Kalagatos Revista de Filosofia
https://doi.org/10.52521/kg.v23i1.16939

Hannah Arendt's Hellenism

O Helenismo de Hannah Arendt

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ABSTRACT:

This article aims to discuss the status of Hellenism in Hannah Arendt's thought. For the author, what is at stake is the attempt to evaluate the choices of the prevailing ways of life in the West. In particular, it aims to reflect on whether politics and philosophy still have any meaning in the contemporary world. In this direction, we will be guided by the hypothesis that Arendt, through the lenses of Homer, Socrates, and Aristotle, saw in the ancients a way of evaluating politics and the activity of thought, guided by beauty as the most adequate criterion to reach its specific meanings.

KEYWORDS: Hellenism, beauty, Politics, Philosophy.

RESUMO:

O presente artigo enseja discutir o estatuto do helenismo no pensamento de Hannah Arendt. Para autora, o que está em jogo é a tentativa de avaliar as escolhas dos modos de vida prevalecentes no Ocidente. De modo especial, visa refletir se a política e a filosofia ainda tem algum sentido no mundo contemporâneo. Nessa direção, seremos guiados pela hipótese de que Arendt, através das lupas de Homero, Sócrates e Aristóteles, enxergava nos antigos uma forma de avaliar a política e a atividade do pensamento guiando-se pela beleza como critério mais adequado para alcançar suas significações específicas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Helenismo, beleza, Política, Filosofia.

In the context of the suggested theme of dialogue between Arendt and the ancients, we decided to reflect on the status of Hellenism in Arendtian thought. Undoubtedly, this is a controversial topic, which has been the subject of reflection by several scholars of Hannah Arendt. Some commentators have explored the subject in greater depth (cf. Taminiaux, 1992; Parekh, 1981; Aguiar, 2001), while others have preferred a more superficial approach (cf. O'Sullivan, 1979; Merquior, 1991). In both cases, the relevance

of the subject is evident. What is at question in the proposed excerpt? Why does Arendt turn to the ancients? Is it merely nostalgia for an idealized polis and philosophy? Or is it a display of her unmistakable knowledge of the Greek language and its most important authors? Is it an anachronism in her understanding of the present? Or was our author influenced by her mentor Heidegger's interest in and treatment of the ancient Greeks? We believe that none of these aspects determines Arendtian Hellenism, although there is a little of all of them, as a certain nostalgia for the authors and history of ancient Greece is undeniable. She was erudite and knew the impact of displaying her philological, poetic, and philosophical expertise, and Heidegger's influence is undeniable. However, what really mattered was her attempt to evaluate the choices of Western ways of life. In a broad sense, therefore, for Arendt, it is a question of understanding the predominant patterns of life in the West or the parameters by which ways of life have been evaluated in the Western tradition. The question is to know what value is attributed to human activities: work, labor, action, philosophy, science, or religion. In the present reflection, we will focus on a more specific characteristic, the focus of Arendtian Hellenism, as a quest to understand whether politics and philosophy still have any meaning and what they have to say today, given the changes in the ways of governing and thinking in the contemporary world. Thus, we can say that her Hellenism is rooted in historical reality, in response to the emergence and prevalence of a totalitarian form of government and its fascist procedures: total war, massification, ideology, anonymity, objective enemy, propaganda, secrecy, and lies, among others.

Arendt witnessed politics being replaced by a kind of manipulated performance of the masses, as well as the usurpation of thought by ideological propaganda. Governments, aspiring to total domination over populations, began to structure themselves around methods, procedures, and institutions that rejected the practices characteristic of political regimes, especially with regard to the protection of free action, dialogue, and speech. It is a matter of seeking a counterfactual perspective on the totalitarian exercise of power and the ideological predominance of thought. The goal is to know whether politics and philosophy would still have any importance in the face of regimes structured on their negations. Her return to the historical and conceptual beginnings of politics and philosophy was a way of reviving, in all of us, the importance of recovering the relevance of politics and human thought.

