

INCOMPLETENESS. REMARKS ON ARENDT'S METHOD

Incompletud. Observaciones sobre el método de Arendt

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ABSTRACT

Hannah Arendt is commonly criticized for defining action as an end in itself, of horizontal power and of councils as an alternative to representative democracy that is unrealistic and unrealizable. In contrast, I show how much Arendt was concerned about the dangers of these concepts: the replacement of action by fabrication, of power by domination and violence, and the impossibility of a council democracy in the face of a highly administrative and depoliticized society. Arendt shows how these hybrid forms revealed their pure forms as a hidden tradition in revolutionary situations. The supposed incompleteness and failure of a struggle for another society can therefore be understood as a recurring possibility and reality and thus as a specific condition of the political. The critique of the hybrid form also includes the critique of modern scientific thought and political thought.

Keywords: Arendt; Action; Fabrication; Power; Domination; Violence; Councils; Logic; Science; Communication.

RESUMEN

Se suele criticar a Hannah Arendt por definir la acción como un fin en sí mismo, y se considera el poder horizontal y los consejos como una alternativa a la democracia representativa irreal e irrealizable. Frente a esa crítica, este artículo muestra hasta qué punto Arendt estaba preocupada por los peligros que se encierran en conceptos como la sustitución de la acción por la fabricación, del poder por la dominación y la violencia, y la imposibilidad de

una democracia de consejos frente a una sociedad altamente administrativa y despolitizada. Arendt muestra cómo estas formas híbridas revelaban sus formas puras como una tradición oculta en situaciones revolucionarias. La supuesta incompletud y el fracaso de una lucha por una sociedad diferente pueden entenderse, entonces, como una posibilidad y una realidad recurrentes y, por tanto, como una condición específica de lo político. La crítica de la forma híbrida incluye también la crítica del pensamiento científico y del pensamiento político modernos.

Palabras clave: Arendt; Fabricación; Poder; Dominación; Violencia; Consejos; Lógica; Ciencia; Comunicación.

In her groundbreaking book «Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics» (Honig 2023), Bonnie Honig argued as early as 1993 that political theorists often use political theory to displace politics rather than to explore it. Kant, Rawls and Sandel have positioned themselves as virtue theorists of politics in order to develop principles of justice, rationality, community and law. With the help of these principles, their political theories were to be protected from the conflict and uncertainty of political reality. But politics, according to Honig, is not about questions at the meta-level of virtue ethics, but about the *virtù* of action. It is about the place of disruption, the struggle for power, about dictatorship or democratic freedom and individuality, as Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Arendt all experienced, or observed.

This led to corresponding methodological considerations: in Machiavelli's case with regard to the importance of events and decisions of the actors in the tension between *virtù*, *fortuna*, *occasione* and *ambizione* and in Arendt's case with regard to the analyses of political phenomena such as power, violence, freedom, etc., and their connection with the fundamental activities of working, producing and acting. Both Machiavelli and Arendt refused to define politics or the political sphere as a system or to enter the parallel meta-level of virtue ethics. For both of them, this double refusal led to an incompleteness that they appreciated not as a deficiency but, on the contrary, as an open space for the development of the phenomena they discussed. Instead of theories, they favoured the experience and wisdom of others. Machiavelli famously reported how he came home in the evening, took off his dirty work clothes on the threshold of his study and, dressed appropriately, went to the classics, who kindly answered his many questions.

I would like to demonstrate this incompleteness using the example of three concepts that for Arendt are of fundamental importance for the political sphere: action, power and councils. The fact that Arendt treats these, and

other phenomena, as «pure» phenomena has been little discussed. «Pure» means that, seen from the fundamental human conditionality of natality, plurality and intersubjectivity, they are in a state of the greatest possible, unrestricted development. This means that they are not mixed with other phenomena as hybrids. In other words, unlike production, action appears as an end in itself, and not as a means to an end, power as a phenomenon of plural action that is not oriented towards domination and violence, and councils as the institutionalisation of such a form of action and power formation, which Arendt understands as an original, hidden form of government. These pure definitions enable the identification of hybrid forms; they form a kind of early warning system and allow us to recognise the extent to which hybrid views prevail or are spreading in politics and political theory, i.e. the extent to which the political space is endangered. Arendt's development of these concepts is much more radical than what can be found in the conventional liberal world: Arendt's world is a republican one. (Heuer 2023a)

Arendt is aware that these pure forms are not to be found undamaged in our world and that they cannot be realised without further ado. Therefore, she deals with both real experienced and theoretically possible events in which they become visible in their pure form. Above all, however, Arendt practices «thinking about events» in order to conceptualise them and thus prevent them from being forgotten.

