, implies an intersubjective perspective that is as circumspect as possible and at the same time not objective or normative. Hence Arendt's statement: "The validity of such judgements would be neither objective and universal, nor subjective, dependent on personal whim, but intersubjective or representative."<sup>18</sup>

This form of intersubjective judgement is now used to assess events not only in our immediate but also in the wider environment, right up to the challenges in our global world. Thus, as early as 1957, in her essay "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World", Arendt declared that there is no meaningful alternative to the fact that, in view of the globalisation of the world, we must also take note of the diversity of perspectives in this world. "It is only natural", she explained, "that the common reactions to it are political apathy, isolationist nationalism, or desperate rebellion against all powers that be rather than enthusiasm or a desire for a revival of humanism."<sup>19</sup> The reaction to a kind of forced global unification may be "a tremendous increase in mutual and a somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else"<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, according to Arendt, to create positive solidarity "a process of mutual understanding and progressing self-clarification on a gigantic scale must take place."<sup>21</sup> This implies: that "the solidarity of mankind can be meaningful in a positive sense only if it is coupled with political responsibility."<sup>22</sup> How topical this essay still is after more than 60 years! And what a memorable statement Arendt makes here: to set in motion a "process of mutual understanding and progressing self-clarification". This sentence pleads for an unusual self-critical attitude, for listening as a necessary part of communication, for making one's own views and ways of acting understandable as the basis of dialogue. According to Arendt, all thoughts and content must answer to Jaspers' question: "Are they such that they may help or such that they will prevent communication? Do they seduce to solitude or arouse to communication?"<sup>23</sup>

18 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, op. cit., p. 141.

19 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 83.

20 Ibid., p. 84.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 86.

The challenges of globalisation and the crises can only be meaningfully met by renouncing not only violent action, but also abstract thinking<sup>24</sup>, the refusal of communication, unquestionable dogmas and supposedly objective truths.

Only communication as mutual understanding and progressive self-explanation can be an indispensable humane basis of globalisation. With this perception of different perspectives, we leave our subjectivist position and adopt a new perspective in the Arendtian in-between. Thus, it is not only globalisation that challenges us to adopt a world perspective, a cosmopolitanism, from which we cannot avoid asking whether an institute of philosophy should continue to be interested only in European philosophy. Rather, any judgement that follows Kant and Arendt is cosmopolitan insofar as it includes all those present, real or imagined, regardless of how large the respective cosmos is.

The possibilities of impairing such judgement are admittedly great. Dwelling on prejudices, replacing reflective judgement with subsuming judgement or logical consequence, the limited cosmos of judgement for reasons of opportunity, the appeal of lying<sup>25</sup>, non-thinking. Just as Arendt names courage as the virtue corresponding to action, it also seems to be courage in judging that gives the power to think for oneself, to open up the corresponding cosmos of diverse views and to confront surprising insights.

## Action / Councils – and the Problem of Persistence

Arendt's defines action that begins again and again under the impression of depoliticisation in the course of the modern era and totalitarian anti-politics in the 20th century as a miracle, as a "despite everything". In *The Human Condition*, she characterises non-action and action in pathetic, existential-philosophical words: the non-action that follows the natural law of rushing towards death from birth, i.e. handing over the everyday to an automatic process, which would "inevitably would carry everything human to ruin and destruction,"<sup>26</sup>. Arendt contrasts this biblical apocalyptic vision of doom with the 'New Jerusalem', the light of action as a curiosity and miracle, the action "that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal 'natural' ruin".<sup>27</sup>

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24 In a preface to *The Warriors*, written by her friend J. Glenn Gray, Arendt quotes: "... abstract thinking is strictly comparable to the inhumanity of abstract emotions" and adds: "the love and hatred of collectives", in: Hannah Arendt: Introduction to *The Warriors* by J. Glenn Gray, in: *Thinking Without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 317.

25 See chapter 3 in this volume: The Temptations of Lying.

26 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, *ibid.*, p. 222.

27 *Ibid.*

Modern times know a series of such spontaneous actions and events that prove the possibility of a separate form of state, the council democracy. However, since the revolutionary parties in the French and Russian revolutions destroyed the spontaneous groups and thus the prospect of a council democracy, and since apparently the conflict between parties and councils appears again and again, the question arises as to how spontaneity can be perpetuated, or how, after the destruction of the beginning, its salvation can be made possible.

An example of the emergence of the councils as an independent form of state is provided by the uprising in Hungary in 1956, which is generally referred to as an insurrection, but which was a revolution because of the question of power posed by the population. This uprising was not aimless, but directly created self-representation with a large network of councils. For Arendt, what was very remarkable was that “the striking absence of party wrangling and any ideological dispute,”<sup>28</sup> and fanaticism were superfluous and out of place, that is, actions that from within slow down, divide and finally cause the common beginning to fail. The reason for this was that the spontaneous movement primarily raised the political demand for freedom, not for consumption, so it was linked to thought and action, that is, the political sphere, and dispensed with detailed programmes and manifestos that went beyond that. Thus, the revolution was driven forward unhindered by an elementary force that had sprung “from the collective action of an entire people”. This people was concerned with two basic goals: the withdrawal of Russian troops and free elections. These general goals, combined with clear political leadership by the councils, left no power vacuum and thus no room for arbitrary violence, looting, lynch law and mob rule. A civil war was thus ruled out all the more. Thus, the Hungarian Revolution escaped the fate of the French Revolution, where, instead of the political demand for freedom, in the words of Heinrich Heine, only soup logic was accessible to the rebellion of the stomach.<sup>29</sup>

It is noteworthy, according to Arendt, that such revolutionary councils “have emerged with a historically unparalleled regularity whenever the people have been permitted for a few days, or a few weeks, or months, to follow their own political devices without being spoon-fed by a party or steered by a government”<sup>30</sup>. No more than a few days, weeks or months means that such councils were always liquidated when they were no longer needed by a revolutionary party. So by Robespierre, who needed the ‘*sociétés populaires*’ as supporters until his seizure of power, only to destroy them immediately afterwards as a potentially competing power factor, and

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28 Hannah Arendt: The Hungarian Revolution and Totalitarian Imperialism, in: *Thinking Without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 132.

29 See The Roving Rats, in: *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine*, tr. Hal Draper, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982, pp. 783–5.

30 Hannah Arendt: The Hungarian Revolution, op. cit., p. 133.

so also by Lenin, who “stole” the name Soviet for his “own *anti-soviet* regime”<sup>31</sup> and crushed the Kronstadt uprising in order to strengthen the monopoly of the ruling party. It is above all the new rulers who recognise and fear the old revolutionary language and therefore destroy the councils.

Besides external and internal reasons for the failure of revolutionary movements, there are also cultural reasons for failure in reformist movements. The fact that action does not take place in a sterile space but in our diverse and contradictory world was described by the Berlin feminist Christina Thürmer-Rohr when she brought together the experiences of feminist movements, especially in Germany, with Arendt’s thinking in a critical reflection at the Zurich Arendt Days in 1997.<sup>32</sup> Movements that in their times did not require heroic action, but like the workers’ movements and ecological movements required common goals, political skill and courage.

Thürmer-Rohr refers to Arendt’s statement in *On Revolution* that “it is in the very beginning to carry with itself a measure of complete arbitrariness”, because it stands outside the chain of cause and effect.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, beginning involves a narrowing of the gaze and a lack of concern, which, according to Thürmer-Rohr, leads to the fact that “it is precisely in the blanked-out and unthinking that those who are beginning drag *traditions of domination* into the new”. Such a beginning “wants the unambiguous assertion and setting, not the multi-dimensional view of things. It cannot tolerate plurality. The feminist critique”, Thürmer-Rohr continues, “is in the process of approaching those burdens of domination that were in its beginnings”<sup>34</sup>. Such burdens of domination lie on the American Revolution, which, in founding its freedom, forgot about the slaves who came from Africa; they also lie on the French Revolution, in which the revolutionaries forgot about women. In the feminist movement, Thürmer-Rohr argues, the concept of “self-determination” disregarded the “relationship to others” because this self was performed by “members of the dominant culture with an egocentric and ethnocentric claim”<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, Western and white feminism has not taken the history of racism, colonialism and anti-Semitism

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31 Ibid., p. 134.

32 Christina Thürmer-Rohr Die Anstößigkeit der Freiheit des Anfangens. Feministische Kritik – Feminismuskritik, in Daniel Ganzfried / Sebastian Hefti (eds.) *Hannah Arendt. Nach dem Totalitarismus*, Hamburg: eva 1997, pp. 135–146. English version see: The Offensiveness of the Freedom to Begin. Feminist Critique – Feminism Critique, in: *HannahArendt.net* 12/2022. (2022/12/1)

33 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 198.

34 Christina Thürmer-Rohr *Die Anstößigkeit*, op. cit., p. 137.

35 Ibid.

“into its own baggage”<sup>36</sup> and has only just “begun to trace the hierarchisations inherent in the tradition of Eurocentric concepts of freedom”<sup>37</sup>.

“The history of the women’s movement”, according to Thürmer-Rohr, “reflects this contradictory process between passionate beginnings and disappointed retreat”: a political beginning with “the impulse to ‘lighten the public sphere’”, when it is “still a provocative field”, with the “undesirability of the newcomers’ appearance” which becomes “precisely a confirmation of the gap and the urgency of their entry”<sup>38</sup>, and then the retreat. The problem begins afterwards, according to Thürmer-Rohr, when beginning usually ends before freedom, which was out of their hands to create. There were small founding acts in marginal places, but “the political movement became social, the social became psychological. Turning to the social question made the movement social work, turning to self-suffered discrimination made it therapeutic”<sup>39</sup>. The newly invented concept of politics, according to Thürmer-Rohr, declared the private to be political and thus shifted the problems to one’s own project, home or heart and treated the political on the scale of the private sphere: as a “desire for unity and identity – we are all the same), we belong together, *hierarchy of values* – we are better than the others – and *exclusion* – the others do not belong to us”<sup>40</sup>. Finally, postmodern identity theories take us even further from a plural and contradictory world. “The luminosity of the word ‘beginning’ is extinguished in the face of the sorting out that followed beginnings again and again; it remains closed to the disappointed and the inconsolable who experience the futility of the search for a place and public action.”<sup>41</sup>

Cultural influences also include the myth of Google as a technology company that, as in the case of Facebook, Apple and Amazon, embodies unexpected, passionate beginnings and the founding of a new smart world. But Google’s entrepreneurial motto of the early years, “Don’t be evil”<sup>42</sup>, alone makes a mockery of the violation of patent law and the destruction of Terra-vision, the Berlin start-up of the 1990s whose patented internet programme of a mobile earth view was copied by Google and presented as Google Earth.<sup>43</sup> Google’s beginnings in the guise of youthful innocence have given way to monopolistic irresponsibility. This fundamental change is obscured by a mythical narrative described by Adrian Daub, a literary scholar who

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36 Ibid., p. 138.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 139.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 140.

42 2018 replaced by Alphabet’s slogan “Do the right thing”.

43 *The Billion Dollar Code*, directed by Robert Thalheim, 2021.

teaches at Stanford, in his analysis of *What the Valley calls Thinking*.<sup>44</sup> This thinking is shaped by the neoliberal elite stories of capitalist self-realisation à la Ayn Rand, whose novels were devoured in California. In them, the author celebrates creative people and despises the supposed parasites. This thinking cultivates the myth of the successful dropouts and finally the myth of those who first fail but then become heroes of success and will fly to Mars in the near future.

## Federations – and the Underestimation of Institutions

Arendt's notion of the miracle of action implies that it is not a moral category, nor, despite the choice of words, a metaphysical category, but an anthropological one. Spontaneous action and its institutional form of councils appear again and again, though possibly rarely. The political space is all the more susceptible to opposing forms of action and institution that have more the appearance of the normal: vertical rule and its identification with arbitrariness and violence, bureaucracy as the rule of the nobody (Arendt), restrictions on the separation of powers and legislation corresponding to this. These forms of restriction are in close exchange with corresponding forms of action and judgement, whose plurality, intersubjectivity and cosmopolitanism are equally restricted.

These limitations are contrasted by the possibilities of expanding plurality and institutionalising it. This is not at all about an administrative construction called multi-level government, but about political philosophy.

Separation of powers and federalism are forms of institutionalisation and consolidation of plurality. They represent power potentials if they are acted upon, whereby speaking and acting already constitute power. Since power and action in general are not only incalculable in their development, but also tend to get out of hand, Montesquieu and the founders of the USA found a formula for limiting power that not only respects plurality, but even promotes it: Strengthening power through power sharing. This formula refers to the separation of powers, but was also used by the founders at the same time as a solution to the open question at the founding of the USA of how democracy could be institutionalised in a country that was very large by the standards of the time (the East Coast). Their answer: through a second territorial federal division of power in the form of the Senate.<sup>45</sup> Separation of powers and federation represent institutional forms of so-called coagulated but naturally constantly available power.

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44 Adrian Daub: *What Tech calls Thinking. An Inquiry into the Intellectual Bedrock of Silicon Valley*, New York: Macmillan 2020.

45 See chapter 13 in this volume: Federalism – A Hidden Treasure.



It is not surprising now that Arendt's concept of plurality and intersubjectivity leads directly to the principle of federation. Consequently, Arendt discussed the principle of federation on three occasions: with regard to the minority question in the 20th century, the nation state and councils as an independent form of rule. Thus, in 1940, in order to overcome the minority problems in Europe, especially of the Jewish people, she proposed the creation of a European federation with a common parliament in which the Jewish people would be represented on an equal footing with other peoples.<sup>46</sup> A federation, according to Arendt, offers the chance to abolish the political difference between majorities and minorities. Her proposal for the establishment of a binational Jewish-Palestinian state, if possible, in a Mediterranean-Middle Eastern federation, also served the goal of enabling equality and diversity in a non-national pluralistic polity.<sup>47</sup>

This would provide an alternative to the modern nation state, in which the national, cultural majority structurally threatens the political equality of all. The federation rejects the concept of exclusionary sovereignty and not only contradicts a nation-state closure to the outside world, as we experience, for example, with the United States despite an internal federalism, but also, in view of a cosmopolitan perspective, as already developed by Kant in his federation of republics, potentially enables further accessions. The various considerations of a Euro-North African Mediterranean Union, drafted by France since the 19th century, give an idea of possible alternatives.<sup>48</sup> Similar proposals were made by Albert Camus for a Franco-Algerian confederation and by African politicians for a West African union. Unfortunately, in the process of decolonisation, both colonisers and colonised failed to resist the temptation of nationalism and the supposedly easy path of violence, the consequences of which continue to negatively shape the politics and culture of formerly colonised countries to this day.

Finally, plurality and federation emerge in the original form of self-representation in the form of councils. In them, according to Arendt in view of the insufficiency of the party and modern representative system, plurality, speech and action, intersubjectivity and power in the republican sense are revealed.

These councils say: we want to have a say. We want to make our voice heard somewhere in the public sphere. ... Such a council state, to which the principle of sovereignty would be quite alien, would be excellently suited for federations of the

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46 Hannah Arendt: The Minority Question, in: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, pp. 124–133.

47 Hannah Arendt: Peace or Armistice in the Near East, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., pp. 423–450.

48 Wolf Lepenies *Die Macht am Mittelmeer*. Französische Träume von einem anderen Europa, München. Hanser 2016.

most diverse kind, if only because power would be constituted horizontally and not vertically in it.<sup>49</sup>

The councils enable network-like action, they represent more than just an institution, they prove that we, as independent but interconnected and acting in equality and diversity, already enter into a kind of federation on the spontaneous level.

The importance of considerations on an institutional design of freedom is shown by a comparison of Arendt's considerations with those of the contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang<sup>50</sup>. Zhao harks back to a world order in Chinese thought of the 11th-3rd centuries BCE, according to which heaven mandates the king to rule over all that lies under that heaven, i.e. all of China at that time. In Zhao's view, our world is currently in chaos, with not only failed states but a failed world as a whole, shaken by economic and financial crises and political as well as ecological crises. This non-world cannot be transformed into a good world by nation states or empire and their egoism and lust for domination, but only by a complete change of perspective. This consists in the complete integration of all states and peoples, including cooperation between them, into a real world politics in which there is no longer an inside and an outside and world problems are no longer viewed from national perspectives. This vision replaces a UN that, according to Zhao, is only *agora* but not an actual *polis*, and it replaces a political philosophy characterised by friend-foe thinking à la Hobbes and Schmitt.<sup>51</sup>

Zhao's cosmopolitanism is sympathetic when he states that we all live under one sky and should solve common problems together. However, it no longer sounds sympathetic when he offers as an alternative the traditional ruling structure of the good order between heaven and earth, which geographically encompasses all land as well as socio-psychologically all people's hearts and politically is supposed to form a world system under the leadership of a leading state. Does this leading state mean China? And where is the UN as a *polis*? According to Zhao, a fusion of states is to take place gradually by means of voluntary membership. The ultimate aim is to turn enemies into friends and to bring the Greek and Chinese philosophical traditions into a harmonious relationship. Politically, however, according to Zhao in an exchange of letters with the French former revolutionary Régis Debray, "dictatorships and democracies are to merge into a new system"<sup>52</sup>. Is the Chinese system in mind here?

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49 Hannah Arendt *Macht und Gewalt*, Munich 1970, p. 132f.

50 Zhao Tingyang *Alles unter dem Himmel. Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Weltordnung*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2020.

51 Zhao Tingyang: *Redefining A Philosophy for World Governance*, Palgrave 2019, p. 60.

52 Régis Debray / Zhao Tingyang: *Du ciel à la terre La Chine et l'Occident*, Arenes Editions, 2014, Kindle pos 1910.

An idea of “all under heaven” (Tianxia) formulated in this way is thoroughly different from Arendt’s “being in the world”. Its republican federalism, whose constitutional conditions Arendt developed against the background of total domination, is contrasted with a hegemonic, expansive empire whose form of government is based on political dictatorship and state-controlled democratic market liberalism. It is astonishing that in the reviews of this book, as far as I can see, this unmissable aspect has not received any attention.<sup>53</sup>

## Nature – Following the Tradition of Dominance and Exploitation

Arendt’s intellectual impulses – plurality, federation and an expanded way of thinking about judgement – are filled with her concern for our world, for human conditionality and the conditions of humane life, as well as for our relation to reality. This concern is about modern interpersonal alienation and distance from the earth.

The technical inventions and subjectivist currents were accompanied by presumptions of human reason and human action, not only in the world of thought, but also quite painfully in the form of presumptions of domination: domination equally over subjects and women, colonised and enslaved, justified as the presumption of domination of “culture“ over inferior, exploitable “nature”.<sup>54</sup> Alexander von Humboldt’s critical description of the plantation economy in Cuba around 1800 shows the close interaction of the exploitation of nature and man, of monoculture and slave economy of that time, of environmental destruction and violence.<sup>55</sup> For Humboldt, the alternative was already the coexistence of ecology and human rights, of sustainability and non-violence.