Our understanding of Hellenism will be guided, this time, by the thesis that Arendt saw in the ancients a way of evaluating politics and intellectual activity guided by beauty as the most appropriate criterion for achieving their specific meanings. Following this direction, in the first part, we will examine the weight of Hellenism in its formulation of politics through the paths opened by Homer and Aristotle. In these authors, so dear to Arendt, the weight of kalón in the evaluation of human action and the recovery of its dignity becomes more evident, as does the connection Arendt makes between politics (*polis*) and beauty *(kalón*); and this comes from Homer. "The polis grew out of and remained root in the

pre-polis Greek experience" (Arendt, 1989, p. 196). Arendt's work is permeated by the idea that politics, the public space, is a space of appearance and, as she states in *The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and its Political Significance:* "the proper criterion by which to judge appearances is beauty" (Arendt, 1993, p. 210). Appearance, public visibility, establishes a world that is organized according to levels of greatness, and "action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness" (Arendt, 1989, p. 205).

Greatness can be understood in an institutional or agonistic sense. In the first sense, the greatest of all human greatnesses resides in the polis and the institutions it brings forth: civility, justice, friendship, law, and limits on human power. In the agonistic sense, the polis is the place of participation and competition among equals to achieve immortality, the flourishing of personality, and the accomplishment of enduring actions. The qualifiers used by Arendt to speak of politics come, at this point, from aesthetics. In other words, Arendt judges politics to be guided by values that emphasize the capacity of political action to reveal greatness, glory, honor, civility, and justice, as well as to endure in the memory of the city. It is the foundation of the Polis, the ancient Greek republic, the event that will point forward and backward as the unifying core of the most significant political categories.

In the same sense, beauty is the most important category for expressing the activity of thinking toward the meaning inherent in human activities. The thinker affirms, referring to Plato:

> When Plato was not concerned with political philosophy (as in The Symposium and elsewhere), he describes the ideas as what "shines forth most" (*ekphanestaton*) and therefore as variations of beautiful. Only in the Republic were the ideas transformed into standards, measurements, and rules of behavior, all of which were variations or derivations of the idea of 'good' in the Greek sense of the word, that is, of the 'good for' or of fitness (Arendt, 1989, p. 225-226).

This connection between thought and beauty will guide us in the thesis that it is constitutive of the Arendtian way of practicing philosophy and that this is related, in some way, to the reception of Hellenic culture in her thinking.

Hellenism and the *polis* as a paradigm of politics

Let us move on to the exposition of our thesis. We will first consider the influences of Homer and Aristotle on Arendt's reflection on politics. It is from these authors that the connection between action (*praxis*) and the most beautiful and immortal human achievements comes. In Homer, the formulation that will be fully developed by Aristotle is present *in nuce*. In the archaic Trojan battles, Arendt finds the seeds of what will become the classical *polis*. Furthermore, Arendt finds in the poet of *the Iliad* elements to reflect on the impact on the contemporary world of the idea of total war: the transgression of all possible limits (*hubris*).

The Trojan War, the original cradle of the idea of *polis*, one of the most iconic events in Greek mythology, has been interpreted from different perspectives throughout history. Although Hannah Arendt did not write directly about this conflict, her political philosophy provides valuable conceptual tools for analyzing it. In Arendt, the Trojan War is seen as an example of a military confrontation that, due to its violence and capacity for destruction, became the standard for what she would call total war, a type of confrontation that aims not only at military surrender, territorial occupation, and possession of goods, but also at the annihilation of a people, the physical and cultural destruction of the city and its monuments. Total war transforms the world (works, achievements, and human relations) into a desert (Arendt, 1998, p. 94). This type of war is the ideal environment for exceeding all limits, where men no longer aspire to rival their peers, but challenge and measure themselves against the gods (Homero, 2010, I l, 56, 64, 69). These limitlessnesses appear in the practices of lying, revenge, cheating, theft, and the breaking of all kinds of bonds (*philia* - Homero*,* 2010, II, 645-675; V, 510-540 and 680-710*).* In Arendt's words:

> the Greeks' war against Troy, which ended in such a total destruction of that city that until recent times it was possible to believe that it had never existed, can probably still be considered the ur-example of a war of annihilation (Arendt, 2005, p. 163).