In the following, I first introduce the pure forms, then present the limitations or hybridisations described by Arendt, and finally address the question of the possibilities for recovering the pure forms.

First, however, I would like to point out Arendt's critique of science and the fundamental distinction she makes between science and politics in order to maximise space for phenomena such as action, power and councils. Arendt thus goes further than Bonnie Honig, because in her view both modern science and politics have contributed to unworldliness. Even if by science Arendt primarily means the natural sciences, the methods of the social sciences are similar. For Arendt the dangers of unworldly scientific thinking are obvious. One can assume that for Arendt, on the other hand, philosophy, literature, the arts and even politics should be free from an objectifying scientific method.

In the following, I will mainly draw on the entries in Arendt's philosophical *Denktagebuch* (Thinking Diary) (Arendt 2002), a fascinating collection of thoughts that accompanied her work, which are short and concise and sometimes even more pointed than the essays in which the thoughts later recur. (German passages are given in my translation).

1. CRITICISING SCIENCE

In the case of science, Arendt is primarily concerned with modern natural science, whose effectiveness does not unfold in a continuum of ideas, but rather in the form of events in which the temporal dimensions of the unexpected and the unforeseeable resonate. Arendt is particularly interested in the contribution of the natural sciences to the loss of the world. This involves a critique not only of a specifically scientific way of thinking, but of the entirety of the accumulation of knowledge, the formation of theories, the institutionalisation of corresponding research and teaching and, finally, the social dominance and endangerment of political thinking. (Crease 2017)

As far as the loss of the world in the double sense of objectivity and intersubjectivity noted by Arendt is concerned, natural science not only promoted its own alienation from the world, but also that of philosophy:

It would be folly indeed to overlook the almost too precise congruity of modern man's world alienation with the subjectivism of modern philosophy, from Descartes and Hobbes to modern philosophy, from Descartes and Hobbes to English sensualism, empiricism, and pragmatism as well as German idealism and materialism up to the recent phenomenological existentialism and logical or epistemological positivism. (Arendt 1958, 248)¹

Alienation from the world and subjectivisation are accompanied by a scientification of the relationships between people and the environment. Scientists are desperately trying to completely eliminate the subjective factor in favour of the scientific standard of objectivity and scientific activity that has existed for 200 years, but they are not succeeding. On the contrary, according to Heisenberg, on whom Arendt relies along with Schrödinger and Whitehead, science does not investigate nature, but itself. «Whenever he tries to learn about things which neither are himself nor owe their existence to him [Man] will ultimately encounter nothing but himself, his own constructions, and the pattern of his own actions». (Arendt 2006a, 86) In the 20th century, this led to a fundamental crisis. Mathematically provable and technically demonstrable «truths», according to Arendt, «will no longer lend themselves to normal expression in speech and thought». (Arendt 1958, 3) Since meaning and understanding only occur with the help of thought and speech, this lack of speech and thought leads to a nonsense that exceeds even

1. In the German version, Arendt adds in brackets. «(...) to the latest schools of phenomenological existentialism (which 'excludes' reality).» (Arendt 1981, 266)

the idea of a «winged lion», as Schrödinger stated. (Arendt 1958, 3) At least some natural scientists are fully aware of the fundamental problems.