In critically assessing our relationship with nature, it becomes clear that the climate crisis is about much more than the data of climate experts and the goals derived from them to achieve climate neutrality. Rather, it is about understanding the relationship between culture and nature not as an opposition, but precisely as a commonality. We need a far-reaching change of perspective, a very active broadened way of thinking. We humans are part of nature, of a world-spanning organism or cosmos in Humboldt’s words. This cosmos includes equally humans and animals (or human and non-human animals), plants, minerals, the classical elements as well as climate and atmosphere. This perspective, which prevailed in antiquity and the Middle Ages, ended with Humboldt and Goethe. A look at the reception of the literary

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53 Robin Celikates: Tianxia and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism, in: *Zeitschrift für Praktische Philosophie* 7, 1, 2020, pp. 376–380.

54 Carolyn Merchant: *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, New York: Harper and Row 1980.

55 Alexander von Humboldt: *Essai politique sur l’île de Cuba*, 1826.

work of Adalbert Stifter, for whom nature was not a mere backdrop in the middle of the 19th century, but itself an actor, not an object but a subject, a producer of atmosphere and a companion of interpersonal constellations, shows how difficult it was for philosophers to deal with nature after that.<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, Rilke and Kafka loved Stifter's works for their depictions of humanity, but did not comment on the predominant nature; Benjamin was very impressed, but criticised the lack of eschatological engagement with nature; Heidegger traced the ineffable, and Adorno criticised the lack of a socio-critical impulse.

To begin a far-reaching change of perspective, a collection of aspects and thought experiments suggests itself. Among them would be Arendt's distinction of the *who* and *what* of a person<sup>57</sup>, which, applied to a group of trees, would recognise their *what* in the wood and its more or less good and useful qualities and their *who* in their role as actors among themselves and towards their environment. As a group of multiple Whos, they would form a place of mood, a bodily atmosphere, the aesthetics of a landscape. They would be distinguished by the *what* of their properties as means to an end and their *who* as ends in themselves, as objects and as subjects. This would resemble Arendt's thesis of intersubjective relations. And this not only in relation to the trees among themselves, but also between them and humans, so that humans and nature enter into intersubjective relations with each other in the common cosmos. This is what Hartmut Rosa describes with his theory of resonances, according to which social phenomena are filled with the human striving for "resonant" relationships. He thus expands Honneth's thesis of recognition to include not only aesthetics and religion but also nature as a resonant space.<sup>58</sup>

Such intersubjectivity naturally implies plurality, which means that within the framework of the cosmos, in addition to human plurality, there is also natural plurality in the form of biodiversity and species diversity of animals and plants, and both pluralities constitute the common cosmos. This expresses the observation of François Cheng, a man of letters influenced by Chinese philosophy, that the beauty of living beings and plants in space and time can only be experienced through their uniqueness, yet not in solitude, but precisely in and through their plurality.<sup>59</sup>

Another aspect would be that cosmic thinking offers the difference of oasis and desert instead of the contrasting pair of culture and nature or civilisation and barbarism. For oasis and desert designate not only natural phenomena, but also the

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56 See chapter 18 in this volume: Desert and Oasis: Arendt Reads Stifter.

57 See chapter 6 in this volume: Who is Capable of Acting?

58 Hartmut Rosa Die Natur als Resonanzraum und als Quelle starker Wertungen, in Gerald Hartung / Thomas Kirchhoff (eds.) *Welche Natur brauchen wir? Analyse einer anthropologischen Grundproblematik des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg/Munich; Karl Alber, 2014, pp. 123–141.

59 François Cheng *Fünf Meditationen über Schönheit*, Munich C. H. Beck 2008, p. 23.

condition of human societies. Thus, Arendt used oasis and desert as metaphors to characterise a human-friendly environment versus the unleashing of totalitarian terror: "... it is as if a way had been found to set the desert itself in motion, to let loose a sand storm, that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth."<sup>60</sup>

If Eichmann was, in Arendt's words, a nobody, that is, not a barbarian, not even a person, but a non-person, then one could add that his humanity had been devastated. So, it is not the state of nature but the man-made devastation of life and nature that is our central problem.

According to the theses developed so far, it becomes clear that the principle of sustainability applies to both, our relationship to the biosphere and our relationship to the human sphere, where sustainability is based on participation, public spirit, responsibility and transparency, freedom and diversity, plurality and federation, and both aspects of sustainability are connected in a cosmic thinking and mutually reinforce each other.

However, the road to this thinking is long. For, since more than half of humanity now lives in large cities and urbanisation continues to increase, one can assume that with a general increase in environmental awareness, knowledge of the natural environment will continue to decrease at the same time. In questions of the cosmos, illiterate people still face a handful of specialists in every conceivable specialised field. And while the natural sciences concentrate on *knowledge of* factual reality, the question arises as to what is needed to *understand* this reality.

It is well known that understanding is easier with the help of literature. In the following chapters we will take a closer look at the positions of Adalbert Stifter and René Char as well as François Jullien's Chinese description of nature.

Written in 2022. First published in this volume.

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60 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 478.

## 18. Desert and Oasis: Arendt Reads Stifter

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Among Arendt's unpublished writings is an undated English-language review of Adalbert Stifter's narration "Rock Crystal". This story was translated into English by Elisabeth Mayer and Marianne Moore in 1945.<sup>1</sup> It is not known why Arendt's review, presumably written in the same year, was not published. The review is brief, but it touches on a variety of aspects, and it contains a series of fascinating comments on the relationship between man and nature which she did not elaborate on in the review or anywhere else.

Arendt did later deal in greater detail with the modern natural sciences, and she explained how process thinking and seeking to escape from the imprisonment to earth promoted world alienation, which also implies alienation from nature.

Arendt also found it necessary to take into account human conditionality, which is given by life and the earth, by natality and mortality, as well as worldliness, plurality and fact. Nothing entitles us to assume, as Arendt explains in *The Human Condition*, that we possess "a nature or essence in the same sense as other things."<sup>2</sup> Human conditionality can contribute for better or worse to human existence. At the same time, the human being eludes essentialist explicability, so that the *what* of organic life can be investigated with the forms of human cognition, but not the *who* of the person. The distinction between *what* and *who* is the basis of the modern distinction between natural science and natural philosophy, i.e. the different approaches to nature as object and nature as subject.

The frame of human conditionality and the non-essential determination of the *who* are the phenomena between which the fragments of Arendt's reading of Stifter are situated, hence her interest in Stifter's sense of reality, which underlies his description of man and nature. Stifter was a poet, painter and natural scientist in the middle of the 19th century who grew up in the mountainous world of the Bohemian Forest. He did not view nature from a romantic perspective of the generation before him, nor from a scientific perspective; as he explained, he dealt with science,

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1 Hannah Arendt: Great Friend of Reality, Adalbert Stifter, in: *Hannah Arendt, Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, Stanford University Press 2007, pp. 110–114.

2 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition* New York: Doubleday 1958, p. 12.

but did not pursue it. Rather, he described human conditionality through inner and outer nature. Here, in her discussion, Arendt complements her abstract remarks on the human *who* with explanations of the sense of reality and other human qualities that explain her existential-philosophical theses on a Being in the World. A few years later, in an obituary for her friend Waldemar Gurian, Arendt gives an impressive description of Gurian's personality, reinforcing the tenor of the Stifter review.<sup>3</sup> One may therefore assume that Arendt's humanistic descriptions of the *who* of the person<sup>4</sup> are accompanied by a corresponding image of nature, which stands out from process thinking and romanticism and at the same time suggests human conditionality through nature.

This consideration will be explored in the following. In the course of the investigation, new questions have repeatedly arisen that have shaped the route of the investigation in a way that I had not initially expected. I do not want to curtail this path, because it is part of the insight and argumentation. The initial question concerns the extent to which Arendt has a positive image of nature or man-nature that could be unfolded as an alternative to her thesis of world alienation and the world in modern times – or at least indirectly suggests an image that could enrich the discussion about man, nature and environment, and perhaps also uncover a tradition.

Here, some aspects of Arendt's unpublished review are first considered. From these, the question then arises as to the extent to which Stifter's work offers an understanding of nature that also contains some aspects important for today's environmental discussion. Since Stifter's themes, ambience and style are not limited to poets such as Rilke, but also philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin and Adorno, these will also be considered from the perspective of nature and the environment. We will see how much nature is thereby oriented towards human benefit, which raises the question of whether there is an alternative at all in the history of European philosophy. We come across this in the form of Schelling's monism and increasingly in the theory of the body from Husserl via Merleau-Ponty to Gernot Böhme. We are thus on a wide-ranging, searching and exploratory path that makes it clear that Arendt's fragment indirectly illustrates the state of a contemporary philosophy of nature that has so far localised the connection between man and nature, between spirit and nature in the body, on the side of man, but has not yet developed a restricted subject-object relationship on the side of nature and between nature and man.

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3 Hannah Arendt: Waldemar Gurian, in: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World 1968, pp.251-262.

4 See chapter 6 in this volume: Who is Capable of Acting? Also Wolfgang Heuer Zum Naturverhältnis einer nachhaltigen Republik. Arendts Kritik der neuzeitlichen Naturwissenschaft weitergedacht, in *Zeitschrift für christlich-jüdische Begegnung im Kontext*, 2021, No. 3, pp. 185–194.

What begins in our walk with Stifter's depiction of an equally subjective and not merely objective natural "force" that is independent of man ultimately leads to the consideration of a far-reaching change of perspective. According to Stifter, man is not the subject and nature the object, but both are subject and object among and between each other. There is no subject-centrism and no hierarchy. Human beings are part of nature, they unite subject and object in their bodies and live in a human and natural environment. From the perspective of human beings, there is an inner, intersubjective environment and an outer one of the rest of nature. Biodiversity corresponds to human plurality, and if one wants to see the republic as the institutionalisation of plurality, then the biotope is the institutionalisation of biodiversity. This change of perspective is linked on the one hand to the connection between Humboldt's cosmos and Arendt's republic that I have described elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, and on the other hand to the philosophy of the body, which can be seen as the bridge for this change of perspective. Since a change of perspective always means a change of concepts, I use Arendt's pair of metaphors "desert" and "oasis" as an alternative to the traditional nature-critical juxtaposition of "civilization" and "barbarism" or "culture" and "wilderness".

The final results of this wandering train of thought will be systematised in a later text.

## Arendt's Stifter

Let us begin with Arendt's reading of Stifter. She calls him a "great friend of reality". Reality and loss of reality are central concepts in Arendt's analyses of modernity. Experience is as much a part of this as truth. "But this very thinking, originally inspired by truth and yet always distancing itself from it, is what makes truth alive; in it, truth lives and works like the event in memory. This is reality. ...The pure experience, the one in which I can experience event and truth, never constitutes reality; it is even alien to reality".<sup>6</sup> Such a thought-out experience, stored in memory, is the object of thinking. "Nothing else! And if we lose the ground of experience then we get into all kinds of theory."<sup>7</sup>

Arendt's text on Stifter refers to the story "Rock Crystal" (*Bergkristall*), but its theses are valid for Stifter's entire work. "Rock Crystal" is about two children in a mountain village whose mother is from a neighbouring village and was never accepted in

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5 See chapter 20 in this volume: The Encounter of *republic* and *cosmos*: Arendt and Humboldt.

6 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, XX, August 1954, Munich Piper 2002, p. 489f. (Translated by WH)

7 Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, in; Melvyn A. Hill (ed): *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1979, p. 308.



her husband's village. The inhabitants of both villages, separated by mountains, were strangers to each other. The children regularly went to visit their maternal grandparents in the other village, as they did this Christmas, to exchange greetings and give presents. The grandmother sends the children back to their parents in time so that they would be home before the winter night falls. But on their way across the mountains, a heavy snowstorm causes the children to lose their way completely. They find refuge in a cave, keep awake to avoid freezing to death, and leave the cave at daybreak with clear skies. Eventually they come across the search parties of both villages and make it back to their village unharmed. This joint rescue operation has brought the inhabitants of both villages closer together. "From that day on, the children became the property of the village, they were no longer regarded as outsiders but as natives who had been brought down from the mountain. Their mother... was now also a native", Stifter recounts.

Stifter originally called this story "The Holy Evening" – the Baby Jesus also appears to one of the children in the night – so that in this Christian interpretation one could interpret salvation as an Easter and the reconciliation of the villages as a Pentecost and thus unite the three highest celebrations of Christianity. Arendt is not interested in the Christian interpretation, however, but in what she describes as a sense of reality, with a reference to an undefined "innocence". Both terms stand in clear contrast to the loss of reality and innocence in the age of ideologies.

Arendt praises Stifter as one of the very few great German-language writers and the greatest of the 19th century in terms of "happiness, wisdom, and beauty"<sup>8</sup>. She emphasises his extraordinary precision, "which never becomes pedantry" and which "has its source in the intimate and altogether happy relationship with reality. It never becomes boring because it springs from an overwhelming never-ending gratitude for everything that is."<sup>9</sup> He is "the greatest landscape-painter in literature" and in this he is undoubtedly greater than Goethe, possessing "the magic wand to transform all visible things into words and all visible movements – the movement of the horse as well as that of the river or of the road – into sentences. One knows the gardens and rocks and mountains and rivers and forests of Stifter's novels even if one has never seen the Bohemian Forest."<sup>10</sup> He shares Goethe's mistrust of generalisations, "of the very quality of an abstract world – and this to such a degree that, for him the word *horse* is already too much of an abstraction".<sup>11</sup>

Reality means the relationship between man and nature; "... for Stifter, reality actually means nature and, for him, man is but one of its most perfect products. Again and again he describes the slow, steady, and blessed process for the growth of

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8 Hannah Arendt: *Great Friend of Reality*, op. cit., p. 110.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

a human being as it lives and blossoms and dies together with the trees and flowers of which it takes care during life-time." Therefore, individual human history, like history itself, is "surrounded by a greater and mightier history". In Stifter's words, "the history of the earth, the most meaningful, the most fascinating history there is, a history in which man's story is only an insertion, and who knows how small an insertion, as it may be followed by other histories of perhaps higher beings". This "calm confidence in nature and in the inherent goodness of all its laws"<sup>12</sup> differs from the mood of doom that emerged after him in the poetry of the 19th century.

Similar to the external laws of nature, the development of the individual personality follows the internal laws. Society as a social space plays no role here, because nature rules everywhere. "As long as man is 'right' ... he obeys natural laws in the same way as he obeys the innate laws of the wood and the stone when he builds a house. For, the real masters everywhere are the values of nature."<sup>13</sup> To this, Arendt adds another indispensable value that can be realised in this environment, trust: "The highest value for man is the development of human nature, and the highest virtue, the prerequisite for this development, is confidence,"<sup>14</sup> This trust appears in Stifter's work on several occasions, in "Rock Crystal" between the siblings, where she spreads fearlessness, "fearless confidence in the very nature of ice and rocks and mountain, which so evidently threatens them with death"<sup>15</sup>. Stifter's strength, which is based in the bond to inner and outer nature, the personality development based on it and the highest virtue of trust, constantly contradicts "our sense of homelessness in society and of alienation in nature."<sup>16</sup>

At this point, the strange concept of innocence enters the picture. Stifter's work, according to Arendt, is characterised by great beauty and "the strange innocent wisdom"; Stifter himself speaks of innocence, and Arendt concludes from this that his highest wish is "to grasp the innocence of the things outside ourselves".<sup>17</sup> And finally, a kind of innocence also characterises the children in their mutual trust, which "fits so well in the sublime majesty of the mountain that they can patiently wait till the village comes to their rescue."<sup>18</sup> Innocence is used by Arendt in an ethical-existential sense: The children, as well as Stifter himself, stand outside society with its rules of conformity, their personalities are in harmony with the natural environment, the interpersonal relationships are based on virtues, above all on trust, and the rela-

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 112.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 113.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 110; Adalbert Stifter: Nachsommer, chap. 6, Der Besuch (all quotations translated by WH)

18 Ibid., p. 113.

tionship to reality finally avoids any generalisation. All this together forms a kind of wisdom that is not only innocent, but also strange.

We can enrich these fragmentary reflections with further fragments in Arendt's work. In the obituary of her friend Waldemar Gurian I already mentioned, Arendt does not talk about the *what* of the scientist, which one would expect in an obituary in a scientific journal, but the *who* of his personality in its spirituality and whole physicality. According to Arendt, this was characterised above all by *innocence* and *courage*. He preserved his innocence through his independent *power of judgement*, an "unerring sense for quality and relevance",<sup>19</sup> which he possessed thanks to his human greatness, "intensity, depth, passionateness of existence itself"<sup>20</sup> and recognised in others regardless of social position and achievement. He was strengthened by the fact that he had created a home for himself with *friendship* in the world, Arendt's intersubjective-plural world, not in the conformist, externally guided society, and preserved it through *loyalty* to friends and everything that was valuable to him. Finally, he needed considerable *courage* to resist conformism because his judgements were often understood as provocations. "He was delighted when he could break down these barriers of so-called civilized society, because he saw in them barriers between human souls. At the source of this delight were innocence and courage, innocence all the more captivating as it occurred in a man who was so extremely well versed in the ways of the world and who therefore needed all the courage he could muster to keep his original innocence alive and intact."<sup>21</sup> It is also noteworthy that Arendt mentions that Gurian was very fat and had a gargantuan capacity both for food and food of the mind.

These phenomena are complemented by the truth of fidelity; in her *Denktagbuch* Arendt noted: "*Treue*: true: true and faithful. As if that to which one cannot be faithful were not true either. Its existence depends on us. Just as it depends on us, whether truth is in the world or not".<sup>22</sup> This truth is purposeless: Socrates' "know thyself" produces particular knowledge and calls for it: "Pursue this particular and find its truth and thus your truth. If you keep both at the same time, you will have truth, human truth, without imposing it on others"<sup>23</sup>, Arendt notes. Nor can truth claim to take precedence over friendship. Cicero's statement, "better to be wrong with Plato than to be right with these people – this is the political principle in which the person matters", Arendt noted in her *Denktagebuch*.<sup>24</sup>

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19 Hannah Arendt: Waldemar Gurian, op. cit., p. 251f.

20 Ibid., p. 257.

21 Ibid.

22 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, II,9, 1950, p. 38f.

23 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, XXII, 19, August 1953, p. 413.

24 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*. XXII, 51, June 1958, p. 595.

This *who*, emphasised in its humanity and significance, complements Stifter's humanity in "Rock Crystal". It is the first element of the change of perspective.