Thus, in light of Arendt's critique, we can see a parallel between the destruction of *the* Trojan *polis* and the collapse of political life under totalitarian practices that prioritize violence, terror, lies, and manipulation over discourse and collective action, in view of the common world. Troy is not only a defeated city, but a disintegrated political space, where the public sphere is erased by the rule of force. Furthermore, the *Iliad* highlights the futility of war, as it is motivated by individual passions (Achilles' wrath, Agamemnon's pride, Paris' betrayal) and culminates in total destruction, in the desertification of Troy, highlighting the fragility of words and negotiations inherent in human relations.

On the other hand, in this same war, there were situations, conflicts, actions, and speeches that, through Homeric poetry, established themselves as positive models for Greek culture and became the seeds of the institutions that would appear with the founding of *the Polis,* such as: the law (*nómos*), the equality of citizens in the public sphere (*isonomia*), and freedom to speak freely in *the agora* (*isegoria)*. Without the work of the poet, these exemplary events would have fallen into oblivion, given the overwhelming level of violence and destruction. Homer's *Iliad* not only narrates a war, but immortalizes the deeds of the heroes who participated in it. The "Homeric *polis*", the war, in this sense, leaves as its legacy not only violence, but also the beginning of a more enduring stage for action and discourse.

The Trojan and Greek heroes — such as Hector, Achilles, and Ulysses — are not only warriors, but figures whose actions transcend the battle and whom the *Iliad* has perpetuated, transforming the war

into an event that goes beyond its merely military dimension, becoming a foundational event of Western culture. This is precisely because the Trojan War saw the first appearance of *the agora,* action, and discourse, the core of *the* Greek *polis* and the standard of what is still called politics today. In Homer, the central importance of public debate appears, which, centuries later, would occupy a central place in *the* Athenian *polis*, as stated in canto I, 490 of *the Iliad:* "And neither did the glory of *the agora* attract him now". In *the* Trojan *agora*, words make the leader, and for this reason, the old Phoenix taught Achilles to lead the Assembly. In the description of the wrath of Achilles (Iliad, 18, 497-506), the idea of sentences arbitrated after debates in *the agora* is present. Although based on values derived from the heroic code, the archaic *agora* already featured practices that anticipated the political debates that would consolidate in the Athenian *polis*.

Through Homer, war somehow inspires the emergence of the *polis*, which transformed the concept of struggle in its form of organization. From then on, Greek genius is measured by the maintenance of the agonistic spirit, in the form of nonviolent competition to be recognized as the best (*aristeuein*) in political or sporting disputes. It was in the *polis* and its Olympics that *kalón* appeared in all its glory and citizens could reveal who they really were. It is the publicity of the city that is the new place from which *kléos andrón* (glory) manifested itself in all its luminosity.

Following Homer and Aristotle, Arendt understands that the greatest human virtues, the excellences (*aretê*), are those that, in some way, approach the perennial being of nature (*phýsis*) and result in *kléa andrôn*, the glory of heroes for bringing out *kalón*, beauty, the timeless character of human discourse and actions, of mortal beings (Vieira, 2003, p. 9-29). Thus, ethical virtues are emphasized, which, because they are performed publicly, shine for themselves (*toû kaloû héneka)*, and not for other purposes. These excellences reveal what men seek for their inherent value, in themselves (Moraes, 2022, p. 2-27; Irwin, 2004, p. 31-46). *Kalón* is what matters to Arendt in her reading of the Trojan War, based on Homer's magnifying glass, as well as the political virtues in Aristotle, which together shape her understanding of *the* Greek *polis* and the greatness it is capable of providing. The Trojan *agora* and the Athenian *polis* brought to the fore an idea of publicity and an instance capable of bringing together, motivating, and realizing the highest values, considered as such, of the human community: *kléa andrôn* (immortal glory) and *aretê* (human excellence).