In addition to philosophical alienation from the world, Arendt also criticises the use of objectifying and behaviourist methods, i.e. specifically scientific thinking, in the social sciences such as psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology. Arendt notes that the social sciences are based on a definition of society as a «way of being together», according to which everyone fulfils a function. «Social science sees all connections in terms of these functions», whereby ideal types are created that are always valid «on condition that everything substantial is eliminated. Jesus and Hitler are charismatic types, i.e. the same, on the condition that one completely disregards what they said and did». (Arendt 2002, 359, see Walsh 2015)

Arendt also criticised university science, but *en passant*. Inspired by the student revolt of 1968, which denounced, among other things, the dependence of academia on state and political interests, such as in connection with the war in Vietnam, Arendt criticised the university as an institution of mass society:

A great number of jobs is available because of the growing number of students. This means that the student-teacher community of knowledge and truth has ceased to exist. People are not hired because they are capable of adding to knowledge, but because they are needed as teachers. The «research» [produced, carried out] is hypocrisy, superfluous and utterly irrelevant to knowledge and job alike. The masses of papers suffocate scholarship and originality. (Arendt 2002, 703)

As fundamental as her critique of science and the university is her alternative of a completely different university as a place with a «new 'humanistic' task ... seen from the political: the instance of disinterested impartiality». (Arendt 2002, 634)

A community of students and teachers determined by knowledge and truth can only exist in small groups, with free thinking, research and personal responsibility. In philosophy as in the natural sciences to achieve this, they would have to abandon the modern worldlessness and practise experience-based thinking and judgement.

No wonder that, in a positive sense, Arendt did not consider the interpretation of texts and works common in philological subjects to be «scientific». Rather, [she saw it] as «an art or a skill», a kind of knowledge that is not acquired using scientific methods. Pursuing such methods, one can conclude, comes with the cost of destroying knowledge. Political science also faces a

similar criticism, even if Arendt did not comment on it in detail. She naturally considered the term «political philosophy» to be a contradiction in terms, because philosophy and politics have opposing views of human plurality or singularity and of *vita contemplativa* or *vita activa*.

As far as criticising scientific thought is concerned, Arendt made a series of comments in her *Denktagebuch* in which she was not concerned with rejecting science, but with respecting its fundamental difference to politics. Politics should be based on plurality, consensus building, reason, and the creation of meaning, as well as intersubjective action and judgement, while ensuring that science and its methods do not intrude into political action.

According to Arendt, one of the qualities characterising science is the negation of plurality: «For all scientific thinking, there is only the human being in biology or psychology, as in philosophy and theology, just as there is only the lion in zoology». (Arendt 2002, 15) From this, it follows with scientific persuasiveness that there is also only one truth, one opinion. It can be given an unchallenged place through agreement: «We regard these truths as self-evident; as against: Truth by revelation - only one [...] Against both: scientific results which do not need agreement because they compel it. It is therefore a «tyranny of knowledge» that finds acceptance. It is not the rule of philosophy, but of science – of wanting to be right». (Arendt 2002, 32) Thinking and reason are undesirable in science; they are replaced by logic and action. «Philosophy, or free thinking, relates to action as science relates to doing. Because it is related to others from the outset as a dialogue-with-itself, it (free thinking) must be communicative - which science does not need». (Arendt 2002, 283)

Arendt's critique of science is aimed at its worldlessness, caused by the thesis that, based on experiments, «one can know only what he has made himself» (Arendt 1958, 269), and also caused by the fact that the «natural sciences no longer express themselves linguistically». Therefore, «their objects have ceased to be objects of thought». (Arendt 2002, 643) It is obviously impossible to think the unthinkable. Sensory perceptions are thus abandoned, and that means the abandonment of common sense.

As far as the actions of science and its compelling truth are concerned, it legitimises a destructive activity: «Doing and destroying belong together; there is something destructive in every action». (Arendt 2002, 284) All of this happens under the guise of reason, because the terms rationality and reason are used synonymously in a devastating way. Arendt noted «Science can result in annihilation. This is a rational argument, but is believed to be irrational because Science and Reason have been identified». (Arendt 2002, 714). The ways of thinking in the field of science, however, eliminate reason

and meaning. «In logic, the spirit of science destroys the ability to think, i.e. the ability to really and originally move and orientate oneself in the realm of the unknowable». (Arendt 2002, 261) Regardless of whether science invites politics to think scientifically or offers politics scientific models or both sides have a common interest in mutual interpenetration, it is surprising to note that «utopia (...) is the form in which scientific thinking penetrates politics. That is why it is so destructive». (Arendt 2002, 591)

Political thinking must therefore move within common sense, always remain in the common world and must not allow any form of «scientific thinking» to destroy politics. It was Engels who, in his essay «The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science» (1880), pursued precisely this intrusion into politics in order to give utopia a scientific appearance and in this way to capture the masses.