### Stifter's Sense of Reality

Arendt's description of Stifter's world refers to its special features, which are methodologically and thematically close to Arendt. These are Stifter's relationship to nature, his aesthetics of the sense of reality, his reverence for small things and, finally, his ethics of innocence towards the environment and the world around us.

First of all, Stifter's *relationship to nature*. As already mentioned, Stifter confronted nature as a natural scientist, as a collector and researcher, but even more so as a poet, as an inhabitant of nature. His novel "Der Nachsommer" (St. Martin's Summer) and his other stories are about this life in a nature with its own laws. Stifter's hero is a scientist who, thanks to his pronounced sense of reality, is able to understand nature holistically, scientifically and aesthetically. Again and again, he dwells on details of the rich surroundings:

The forest flowers listened up, the squirrel paused on its beech branch, the butterflies hovered sideways as they advanced, and the twig vaults cast flashing green carbuncles and flying shadows on the white robes as they passed; the woodpecker shot into the branches, trunk after trunk stepped backwards, until little by little only bits of white wavered among the green lattice – and at last even these no longer – but the rider too plunged into the depths of the forest and disappeared, and again only the shining lawn, the light-dotted trunks, the old silence and wasteland and the meddling brook remained, only the crushed little herbs sought to rise, and the lawn showed its tender wounding. The procession was over – our lovely forest spot had seen its first people.<sup>25</sup>

However, Stifter does not string all these elements of nature together, but rather "sees the forest and nature ... as a biocoenosis, as a community of plants and animals, i.e. as a living whole. But he also uses the term 'forest' for an economically oriented and managed forest."<sup>26</sup> This living totality is created by God, but humans are responsible for their environment:

If the Lord God has given man greater gifts, he also demands more from him – but for that reason he loves his other brothers and sisters, the animals and plants, no less. He has given them dwellings that are denied to man, the heights of the

25 Adalbert Stifter *Der Hochwald*. In *Gesammelte Werke in sechs Bänden*, Vol. 1, Wiesbaden Insel Verlag 1959, p. 230.

26 Reinhold Erlbeck *Die Waldwelt Oberplan zur Zeit Adalbert Stifters*, in *LWF aktuell* 116, 2018, p. 21.

mountains, the greatness of the forests, the vast seas and the vast deserts – there, though no eye may come, He hangs His stars above them, gives them the splendour of their garments, sets their table, adorns them with all kinds of gifts, and comes and walks among them, just as he does here and among the people whom he also loves, although they, as it has often seemed to me, abuse his animals and plants, because in their arrogance they think themselves the only ones, and in their simplicity never go out into their realms and dwellings to learn their language and essence.<sup>27</sup>

Nature does not appear as an object of admiration or exploitation, but as a subject in its own right, which surrounds people in the form of a rugged mountain world, with summer thunderstorms or winter sleet, but also with warming rays of sunshine and the balancing, harmonious night of summer. Understanding nature not as an object, but as an environment and co-environment, implies a rejection of the Cartesian concept of nature.

Subjectivism and dualism of spirit and substance, which Arendt also rejects from the perspective of interpersonal plurality. Nature follows its own paths. Animals, meadows and forests are subject to the even course of their development. The weather can be changeable and dangerous. “Stifter’s weather forms the chaotically unpredictable, affectively uneasy reverse side of the order of things persistently exhibited in the foreground. Because it cannot be made into a thing with the best disciplinary will, the weather is the great other of Stifter’s order, which it nevertheless needs.”<sup>28</sup> Nature is indifferent to people. “There, for example, a stream flows in a beautiful silver mirror, a boy falls in, the water ripples sweetly around his curls, he sinks – and after a while the silver mirror flows again, as before.”<sup>29</sup>

And in the whole of the universe, the Earth occupies a completely insignificant place:

The earth itself is no longer seen from the nearest suns, and even if they had telescopes there that were ten thousand times larger than ours. And when, on that night when our earth ceases forever, a Sirius dweller looks at the beautiful starry sky, he does not know that there is one star less; even if he had once counted them all, and entered them on charts, and counted them again today, and looked

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27 Adalbert Stifter *Der Hochwald*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., p. 265.

28 Oliver Grill *Vonvorhersehbares Wetter? Zur Meteorologie in Alexander von Humboldts Kosmos und Adalbert Stifters Nachsommer* in *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, Neue Folge XXVI (2016), H. 1, p. 75.

29 Adalbert Stifter *Abdias*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 7.

at his charts, not one would be missing, and the sky would glow above his head as glorious as ever.<sup>30</sup>

In some texts, border crossers between animals and humans appear, tame birds in “Der Nachsommer” and the brown girl in “Katzensilber”. They are weather-sensitive and much more precise in their perceptions than the usual human perception or even meteorological measuring instruments. The brown girl is a creature of nature, lives in the forest and, thanks to her subtle connection to nature, has a feeling for the weather that is far superior to traditional weather rules. Here, two systems of knowledge collide, both based on experience; but the latter is reduced to rules and cannot protect the grandmother, who is bound by these rules, from a sudden hail-storm, whereas the brown girl can. No one knew it. “The priest knew nothing. No such thing had been entered in the parish or school registers, nor had it ever been seen among the parishioners.”<sup>31</sup>

Stifter, who actually aspired to a career as a painter, gives this heightened sense of reality its own *aesthetic*. This aesthetic includes not only the repeated meticulous enumeration of everything there is to see, but above all the changing environment: the thunderstorm clouds in the late afternoon, which no longer threaten, but remain in their fullness far away over the mountains; the snowfall, which deprives the children in “Rock Crystal” of all acoustic and visual orientation. “All around them there was nothing but blinding white, white everywhere, which itself only drew an ever-smaller circle around them, and then changed into a light nebula falling in strips, which consumed and concealed everything else, and in the end was nothing but the insatiable falling snow.”<sup>32</sup> Above all, the description of an icy rain that covered an entire forest and all the houses, forming shiny icicles:

From the roof of the house hung all around, forming, as if they were organ pipes, which held a drop of water, which made them longer again, and again more inclined to fall. When I got out, I noticed that the cover of my raincoat, which I usually spread over myself and the sledge so that I could move myself and my arms under it, had in fact become a roof that stood firmly around me and caused a ringing of falling ice in all parts of the sledge when I got out. Thomas's hat was frozen, his coat cracked as he dismounted, and every bar, every piece of wood, every buckle, every part of the whole sledge, as we looked at it now, was covered in ice, as in transparent liquid sugar, even in the manes, like a thousand pale pearls,

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30 Adalbert Stifter Ein Gang durch die Katakomben. In *Werke und Briefe. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 9,1, Stuttgart Kolhammer 2005, pp. 49–62.

31 Adalbert Stifter Katzensilber, in *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 278.- Cf. Philippe Roepstorff-Robiano Adalbert Stifters Mensch-Tier-Symbiosen. Vögel, Wolken und das “braune Mädchen”, in *Recherches Germaniques* 10/2015, pp. 195–216.

32 Adalbert Stifter Bergkristall, in *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 212.

hung the frozen drops of water, and finally it was stitched around the hoof hairs of the chestnut, like silver borders.<sup>33</sup>

This coating of ice weighed heavily on all branches and even knocked down large trees:

A high-pitched cracking, as it were like a scream, came first, followed by a short wafting, whizzing or streaking, and then the dull, resounding crash, and a mighty trunk lay on the earth. The bang went through the forest like a roar, and through the density of the dampening branches; there was also a ringing and shimmering, as if endless glass was being shifted and shaken – then it was as before, the trunks stood and protruded one after the other, nothing moved, and the still standing roar continued.<sup>34</sup>

It is not a scientifically objective, not a photographically documented reality, but one that is felt existentially according to subjective experience. Will the lingering thunderclouds bring another thunderstorm, or will they dissolve in the late afternoon? The blinding white of the snow in “Rock Crystal” makes the complete loss of orientation palpable, and the freezing rain gets under your skin because it turns every movement into an unpredictable, threatening adventure.

Stifter’s heightened sense of reality and respect for nature is demonstrated in his *reverence for small things*, and respect for flexibility rather than strength. Thus the brown girl, in her naturalness, had not only recognised the approaching dangerous hailstorm, but also knew what would protect against it: “What resisted was crushed, what was solid was shattered, what had life was killed. Only soft things resisted, the earth crushed by the hailstones and the bundles of brushwood”<sup>35</sup>, says Stifter, recalling Daoism.

Great is the natural rhythm, not the spectacular. So he explains in the preface to his collection of stories in “Colourful Stones”:

The blowing of the air, the trickling of the water, the growing of the grain, the surging of the sea, the greening of the earth, the shining of the sky, the gleaming of the stars, I consider great. I do not consider the magnificent thunderstorm, the lightning that splits houses, the storm that drives the surf, the fire-breathing mountain, the earthquake that buries countries, to be greater than the above phenomena, indeed I consider them to be smaller, because they are only effects of much higher laws. They occur in isolated places and are the results of one-sided causes. The force that makes the milk in the poor woman’s pot boil up and

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33 Adalbert Stifter Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters, in Adelbert Stifter *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 536.

34 Ibid., 541.

35 Adalbert Stifter *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 263.

overflow is also the force that makes the lava in the fire-breathing mountain rise up and slide down on the curses of the mountains.<sup>36</sup>

“All greatness,” he adds in a letter to his publisher, “is simple and gentle, as indeed is the world-building.”<sup>37</sup> It follows that: “There is nothing great and nothing small. The structure of the little animal, hardly visible to human eyes, is admirable and immeasurably large, the simple roundness of Sirius is small ... God does not have the word big and small, for him it is only the right thing.”<sup>38</sup>

The resulting “reverence for things as they are in themselves” guides action. It was

so great for me that in the case of entanglements, contentious claims and the need to put some things in order, I did not look at our benefit, but at what the things demanded only for themselves, and what was in accordance with their nature, so that they might become again what they were, and to get back what was taken from them, without which they cannot be what they are. This trait of mine has caused me much grief, it has brought me great censure; but it has also earned me respect and recognition. When my opinion was accepted and put into practice, then the new order of things endured, because it was founded on the essentials of its nature; it brought greater benefit to our state than if we had formerly striven for the unilateral, because we were protected from new disorders, that is, from repeated exertions.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the *ethics of innocence* in the human relationship to the environment and the world around us, which dominates Stifter’s sense of reality and is based on reverence for small things, does not display any pre-established harmony. On the contrary, there are natural disasters, snowstorms, freezing rain and plague outbreaks, all catastrophic events that correspond to violent disturbances in interpersonal relationships, such as the alienation of the inhabitants of both villages from each other in “Rock Crystal”, and whose order is to be restored. This is done symmetrically by appeasing the destructive side of nature through cultivation and by subjecting this act of cultivation itself to a supposed natural law, while at the same time subjecting culture to a human natural law. The cultivation of nature goes hand in hand with the naturalisation of culture.<sup>40</sup>

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36 Adelbert Stifter *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 7.

37 Letter to Heckenast, Juli 1847, in Adalbert Stifter *Briefe*, Tübingen Wunderlich 1936, p. 96.

38 Letter to Friedrich Eulemann, 3 February 1854, in *Stifter Briefe*, op. cit., p. 149f

39 Adalbert Stifter Der Nachsommer, in *Gesammelte Werke*, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 718f.

40 Christian Begemann / Davide Giuriato (eds.): *Stifter Handbuch, Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart: J. P. Metzler Verlag, 2017, p. 73. – Stifter explained in a letter how much the storms impressed him: “My first attempts at writing lie in my childhood, where I always described thunderstorms.” Letter to Leo Tepe, 26 December 1867, in: Stifter: *Briefe*, op. cit., p. 394.



It is St. Martin's Summer in which nature moderates, "the thunderstorms and the heat have ceased, but a mild warmth and delicate transparency place all objects pure and calm before us, clarified and prepared that one day the near winter may take them up into its shell, which for us may mean death and departure from this earth".<sup>41</sup> And it is the "simplicity, greatness and goodness of the human soul"<sup>42</sup> that makes the naturalisation of culture possible.

This applies not only to individuals, but also to society and politics. Laws and norms of existence and coexistence should be gentle and thus in accordance with the nature of those to whom they apply. The intelligent person, as it says in "Der Nachsommer", must adopt them as his own. In this context, it is not surprising that Stifter's initial enthusiasm for the revolutionary movement waned in 1848 due to excesses.

Before the revolution, he described in a first version of "Das Haidedorf" (1840) a "republic" of nature beings. The young protagonist of the story encounters the following on the heath: "a 'society' of domesticated or wild animals, even of plants and rock formations, whose (social) organisation, as he 'knew from experience', is based on the natural cohesion of living beings or the purposeful division of natural things. Even a rambunctious billy-goat, in its 'unreasonableness', causes only temporary disruption ... in the small republic of its fellow citizens, which is former by its inner constitution."<sup>43</sup>

## Resonances

It is not surprising that poets such as Rilke, Hesse, Thomas Mann and Kafka were fascinated by Stifter's prose, especially "Der Nachsommer", as were philosophers who were close to poetry such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Arendt.

For Rilke, it was "one of the most unhurried, even-tempered and equanimous books in the world, and for that very reason one from which an extraordinary amount of purity of life and – mildness can emanate".<sup>44</sup> Hesse emphasised the Daoist-like reverence for small things: "To read one of Stifter's finely penned, well-composed, reverent narratives is, in the midst of today's moods, as fruitful, admonishing and clarifying as a contemplation of Tolstoy's early poetry or the parables of

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41 Letter to Gustav Heckenast, 12 June 1856, in: Stifter: *Briefe*, op. cit., p. 178.

42 Letter to Gustav Heckenast, 16 February 1847, in Stifter *Briefe*, op. cit., p. 89f.

43 Monika Ritzer Lektionen in Demokratie Adalbert Stifters politische Essays. Textstrategie und kulturhistorische Heuristik, in *KulturPoetik*, 10/2, 2010, p. 180.

44 Quoted from Joachim W. Störck Stifter und Rilke. In *Adalbert Stifter, Studien und Interpretationen*. Heidelberg L. Stiehm, 1968, p. 293.

Chuang Tse.”<sup>45</sup> And Thomas Mann was fascinated by the “strangest, most cryptic, secretly boldest and whimsically gripping narrator in world literature”.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, according to Max Brod, Kafka “never had the slightest interest in the authors of the ‘night side’, of decadence..... He was powerfully drawn to the simple positive forms of life. Among his favourite books were Stifter’s ‘Nachsommer’ and Hebel’s ‘Schatzkästlein’.”<sup>47</sup> But Kafka, as his entire prose shows, considered social progress in the direction of a life-worldly Indian summer to be impossible as long as there was no legally guaranteed “social” possibility of existence. In her 1944 essay “A Hidden Tradition”, Arendt describes the existential hopelessness of the Jewish pariah in modern times, and refers to Kafka’s poetic vision of “the fate of the man of goodwill.”<sup>48</sup> No life is possible as an exception if freedom and equality of rights are not guaranteed for all. Arendt’s friend Gurian, like the actors in Stifter, can live in innocence and in harmony with nature because this is guaranteed and potentially normal. According to Brod, Kafka was very much moved by an anecdote by Flaubert, who, “returning from a visit to a simple, happy family of many children, had exclaimed spontaneously: ‘Ils sont dans le vrai’. “A true human life,” Arendt continues, “cannot be led by people who feel themselves detached from the basic and simple laws of humanity nor by those who elect to live in vacuum even if they be led to do so by persecution. Men’s lives must be normal, not exceptional.”<sup>49</sup>

Nietzsche, too, praised Stifter in the highest tones:

Apart from Goethe’s writings and especially Goethe’s conversations with Eckermann (the best German book of all), what German prose literature remains that is worth reading over and over again? Lichtenberg’s *Aphorisms*, the first book of Jung-Stilling’s *Story of My Life*, Adalbert Stifter’s *St. Martin’s Summer* and Gottfried Keller’s *People of Seldwyla*—and there, for the time being, it comes to an end.<sup>50</sup>

Nietzsche, too, praises the days that “only this late summertime is able to produce: Heaven and earth flowing calmly side by side in harmony”<sup>51</sup>. Tranquillity, harmony

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45 Hermann Hesse *Sämtliche Werke in 20 Bänden und einem Registerband*. Vol. 1. 8 Die Welt im Buch III. Rezensionen und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1917–1925, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 2002, p. 396.

46 Thomas Mann *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus* [1949], in *Doktor Faustus. Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 1967, p. 773f.

47 Max Brod *Franz Kafka. Eine Biographie* (Erinnerungen und Dokumente). Prague: Heinrich Mercy Sohn 1937, 63f.

48 Hannah Arendt: *The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition*, in: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, p. 276f.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 295.

50 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Human, All Too Human*. A Book for Free Spirits, Translated by Paul V. Cohn, B.A. New York: The MacMillan Company 1913, part II, 109, p. 250.

51 Friedrich Nietzsche *Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungs-Anstalten*, in *Werke in drei Bänden*. Vol. 3, Munich Carl Hanser 1954, p. 179.

and unison are frequently recurring concepts in Nietzsche's images of autumn. Autumn is "synonymous with bliss, ripeness, sweetness, fullness, even abundance".<sup>52</sup>

To shape this artistically is one of the most difficult things, as he explains in the aphorism "What all art wants to do and cannot":

The last and hardest task of the artist is the presentment of what remains the same, reposes in itself, is lofty and simple and free from the bizarre. Hence the noblest forms of moral perfection are rejected as inartistic by weaker artists, because the sight of these fruits is too painful for their ambition. The fruit gleams at them from the topmost branches of art, but they lack the ladder, the courage, the grip to venture so high.<sup>53</sup>

But there is no way around the task of a poet as "guide to the future". He will,

just as the earlier poets portrayed the images of the Gods, portray the fair images of men. He will divine those cases where, in the midst of our modern world and reality (which will not be shirked or repudiated in the usual poetic fashion), a great, noble soul is still possible, where it may be embodied in harmonious, equable conditions, where it may become permanent, visible, and representative of a type, and so, by the stimulus to imitation and envy, help to create the future. The poems of such a poet would be distinguished by appearing secluded and protected from the heated atmosphere of the passions. The irremediable failure, the shattering of all the strings of the human instrument, the scornful laughter and gnashing of teeth, and all tragedy and comedy in the usual old sense, would appear by the side of this new art as mere archaic lumber, a blurring of the outlines of the world-picture. Strength, kindness, gentleness, purity, and an unsought, innate moderation in the personalities and their action: a levelled soil, giving rest and pleasure to the foot: a shining heaven mirrored in faces and events: science and art welded into a new unity: the mind living together with her sister, the soul, without arrogance or jealousy, and enticing from contrasts the grace of seriousness, not the impatience of discord—all this would be the general environment, the background on which the delicate differences of the embodied ideals would make the real picture, that of ever-growing human majesty.<sup>54</sup>

Nietzsche, however, does not comment on Stifter's harmony of inner and outer nature. For him, the critique of moral and scientific norms, on which a false humanisation of nature and the naturalisation of man is based, has priority. The humanisation

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52 Renate Müller-Buck "Oktober-Sonne bis ins Geistigste hinauf". Anfängliches zur Bedeutung von Goethes Novelle und Stifters Nachsommer für Nietzsches Kunstauffassung. In *Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung* 18 (1989), p. 539.