In the *polis*, immortality, the highest value in warrior ethics, will be redefined, this time associated with a perspective of founding and maintaining life in common, that is, distanced from violence, linked to a struggle maintained within the limits of *phronesis*, far from *hubris. The* theme of the *Iliad* is not the theft and rescue of Helen, but the breaking of *philia,* the war waged under the rule of *hubris,* the harm that violence and terror bring to communities when words lose their essential qualities of revealing truth (*aletheia*) and cementing human bonds. Thus, positively, the importance of virtues for the city also came

from the Trojan War, such as *phronesis,* friendship, action in concert, and free and truthful speech. These aspects nullify the position of the tyrant and make the *Polis* an island where the principle of force, destruction, and coercion is eliminated from public relations between men.

One of the virtues (*aretê*) through which human excellence could appear lies in courage (*andreia*). The figure of Homeric heroes, especially in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* represents an example of fundamental courage. Homer, for Arendt, does not describe courage as mere bravery or a display of strength, but as the willingness to leave behind a comfortable private life and self-centeredness. Courage is thus throwing oneself into the gaze of others, measuring oneself against others to be the best (*eu aristeun)*, fleeing from the idea of survival as a yardstick for measuring life. It is the choice of greatness and its inherent beauty (*kálon) exempli gratia* to measure life. In her words:

> The connotation of courage, which we now feel to be an indispensable quality of hero, is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own". (...) courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one's self. (Arendt, 1989, p. 186).

For Arendt, the transposition from the home (*oikos,* private life) to the public sphere requires a virtue similar to that of the hero who does not fear the challenges of battle, knowing that he will be judged by the yardstick of immortal fame (*kléos andrón*). In this case, the weapons will be the ability to initiate, the talent for action in concert, familiarity with words, and the choice of the most appropriate ones to say what needs to be revealed in the circumstances in question.

In Homeric poems, the hero's action is not only for survival, but for the accomplishment of something great, a way of marking existence in the community's memory, despite the ephemeral life. Arendt observes that, for Homer, heroism is closely linked to the acceptance of risk and the inevitability of death. Warrior action, as well as political action, carried out under the company of fellow citizens of *the polis*, are means of giving life added meaning beyond mere survival, as well as death on the battlefield or in public life.

With this proposal, Arendt affirms politics as a mundane category. In philosophy and ethics, we are accustomed to evaluating action and politics based on categories derived from morality. This is the rule of tradition. Goodness is the main category with which we are accustomed to evaluating public affairs. Why does Arendt not work with this measure? Distancing herself from the metaphysical, contemplative provenance of this tradition, she prefers something more secular, which values a conception of transcendence that does not go beyond the difficult task of building and sustaining the world as the fruit of human hands and words.

The mundanity of politics is related to the fact that it requires a sphere of appearance. Political appearance is something tenuous, unnatural, formed from the testimony of the pronouncements of

words and actions that emerge from acting together. In this sense, appearance is more fragile than objects manufactured for use or objects of art. But this impulse to appear, inherent in human life, endows political action with a durability and beauty that is sometimes superior to aesthetic or functional objects and makes it infinitely immortal compared to ephemeral objects made for consumption. For this reason, Arendt dialogues in The *Life of the Mind* (1992) with Swiss biologist Adolf Portmann, who opposed the functionalist thesis, according to which appearances in living beings serve purely the dual purpose of self-preservation and preservation of the species. Following the biologist, she states that it is much more plausible to understand that internal organs, which are not visible, exist solely to produce and sustain appearances. On this subject, the author states:

> […] the predominance of outside appearance implies, in addition to the sheer receptivity of our senses, a spontaneous activity: whatever can see wants to be seen, whatever can hear calls out to be heard, whatever can touch presents itself to be touched. It is indeed as though everything that is alive [...] has an urgence to appear, to fit itself to a world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its "inner self" but itself as an individual (Arendt, 1981, p. 29).