If tyrannical thinking can advance with catlike tread to claim objectivity, logic of scientific thinking, and truth, then it is because this thinking promises more security than experience, openness and incompleteness. Thinking is dangerous, Arendt admits, but non-thinking even more so. (Arendt 2018a, 498) «Is there thinking that is not tyrannical?» she asks and explains: «This is actually Jaspers' endeavour, without him fully knowing it. For communication, in contrast to discussion – advocacy thinking – does not seek to assure itself of truth through the superiority of argumentation». (Arendt 2002, 45)

When, in the face of climate change, scientists reach clear conclusions based on identical findings, the slogan of the Fridays for Future movement «Follow the science» seems as plausible as it is compelling. This seems to provide certainty and make risky political dialogue superfluous. Yet it is precisely the task of politicians to discuss the facts and draw political conclusions; scientists must also participate in the debates, but as citizens. As Arendt notes, «the answers given in this debate, whether they come from laymen, philosophers or scientists, are unscientific (though not a-scientific); they can never be provably right or wrong. Their truth is more akin to the validity of agreements than to the compelling validity of scientific statements». (Arendt 2000a, 375)

This liberation of politics from the right-to-have a compelling truth, from logic and utopia, is the prerequisite for the perspective of the completely open activity of action, whose intersubjective space frees from personal singularity, isolation or even loneliness and enables the formation of the fleeting phenomenon of power and the institutional stabilisation of action and power in the form of councils.

In the context of action, we will encounter the significance of other phenomena such as means and ends and work in the sense of fabrication, which are closer to scientific than to political thinking.

2. ACTION AS AN END IN ITSELF

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt unfolds the panorama of action in a poetic style (especially in the German version). Its characteristics include, above all, the doubling of equality and difference between people, which enables us to communicate but also requires language. The characteristics include self-disclosure through public appearance, which has the importance of a second birth, and finally the difference between the *what* of a person with their talents and characteristics, and the *who* of the whole person, as well as the intersecting human actions that form webs of reference, networks of relationships. The various actors hardly ever achieve their goals, so that their actions often appear confused and unexpected to them. In contrast, the spectators can ascribe meaning to the actions from a distance, and the story of an entire life can only be related at its end.

An action is not subject to logic and inevitability, but is conditioned by plurality and unpredictability, we can only see it as an example. Machiavelli was therefore concerned with events and actions and compared his experiences with those recorded by Livy in ancient Rome. Therefore, for Arendt, judgement is also exemplary, a process that does not subsume, but reflects the exemplarity of action.

The exemplary refers not only to plurality, but also to the repeated beginnings that accompany it. It is not only the antidote to political tyranny, but also to limitless reason. «The source of freedom always lies in the beginning. The tyranny of reason has no power over this beginning, because it can never be deduced from its logic and because it must always presuppose it in order to make the inevitable function at all.» (Arendt 2002, 157) If action ceases and with it the common speech, logic, as the last «residue of speech», leads to muteness, which «is the specific evil of violence. [...] Logical thinking therefore always leads to violence. Logic speaks to no one and talks about nothing. Thus it prepares violence». (Arendt 2002, 345)

Since action and the unpredictability of deeds have an inherent tendency towards boundlessness, the first consideration is limitation. In the case of the unpredictability of actions, forgiveness helps to make it possible to act again after deeds have been committed, and in the case of boundlessness, the

politically constituted space with its laws serves to make this space for action possible and at the same time to protect it from abuse.

In Arendt's descriptions, the world of action appears in its purest form: action is an end in itself, which is characterised by its immateriality and direct interpersonal relationships as opposed to consuming work and the production of durable goods. The end in itself of action means that action occurs in freedom and for its own sake: «The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.» (Arendt 2006b, 145). The power formed through action is of course also an end in itself, because it arises and persists through this action and owes its legitimacy to its existence, whereas violence requires justification.