53 Friedrich Nietzsche *Human, All Too Human*, op. cit., part II, Aph. 177.

54 Ibid., Aph. 99.

of nature takes place through its “logification”, a “forced way of looking at things”, through which “the instinctive true and only understanding of nature” has been lost and replaced by “a clever calculation and outwitting of nature”.<sup>55</sup> Nature knows no mathematics, logic and regularity. “We are the ones who invented causation, succession, for-each-other, relativity, compulsion, numbers, law, freedom, grounds, purpose; and if we project and inscribe this symbol world onto things as an ‘in-itself’, then this is the way we have always done things, namely mythologically”.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, with this humanisation of nature, it is declared to be good or evil:

At first men imposed their own personalities on Nature: everywhere they saw themselves and their like, i.e. their own evil and capricious temperaments, hidden, as it were, behind clouds, thunderstorms, wild beasts, trees, and plants: it was then that they declared Nature was evil. Afterwards there came a time, that of Rousseau, when they sought to distinguish themselves from Nature: they were so tired of each other that they wished to have separate little hiding-places where man and his misery could not penetrate: then they invented “nature is good.”<sup>57</sup>

The scientific humanisation of nature must be abolished in order to be able to abolish the moral naturalisation of man. Recognising free nature, in which “we are so fond of being out among Nature, because it has no opinions about us”<sup>58</sup>. Acknowledging that we ourselves are nature, but different from “what we feel when we call her name”<sup>59</sup>. It is the instincts of nature and of human beings that must be recognised, from which inequality and the will to power follow.

It will be the strong and domineering natures who experience their most exquisite pleasure under such coercion, in being bound by but also perfected under their own law; the passion of their tremendous will becomes less intense in the face of all stylized nature, all conquered and serving nature; even when they have palaces to build and gardens to design, they resist giving nature free rein.<sup>60</sup>

In this way, Nietzsche leaves tranquillity, harmony, reverence for small things to the highly praised founder, and to the artists “the representation of that which remains

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55 Friedrich Nietzsche Nachgelassene Schriften IV; in *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Berlin De Gruyter 1988, p. 716.

56 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. by Rolf-Peter Horstmann / Judith Norman, Cambridge University Press 2002, 21, p 21.

57 Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Dawn of Day*, tr. by John McFarland Kennedy, New York: The MacMillan Company 1911, p. 26.

58 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Human, All Too Human*, *ibid.*, part 1, p. 508.

59 *Ibid.*, part II, p. 327.

60 Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*, Cambridge CUP, 2001, p. 291.

constant, that which is at peace within itself, high, simple, far removed from the individual stimulus". Nietzsche's orientation towards the perspective of the liberation of the individual, his psyche, drives and will to power, as well as the superman, takes "Der Nachsommer" like a soothing rest, but not as a completely different critique of culture and nature.

In 1964, Heidegger read a third of Stifter's "Eisgeschichte" (Ice Story) on Swiss radio, commented on it briefly and published both together in the volume *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*. For him, what was special about this story was not the unusual natural event or the special aesthetics of the depiction, but the existential threat to humanity posed by a process that did not lie in the spectacular at all, but was "something inconspicuous that silently and gently prevails"<sup>61</sup>, to which the poet directed thought. "The showing of the truly great in the small, making visible in the invisible, and that through the conspicuous and through the daily of the world of mankind, letting the unspoken be heard in the spoken – this saying is what works in the words of the poet Adalbert Stifter".<sup>62</sup> The fact that a poet presents the unspoken in the spoken is not unusual; on the contrary, it is a central characteristic of poetry. This unspoken becomes interesting in a context that Heidegger established in the "Black Notebooks" in the 1940s, namely the "event" that must be prepared "if the change of our being is to be founded in a reason."<sup>63</sup> That the poet is the guide here, who alone sees behind the obvious and at the same time is able to direct the thinking of all, is only an assertion that is not substantiated in the "Eisgeschichte". The great project of *aletheia*, of uncovering the hidden truth, is repeatedly thwarted by Heidegger himself, which prompted the actor Klaus Pohl, who plays Heidegger in the Arendt film by Margarethe von Trotta, to say that Heidegger had to be played as a mask, "the mask over the mask over the mask"<sup>64</sup>. And finally, this interpretation shows that for Heidegger the events in the forest have nothing to do with nature, but merely serve as a metaphor for human affairs.

How Heidegger, in another state of concealment, reveals the unspoken in the spoken, is shown by his letter to Hannah Arendt, which he sent to her on the occasion of her first visit to Germany after the Second World War.<sup>65</sup> There are five longer

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61 Martin Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 13, Frankfurt/M. Vittorio Klostermann 1983, p. 196.

62 Ibid., p. 197. – Cf. Eva Geulen *Reden und Schweigen* Walter Benjamin und Martin Heidegger über Adalbert Stifter, in *Worthörig wider Willen. Darstellungsproblematik und Sprachreflexion in der Prosa Adalbert Stifters*, Munich Iudicium 1992, pp. 42–56.

63 Martin Heidegger *Anmerkungen I-V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*, Frankfurt/M. Vittorio Klostermann 2015, p. 58. Cf. Klaus Neugebauer Heidegger liest Adalbert Stifter, in *Heidegger Studies*, Vol. 34, 2018, pp. 129–146.

64 Klaus Pohl *Der Hosenmatzdeutsche oder Die Martin Heidegger-Maske*, in Martin Wiebel *Hannah Arendt. Ihr Denken verändert die Welt*, Munich Piper 2012, p. 187

65 Hannah Arendt / Martin Heidegger *Briefe 1925–1975*, Frankfurt/M. Vittorio Klostermann 1998, Nr. 53, pp. 83–85.

quotations from Stifter's story "Limestone", which deals with the fate of a country priest. He had lost his family members and the parental farm, and his love for the neighbour's daughter had failed because of her parents' negative attitude towards him. As a priest, he withdrew to the mountains, lived in strict asceticism and shamefully hid the white linen he had bought himself, inspired by the neighbour's love, and which has since reminded him of the love that had passed.

Heidegger obviously identified with this priest, whose "two tiny little lobes of white" peep out from under his worn clothes and "testify" to his dignity. According to the narrator, the priest was in "immense poverty, such as I have never encountered in a person above the level of a beggar". His anxious cleanliness "emphasised the poverty even more embarrassingly". The neighbouring family in his childhood "also had a little daughter, a child, no, it was not a child any more... The 'little daughter' had very fine red cheeks, she had fine red lips, innocent eyes that were brown and looked kindly around her". She had told him, the later pastor, about the importance of white linen and silverware. "I remember at these words... that I had always seen on the body of the speaker at the edge of the neck and on the sleeves the finest white linen." In the last quotation, the priest tells shamefully that he still had this "lovely linen".

In accordance with Stifter's gentle law, Heidegger commented on these quotations with the remark that "no other narration of the story of a love is so shy, no gentleness of never forgetting so powerful". Thus, the unspoken in the spoken is at once an artistic principle, philosophical reflection, a call to silence and, at the same time, hidden private concerns.

Walter Benjamin was also fascinated by Stifter and at the same time interested in metaphysical questions in a way that led him, unlike Heidegger, to vehemently reject him. He reported to Ernst Schoen that he had read a lot of Stifter, "behind whose unremarkable exterior and apparent harmlessness a great moral and great aesthetic problem is concealed. What do you know of him? 'Rock Crystal' and 'The Briefcase of My Great-Grandfather' contain an almost pure beauty, the only one among the many I know of him".<sup>66</sup> Benjamin welcomed this beauty in the form of the "wonderful" descriptions of nature and children as long as it was not associated with the phenomenon of fate. When Stifter combined the two, however, he committed a "monstrous error". In the preface to the "Coloured Stones", where he writes about the gentle law, "he indeed loses the sense for the elementary relations of man to the world in their purified justifiedness, in other words: the sense for justice in the highest sense of this word". For when Stifter had "found the other side, the shadow and night side of that limitation to the small circumstances of life", he did not limit himself to

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66 Walter Benjamin An Ernst Schoen, 28 December 1917, in *Deutsche Menschen*. Eine Folge von Briefen. Auswahl und Einleitung von Detlef Holz [1936]. In *Gesammelte Schriften*. Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 1972, vol. 4/1, pp. 149–233. Nachträge in vol. 7/2, 829 f

that, but carried “that simplicity also into the great circumstances of fate ... which, however, necessarily have a quite different simplicity and purity, namely that which is simultaneous with greatness or, better, with justice”<sup>67</sup>. Benjamin considered the strict separation of nature and fate to be indispensable and criticised Stifter’s uncertainty and “weak hand” with which he drew the border of this separation in an almost embarrassing manner instead of recognising the “highest inner justice” with which alone a secure distinction is possible.

For Benjamin, bringing nature and humans together existentially was so unthinkable that he resorted to the most negative characterisations of this border crossing imaginable. There is talk of a “spasmodic impulse”, a “sub-humanly demonic and ghostly” path, of a “secret bastardisation”, a “terrible trait” that reveals “a double nature”, “two faces”. “In him, the impulse of purity has at times detached itself from the longing for justice, lost itself in the small to then emerge hypertrophically (that is possible!) as indistinguishable purity and impurity”. Stifter had no idea that it was about the struggle with the eschatological, final realm of justice and purity: “There is no final metaphysically consistent purity without the struggle for the sight of the highest and outermost realities and one must not forget that Stifter did not know this struggle.”<sup>68</sup> In addition, according to Benjamin, there are the deficiencies of representation, which are based on a pronounced visibility of Stifter’s poetry. This, he says, is accompanied by an inability to hear revelation and represent shock, hence the demonic. The space in which feelings and thoughts are depicted is deaf, his soul mute, lacking any contact with the world being, the language.

Nature has its place here not only as a successful visual description; if it were not strictly limited, it would contaminate the moral world as the demonic, in which purity, justice, revelation and language are the only things that matter.

For Adorno, finally, Stifter’s world of nature plays no role, but rather the world of man and a reflective, enlightened distance from it. This, however, is just as absent from Homeric archaism as it is from “the desperate efforts of the late Goethe and Stifter to bring bourgeois conditions to life as a primordial reality, open to the unexchangeable word like a name”.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to enlightened consciousness, to which narrative speech and its general conceptual essence corresponds, “this representational element always appears as one of stupidity, a non-understanding, non-

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67 Walter Benjamin Stifter, in *Gesammelte Schriften* II,2, Frankfurt/M Suhrkamp. 1980, p. 608.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 609. See also Peter Demetz Walter Benjamin als Leser Adalbert Stifters, in *Böhmen böhmisch. Essays*, Vienna Zsolnay 2006, p. 89.

69 Theodor W. Adorno Über epische Naivität, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11 *Noten zur Literatur*, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 2011, p. 35. Cf. Guido Kreis Das richtige Leben. Stifter als Antwort auf Adorno. In *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 78, 2004, pp. 55–94.

knowledge, obdurately clinging to the particular where it is at the same time already determined as dissolved by the general. The epic imitates the spell of myth in order to soften it. ... Naiveté is the price."<sup>70</sup>

This literature cannot be reproached for its naivety, only the traditional praise of the "only in the dialectic of form has the stupidity of narration turned it into a conscience hostile, restorative ideology"<sup>71</sup>, whereas it originally came from an "enlightened, as it were positivist aspirations. ... In the epic naivety lives in the critique of the bourgeois reason."<sup>72</sup>

What prompted the greatest nineteenth-century German storytellers in Adorno's eyes, Goethe, Stifter and Keller, to draw and paint rather than write, and thus to emancipate representation from reflective reason, was their attempt, "to let the real emerge pure, undisturbed by the violence of orders. The narrator's stupidity and blindness already expresses impossibility and hopelessness the time of such a beginning."<sup>73</sup>

This brief look at the interests of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin and Adorno in Stifter shows that they were not of a natural philosophical origin. Nietzsche and Benjamin were overwhelmed by beauty, but nature appears in Nietzsche only as a law and object of predation, and in Benjamin as an eschatological adversary. For Heidegger, nature in Stifter is the place where the ineffable is revealed in relation to a redefinition of metaphysics, and Adorno, finally, does not say a word about nature; he is concerned solely with the critical reflection of interpersonal relations.

## What Nature?

This perhaps surprising separation, defence or even absence of nature in modern German philosophy is a consequence of what Arendt calls world alienation and self-alienation. Both shaped the philosophical directions from Descartes' doubt and English sensualism to existentialism and positivism.<sup>74</sup> To this can be added Marxism and critical theory, which describe nature only as an object of exploitation, a means of reproduction and the other of reason, but do not develop a positive relationship to nature.

This alienation from the world and from oneself is a fundamental experience that shapes not only philosophical reflection, but also ethics. According to Karen Gloy, modern ethics is based on an image of nature as an artificial, manipulable and

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70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., p. 36.

73 Ibid., p. 37.

74 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 248.



dirigable object of man and accordingly she sees the relationship between man and nature and between subject and object as one of domination and servitude, interpreted with the dominance of man and the subordination of nature.<sup>75</sup>

Among the few exceptions of a positive relationship to nature in the philosophical field are Spinoza and Schelling. Spinoza rejected the Cartesian dualism of opposing spirit and matter. With his monism, he declared both to be merely attributes of a single substance, so that interactions between spirit and matter as well as body and soul were possible. In a kind of psychophysical connection, every idea therefore corresponds to an object in the material world. Behind this is the assumption that the world can be traced back to this substance and, *deus sive natura*, God is this substance and thus nature. Goethe was filled with this man-nature conception. Spinozism, naturalised in his time, conceived of nature as a living wholeness that develops from itself without dependence on a God, and in which human beings are involved in contemplation and activity. Against this background, it is apparent why Goethe rejected Newton's optical findings as a technical intervention in nature.

Schelling as well as Fichte were impressed by Kant's bold theses on the limited possibility of knowing reality, with which he put reason in the place of faith. He thus opened up the question of the ultimate reason as well as the question of the cognising subject and the unknowable thing-in-itself. Fichte radicalised Kant's subject as the ego that creates the world as a nameless non-ego and "depotentiates" it as a mere representation of the thing-in-itself and also of nature, which contemporary critics such as Jacobi described as a mere fantasy, even a ghost.<sup>76</sup> Nature as a mere non-ego is merely the object of cognitive rationality and thus the expression of the freedom of the absolute ego. Thus, cognition is not oriented towards the objects, but conversely demands that the objects be oriented towards cognition and the conditions of cognition.<sup>77</sup> Although Fichte envisaged natural science as part of his epistemology alongside law, morals and religion, he never elaborated on this.

At this point, Hegel should also be mentioned briefly, because he had a close relationship with Schelling at the Tübingen Stift and later in Jena and had an extremely influential influence on the philosophical thinking of the 19th century. Hegel considered the great importance that Goethe and Schelling attached to natural philosophy to be inappropriate. To place it "above reflection" was "a deviation, because one cannot philosophise from observation".<sup>78</sup> Rather, "in all this wealth of knowledge, the

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75 Karen Gloy Natur im westlichen und östlichen Verständnis, in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 44, 1997, p. 165.

76 Karen Gloy Schellings Naturphilosophie. Grundzüge und Kritik, in Michael Esfeld / Jean-Marc Tétaz (eds.) *Généalogie de la pensée moderne. Genealogie des neuzeitlichen Denkens*. Festschrift für Ingeborg Schüssler, Frankfurt/M., Lancaster De Gruyter 2004, p. 187.

77 Ibid.

78 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* II, Werkausgabe vol. 9, Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 1970, p. 21.

question arises or arises anew for us: What is nature? It remains a problem.”<sup>79</sup> It is the task of the spirit, in conceiving nature, “to transform the opposite of the concept into the concept”.<sup>80</sup>

For Hegel, nature in relation to the idea is the “idea of otherness”, of the negative. Like Kant and Fichte, he defines nature from the perspective of the subject: “Nature has arisen as the idea in the form of *otherness*. Since the *idea* is thus *external* as the negative of itself or *itself*, nature is not external only relatively to this idea (and to the subjective existence of it, the spirit), but the *externality* constitutes the determination in which it is as nature.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, in nature the idea is “external to itself”, while in the idea, however, nature is by no means external to itself. Finally, Hegel devotes himself to the diversity of nature with its multiplicity of forms, which, however, he cannot bring to a concept. This is not his problem, however, because it “does not reveal to him the power of nature to oppose the unity of the concept, but rather the powerlessness of nature: it cannot hold the concept. But what appears as the ‘impotence of nature’ in the perspective of the concept appears as its wealth in the perspective of life. Hegel also speaks here of ‘infinite wealth’ – but he cannot gain much from it, especially since this is not the subject of philosophy, and so he associates it with ‘randomness’”<sup>82</sup>.

Thanks to its freedom, its artistic creativity and its morality, the spirit stands above nature. Even then, when “spiritual randomness, *arbitrariness*, proceeds to *evil*,” because there “this itself is still an infinitely higher thing than the lawful wandering of the stars or than the innocence of the plant; for what thus strays is still spirit.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, Hegel, like Fichte, embodies the modern dualism that elevates human beings with spirit and idea above and against nature, providing another philosophic expression for the Anthropocene.

Schelling now distances himself from Fichte’s non-ego and also contradicts Hegel’s subordination of nature to the “idea”. As already mentioned, Schelling follows Spinoza’s monism and brings spirit and nature onto a common level by calling

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79 Ibid.

80 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Nürnberger Gymnasialkurse und Gymnasialreden (1808–1816), in *Gesammelte Werke* (GW) vol. 10, Hamburg Felix Meiner 2006, p. 827.

81 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *Enzyklopädie*, op. cit., § 247.

82 Walter Jaeschke *Hegel Handbuch*, Leben-Werk-Schule, Stuttgart J. P. Metzler Verlag 2016, p. 307. – Cf. Hegel’s work on his philosophy of nature Wolfgang Bonsiepen Hegels Vorlesungen über Naturphilosophie, in *Hegel-Studien*, Vol. 26 1991, pp. 40–54. On Hegel’s changing definitions of philosophy of nature cf. Gerald Hartung Review der Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Natur Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1819/20, 1821/22 und 1823/24 in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 24,1, and on the seminar postscripts in 1825/26 and 1828 vol. 24,2 in vol. 49 (2015), pp. 186–192

83 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *Enzyklopädie*, op. cit., § 248.