The world is made up of these things that appear because they have shapes, finishes, contours, and individualities. These conditions organize them and authorize their visibility. Modernity has reversed this. It is like the mythological bird that, although it has rich and beautiful plumage, prefers to show its unsightly entrails that were not made to be displayed. By transforming the economic into the most important dimension of life, invisible biological needs become the only things worthy of the attention of power, culture, and science. In this, voracious invisible processes began to destroy the very foundation of culture and power: the space of appearance, mundanity.

As a mundane activity, politics can be judged by what it presents in the sphere of appearance, that is, aesthetically. Beauty makes an object or an action transcend the field of needs and last through the centuries, even if that object was made to be used and the action is motivated by private interests. As beautiful, objects and actions are transfigured. Political products share with art objects the need for a space to be seen. They only realize their own being, which is appearance, in a common world, the republic. When covered up by life, technology, and private ownership, art objects and actions do not achieve their inherent validity (Arendt, 2000, p. 272).

If beauty can be a criterion for judging politics, in what sense does Arendt understand this? As we have seen previously, beauty is synonymous with greatness. For the author, it is the human capacity to build things, to perform actions, and to utter words that transcend the determinations arising from the mere reproductive demands of the life cycle. Human greatness builds and sustains the world, the web of human relationships as something worthy of remaining and enduring. It shows immortality its concrete human possibility. Immortal is what enters and becomes part of the human world. The greatness of an

action is not something that can be produced; it happens to the extent that a certain imperishability is conferred on acts and words:

> […] beauty is the very manifestation of imperishability. The fleeting greatness of word and deed can endure in the world to the extent that beauty is bestwed upon it. Without the beauty, that is, the radiant glory in which potential immortality is manifest in the human world, all human life would be futile and no greatness could endure (Arendt, 1993, p. 218).

In this sense, beauty manifests itself in politics to the extent that power establishes and sustains a sphere in which human plurality is respected and the tenuous agonistic balance has a guaranteed place. Greatness is thus a characteristic of politics since its activities favor what Arendt called foundation, miracle, natality. That is, the emergence of something that can only arise from words and actions. It is a kind of deviation from the natural to found a second nature, the world, the web of human relations, the place and condition for the emergence of man with a singular identity manifestable in common life and not mere interiority or biological being. Political beauty is related to this institution of the courage to start something new that breaks the automatism to which we are bound by our belonging to the human animal species, as well as to the determinations coming from the economic universe. "Action can be judged only by greatness [....] because the art of politics teaches men how to bring forth what is great and radiant" (Arendt, 1989, p. 205-206).

The evaluation of power by beauty leads Arendt to conceive of it as capable of preserving and caring for the sphere of appearance, a perennial place for mortals. Power emerges in the fragile human capacities to act and speak and establishes law, government, the legislature, parties, etc. If these institutions do not have their functioning fueled by human coexistence, as is often the case with power reduced to administrative management in modernity or the practice of virtual algorithms, it is politics itself that will be compromised. Without a place for the "who" to appear, men return to their merely natural functional determinations, according to which they merely behave and silently follow their destinies determined by the automatism of the economy, mass advertising, or the dictates of current algorithms. If power is not also a space of appearance, its raison d'être has been lost.

Preserving the sphere of appearance means enabling the organization of life based on the sense of beauty that Arendt calls taste. Arendt defines taste not as a quality of individual idiosyncrasy, but as a kind of sensitivity to beauty (Arendt, 2000, p. 267), an active connection with what is beautiful (Arendt, 2000, p. 273) or, further, the ability to care for the things of the world (Arendt, 2000, p. 268). Taste distinguishes between *worth* and *value*, between what is valuable in itself and what is valuable for its use or for the speculative standard of wealth (Arendt, 2010, p. 206).