The concept of self-purpose is undoubtedly surprising because we have just heard about goals that can hardly be achieved in a straightforward manner and that are generally associated with an end or even a means to an end. Even the concept of an end in itself is still linked to the end. So what is done when the purpose of politics is freedom? At a conference in 1972 with her friends and colleagues, Arendt explained, as an example, that the question of an appropriate, socially inclusive housing policy has a political and a non-political social component.

The political issue is that these people love their neighborhood and don't want to move, even if you give them one more bathroom. (...) But if it's a question of how many square feet every human being needs in order to be able to breathe and to live a decent life, this is something which we really can figure out. (Arendt 1979, 318f).

From this possibly follows the purpose of refraining from resettlement in order to come closer to the goal of social integration. The political thus concerns the space of neighbourhood, interpersonal relationships and dignity, all of which constitute freedom. On the contrary, technical questions, in this case, are not political. Political issues are primarily concerned with the human condition, the «care of the world», the preservation of the conditions of freedom and justice, referring to the framework, the world in which we live.

Now this purposeful and expedient action is not only exposed to its inherent dangers, but much more seriously to the practices that have existed since the «tradition» of replacing action with production. This tradition began with Plato, and it required a concept of rule that since Plato has been based on the distinction between knowing and doing - a way of thinking and acting in which knowing means ruling and commanding and doing means obeying and executing. The aim is to abolish politics as an end in itself and

transform it into a form of production. «How persistent and successful the transformation of action into a mode of making has been is easily attested by the whole terminology of political theory and political thought, which indeed makes it almost impossible to discuss these matters without using the category of means and ends and thinking in terms of instrumentality». (Arendt 1958, 204f.)

Work in the sense of fabrication, as a degrading form of politics has always pursued higher purposes that lie beyond the political. Arendt notes on Marx:

But man is sovereign only as a producer, i.e. as a worker. [...] A form of society and state is designed [...] which one believes to be able to produce in the sense of a product of labour, only that now, instead of the matter of nature, people themselves must serve as material. This creates [...] an idea of action that is so similar to the process of production that the moral question: What is permitted, must be answered with the only seemingly un-moral, in reality a-moral answer: Everything is permitted that serves the goal. (Arendt 2002, 80)

If all human activities are seen from the perspective of production, Arendt warns, thinking is transformed into an absolutised form of contemplation and action into violence.

Thus, in the Western tradition, starting from the experience of production, everything has been split into contemplative thinking, in which the 'ideas', the purposes etc. are given, and into violent action, which realises these contemplated purposes with the help of violent means. Our concepts of theory and practice are equally orientated towards production. (Arendt 2002, 305)

In addition to logical thinking, which negates spontaneity and diversity, it is above all ends-means thinking that has a politically and morally destructive effect in the public sphere. And in this way of thinking, ends soon become irrelevant due to unpredictable developments and the importance of means increases:

...the so-called means are always the only thing that counts, the end always becomes an illusionary endeavour, because the immediate, tangible action is there immediately, so that the world has changed in principle before the end is achieved, and changed in such a way that the end may no longer be meaningful at all. (Arendt 2002, 47)

Who wouldn't think of liberation movements that, in view of the inexorable dwindling of the prospect of a revolutionary situation, are prepared to use any means for self-preservation. The liberation movement becomes a criminal organisation.

Arendt's critique of imperative logic and end-means thinking is radical - both in its formulation and in its juxtaposition to the equally radically formulated sphere of action as an end in itself. This brings with it unfamiliar perspectives. For example, the distinction between intention and effect: «To get out of this whole end-means thinking: An action with good 'means' for the sake of an 'evil' end inflicts goodness on the world; an action with 'evil' means for the sake of a 'good' end inflicts wickedness on the world.» (Arendt 2002, 108)

Equally surprising is Arendt's desire to make a sharp distinction between opinion and truth in the political arena, in line with her critical stance. This involves the truth of the facts and their evaluation, for example the statement in Arendt's time that France was defeated by Germany in 1940 or that Hitler's rule was supported by a majority of Germans. Such a truth only becomes real through its evaluation in the political arena. «Factual truth (...) is political by nature. (...) Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interest and passions can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth.» (Arendt 2006c, 233f.)