“nature the visible spirit and spirit the invisible nature”<sup>84</sup>. In order to understand nature as “unconditional reality”, it is necessary to recognise its autonomy as a legislator of itself as well as its self-sufficiency, because “nature ... is enough for itself”.<sup>85</sup> For Schelling, nature means starting from an all-encompassing organism, from infinite productivity, not from being but from becoming, and finally from an indissoluble bond between nature and human beings. Humans emerged from nature and have their permanent and indispensable basis of life in it.

The freedom of human consciousness brings with it the great danger of forgetting this connection with nature. While Fichte promoted such forgetting and left the field of objectifying natural science and its mathematisation to natural research, Schelling stood for the holistic reference to the world, as also represented by Goethe and Humboldt. They all took a position beyond romantic rapture and positivist coldness. Their approach to the world on an inter-disciplinary or even transdisciplinary basis was challenged by the rising natural sciences and the branching and systematising definitions of research, science and philosophy. Hegel kept up with his conceptualisations and systems, while a supposed romantic like Schelling lost influence. It was not until the 1980s that Schelling’s thesis of the productivity of nature was rediscovered and the topicality of self-organisation established in view of its compatibility with Ilya Prigogine’s theses.<sup>86</sup>

The juxtaposition of spirit and nature or culture and nature was unchallenged until the environmental crisis in the 20th century. If today the fragmentation of the sciences and the disintegration of science, art and reality are lamented, then this should not only be blamed on the natural sciences, according to Dietrich von Engelhardt, but also on the humanities. For these “have in turn turned away from nature and contributed to a one-sided concept of education. Today, not only two cultures, but four cultures stand relatively alien and unmediated to each other: the culture of the natural sciences, the culture of the humanities, the culture of the arts, and finally the culture of behaviour”.<sup>87</sup> What remains is a legacy of this holism in natural science, medicine and psychology, but not in philosophy. German idealism itself, in the form of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, also led to the defeat of those who embodied a holistic view of the world. They broke with Kant’s self-critical and modest attitude and radicalised philosophy and their own appearance. Jaspers’ work on Schelling in

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84 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling Einleitung zu den Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur, in *Werke*, vol 1, Leipzig Fritz Eckardt Verlag 1907, p. 151.

85 Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik Schellings Idee einer Naturphilosophie. Ein noch heute herausforderndes Projekt, in *Information Philosophie*, 27, 2, June 1999.

86 Marie-Luise Heuser-Kessler *Die Produktivität der Natur. Schellings Naturphilosophie und das neue Paradigma der Selbstorganisation in den Naturwissenschaften*, Berlin Duncker & Humblot 1986.

87 Dietrich von Engelhardt *Naturwissenschaft und Medizin im romantischen Umfeld*, in Friedrich Strack (ed.) *200 Jahre Heidelberger Romantik*, Berlin, Heidelberg Springer 2008, p. 514

the context of the history of ideas highlights human inadequacies alongside his intellectual fireworks: Schelling's gesture of reflexivity without honesty, his objectivity that loses sight of reality and "falls into the non-committal view of phantasms"<sup>88</sup>, and a sense of mission that senses the crisis of his time, but in thought is "rather to be ascribed to the modes of concealment of an old (age), a mode of saving that is not rescue but rather false reassurance"<sup>89</sup>. Jaspers also shows the inability of the three philosophers to communicate with each other, and thus the importance of the philosophers' character. Their destructive side and their break with Kant brought about the break with the 18th century Enlightenment. Taking up Schelling means recognising the weakness of the tradition of general natural philosophy and taking up what seems to be profitable for the present question of ecology: monism and a corresponding change of perspective.

### Corporeal, Desert / Oasis

Such a change of perspective means starting not from the separation of spirit/human being on the one hand and nature on the other but from a common nature of the terrestrial organism, to which plants, living beings/animals/humans and physical substance/elements/climate belong. In their interplay, they form the Humboldtian cosmos in which all components interact with each other, not people and "nature", but people as elements of their environment. In this way, the "spirit" as a traditional, European reason since antiquity is freed from the opposition of man and nature and becomes a component of nature.

In the 20th century, Edmund Husserl took a significant step in this direction by introducing the body into the relationship between subject and object. This was followed by Merleau-Ponty and others such as Gernot Böhme and Bernhard Waldenfels.<sup>90</sup> For Husserl, the body is the "transition point" between nature and spirit, and it is at the same time part of a double structure of body and body, subjective, sensual experience and objective object. Touching one's own body reveals its double existence as subject and object. But Husserl's so-called constitutional analyses of the three fundamental regions of reality, material nature, animal or animate nature,

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88 Karl Jaspers Schellings Grösse und sein Verhängnis, in *Merkur*, 9/83, 1955, p. 27. Extensively in *Schelling. Größe und Verhängnis*, Munich Piper 1955.

89 Ibid., p. 29.

90 Edmund Husserl *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Haag: Martinus Nijhof, vol. 2, 1952. Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *La nature. Cours du Collège de France 1956–1960*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995. Also *Das Sichtbare und das Unsichtbare*, Munich Wilhelm Fink 1986. Gernot Böhme *Leib. Die Natur, die wir selbst sind*. Berlin Suhrkamp 2019. Bernhard Waldenfels *Das leibliche Selbst. Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des Leibes*. Frankfurt/M. Suhrkamp 2000.

and the spiritual world, are explicitly oriented towards the natural sciences; nature itself, according to Böhme, is not mentioned. However, this is not about a redefinition of the human understanding of nature, but exclusively about the question of knowledge. Husserl's critique of Descartes' dualism therefore refers exclusively to the physical understanding of the world, which lacks the psychological dimension.

Merleau-Ponty, influenced by Husserl, abolishes the separation of body and mind in his body phenomenology in favour of a "third way" of being-in-the-world. As with Husserl, he is also concerned with the relationship between subject and object in the cognising human being, not with the abolition of the separation of subject and object in an intersubjective relationship between the elements of the organism, also called cosmos. Nevertheless, he agrees with Bergson that we humans are part of nature.<sup>91</sup>

Gernot Böhme, on the other hand, connects the role of the body with the phenomenology of the German Enlightenment. Drawing on Goethe's theory of colours, he describes the difference between a bodily and a scientific relationship to nature: for Goethe, colours are nature appearing to us through our bodies, whereas for Newton they are scientific data.<sup>92</sup>

Here is an opportunity to return to Arendt. There is no doubt that she is close to Goethe in her book review, as is Stifter. Goethe's and Böhme's phenomenology of the body is a plausible path to an ecological philosophy of nature that should be thought further. Shouldn't all scientific and philosophical-phenomenological concepts of nature be distinguished? What do we understand by subject and object if we no longer tie them to the terms spirit/human-nature? How can we distinguish the who and the what of the person and bring them into a new coexistence with each other as well as introduce them into the relationship between philosophy and science? Shouldn't the concept of landscape also be understood in a new way, for which a comparison with the old Chinese, non-essentialist philosophy could be helpful?<sup>93</sup> And isn't it worth looking back at Montaigne's sceptical plea against the presumptions of human reason and for the perception of the numerous abilities of animals, 200 years before Hegel once again claimed that it is thinking that distinguishes humans from animals? Can the concepts of subject/object be replaced by that of intersubjectivity, as is indicated by the discussion on animal and nature rights? What concepts should replace spirit/human-nature, culture-nature or: civilisation-barbarism?

The pair of opposites oasis and desert, which Arendt indirectly refers to, comes to mind. Arendt uses the oasis to characterise a human-friendly environment. It

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91 Maurice Merleau-Ponty *La Nature*, op. cit., p. 351f.

92 Gernot Böhme *Phänomenologie der Natur*, in *Leib*, op. cit., pp. 122–126.

93 See the description of landscape in classical Chinese philosophy by François Jullien *Von Landschaft leben oder das Ungedachte der Vernunft*, Berlin Matthes & Seitz 2016. See also in this volume: Overcoming Inhuman Perspectives on Nature.

stands as an alternative to the desert, which Arendt uses as a metaphor for the unleashing of totalitarian terror: "... it seems as if a way had been found to set the desert itself in motion, to let loose a sand storm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth".<sup>94</sup> Another time, she describes the philosophising dockworker Eric Hoffer in San Francisco as an oasis compared to the other intellectual conditions in the United States in the 1950s.<sup>95</sup>

Oasis and desert are of course natural phenomena, but they also those that describe the state of human societies. If we no longer assume a hierarchical order between humans and nature or culture/civilisation and barbarism, but a horizontal equality, then one can compare plurality on the side of humans with biodiversity on the side of "nature", or the institutionalised republic with the biotope. In such a world of people and "nature", the question of sustainability is no longer limited to "nature", but equally concerns the republic and also the republic in its entanglement with nature. For this reason, barbarism is equally a description of the state in nature and in the republic; it is the desert, which is contrasted with the oasis.

Those who live in the republic would therefore do well to get to know the elements of the common cosmos that are intertwined with it, in order to recognise features of oases and deserts and to avoid general inclusions or exclusions of formal groups such as "nature". The destruction of biodiversity today is not only similar to the destruction of interpersonal plurality – both destructions often take place together. In order to understand both destructions, they must not be mere statistical quantities, but must be perceived visibly and tangibly. The diversity of biodiversity, of existences in their spatialities and interactions, can only be understood if we know them and are able to tell stories about them. Like the philosopher Baptiste Morizot, who learns to understand the migrations of wild animals, read their tracks and recognise their world as a space of communication, or the forester Peter Wohlleben, who tells of the communicative relationships of trees with each other, or the anthropologist Philippe Descola, who relativises our view of nature from the perspective of indigenous people as just one of many possibilities. Understanding these and other researchers helps us to understand. We can perceive what Gadamer called a knowledge that is not science, but the ability to engage with the essence, with the stubbornness of the world, with the inner measure that is inherent in being. The Arendtian "world" and the Humboldtian "cosmos" replace the old irreconcilable division of "nature" and "culture", of "civilization" and "barbarism". Nature is not barbaric *per se*, nor is the human world necessarily civilized.

Does the destruction of a human "world" really mean sinking to a barbaric "state of nature", or is it not rather about the destruction of oases, as Arendt called places

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94 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Meridian 1958, p. 478.

95 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence 1926–1969*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1992, p. 257f.

of political freedom and diversity – oases in the human, plant and animal world? If so then our central problem would not be the state of nature, but the devastation of life caused by humans. The principle of sustainability therefore applies not only to our relationship with the biosphere, but also to our societies, where sustainability is based on participation, public spirit, responsibility and transparency, on freedom and diversity.

Written in 2020. First published in this volume.

## 19. Overcoming Inhuman Perspectives on Nature

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Nature as a storehouse of raw materials, as a rubbish dump, or as an amusement park – in any case as an object for the satisfaction of human desires such as hunger, greed, exoticism and domination – the goals and practices associated with these terms shape perspectives on the nature that surrounds us. Yet the unmistakable relationship between inhumane behaviour towards humans and exploitative, destructive behaviour towards nature is rarely addressed. However, if we remember Humboldt, who condemned the simultaneous exploitation of slaves and nature by monocultures, or Carolyn Merchant’s classic “The Death of Nature”<sup>1</sup> about the modern exploitation and oppression of women and nature (I would include also that of slaves), then we recognise the commonalities and interactions between humans and nature in what Humboldt called a cosmos.

From this perspective, inhumanity towards humans can no longer be easily separated from hostile behaviour towards nature. One can speak of indirect inhumanity, in which unintentional climate change causes unintentional heat waves, droughts, floods, migrations and deaths. But one can also speak of inhumanity in a broader sense as harmful behaviour towards nature, where the all-encompassing context of the cosmos is affected. This is a humanistic perspective *à la* Humboldt and Merchant, which is what is meant here when we speak of overcoming inhumane perspectives on nature.

As important as the work and findings of natural scientists in the field of climate are, or the political activities of the “Fridays for Future” movement, they remain very much related to human needs; climate and environmental protection are understood as a means to the end of human well-being and this all the more so with the dwindling experience of the cosmos as a living, emotional space in the course of worldwide urbanisation; this cosmos then only appears in the form of numbers, calculations, statistics and horror images. Flaubert famously described the fact that science as such does not produce meaning in an unfinished satirical novel “Bouvier et Pécuchet” – for Arendt a fitting narrative about the “hopelessness of positivism”<sup>2</sup>.

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1 See chapter 20 in this volume: The Encounter of *republic* and *cosmos*: Arendt and Humboldt.  
2 1938/10/16, in Hannah Arendt / Heinrich Blücher *Briefe 1936–1968*, Munich Piper 1996, p. 87.



This leads us to the second proposition of this essay, which is that it is indispensable not only to perceive the cosmos as a living organism in its diversity, its modes of appearance and its surprises, but also to perceive it in a living and emotional way. Sober statistics and objective rationality are not capable of this. But not because objective science is emotionless. Rather, its claim to scientific truth conceals the fact that all rational perception is based on prior sensations and feelings, i.e. every rationally treated subject is accompanied by emotional movements and images<sup>3</sup>, and in most cases has been generated by emotional motives in the first place. Thus, Humboldt's description of the slave and monoculture agriculture is based on images and feelings of inhumanity, Arendt explicitly renounced the *sine ira et studio* principle of scientific objectivity in her analytical description of total domination, and she resorted to the "understanding heart" of the biblical sage Solomon when she dealt with the meaning of reflective judgement.<sup>4</sup>

Overcoming inhuman perspectives on nature therefore requires not only the realisation that this process is always consciously or unconsciously based on sensory imagination and is not possible without it, but that it should also be actively included and cultivated as a means of cognition. In this way, a bridge is built between science and literature and poetry.

In the following, I would like to present both concerns, the cosmic location of man and nature and their emotional grounding, using three different perspectives on nature which point to the unlimited diversity of such perspectives, but at the same time also represent a form of intensification. Firstly, the concept of nature as an acting subject in the literature of the Bohemian writer Adalbert Stifter in the 19th century; secondly, nature as part of an existential space in the poetry of the French poet and resistance fighter René Char, a friend of Albert Camus, in the middle of the 20th century; and thirdly, the concept of the phenomenological landscape, merging 'I' and 'World' according to François Jullien in classical Chinese philosophy.

## Nature as an Acting Subject - Adalbert Stifter

Adalbert Stifter (1805–68) grew up in the Bohemian Forest on the western edge of Austria-Hungary. He confronted nature as a natural scientist, as a collector and researcher, but even more as a poet, as an inhabitant of nature. He wrote at the time of late Romanticism, but was not himself a Romantic. His novel "Indian Summer" and his stories reflect Stifter's relationship to nature with its own laws. This relationship

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3 Cf. Antonio Damasio: *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Putnam, 1994.

4 Hannah Arendt: *Understanding and Politics*, in: *Essays on Understanding 1930–1954*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company 1994, pp. 307–327.

to nature is based on an aesthetic of the sense of reality, a reverence for small things and, finally, an ethic of innocence towards the environment and fellow world.<sup>5</sup>

Stifter's hero in his novel "*Der Nachsommer*" (St. Martin's Summer) is a naturalist who, thanks to his pronounced sense of reality, is able to experience nature holistically, i.e. scientifically and aesthetically. Again and again, the richly detailed environment of flora and fauna is described in minute detail as a "biocenosis, as a society of plants and animals, as a living totality. However, Stifter also uses the term 'forest' for an economically oriented and managed forest"<sup>6</sup>. This living totality is created by God, but people are responsible for their environment.

Nature now appears not as an object of customary admiration or exploitation, but as an independent subject that surrounds people in the form of a rugged mountain world, with summer thunderstorms or winter sleet, but also with warming rays of sunshine and a balancing, harmonious late summer. Nature is not understood as an object, but as an environment and shared world; it follows its own paths. Animals, meadows and forests are subject to the steady course of their development. The weather can be changeable and dangerous, nature is indifferent to people, it can be as healing as it is deadly.

There, for example, a stream flows in a beautiful silver mirror, a boy falls into it, the water ripples sweetly around his curls, he sinks – and after a while the silver mirror flows again, as before.<sup>7</sup>

In the universe as a whole, the earth occupies a completely insignificant place.

In some of Stifter's texts, border crossers between animal and human appear, tame birds in "Indian Summer", or a "brown girl" in the story "*Katzensilber*" who lives in the forest. She is weather-sensitive and much more precise in her perceptions than the people around her or even meteorological measuring instruments. Here, two systems of knowledge collide, whereby Stifter makes another distinction, that between experience and intuition. Experience cannot exclude erroneous conclusions, while intuition is completely focused on the moment.

Stifter, who actually aspired to a career as a painter, gives this heightened sense of reality its own aesthetic. This aesthetic includes not only the repeated meticulous enumeration of everything there is to see, but above all the changing environment: The thunderstorm clouds in the late afternoon, which no longer threaten but remain in their fullness far away over the mountains; or the heavy snowfall in the mountains, which deprives the children in the story "*Bergkristall*" (Rock Crystal) of all acoustic

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5 See more in detail chapter 18 in this volume: Desert and Oasis: Arendt Reads Stifter.

6 Reinhold Erlbeck Die Waldwelt Oberplans zur Zeit Adalbert Stifters, in *LWF aktuell* 116, 2018, p. 21.

7 Adalbert Stifter Abdias, in *Gesammelte Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden Insel Verlag 1959, p. 7.

and visual orientation; or the freezing rain, which covers an entire forest and all the houses with a thick layer of ice which even strong trees cannot withstand:

A high-pitched cracking, as it were like a scream, came first, followed by a short wafting, whizzing or streaking, and then the dull, resounding crash, and a mighty trunk lay on the earth. The bang went through the forest like a roar, and through the density of the dampening branches; there was also a ringing and shimmering, as if endless glass was being shifted and shaken – then it was as before.<sup>8</sup>

It is not a scientifically distanced, not a photographically documented reality, but one that is felt existentially according to subjective experience. Such an experience traces the persistence of the storm clouds, feels the complete loss of orientation in the white of the driving snow in its contourless colourlessness and lets us see the freezing rain on skin and trees with a shiver.

Stifter's heightened sense of reality and respect of nature leads him to revere small things. They include flexibility in action instead of strength. Thus, the brown girl in her naturalness had not only intuitively recognised the approaching dangerous hailstorm, but also knew what protected against it: "What resisted was crushed, what was solid was shattered, what had life was killed. Only soft things resisted, the earth beaten by the hailstones or the brushwood bundles"<sup>9</sup>, said Stifter, indirectly recalling Daoism. Great is the natural rhythm, not the spectacular.<sup>10</sup> "All greatness", Stifter wrote to his publisher, "is simple and gentle, just as the building of the world is."<sup>11</sup> Consequently "there is nothing great and nothing small. The structure of the little animal, hardly visible to human eyes, is admirable and immeasurably large; the simple roundness of Sirius is small."<sup>12</sup> The resulting "reverence for things as they are in themselves" is action-guiding.