Taste, an aesthetic-political sense, is something of the order of human coexistence. It is related to courage, to the ability to step outside oneself and come into contact with others through the mediation of words and actions. The politics that emerge from human coexistence produce beauty, something that enters the human world by enduring in the memory of the community. This means that politics can be linked to the miracle of life, to birth, to the fact that man was born to begin and not to die.

In conclusion, we can say that Arendtian Hellenism has a profound impact on her view of politics. From the Homeric *agora* to *the* classical Athenian *polis*, the political dimension of life appeared and became a tradition in the West, and with this dimension came the institutionalization of the Republic, a space for dialogue, law, and the common interest (*koinonia*) as the highest form of interaction between men. Following Aristotle (1979, 11 40b 9), Arendt (1993, p. 93) takes Pericles as an example of a political man (*phronimos)*, whose wisdom lay in defending plurality and the participation of all citizens in common affairs. For Pericles, political struggle required and was sustained by the presence of the other. Pericles' democracy meant the containment of any tendency toward tyranny in *the polis*. Active participation and free consent eliminated terror, violence, domination, and coercion from the public sphere. This is why this space was imbued with greatness and beauty (*kalón).* Arendt finds in this return to the ancient past a way to denounce and resist the lack of greatness and ugliness (*kakia)* present in totalitarian governments. The domination of anonymity, secrecy, automated processes, force, lies, and fear make it impossible for any greatness to emerge in totalitarian forms of government. If the *polis* meant overcoming the policy of extermination practiced in archaic Troy, totalitarian forms, based on total war, brought back to the contemporary world annihilation, terror, lies, fear, and manipulation as patterns of political engagement.

Hellenism and Socrates as a paradigm of philosophizing

The same premises presented above guide our thesis in relation to Philosophy in Arendt. Here too, the author's peculiar Hellenism will be fundamental in capturing her understanding of philosophical activity. Of course, just as Arendt's understanding of politics refers to other authors and events beyond her Hellenism, so too does the author's view of what philosophy is go far beyond her Hellenism. We will dwell on this aspect in order to better achieve the proposed scope of thinking about Arendt's relationship with the ancients. A more comprehensive reading on the subject can be found in *Filosofia e Política segundo Hannah Arendt* (Aguiar, 2002).

It is worth noting that for our author, the difference between philosophy and philosophical activity is fundamental. The former is related to the understanding of philosophy as a system, whose *modus operandi* starts from an absolute foundation and develops in the argumentative demonstration of

the true character of its absoluteness. Philosophical discourse, thus, *dialegesthai,* is based on absolute greatness (Arendt, 1993, p. 92), completely external to the affairs of the city, the *pragmata on' anthrôpôn* (Arendt, 1993, p. 106). What causes astonishment (*thaumadzein*) in this type of philosopher-sage (*sophos*) is of the order of eternity and leads to silent contemplation. This invisible absolute is inaccessible to ordinary men. Only the wise have access to this universe. Arendt follows Aristotle (1979, 1141b 9) and lists Anaxagoras and Thales as paradigms of philosophers (*sophos).* They do not know how to guide themselves by the signs and words of the common world. They do not notice the holes in the streets, they do not navigate everyday words, they do not know their crossroads, and they are the objects of the people's ridicule (Arendt, 1993, p. 93). They only inhabit the city physically and do not feel responsible for its problems. They are very distant from *the doxadzein* of the citizens. These are the types of philosophers who created the great philosophical systems that make up the history of philosophy.

Others are thinkers who dealt with the affairs of their respective homelands and cities*,* including Aristotle, compiler of the constitutions of Greek cities, including Athens, but also Cicero, Machiavelli, Tocqueville*,* and so many others whom Arendt calls political writers. Although he left nothing written, the paradigm of these philosophers, for Arendt, is Socrates. Obviously, this is the aporetic Socrates of the early Platonic writings, whose activity did not involve the destruction of *doxa,* but rather making it true. These early Platonic dialogues never reached a peremptory conclusion, an apodictic truth, and therefore were consistent with a philosophical practice closer to life in *the Polis.*