Like all truths, factual truths have a compelling character. They are therefore despotic from the point of view of politics, which is why tyrants hate them and constitutional forms of government do not have a good relationship with them. It therefore stands to reason, according to Arendt, that «the modes of thought and communication that deal with truth, if seen from the political perspective, are necessarily domineering» (Arendt 2006c, 237). The problem is that such modes only accept their own opinion, which becomes quasi identical with the truth.

What Arendt opposes to this is the enlarged mentality based on Kantian judgement, the ability to evaluate a truth from different perspectives. Because the thinking of others becomes present, political thinking is representative. The willingness to take note of as many different points of view as possible and to allow a «disinterested pleasure» (Kant) or disinterest, and to accept the fact that a situation could also look different for reasons of contingency, is difficult for a committed person to bear. Therefore, for Arendt, «nothing is more common, even among highly sophisticated people, than the blind obstinacy that becomes manifest in lack of imagination and failure to judge.» (Arendt 2006c, 237) Hence the recourse to superordinate orientation aids, such as the dialectic of material conditions or a hidden plan of nature.

Since factual truths are no more evident than opinions, facts can be presented as mere opinions in order to dismantle the factual truth and valorise one's own opinion. However, this destroys the common basis of being-in-the-world.

The simple distinction between truth and opinion has to be made again and again in different circumstances. This always proves to be difficult. In a letter to Jaspers, for example, Arendt wrote:

I fear that, politically speaking, freedom of expression is the basis of freedom of teaching today. This could only be different if one has a dogmatic concept of truth. As much as truth is opposed to opinion, politically in any democracy it goes around in the guise of opinion. In other words, the body politic cannot and must not decide what truth is, and can therefore only protect freedom of expression of truth in the form of freedom of opinion. (Arendt and Jaspers 1985, 85)

It is always fundamentally the case that «In the political (...) only opinion (can) rule; in it there is only perspective! That is precisely its 'truth'. Whoever goes to the people's assembly leaves his 'ideas' at home». (Arendt 2002, 375)

It follows that Arendt's above-mentioned plea in favour of communication instead of confrontational argumentation should be the basis of politics. However, in an entry in her *Denktagebuch* she refers to the problem of communication: «If truth enters the marketplace, it becomes opinion. If it wants to prevail, it must a) persuade which is contrary to truth or b) acquire power and kill all other opinions» (Arendt 2002, 630). In this way, however, communication becomes argumentation again, and work and violence re-enter the political sphere. Argumentation is often based on a prior decision. «[...] what we know and what we have decided no longer needs words. This is where muteness begins (and violence if it interferes in action). This is the danger of science and fanaticism (having decided, no longer being accessible!) in politics» (Arendt 2002, 418f.).

3. HORIZONTAL POWER

Just as Arendt separates action from work, she liberates power from domination and violence. Like politics, freedom and authority, power arises in the in-between, «whenever people do something together», it is «the primal phenomenon of plurality, as it were». The beginning of action, «the 'initium'

that is the human being, is only realised in this sphere of the between (...). *Arché* is beginning and power in one» (Arendt 2002, 161).

The blending of the concepts of power, domination and violence is based on experience and is therefore seen as normal. Thus, for Arendt, the 20th century is characterised as an age of violence, against which the student movement rebelled without developing a concept of power which could be compared to Arendt's radical concept and instead succumbing to dogmatic thinking and the interests of domination. Power is traditionally explained as the activity of the will on the basis of sovereignty. It is not to be found in antiquity, since power «only becomes essential under conditions of equality» (Arendt 2002, 121). Power relates exclusively to the in-between, truth has no power, «only when many agree on a truth does it become power. But what then gives power is the agreement on it, not the truth as such» (Arendt 2002, 627).