Finally, the ethics of innocence in the human relationship to the environment and the world around us, which dominates Stifter's sense of reality and is based on reverence for small things, does not exhibit any pre-established harmony. On the contrary, natural catastrophes, snowfall, snowstorms, sleet and outbreaks of plague occur, all of them catastrophic events, each of which corresponds to violent disturbances in interpersonal relationships, such as in "*Bergkristall*" the estrangement of the inhabitants of two hostile villages, who find their way back to each other through the rescue of the two children.

Stifter wants to appease the destructive side of nature through cultivation and to subject this act of cultivation itself to a supposed natural law; cultivation of na-

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8 Adalbert Stifter Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters, in *ibid.*, vol. p. 541.

9 Adalbert Stifter, *Katzensilber*, *ibid.*, p. 263.

10 Adalbert Stifter *Gesammelte Werke in sechs Bänden*, *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 7.

11 Letter to Heckenast, July 1847, in Adalbert Stifter *Briefe*, Tübingen Wunderlich 1936, p. 96.

12 Letter to Friedrich Eulemann, 3 February 1854, *ibid.*, p. 149f.

ture goes hand in hand with a naturalisation of culture.<sup>13</sup> It is the late summer in which nature is moderated, “the thunderstorms and the heat have ceased, but a mild warmth and delicate transparency place all objects pure and calm before us, clarified and prepared, so that one day the approaching winter will take them up into its shell, which for us may mean death and departure from this earth”.<sup>14</sup> And it is the “simplicity, greatness and goodness of the human soul”<sup>15</sup> that makes the naturalisation of culture possible, which applies not only to individuals but also to society and politics, laws and norms of existence and coexistence.

### Nature as Part of an Existential Space – René Char

The relationship between man and nature in René Char’s poetry appears quite differently, as an existential space in the face of the threat of modernity and totalitarianism. René Char (1907–88) grew up in the south of France near Mont Ventoux, made famous by Petrarch. He belonged to the Surrealists in Paris in the 1920s like André Breton and Paul Eluard, broke away from them in the 1930s/1940s because of their unseriousness in the face of totalitarian movements, returned to the south of France, turned his attention to the language of ordinary people. He acted there as a leading regional resistance fighter in the *maquis* during the German occupation, became friends with Albert Camus in a great agreement on political and poetic questions, and took part in protest movements against the stationing of nuclear weapons and the destruction of the environment in Southern France in the 1950s and 1960s. Char was friends with the painters Nicolas de Staël and Joan Miró, artists such as Picasso, Juan Gris, Henri Matisse, and Georges Braque illustrated his poems, and Pierre Boulez set one of his plays to music. Rimbaud and the painter Georges de la Tour inspired him. He is considered the most important French poet of the 20th century.

Char’s poetry is extremely hermetic, initially influenced by the role of the dream and the subconscious in surrealism against instrumental rationalism, and later he was increasingly interested in condensing thoughts into aphorisms, often in the form of fragments, islands of words. During the Second World War he wrote down political-poetic observations, which Camus published after the war under the title “Hypnos: Notes from the Maquis (1943–1944)” and which Paul Celan translated into German. From these notes, Arendt quoted the aphorism “Our inheritance is not preceded by any testament” when dealing with the spirit of revolution.

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13 Christian Begemann / Davide Giuriato (eds.) *Stifter-Handbuch, Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart J P. Metzler Verlag 2017, p. 73.

14 Letter to Gustav Heckenast, 12 June 1856, in: *Briefe*, *ibid.*, p. 178.

15 Letter to Gustav Heckenast, 16 February 1847, in: *Briefe*, *ibid.*, p. 89f.

*Maquis*, nature and myth form the existential space for Char, to which he gives a poetic language and thus creates meaning. The *maquis* as an incisive life experience, as a natural environment, home, and place of resistance; nature as an environment that guides and confronts us, in the form of day and night, sky and earth, the seasons, plants and animals, as a protective space; myth, finally, as a transcendental foundation of meaning for existence in this space.

Char looks at the world through the eyes of Heraclitean dialectics, not in the Hegelian sense but rather the Asian one, and allows the interplay of the elements, the reconciled opposites, to appear in their common presence. The poem “The Shark and the Seagull”, for example, “centres on the opposition of duration and departure, of heaviness and lightness, of diving into the sea and flying”<sup>16</sup>.

The core of Char’s attitude to life is the intellectual and practical revolt as a permanent ethical requirement. This revolt is accompanied by a stoic attitude. In “Hypnos” he notes:

To be stoic is to freeze, to freeze with the beautiful eyes of Narcissus. We calculated the pain that the executioner could extract from every inch of our bodies; then we went, pressed heart, and stood against it.<sup>17</sup>

This stoic revolt is not utopian or nihilistic, but filled with tragic optimism, which is also characteristic of Camus, whose relationship to Char I will discuss later.

The poetic actor, the rebel, Char himself, appears in his poetry as heart, lightning and bird; the heart and not the head as the source of energy and as the essence of the human being, and the lightning as the energy of knowledge, which in the intensification of the aphorism of Heraclitus on lightning as the helmsman of the universe appears again and again in Char’s poetry, as condensed in the following sentence:

When we inhabit a flash of lightning, it is the heart of eternity.<sup>18</sup>

This expresses, according to one commentator, the “most vivid contradiction and at the same time the most perfect moment”<sup>19</sup>.

Finally, Char mentions some thirty different varieties of birds, but it is above all the swift that embodies the rebel; it is like the heart. The poem “The Swift” reads:

Swift with wings too wide, wheeling and shrieking his joy as he circles the house.  
Such is the heart.

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16 Horst Wernicke “Dieser Rauch, der uns trug ...” René Char Dichtung und Widerstand, in René Char, *Einen Blitz bewohnen. Gedichte*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 1995, p. 147. (All quotations translated by WH)

17 René Char *Hypnos. Aufzeichnungen aus dem Maquis 1943–1944*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag, p. 9f.

18 René Char *Einen Blitz bewohnen, Gedichte*, *ibid.*, p. 45.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

He dries up thunder. He sows in the serene sky. If he touches the ground, he tears himself apart.

His opposite is the swallow, the familiar, whom he detests. What value has: lace from the tower?

He rests in the most sombre hollow. No one lives in space narrower than he.

Through the summer of long brightness, he will streak his way in shadows, through the window blinds of midnight.

No eyes can hold him. He shrieks for his only presence. The smallest rifle shoots him down.

Such is the heart.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Stoic revolt, tragic optimism and the actor's heart, lightning and birds form the foundations of the existential space lined with the experiences of the *maquis*, the environment of nature and the cloak of myth.

The *maquis* is the site of the experience of contradictions sharpened to the extreme, of freedom and slavery, life and death, loyalty and betrayal, night and morning, visibility, and concealment. Like Nietzsche, Char sees in this space a unity of ethics and human/non-human nature, here integrity and honesty prove themselves against collaboration and betrayal. No tradition has the necessary knowledge to act, it requires survival skills, the desire, as a drive, and the dawn of departure: "... belong to the leap. Not to its epilogue, the revelry"<sup>21</sup>, "to extend the momentum of the great road, or what one considers to be it, into insatiable wanderings, that is the task of the wanderer into the morning."<sup>22</sup> Char had pinned a colour reproduction of Georges de la Tour's painting "The Prisoner" on the wall in one of the resistance group's rooms, showing a nun stroking the forehead of a huddled prisoner in the warming glow of her candle. "The more time passes," Char wrote in 'Hypnos', "the more it seems to reflect its meaning back on our situation ... Not a single resistance fighter who has walked through the door in the past two years has not burned his eyes on the evidence of this candle."<sup>23</sup>

No wonder Char detested the world of post-totalitarian "strategists" after this experience:

We are partisans, after the conflagration to extinguish the traces, to wall up the labyrinth and to raise civic responsibility. The strategists are not partisans, they are the plague of this world and its bad breath.<sup>24</sup>

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20 René Char *Zorn und Geheimnis, Gedichte*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 1991, p. 139f.

21 René Char: *Hypnos*, op. cit., p. 77.

22 René Char *Die Bibliothek in Flammen und andere Gedichte*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 1992, p. 79.

23 René Char: *Hypnos*, *ibid.*, p. 71.

24 René Char: *Bilets à Francis Curel*, in: *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard 1983, p. 637.

The second element of Char's existential space, *nature*, corresponds with the maquis experience, the detailed knowledge of flora and fauna, the interplay of the high granite mountains and the untamed river. Char admires the animals, the swift flying round the tower, the bull as a fighter in a lost cause, the trout as a victim of industrialisation, the snake because it is cursed, and the larch tree because it strives towards the light.<sup>25</sup> All natural phenomena are part of human existence: the shelter of the night, the darkness at noon in the Mediterranean summer sun, or the lightning already mentioned. The landscape is saved in the poem from environmental destruction.

Finally, the third element, myth, is narrative and sense-making. Myth in Char is cosmic and the heritage of classical Greece. There is Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep, who watches over sleep, protects the night, enables the invisibility of resistance, of revolt, who gives energy and is energy:

Hypnos seized winter and clothed it in granite. Winter became sleep, Hypnos became fire. The rest is up to the human being.<sup>26</sup>

For Char we are meteors, "a watch our sky, a hunt our run, a drop of brightness what we chase"<sup>27</sup>. There "may my presence, which excites mysterious unease, implacable hatred in you, be meteor in your soul."<sup>28</sup> Finally, there is the constellation of Orion as the other side of Hypnos, the most luminous and powerful group of stars in the winter firmament, equal to the gods Osiris in Egypt and Nimrod in Assyria.<sup>29</sup>

Char found a close friend in Camus, who would not have written *The Rebel* without the poet's tragic optimism. "I wanted this book to be OURS", Camus wrote to Char, "and without you it could never have been a book of hope."<sup>30</sup> "Nazi Germany," he wrote, "had no more determined opponent or more generous enemy than a great French poet, René Char, in whose work you will find today as tomorrow the faithful mirror of a free and proud virtue whose memory sustains us."<sup>31</sup> And Char, for his part, wrote: "Camus was a good and profound man by the grace of this goodness, of an absolute clarity in friendship, without real intellectual ice, modest, close, under all sorts of playfulness, to those deprived of sovereign moods."<sup>32</sup> Char's poetry, Camus declared, "flared up like those great brush fires that in the poet's homeland give

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25 Jean Voellmy "Orte, wo wir niederknien um zu trinken". Die Provence im Werk René Chars, in René Char *Einen Blitz bewohnen*, *ibid.*, p. 113.

26 René Char: *Hypnos*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

27 René Char: *ibid.*, p. 117.

28 René Char *Die Bibliothek in Flammen*, *ibid.*, p.131.

29 Horst Wernicke "Dieser Rauch, der uns trug ...", *ibid.*, p. 175. See also Manfred Bauschulte *René Char. Poet und Partisan. Eine Biographie*, Vienna 2017, pp. 208–212, 213–227.

30 Albert Camus / René Char: *Correspondance 1946–1959*, Paris: Gallimard 2007, p. 86.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

fragrance to the wind and nourishment to the earth. We breathed a sigh of relief at last. The mystery of nature, the living waters, the light broke into the room where poetry had hitherto delighted in shadows and echoes. ... Here, in full battle, a poet has dared to call out to us: 'In our darkness, beauty has not one place in it. All the place is allotted to it, to beauty.'<sup>33</sup>

Char's world is cosmic, but unlike Humboldt's harmonious view, it is out of balance; it needs the partisan, the ethical agent, the protective light of humanity and conviviality with the forces of nature.

## Phenomenology of Landscape – François Jullien

The third part of this essay brings together the subjectivisation of nature in Stifter and the existential human-nature space in Char in a correlation of 'I' and 'World' as offered by classical Chinese philosophy. I draw here on François Jullien's work "Living on Landscape or the Unthought of Reason"<sup>34</sup>.

Turning to the Chinese philosophy of landscape reveals three prejudices of the European concept of landscape: first, it is merely part of the whole, of nature; second, it is subject to a primarily visual perception; and third, it is entirely the object of subjective observation. It is clear that a landscape understood in this way, whose concept has only existed in Europe since the Renaissance, appears against the background of the modern division between subject and object, reason and feeling, and activity and passivity. It is evaluated, classified and analysed aesthetically and in terms of its form.

The Chinese concept of landscape is quite different. The Chinese word for landscape "mountain-water" expresses the usual pairing, a combination of different terms instead of their logical demarcation, so that the correlation, here between mountain and water, seeing and hearing, is in the foreground. Nature appears as interaction. There is no fixed position of the observer – but rather reciprocal positions are taken. Landscape is not observed, but one allows oneself to be absorbed by it, whereby the world unfolds.

Landscape grows through what it mobilises in us. It is not a decoration, but brings about a renewal of life by anchoring us in it; it is not a mimesis of a representation of typical manifestations, but evokes the vital; it is not beautiful, but alive; and it is not an object of mere perception, but part of an intense exchange.

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33 Albert Camus / René Char In René Char *Draußen die Nacht wird regiert. Poesien*, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 1986, p. 200.

34 François Jullien *Von Landschaft leben oder das Ungedachte der Vernunft*, Berlin Matthes & Seitz 2016.



Landscape therefore appears when the perceptive is at the same time the affective, when it touches us in our inner being and is thus a resource. The perceptive/affective is the opposite of passion: the perceptive grows out of perception, while the affective leads to being attuned.

Both are the common origin of 'I' and 'World' and form the sensual, the 'spirit' of the landscape. In order to arrive at such an understanding, it is necessary to de-psychologise and de-subjectivise this understanding. The spiritual takes place in a space of contrasts, it operates in the here and now, but is permeated by the beyond. Terms like ambience, atmosphere and aura, shunned in the West because of their vagueness, permeate this idea of landscape.

Landscape is tension, not order and harmony; it becomes boring when the tension fades. It is singular, something special, but not extreme or rare, it is its own, and it makes existence appear as individuation. It is variation, not repetition, and it consists of the far-away. Landscape is characterised by spacing and an in-between, by distance, not contrast or variety, but variation. The far-away adds a welcome imprecision to distance, it is the place between being and non-being, of dreams, of the lack of limitation by horizons, of infinite depth. It is the starting point for meditation, the expansion of inner boundaries and an art of living as a strategy emerging directly from the landscape to free the world from its inertia.

Landscape has nothing to do with a "harmony with nature", which is still based on the subject-object split and therefore tends towards romanticism or irrationalism. Rather, there is landscape when my capacity for knowledge "tips over" into a sense of understanding or a silent agreement<sup>35</sup>, when knowledge becomes an inner understanding, when we move from science, which makes us know, to poetry, which makes us understand, which in this way tells me something about landscape, touches me. The opposition between reason and passion is cancelled out. In this intimacy we are in the world, rather than in contemplative observation of contexts, we are involved in coherence. Like Zhuangzi and Mengzi, the 16th-century thinker Wang Yangming declared that the I and the World emerged simultaneously, "that all human beings form one being" and that anyone who distinguished between the Thou and the I was a good-for-nothing and endangered not only all humanity but also the world of animals and plants.<sup>36</sup>

Jullien concludes by saying that we must seek a way out of the alternative of treating the world mechanically and economically or nostalgically as a lost paradise, and he surprisingly pleads for landscape to be understood as "the whole of the world", therefore also as a global local, therefore also in a world of megacities. What counts, he argues, are the numerous polarities "that put the world area in tension and save it from the uni-formation that threatens it, condemns it to atony out of boredom,

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35 Ibid., p. 184.

36 Ibid., p. 202.

and finally consigns it to indifference.”<sup>37</sup> The relationship between humankind and nature cannot be separated from the relationship between the members of the humankind themselves.

Stifter, Char and Jullien contrast the inhumanity of the human perspective on nature, which Humboldt described as the simultaneity of the exploitation of nature and humans, with the respect for humans and nature in their mutual coexistence. They change the perspective from subjectivity to an intersubjective reciprocal relationship between nature and humans: Stifter with a nature as humanised subject and the subjects as exposed to this nature, Char (and with him Camus) with a rebelling human and natural life-world, and Jullien with the mutually complementary elements. They reject Hegel’s logic and dialectic as alien to them.

All three describe a perceptive that goes hand in hand with the affective – moods, beauty and sublimity, the inherent life and interplay of matter, atmosphere, flora and fauna. Not romantically transfiguring, but as an existential world in which the relationships between inside and outside strive for a balance that likewise brings *emotio* and *ratio* into productive equilibrium. With Stifter this is in the form of occasionally threatening but not annihilating situations, with Char in the form of a unity in myth, and with Jullien in the form of a Daoist serenity. This results in a new world of conscious living in and with nature, of perception, respect and a perspective that no longer looks at the cosmos from human beings, but from the cosmos, the common of human beings and nature.

This interplay of phenomena can be experienced and described but is difficult to define if one wants to dispense with the use of specific concepts and the accompanying danger of simplifications, abstractions and possible inhumanisation. From here it is necessary to think further, or better to look further. The example of “mountain-water” uses terms that open up a non-conceptual space of the former “landscape”. We could continue this line of thought: what do we see when we say “cosmos”, but also what do we see when we say “nature”, or when we say “human being”?

Written in 2021. First published in this volume.

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37 Ibid., p. 213.



## 20. The Encounter of *republic* and *cosmos*: Arendt and Humboldt

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*Voices from outer space:*

Soichi Noguchi: “We are citizens of outer space.”

Yuri Gagarin: “I saw how beautiful our planet is.

People, let’s preserve and multiply this beauty, not destroy it!”

Nicole Stott, on behalf of 18 astronauts to the delegates  
of the Paris Climate Conference 2015:

“The one thing we all wish is that groups like yours could be holding your meeting  
in space with the beautiful horizon to horizon view of our planet as a backdrop. It  
would be an awe-inspiring distraction for sure, but there would be nothing better  
for reinforcing the significance of what you’re doing there today.”

The location of these astronauts is not the Archimedean point from which, according to Arendt, cosmic extra-terrestrial energy in the form of nuclear energy is directed to Earth.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, it is the physical location of a sensual view of our planet, whose limitedness, togetherness and beauty is rendered visible. The earth appears as a terrestrial globe, but at the same time as a world in Arendt’s sense, as a space of interpersonal relationships, at least as a potential space, as a potential world. For we know that Arendt’s illuminating account of the human conditionality of plurality simultaneously as equality and diversity<sup>2</sup>, and freedom simultaneously as action and the assumption of its “downside”, responsibility<sup>3</sup>, merely describes the possibility of its full potential. The real and at the same time imaginary view of the earth from this location reveals in the common everyday life a constant struggle between the realization of plurality, freedom and responsibility, on the one hand, and the pursuit of hegemony, sovereignty and the oppression and destruction of worldly spaces, on

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1 Hannah Arendt: *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*. In: *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin. 2006, Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, Ch. 24.