According to Arendt, these aporetic Socratic dialogues were situated within the proverbial culture that constituted Greek *paideia*, in which *kalo' k'agathon,* the affinity between beauty and goodness, prevailed and resulted in extensive Greek production in literature, philosophy, architecture, music, mathematics, sports, urbanism, sculpture, and the sciences. Greek *paideia* was aware of the importance of beauty, even if it had no immediate use. Beauty shines for itself (*toû kaloû héneka)* and not for other purposes. Therefore, Arendt states: "Seen from the point of view of the ideas themselves, which are defined as that whose appearance illuminates, the beautiful, which cannot be used but only shines forth, had much more right to become the idea of ideas" (Arendt, 2005, p. 11)

Fundamental to this question, for Arendt, is the affinity between thought, *thaumadzein,* beauty, and the *polis,* that is, the extent to which thinkers are willing to reflect and see meaning in human affairs. Evidently, in dark times, we are more confronted with vile, ugly practices (*kakia*), making it difficult to perceive the beauty (*kalon*) that insinuates itself and appears in human practices and that are worthy of philosophical reflection because they carry some glory, some merit of being remembered (*kléo andrón*). However, even in the Trojan War, a war of extermination, there were merits, just as there were in the European and global anti-fascist resistance of the 20th century. Opening one's mind to understanding

what is happening in the world, listening to words and opinions, and discussing them seriously is the Socratic way to give some relevance to philosophy in the city. Arendt stated in *Men in Dark Times* (2008) that there is always a flickering light capable of illuminating the darkness when silence, ignorance, violence, and the pretense of total domination prevail, and that this light, with the attention of philosophers, becomes a great flash of light for humanity.

For this to happen, there must be a relationship between philosophy and listening, philosophy and speech, the core of Socrates' teaching pointed out by Arendt. The Socratic practice of philosophy had a special relationship with speech. It was based on listening to *the doxa* of citizens. No one can know the truth of others in advance. Only in a situation of dogmatic and manipulated ideological thinking is it possible to know the truth before others speak. Philosophers do not have special access to the truth. The demonstrative mode applied to human affairs may ultimately arrive at a result that, when presented in the public square, will become just another opinion like any other. That is why "Socrates had made new demands for philosophy precisely because he did not claim to be a wise" (Arendt, 2005, p. 11). Although he refused honors and public power, "Socrates, who refused public office and honor, never retired into this private life, but on the contrary moved in the marketplace, in the very midst of these *doxai,* these opinions. (Arendt, 2005, p. 11). What Plato called *dialegesthai,* Socrates called maieutics. His was the work of an obstetrician. Socrates "wanted to help others give birth to what they themselves thought anyhow, to find the truth in their *doxa.* " 2005, p. 11). His dialectic did not extract truth by destroying *doxa,* but revealed opinion in its own truth. The role of the philosopher is not to govern or educate citizens. Thus, "The difference with Plato is decisive: Socrates did not want to educate the citizens so much as he wanted to improve their doxai, (Arendt, 2005, p. 15). For him, each citizen would have to be sufficiently articulate to show their opinion in its truthfulness. In this view, the philosopher has a public function, "Socrates seems to have believed that the political function of the philosopher was to help establish this kind of common world, built on the understanding of friendship, in which no rulership is needed" (Arendt, 2005, p. 18).

Socrates' practice was based on the oracle of Apollo at Delphi: *gnôthai sauthon*, know thyself, and it is in this context that the Socratic phrase, "I know that I know nothing" makes sense, for it means nothing more than: I know that I do not have the truth for everyone, I cannot know the truth of the other unless I ask him and thus know his *doxa* (Arendt, 2005, p. 18). Our mortality limits what we can know about others, in view of which there is no absolute, eternally valid truth. There are many *logoi,* many words-thoughts*, and* all of them form the human world. Arendt was interested in a new philosophy whose beginning was Socratic, that is, guided by human affairs, whose *thaumadzein,* wonder, came from the beauty that emerges when one dialogues with the *doxai* that circulate in the city. This stepping outside oneself (*go visiting*), this listening inherent to thought, preserving friendship with oneself (*eme emeauhos*) is

the great challenge in view of the break with dogmatism and ideological fixations present in culture, in bubbles, in fictional parallel universes so well pointed out by Arendt in the text *Ideology and Terror* (1990, p. 512-531).