In traditional thinking, power as the action of the many with the renunciation of the sovereignty and will of the individual appears to be a direct path to chaos and failure. Consequently, the sentence «The strong one is most powerful alone» (Schiller) has taken on the character of an undeniably plausible proverb. For Arendt, however, chaos in the sense of unpredictability is the only guarantee of freedom in politics, provided that those who act are characterised by reliability towards themselves and others and, it can be concluded, remain within the boundaries of communication and the *polis*. (Arendt 2002, 74)

Who, influenced by tradition, would deny that one must have power in order to be able to will? That you need sovereignty that is based on power? That security is the goal of all politics and that it can best be guaranteed by a rule that is ultimately willing to use force rather than by changing and uncertain power constellations? Arendt concludes that the problem of power is a central political fact of all politics based on sovereignty. But then she adds: «That is, all politics with the exception of American politics» (Arendt 2002, 141). For there, sovereignty is deprived of its claim to exclusivity through the separation of powers and federalism. However, the internationally sovereign appearance of the USA makes it easy to overlook the internal rejection of sovereignty. Sovereignty thinking is so widespread in the wake of the French Revolution and the *nation une et indivisible* that the contradiction to the republican constitutions influenced by Montesquieu's thinking is hardly recognised. According to Arendt, the great discovery of Montesquieu lies precisely in the possibility of strengthening power through power-sharing. The power of those who act is not good *per se* and must therefore be limited. For there is «what is actually destructive about power, its subjectivity», which is

«based on an illegitimate monopolization» (Arendt 2002, 184). When power presents itself as sovereign or as authority, «it is in fact always suited to doing injustice» (Arendt 2002, 186). Hence the limitation of individual power, which as a second effect increases the stability of the whole. The same also applies, by the way, according to Montesquieu, to reason, to limit reason by reason, because it strives for omnipotence. (Arendt 2002, 62)

The traditional assumption that reason realises what is good and power wants what is evil has led to the indiscriminate equation of power and domination or violence. When comparing power and violence, violence appears to be more reliable. In contrast to power, it is measurable and calculable, it is not located somewhere in an immaterial space between people, but in visible possession, one has the means of violence at one's disposal, violence is tangible (Arendt 2002, 273). As far as the relationship between power, violence and domination is concerned, according to Arendt, domination requires violence in order to keep power alive. However, if control over violence has been lost, power has already completely dissolved at this point. Violence can destroy power, but it cannot create a substitute for it (Arendt 2002, 676). In her essay «On Violence», Arendt explains these considerations using practical examples: for example when a technically weaker side in a military conflict builds up more power than the stronger side, such as the Vietnamese people in the fight against the USA (Arendt 1979).

If politics and freedom are based on the formation of power, then the indispensable question arises at all times as to the state of power in a community. And much more than the violence in the big cities, feared at the time her essay was published, there was the problem of the loss of power through the rule of the anonymous, ever larger administrative apparatus, the «nobody», in both socialist and capitalist countries. Their centralisation and monopolisation «causes the drying up or oozing away of all authentic power sources in the country» (Arendt 1979, 182). As in the case of the French student movement in 1968, this can lead to a power vacuum, to «power lying in the street», which De Gaulle sensed when he turned to the military for the means of power to defend his government.

Before we look at the significance of these sources of power for Arendt in the form of councils, I would like to briefly address Habermas' criticism of Arendt's definition of power (see Heuer 2023c). Although Arendt not only presents a pure definition of power, but also addresses its intermingling with domination and violence and its bureaucratic disempowerment, Habermas (2012) takes issue with the pure definition in Arendt's theory, with its elements of communication, space of appearance, plurality and web of human affairs. In his view, the formation of power cannot be an end in

itself, but must be «a potential to realise goals» (Habermas 2012, 213). He systematises Arendt's manifestations of power for the formation of orders to protect political freedom, to resist the threatening forces inside and outside a polity, and to found new institutions by revolutions. «Is such a concept scientifically useful? Is it at all suited to descriptive purposes?» Habermas asks and indirectly denies it. He criticises that Arendt does not include any strategic elements like production and violence, or the administrative political relations to economy and society, and finally cannot grasp phenomena of structural violence. (Habermas 2012, 214) Her orientation to the Aristotelian conception of *praxis* and *poiesis* and the strict dichotomies such as between politics and society made her the

victim of a concept of politics that is inapplicable to modern conditions (....) 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 organization 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. (Habermas 2012, 219f.)