2 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., pp. 35–37.

3 Hannah Arendt: *Collective Responsibility*, in: James S. Bernauer (ed.): *Amor Mundi, Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Berlin: Springer 1987, pp. 43–50.

the other. The common world is rife with conflict zones. Not only are they caused by failed states and hegemonic powers, they are even encouraged by the fact that the world itself is a kind of failed community in which even a shared, but largely powerless instrument like the “United Nations” has little directive force.

With the emergence of the discussions about the Anthropocene, it is no longer only a question of defending human plurality, but also of the natural foundations of life, earth, water, air, climate and living beings, i.e. the preservation of the earth (or in the jargon of Christian peace and environmental initiatives of the 1980s: the preservation of creation) to make the world in the Arendtian sense possible. The question that arises in this relationship between earth and world is: do we want to approach the problems of the world and our relationship to creation with a liberal and instrumental way of thinking and acting, or do we want to regard plurality, politics, the world and nature/earth not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself, that means with a cosmopolitan, republican attitude?

This question prompts me to bring together two research directions that have a critical relationship to modernity: Hannah Arendt’s republicanism on one hand and the exploration of nature by the Enlightenment philosopher Alexander von Humboldt, which Andrea Wulf called the “invention of nature”<sup>4</sup> on the other. Both are critics of a utilitarian understanding of politics and nature, both are phenomenologists, both are intellectuals in the tradition of the European Enlightenment, and both are republicans. So far there have been initial considerations in this direction that require further deepening, to which this essay is intended to make a contribution.<sup>5</sup>

This brief encounter with Arendt and Humboldt is not intended to serve the purpose of creating a kind of republican biocentric philosophy, biocentric as opposed to the ways of thinking according to the Anthropocene. But this encounter can point to another aspect, namely a corresponding way of thinking, in which the worldviews of Arendt and Humboldt inspire each other. A strong republican citizenry would thus elevate sustainability to a decisive criterion in its relationship with nature, while Humboldt’s understanding of nature would radicalize this relationship by the assumption of a worldwide unity of man and nature.

In the following, I would first like to address Arendt’s critique of the modern understanding of nature as one of the foundations of her republican understanding and ask whether the preservation of the earth requires strong republican thinking, i.e. political thinking carried by sustainability and civic commitment. Then I would

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4 Andrea Wulf: *The Invention of Nature*, London: John Murray 2015.

5 See Peter Cannavò: Environmental Political Theory and Republicanism, In: *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*. Edited by Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, and David Schlosberg, Oxford University Press, 2016.

like to ask whether Humboldt's views of nature and the cosmos offer an understanding of nature adequate to republicanism, and finally I would like to consider Arendt's and Humboldt's ways of thinking and methods that correspond to republicanism and the cosmos.

## Arendt - Nature as a Process

Here, I would like to highlight two aspects of Arendt's analysis of nature: her critique of the alienation of the earth and the world by the natural sciences, and her critique of the understanding of nature as a process.

Most of the secondary literature on Arendt's understanding of nature deals little with the relationship between the environment and politics, with the exception of the publications of Hargis and Whiteside.<sup>6</sup> The latter emphasizes the close connection between the concepts of culture and nature, which Arendt regards as being much more closely connected with each other than her strict distinction in terms of definition suggests, namely as cultural preservation of nature.<sup>7</sup>

Referring to earth and world alienation, Arendt describes modern discoveries and inventions not as liberating and enriching progress, but as alienation from the earth through acceleration, as a reduction of distance *on* earth through distance *from* earth and, at the same time, as worldlessness due to the dual movement of expropriation and the process of accumulation. According to Arendt, "the Renaissance's new-awakened love for the earth and the world, with its rebellion against the rationalism of medieval scholasticism"<sup>8</sup> became the first victim of the modern age's triumphal world alienation. The new science went beyond the heliocentric view of the world in an effort to move around the universe with panoramic relativism and to conduct experiments with cosmic processes of evolution "unknown in the household of earthly

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6 Jill Hargis: Hannah Arendt's turn to the self and environmental responses to climate change paralysis, in: *Environmental Politics*, 2016, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 475–493, and Kerry H. Whiteside: Worldliness and Respect for Nature: An Ecological Appreciation of Hannah Arendt's Conception of Culture. In: *Environmental Values*, 1998, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 25–40,

7 Other studies deal with individual aspects of Arendt's work, see Anne Chapman: The Ways That Nature Matters: The World and the Earth in the Thought of Hannah Arendt, in: *Environmental Values* 2007, 16, no. 4, pp. 433–445; Paul Ott: World and Earth: Hannah Arendt and the Human Relationship to Nature, in: *Ethics, Place and Environment* 2009, vol. 12, no.1, pp 1–16; Janet Donohoe: Edmund Husserl, Hannah Arendt and a Phenomenology of Nature, in: *Phenomenology and the Primacy of the Political*, 2017, pp. 175–188; Waseem Yaqoob: The Archimedean point: Science and technology in the thought of Hannah Arendt, 1951–1963, In: *Journal of European Studies*, 2014, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 199–224.

8 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 240.

nature". "And even at the risk of endangering the natural life process we expose the earth to universal, cosmic forces alien to nature's household"<sup>9</sup>.

The complicated relationship to nature did not first emerge with the capture of the Archimedean point, but originally with a modern natural science that does not deal with nature per se, but with its own questions, subordinating facts to laws that can prove everything. Man is reduced to "no more than a special case of organic life, ... to whom man's habitat – the earth, together with earthbound laws – is no more than a special borderline case of absolute, universal laws"<sup>10</sup>. Sensory perceptions, common sense and language are replaced by constructs and formulas. Arendt quotes Nils Bohr as saying that the aim is no longer "to augment and order"<sup>11</sup> human experience, but to discover what lies behind natural phenomena.

It is striking that Arendt understands world alienation not merely as a scientific process, but as a broad cultural process in which the natural sciences determine the prevailing views in religion, philosophy, historiography, and political theory. Hence, she asserts "the almost too precise congruity of modern man's world alienation with the subjectivism of modern philosophy"<sup>12</sup> – from the doubts of Descartes through Hobbes and English sensualism, empiricism and pragmatism to the existentialism and positivism of the twentieth century – accompanied by the withdrawal of people into their own selves. Hence it was not simply ideas about alienation from the world that moved philosophers, but concrete events, inventions and discoveries, to which they responded with doubts, axiomatic conclusions and a "catastrophic loss of judgement"<sup>13</sup>.

The second aspect, the interpretation of nature as a process, emerges as a result of technical progress according to Arendt. The interpretation of history was likewise affected by thinking in processes. Nature and history were both subjected to the flow of progress<sup>14</sup>, so that the procedural nature of examining them is inevitably constructed "(...) in the sense of the consuming process of life that is most immediately

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9 Ibid., p. 238.

10 Hannah Arendt: *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*, in: *Between Past and Future*. op. cit., p. 260.

11 Ibid., p. 261.

12 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 248.

13 This phrase is included in the German version authorized by Arendt. Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, in *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft, Übungen im politischen Denken I*, Munich Piper 1994, p. 68 "... die Verachtung der deutschen idealistischen Philosophie für den gesunden Menschenverstand hängt aufs engste mit Hegels ausdrücklicher Verachtung für die von Kant so gepriesene menschliche Urteilskraft, das eigentlich höchste Vermögen der Vernunft, zusammen." (The contempt of German idealistic philosophy for common sense is closely linked to Hegel's explicit contempt for the human power of judgement so praised by Kant, which is in fact the intellect's greatest asset.)

14 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, Munich 2002, XX, 8.

given to our experience”<sup>15</sup>. This life process corresponds to Arendt’s characterization of work in its processual, “destructive, devouring aspect of the laboring activity ... is visible only from the standpoint of the world”<sup>16</sup>. For Arendt as a phenomenologist it is particularly disturbing that a phenomenon or anything particular no longer appears “in the sense of an aspect or an example. It no longer shows itself at all, but is constantly consumed, ‘processed’”<sup>17</sup>. Finally, Arendt observes that progress in science and technology only came about because human beings intervened in interpersonal areas in a way that was previously only possible in the realm of history. Scientific and technical rather than political actors develop potential extermination processes and intervene in nature on a large scale with breeding, today with gene manipulation.<sup>18</sup>

According to Arendt, the difference between the ancient and the modern understanding of nature could not be greater. On the one hand, the immortality of nature and human deeds in ancient Greece, “which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves”<sup>19</sup>, and on the other hand the “world of things, which we already produce as transient, as parts of a gigantic production and consumption process, which makes them emerge and disappear ever faster” and which is itself surrounded by a transient nature, the disappearance of which takes place only at a slower pace – and this only as long as man leaves the natural processes of the emergence and disappearance of seas, continents and mountains to itself and does not intervene in an accelerating way. Immortality, in any case, has disappeared from the world surrounding human beings as well as from the nature surrounding the world. On its part, it is surrounded by a transient nature, the disappearance of which takes place only at a slower pace – and this only as long as human beings leave the natural processes of the origin and disappearance of seas, continents and mountains to themselves and do not intervene in an accelerating way. Immortality, in any case, has disappeared from the world surrounding man as well as from the nature surrounding the world.”<sup>20</sup>

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15 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., XXII, 3.

16 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 87.

17 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., XXII, 3.

18 Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 77.

19 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 19.

20 Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 76f. “die Welt der Dinge, die wir schon als vergängliche herstellen, als Teile eines gigantischen Produktions- und Konsumtionsprozesses, der sie immer schneller entstehen und vergehen lässt” und die “ihrerseits von einer vergänglichen Natur umgeben ist, deren Hinschwinden sich nur in einem langsameren Tempo vollzieht – und auch dies nur solange, als der Mensch die natürlichen Prozesse des Entstehens und Vergehens von Meeren, Kontinenten und Gebirgen sich selbst überlässt und nicht beschleunigend eingreift. Unvergänglichkeit jedenfalls ist aus der den Menschen umgeben-



These procedural interventions have assumed the character of irreversible actions, comparable to interpersonal actions.<sup>21</sup> In the course of time, the transience of the world of things and of nature<sup>22</sup> due to processes and interventions in the world and in nature, the consequences of which are irreversible<sup>23</sup>. In this process, the ability to act has become more and more the “exclusive prerogative” of natural scientists. “It seems only proper, that their deeds should eventually have turned out to have greater news value, to be of greater political significance than the administrative and diplomatic doings of most so-called statesmen.”<sup>24</sup>

Arendt’s critiques of loss of the earth and the world, of process thinking, of the endangerment of man and nature, and of the quasi unrestricted actions of scientists remain topical even in the face of newer technological developments – digitalization, biotechnology, and AI. At the same time, the exploitation, pollution and destruction of the living environment is gaining momentum.

In Arendt’s view, this process threatens to destroy man’s stature unless reason, public spirit and the ability to judge take centre stage again. The aim is to reverse the emancipation of the natural sciences from the “anthropocentric, i.e. truly humanistic, concerns”<sup>25</sup> that were not explained in detail but in a political rather than a conservative or romantic way. She ends her essays on “Nature and History” (in the German version) with the remark that she could or should not offer solutions in such an essay, but “perhaps contribute something to self-declaration and above all encourage to pursue the essence and the possibilities of action (...)”<sup>26</sup>; in other words, political action in the context of republicanism. Thus Arendt defends the freedom and curiosity of research, but at the same time considers “the layman and the humanist” indispensable in order “to judge what the scientist is doing because it concerns all men, and this debate must of course be joined by the scientists themselves insofar as they are fellow citizens.”<sup>27</sup> It should, however, be noted that humanism today is no longer an anthropocentric but a biocentric understanding of the world.

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den Welt wie aus der die Welt umgebenden Natur verschwunden.” (“... the world of things that we already produce as ephemeral, as parts of a gigantic production and consumption process that makes them come into being and pass away ever more quickly and that “for its part is surrounded by an ephemeral nature whose disappearance only takes place at a slower pace – and this too only as long as man leaves the natural processes of the emergence and passing away of seas, continents and mountains to themselves and does not intervene in an accelerating way. Imperishability, in any case, has disappeared from the world surrounding man as well as from the nature surrounding the world.”)

21 Hannah Arendt: *The Concept of History*, in *Between Past and Future*, op. cit., pp. 86–90.

22 Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 72, 77.

23 *Ibid.*: p. 77f.

24 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 206.

25 Hannah Arendt: *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*, op. cit., p. 260.

26 Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 79.

27 Hannah Arendt: *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*, op. cit., p. 262.

I would like to add a third aspect, the role of nature in relation to the human necessities of life. Arendt touches on it only briefly with regard to the role of essential reproductive food, metabolism and life as the basic condition of working. And yet Arendt spoke about the beauty and indispensability of nature. Thus, when she turns to the world of phenomena, which not only constitutes the space of the political but according to the biologist Portmann, cited approvingly by Arendt, is also characteristic of all sentient beings, humans and animals who perceive phenomena and as phenomena of almost infinite diversity have the ability “to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched”<sup>28</sup>. These phenomena are not only subject to a natural necessity, but in their manifestations largely an end in themselves.

Elsewhere, Arendt draws an emotional picture of nature interacting with humans. In a review of writer Adalbert Stifter’s relationship to nature in his novels and stories, she describes it as unparalleled in its pure joy, wisdom and beauty.<sup>29</sup> Arendt highlights the great beauty and “strangely innocent wisdom” of Stifter’s work and his incomparable ability to unfold a narrative landscape painting of the mountains of Bohemia. For Stifter, nature is reality. The people who live there are part of the common cycle with nature. They have a home there and are not confronted by a foreign society. “Our sense of homelessness in society and of alienation in nature, whose laws we feel will function only as long as we leave it alone (as Kafka once put it), are constantly contradicted by Stifter.”<sup>30</sup> The development of human nature in Stifter is the greatest good, according to Arendt, and trust the highest virtue as a prerequisite for this development. The narrative “Rock Crystal” demonstrates this reality, beauty, and innocent wisdom, when two children who get lost in a snowstorm in the mountains are rescued by the inhabitants of two villages, who until then had been estranged from each other.

Nature, the environment, technology, science, politics and philosophy are inseparable in Arendt’s view. As far-reaching as it is incomplete, her alternative sees the creation of world in the sense of inter-subjective worlds and the recovery of political action that subjects all human concerns to a deliberative process, including the contents of the sciences and their application. Her republican cosmopolitan approaches lend weight to our perception of the environmental/earth crisis as a crisis of liberal and autocratic governments in our world(s). Against this background, technical solutions promoted as “geotechnology”, such as the installation of reflective mirrors in space to minimize global warming, can be criticised not only in terms of feasibility,

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28 Hannah Arendt: *The Life of the Mind*, New York: Harcourt, Brace Co. 1977, p. 19.

29 Hannah Arendt: Great Friend of Reality. Adalbert Stifter, in: *Hannah Arendt, Reflections on Literature and Culture*. Ed. Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, Stanford University Press 2007, pp. 110–114. Cf. more detailed descriptions in chapter 18 and 19 in this volume: Desert and Oasis: Arendt Reads Stifter, and: Overcoming Inhuman Perspectives on Nature.

30 Hannah Arendt: *ibid.*, p. 113.

but above all as the continuation of an instrument-based creator mentality. Instead, we need to replace liberal thinking with environmental thinking.

The critique of “globalization” has priority here, for instance the ideas of Étienne Tassin, who described international relations as world-destructive, domesticated, privatized, and consumed.<sup>31</sup> According to Tassin, a globalized world in which the ecosystem of all things living, the cultural assets of all peoples and the pluralist communities of political actors must be preserved and enabled calls for a corresponding threefold effort in the form of ecology, ecumenism and cosmopolitanism in the interests of the environment, cultural assets and the meta-national sphere.

The already mentioned thesis of Kerry Whiteside that Arendt remarks on the role of culture in ancient Athens and Rome to derive the preservation of agri-culture as an alternative to the exploitation and destruction of nature<sup>32</sup> can also be found in the unity of town and country during the Renaissance, when culture was understood as the parallel preservation of culture, virtue and landscape. Arendt’s “worldly love of the Renaissance” expressed itself in the landscape as the cultural *topos* of Dante, Petrarch and Aeneas Sylvius before it was subjected to the new thinking of science and technology.

This worldly love of the Renaissance cannot be separated from the civic bourgeoisie’s love of political freedom and equality. In 1338/1339, Ambrogio Lorenzetti frescoed the government hall of Siena’s town hall, depicting good and bad governments and their impact on the life of the city and the surrounding countryside. The prosperous bourgeoisie of the time were aware that the wealth of their city and the wisdom of their rulers could only be secured through peace, harmony and equality under the rule of law, and the absence of selfish factions and damage to the common good.<sup>33</sup> These principles, known since Cicero, have shaped republicanism from that time up to Arendt and mean more than the absence of war; they enable the development of the virtue that Montesquieu called the principle of the republic and includes preservation of the land as agriculture and landscape.<sup>34</sup>

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31 Étienne Tassin: De la domination totale à la domination globale. Perspectives arendtiennes sur la mondialisation d’un point de vue cosmopolitique, in: Annabel Herzog (éd.): *Hannah Arendt. Le totalitarisme et la banalité du mal*. Paris: PUF 2011, p. 15.

32 Kerry H. Whiteside: Worldliness and Respect for Nature: an Ecological Application of Hannah Arendt’s Conception of Culture, in: *Environmental Values*, 1998, 7, p. 25–40.

33 Quentin Skinner: Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher, in: *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 72, 1986, pp. 1–56.

34 We find here no evidence of a distinctly ecological policy of urban citizenship, but clearly a “knowledge of the indissoluble connection between city and country” as “a specific European cultural asset and thought” that needs to be revived, see Holger Magel: Ländlicher Raum – Wohin? Plädoyer für ein nachhaltiges Landmanagement und eine aktive Bürgergesellschaft, in *Allgemeine Vermessungsnachrichten (AVN)* 11/12, 2005, p. 390f.

We also find equality under the rule of law in the constitution of our Western societies. Here, however, the republic and liberal democracy are not only structurally in permanent conflict with each other (indivisible or divided sovereignty, rule of the people or of law, rule of virtue or principle of virtue, etc.), but also represent two historically competing currents in the tradition of Rousseau/Marx, on the one hand, and Montesquieu/Founding Fathers, on the other. The Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility, a UN initiative launched by Brazilian entrepreneurs in 2000 as “Global Compact” to protect the interests of workers, customers and the environment in a progressively globalized world, exemplifies the emergence of the principle of virtue at a time of active civil society in the style of Lorenzetti.<sup>35</sup> Here, the principle of socially responsible action is voluntarily adopted by numerous companies and social and political institutions around the world, transforming them in the process into corporate citizens, members of civil society. This assumption of multiple responsibilities in the context of republicanism can bring about an effective shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism, encouraging people to “build better relationships with nature itself and with other people. Such an approach should be based, firstly, on a logic of respect for nature, sufficiency and interdependence, shared responsibility and fairness for all in search of an environmentally balanced environment; and, secondly, on the ethics of a citizenship that thinks globally and locally at the same time and insists on transparency and accountability in all environmental matters.”<sup>36</sup> Hence the special report of the *German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU)* in 2014 bears the title “Climate Protection as a World Citizen Movement”<sup>37</sup>.