The other aspect of the Delphic oracle highlighted by Arendt states that "It is better to be in disagreement with the whole world than, being one, to be in disagreement with myself." (Arendt, 2005, p. 18). This means that uncritical adherence to truths dictated by others can indicate a tremendous contradiction and a destruction of the self, of the individuality that is present in the ability to think for oneself. It indicates at the same time a closure and even a destruction of the world (facts, works, and human speech). Thinking implies the realization of a dialogue and a dialoguing community. Thinking is not just answering a question with a coherent, rational, and logically argued hypothesis. Thinking is, above all, talking to oneself. It indicates, on the one hand, a friendship and ability to live with oneself and, on the other, an indication of the existence of the human community in its cultural, political, and philosophical plurality. The limit of this community lies in *the eros* of dialogue with the community sustained by the bond of dialoguing friendship and openness to seeing some beauty in human actions, words, and works. Arendt says: "only he who knows how to live with himself is fit to live with others" (Arendt, 2005, p. 21). Solitude, the ability to dialogue and respond for one's own *doxas and* actions, is the best remedy against the commission of banal evil, driven by the force and logic of totalitarian mass organizations.

The Socratic understanding of thought as a two-in-one activity aspires to a relevant place for philosophy in the city. The "two-in-one" of thinking bears the mark of human plurality, openness to the other, to difference. The challenges for philosophical activity today are great, both because of the prevalence of *doxas* dominated by ideology and because of the predominance of social networks manipulated by algorithms that drive discourses of hatred, fear, lies, and moral terror. This type of philosophizing proposed by Arendt, in an impulse of *amor mundi,* rejects entrenchment within the walls of academia, closure in merely formal argumentative coherence, and places itself in the agonistic battle to pierce the bubbles of parallel worlds constructed virtually to the detriment of the public space of appearance. Philosophical activity, in this way, will recover its intimate relationship with beauty, for "Beautiful things seem to us 'worthy of being seen', that is, worthy of remaining among us for their own sake, even if they serve no purpose" (Arendt, 1989, p. 167).

In conclusion, we can say that emphasizing philosophy's relationship with the common world does not mean that philosophy has become just one *doxa* among *doxas.* In *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt, 1992), our author discusses this side of the issue and points out that philosophy's intimate relationship with the invisible, that is, with the question of meaning, will remain, the difference being that the field of meaning, the proper domain of philosophy, will have an intimate relationship with the world of

appearances. *Thaumadzein* will come from the common world, but philosophical interest will guide thought to the dimension of meaning, a realm that does not interest citizens and ordinary men, who are fixed on the perspective inherent in their *doxas*. Arendt will link herself to the Socratic answer to the question "What makes us think?" Obviously, this answer reinforces that the activities of thought occur in a world of appearances (Arendt, 1992, pp. 125-148; pp. 55-98) and reveal their relevance there.

In conclusion, we can say that Arendtian Hellenism was quite fruitful for her understanding of politics and philosophy. Despite the difficulty and even denial of these activities today, the civilizational importance of political forms of human coexistence is undeniable, just as the current propensity for political tyranny leads us to barbarism. Similarly, in times of the hegemony of social networks as means of information and algorithmic choices based on moral terror, fear, and *fake news,* favoring monolithic and unique thinking, the Socratic-Arendtian response to the question of what makes us think becomes more relevant. Although there is a certain amount of Eurocentrism in Arendtian Hellenism, we can say that it is a Eurocentrism that points to the other of itself, insofar as its understanding of politics and philosophy questions the *standard* view of political forms disseminated in traditional typifications *and* by the metaphysical view of philosophy disseminated by the official philosophical tradition.

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Received: 11/2025
Approved: 01/2026