## Humboldt – Nature as an Organism

An outstanding example of these recommendations can be found in Alexander von Humboldt’s understanding of nature and politics. Humboldt was filled with an irre-

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35 Cf. chapter 9 in this volume: Sustainability – The Power of the ‘Unreasonable’.

36 David Bollier / Burns H. Weston Das Menschenrecht auf eine saubere Umwelt und die Renaissance der Commons, in Silke Helfrich (ed.) *Commons. Für eine neue Politik jenseits von Markt und Staat*, Bielefeld transcript 2015, p. 418. Similarly Jeremy Rifkin: “Geopolitics has always been based on the assumption that the environment is a giant battleground – a war of all against all – where we each fight with one another to secure resources to ensure our individual survival. Biosphere politics, by contrast, is based on the idea that the Earth is a living organism made up of interdependent relationships and that we each survive by stewarding the larger communities of which we are a part.” In: Jeremy Rifkin: *The Empathic Civilization. The Race to Global Consciousness in a World of Crisis*, New York: Polity Press 2010, p. 615.

37 For a critical discussion of this concept, see *GAIA 1 – 2015, World Citizens Movement and Climate Protection*, <https://www.oekom.de/zeitschriften/gaia/archive/archive/heft/678.html> (2023.7.5.)

pressible curiosity about nature: “I have a longing for *freedom* and distant journeys.” On his five-year journey through what are now the modern states of Venezuela, Cuba, Trinidad, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico and the United States, he collected numerous specimens, noted down his observations of flora and fauna, soils, mountains and climatic conditions. He took countless measurements of distances, altitudes and temperatures; he drew maps, but he was the opposite of the cool, technical surveyor suggested by Daniel Kehlmann’s novel *Measuring the World*<sup>38</sup>.

On the contrary, Humboldt found that nature spans the world like a single organism, which is why he spoke of *cosmos*. He saw nature as a living whole, not a “dead aggregate”<sup>39</sup>. His realization that vegetation in the earth’s northern hemisphere resembled the upper mountain regions of the Andes served to prove that even regions and heights remote from each other were connected, an insight he used to establish a geography of plants.

In contrast to Bacon, who regarded the world as created for man, or Descartes, who saw animals effectively as automata<sup>40</sup>, Humboldt witnessed countless interdependencies and established “how many things are connected with the existence of a single plant”. He discovered the “principle of a keystone species (...) almost 200 years before the concept was named”<sup>41</sup>.

“The phrase *physical description of the world* that I use here is modelled on the long since commonly used physical description of the earth. The expansion of the contents, the depiction of the natural whole from distant nebulae to the climatic spread of the organic tissues that colour our cliffs, make the introduction of a new word necessary.”<sup>42</sup> It is *cosmos* in the Greek understanding of the world order that Humboldt was eager to permeate: “My main impulse was the endeavour to conceive physical things in their general context and nature as a whole, moved and enlivened by inner forces, (...) so that without serious inclination to the knowledge of the individual, all great and universal world-views can only be an airy vision.”<sup>43</sup> His attempt to spread *cosmos* throughout numerous volumes of the same name towards the end of his life was not fully crowned with success. “We are far from a time when it might be possible to concentrate all our sensuous views on the unity of the concept of nature.”<sup>44</sup>

It is this *cosmos* in the Greek understanding of the world order that Humboldt was keen to investigate. His idea of a multifaceted unity of nature also embraced

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38 “What speaks to the soul ... escapes our measurements”, see: Andrea Wulf, op. cit., p. 72.

39 Andrea Wulf, op. cit., p. 88.

40 Andrea Wulf, op. cit., p. 59.

41 Andrea Wulf, op. cit., p. 74.

42 Alexander von Humboldt *Kosmos*. vol 1, Kindle, position 842.

43 Ibid., position 26.

44 Ibid., position 923.

people in their exchange with nature. He was fully interested in the social and political conditions of life, thus distinguishing him as a republican, “a convinced republican at the Prussian court”<sup>45</sup>. He thus describes the negative consequences of tree clearing and subsequent soil erosion, and criticizes slavery and oppression. In his extensive studies on what is now Mexico, he detailed the social and political situation of the Indians and of African slaves, as well as the hatred that prevailed between the various social classes and seriously hindered the just economic development of the country. At the same time, he boasted that the Toltecs had “a far more perfect solar year than the Greeks and Romans”<sup>46</sup>.

It was not only part of his ethos as a scientist, but also part of his humanist convictions that made him determine that it was up to travelers who witnessed grievances and oppressions “to bring the laments of the wretched to the ears of those who have the power to assuage them”<sup>47</sup>. When he visited the United States following his stay in Central and South America, he voiced his criticism of the slave economy to President Jefferson. He thanked Jefferson after his visit: “I have had the good fortune to see the first Magistrate of this great republic with the simplicity of a philosopher”<sup>48</sup>, a message that was followed by years of correspondence. Humboldt admired the newly formed republic for not having taken the fatal course of the French Revolution. He was sceptical instead about the future of independence movements in Central and South America, since the strong cultural imprint of feudalism and the clergy coupled with lack of opportunity to cultivate republican practices bore the risk of ending in tyranny rather than a republic. And in 1854 he complained to Varnhagen about the decline of republicanism in the USA: “(...) the whole thing gives me the sad impression that freedom is simply a mechanism in the element of usefulness, refining little there to stimulate the spiritual and the comfortable, which is supposed to be the purpose of political freedom. (...) Hence indifference to slavery. But the United States is a Cartesian whirlwind, sweeping everything away, tediously leveling.”<sup>49</sup>

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45 Ottmar Ette *Das Mobile des Wissens. Alexander von Humboldts Foren der Kulturen und das Humboldt-Forum*. In Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.) *Zukunftsmodell Humboldt*, 2007, p. 9.

46 Alexander von Humboldt *Versuch über den politischen Zustand des Königreichs Neu-Spanien, Darmstädter Ausgabe*, Vol. 4, 2008, p. 164.

47 Cf. Andrea Wulf, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

48 Gerhard Casper: A Young Man from “ultima Thule” Visits Jefferson: Alexander von Humboldt in Philadelphia and Washington, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, September 2011, Vol. 155, no. 3, p. 258.

49 Humboldt an Varnhagen von Ense, 31 July 1854, in Alexander von Humboldt *Über die Freiheit des Menschen. Auf der Suche nach Wahrheit*, ed. by Manfred Otto, Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer Verlag 1999, p. 181f.

## ***Cosmos and Republic as a Thinking Space***

Such a thinking space does not only exist as a place of exchange of views, but is characterized by Arendt's critique of the natural science disinterest in world and nature, and Humboldt's views of nature and the cosmos. Both differ completely from abstract, surveying, instrumental thinking. What is the object of our thinking? was the question Arendt asked herself, to which she replied: "Experience! Nothing else! And if we lose the ground of experience, then we get into all kinds of theory."<sup>50</sup>

For Humboldt, Hegel's approach to the world or even the cosmos was unbearable for its lack of vision. "A forest of ideas is certainly in that Hegel (...) though for someone like me who is stuck insect-like on the ground and with a very different nature, an abstract assertion of purely false facts and views about America and the Indian world becomes liberty-robbing and frightening. But at the same time I don't ignore the greatness."<sup>51</sup>

Humboldt is the first scientist to produce scientific results in images; pictorial representation is part of the cognitive process, not mere illustration. And since the perception of external nature and inner human nature not only takes place in concepts or in an unemotional outlook and unemotional thinking, but in the world of feelings as well, Humboldt's work is deliberately marked by sensual impressions that arise while observing nature. His *Views of Nature* is a "scientific book full of lyrical passages. For Humboldt, prose was as important as the content, and he did not allow his publisher to change a single syllable in order to preserve the 'melody' of his sentences"<sup>52</sup>. He emphasized "the combination of a literary and a purely scientific purpose, the desire to simultaneously engage the imagination and enrich life with ideas by multiplying knowledge"<sup>53</sup>.

In his book on what is now Mexico, he introduced his geographical account with an impressive description of a sandstorm. "I have tried, always authentically describing, characterizing, even trying to be scientifically truthful, without entering the arid region of knowledge."<sup>54</sup>

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50 Hannah Arendt *Ich will verstehen, Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk*. Ed. Ursula Ludz, Munich Piper 1996, p. 79

51 Humboldt to Varnhagen von Ense, 1 July 1837, in Alexander von Humboldt *Über die Freiheit des Menschen*, op. cit., p. 180.

52 Andres Wulf, op. cit., p. 132.

53 Ottmar Ette *Schreiben in der Moderne*, in *AvH – Aufbruch in die Moderne*, ed. Ottmar Ette et al., Berlin 2001, p. 49.

54 *Briefe von Alexander von Humboldt an Varnhagen von Ense aus den Jahren 1827 bis 1858*. Nebst Auszügen aus Varnhagen's Tagebüchern und Briefen von Varnhagen und Andern an Humboldt. Ed. By Ludmilla Assing, Leipzig F.A. Brockhaus 1860, p. 23.

This prompted Humboldt researcher Ottmar Ette to summarize Humboldt's method as transdisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary.<sup>55</sup>

Arendt's thinking has been variously discussed in terms of her essayistic, open-minded thinking, which she herself called "exercises in political thinking", her description of semantic changes in concepts and ways of thinking between the antiquity and modernity, therefore the title she gave to a collection of her essays *Between Past and Future*, her use of linguistic imagery and metaphors to designate the new, of irony, sharpness and laughter, e.g. in the characterization of Eichmann, the reduction of essentialists to a minimum, which she called "The Human Condition" in order to display intersubjective phenomena, the use of poetry and literature in the reproduction of moods and experiences of political consequence typical of the time, so in her books *Rahel Varnhagen*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Men in Dark Times*, and *The Hidden Tradition*, of theatrical, atmospheric scenes (about Anton Schmidt, who had rescued persecuted Jews, in the Eichmann trial, or the recitation of Pasternak's poems by the audience from memory when he dropped his manuscript at a rare public reading in the USSR, mentioned in her essay on the Hungarian Revolution), of imagination as a prerequisite of judgment, and the critique and redefinition of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* as joint action and thinking / judging in public<sup>56</sup> These thinking processes are closely linked to emotional movements (writing with *ira et studio*, laughter, pure joy, wisdom and beauty, the "basic experience of abandonment", giving meaning and understanding, etc.). Nor should the transfer of Kantian aesthetic judgment to political judgement be interpreted by any means as de-emotionalization, since "disinterested pleasure" underlies the process of judgment, and the appearance of the *who*, as we saw in the reference to Portmann, has an aesthetic component (the beautiful gesture, ugly behaviour). Finally, Arendt's reference to Solomon's "understanding heart" in her essay on "Understanding and Politics"<sup>57</sup>, which she used while investigating the conditions for judgment before embarking on her writings on Kant, shows that she was not seeking an abstract formula for judgment, but

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55 Ottmar Ette *Unterwegs zu einer Weltwissenschaft? Alexander von Humboldts Weltbegriffe und die transregionalen Studien*, in *HiN*, vol. 7, No. 13, 2006, p. 10.

56 Cf. chapter 10 in this volume: Horror and Laughter – Arendt, Tabori, Borowski. Also: Volker M. Heins: *Reasons of the Heart: Weber and Arendt on Emotion in Politics*, in: *The European Legacy*, October 2007, vol. 12 no. 6, pp. 715–728; Michalinos Zembylas: *Hannah Arendt's political thinking on emotions and education: implications for democratic education*, in: *Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, August 2018; Barbara Hahn: *Hannah Arendt – Leidenschaft, Menschen und Bücher*, Berlin: Berlinverlag 2005; Marie Luise Knott: *Verlernen: Denkwege bei Hannah Arendt*, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2011; Maria Robaszekiewicz: *Übungen im politischen Denken. Hannah Arendts Schriften als Einleitung der politischen Praxis*, Wiesbaden Springer 2017; Maike Weißpflug *Die Kunst, politisch zu denken*, Berlin Matthes & Seitz 2019.

57 Hannah Arendt: *Understanding and Politics*, in: *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken 1994, p. 322.



rather the possibility of understanding as meaning. Meaningfulness through narratives and the perception of different perspectives and experiences requires the whole person, as the Enlightenment essayist and diplomat Melchior Grimm put it: “The prerequisite for a distinct and mature taste is having a sharp mind, a sensitive soul and a righteous heart.”<sup>58</sup>

What finally distinguishes this space of thought is a common cosmopolitanism. In Arendt’s work it finds its basis in the qualitatively interpersonal, active plurality as the starting point, which is followed as a second step of thought by the institutionalization appropriate to this plurality in the form of a federation.<sup>59</sup> Finally, in a third step, this plurality and federation requires the appropriate form of judgement, the extended power of judgement adopted by Kant, the location of which is cosmopolitan. It presupposes that the judges leave the exclusivity of the European or Western horizon and judge from a cosmopolitan location, in contrast to Hegel’s pejorative critique of Chinese philosophy.<sup>60</sup>

Humboldt’s view of the world is one that not only encompasses nature as a global organism, but also, according to Ette, characterises the world as a commonality of world trade, world history, world view and world consciousness. What Alexander von Humboldt developed on the level of world knowledge was represented by his brother Wilhelm, with whom he constantly corresponded, on the level of linguistic knowledge, so that it applies to both that “the dialogical principle is central not just to Humboldt’s theory of language but also to his philosophical anthropology, and it has a direct political relevance. ... The diversity of languages and their comparative study is not just essential to our understanding of our own languages as well as those of others; it is intrinsic to the nature of language as such. Translation is thus a privileged route to cultural as well as linguistic communication.”<sup>61</sup>

From this cosmopolitan perspective two things follow: first, to leave the preferred regional location without abandoning it, but to subject it to critical assessment within the framework of many different points of view. Second, to adopt the standpoint of cosmopolitan political action. It is a different matter whether one looks at international institutions such as the UN Security Council from a regional or national perspective, at international organizations such as the courts of criminal justice, at rules such as the Responsibility to Protect and challenges such as climate change and the extinction of species, or from changing standpoints in the world. Then we will find that these institutions are not only hopeful approaches, but are

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58 Melchior Grimm *Paris zündet die Lichter an. Literarische Korrespondenz*, Leipzig Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1977, p. 121.

59 Cf. chapter 13 in this volume: Federalism – A Hidden Treasure.

60 Cf. chapter 17 in this volume: Elements of Cosmopolitanism – and its Handicaps.

61 John Walker: Wilhelm von Humboldt and Dialogical Thinking, in: *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, January 2017, vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 83–94.

still far too weak instruments with regard to a necessary, future cosmopolitan policy, in which regional standpoints are not necessarily limited to its regions.

## Conclusion

We can now conclude from what has been said, that Arendt's and Humboldt's self and world relationships seem to be radical, less in their open or implicit criticism of the natural sciences, but above all by their strong rejection of any kind of instrumentalization of men and nature. The preservation of nature is not missing in Arendt's statements that the meaning of politics is freedom, and that the realization of human plurality is the basis of politics and freedom; at the same time, Humboldt's statement of the unity of man and nature includes a republican respect for mankind. Both perspectives exclude the exploitation of man and nature, in open or implicit form like cheap promises or technical solutions, such as solar sails in space to prevent the global rise in temperature.

It is no coincidence that Arendt and Humboldt have a peculiar way of writing that cannot be separated from their perspective of thinking. The question that can not be further examined here is to what extent a republicanism that is oriented towards sustainability and an Arendtian action as an end in itself expresses itself in its own way of thinking and writing. Weaving the thread of Humboldt and Arendt further would not only bring *cosmos* and *republic* together, but also Grimm's unity of judgment, feeling and prudence in a way that overcomes opposition and disciplinary boundaries, nature and culture, reason and feeling, science and aesthetics. This means that *cosmos* and *republic* could trigger a common environmental philosophy and environmental aesthetics that goes beyond a natural philosophy and natural aesthetics confined to external nature.<sup>62</sup>

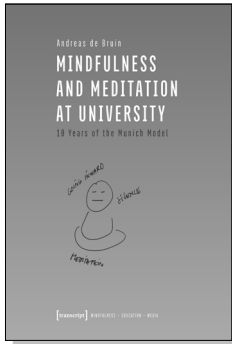
And finally, we have seen that cosmopolitanism, in the face of global problems, becomes an indispensable place of thought and politics, to which one arrives with Humboldt from nature and with Arendt from human plurality and Kant's *erweiterte Denkungsart*. All this opens up further reflection on a republican-biocentric perspective.

Written in 2019. First published: *Cosmos and Republic: A Hidden Dialogue between Hannah Arendt and Alexander von Humboldt*, in: *Russian Sociological Review*, 2019, vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 284–298.

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62 Cf. for further reflections Gernot Böhme: *Leib. Die Natur, die wir selbst sind*, Berlin 2019, p. 41.

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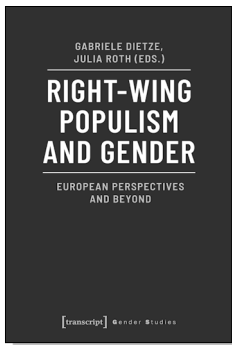
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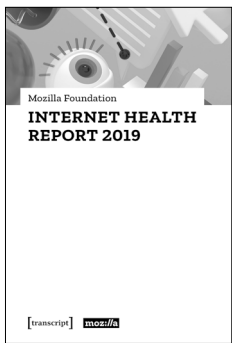
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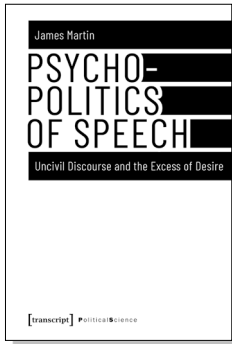
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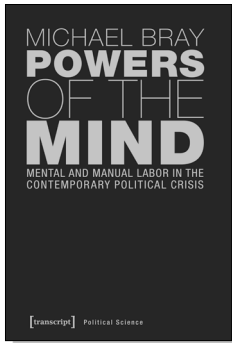
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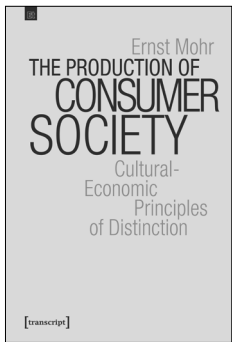
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