Habermas presents the clearly «damaged» intersubjectivity of a type of power formation that is structurally restricted by communication barriers, while Arendt presents the constantly renewed formation of power that breaks through the automatic processes of political and administrative action. For Habermas, Arendt's reference to councils is insignificant and no reason to think about the possibilities of a participatory civil society. Arendt and Jaspers appear to him as «intrepid radical democrats» with an elitist attitude (Habermas 2012, 227), who, with their proximity 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.

4. COUNCILS - INSTITUTIONALISED POWER

Councils are sources of power in the country: In her book *On Revolution*, Arendt compares the successful founding of the republic of the USA with the failure of the founding of freedom by the French Revolution (see Lederman 2019). Arendt treats all the issues addressed in this work, such as the formation of power and authority instead of rule, councils instead of

representation, the separation of powers and federation instead of national sovereignty, as phenomena of the in-between.

The fact that Arendt is able to present the councils in a pure form is possible because they have repeatedly emerged spontaneously during revolutionary movements, as *sociétés populaires* during the French Revolution, as sections during the Paris Commune or as neighbourhood and factory councils during the Hungarian Revolution. They form a recurring wealth of experience and are by no means a one-off rarity. Arendt combines these non-constitutionally institutionalised councils with the institutionalised town hall meetings and civil society local associations in colonial New England to create a form of government that goes beyond a decentralised structure of action and representation at the level of participation. The repetitive formation of councils and the extensive positive experiences with federation and decentralisation (see Heuer 2023e) provide the conditions for the founding of a council republic. Although the idea of councils and the practical experiences in the USA form the core of the founding of freedom, it has not been remembered as a treasure of revolutionary experience. It was not understood conceptually. The very concept of revolution is lacking due to a «failure to remember and, with it, failure to understand» (Arendt 2006d, 209). A theoretical reappraisal only seems to exist with regard to the French Revolution, so that the USA did not welcome an initially free revolution such as the one in Cuba, but fatefully forced it into alignment with the Soviet Union due to its boycott policy. As far as the French Revolution is concerned, Arendt writes, «I am inclined to think that it was precisely the great amount of theoretical concern and conceptual thought lavished upon the French Revolution by Europe's thinkers and philosophers which contributed decisively to its world-wide success, despite its disastrous end» (Arendt 2006d, 212), which also shows that Arendt is one of the few who did the same with regard to the American Revolution.

One of the conceptual ambiguities is the underestimation of the action that, according to Arendt, makes the difference between a truly free republic and a mere constitutional state. There is «no reason for us to mistake civil rights for political freedom, or to equate these preliminaries of civilised government with the very substance of a free republic. For political freedom, generally speaking means the right 'to be a participator in government', or it means nothing [...]» (Arendt 2006d, 210). This resulted in «the failure of the founders to incorporate the township and the town-hall meeting into the Constitution» (Arendt 2006d, 227). The Swiss cantonal system and that of the wards in the USA should be analysed here, but Arendt does not do so.

According to Arendt, all these failures and the representative system lead to a degeneration of state and government into a bureaucratic administra-

tion, the renewed distinction between rulers and ruled and the emergence of a ruling oligarchy. An oligarchy that pretends to act in the interests of the masses and to be democratic, which in this context means serving public welfare and private interests. Under these circumstances, the people are condemned either to sink into lethargy or to call upon the spirit of resistance, the only real power, the power of revolution held in reserve (Arendt 2006d, 229). However, it cannot be ruled out that the resistance will not be carried out by the citizens, but by a mob, such as the one incited by the populist election loser Trump in 2021 which stormed the Capitol.

Arendt's admiration of the councils is unreserved. «You know I have this romantic sympathy with the council system», she said at the conference mentioned previously (Arendt 1979, 327). In her essay on the Hungarian Revolution, she had emphasised that their demands «exclusively contained the longing for Freedom and Truth» (Arendt 2018b, 127), did not include party bickering, lynch law and mob rule, while the party bureaucracies from left to right took decisive action against them.

Arendt admits that

if it is true that the revolutionary parties never understood to what an extent the council system was identical with the emergence of a new form of government, it is no less true that the councils were incapable of understanding to what enormous extent the government machinery in modern societies must indeed perform the functions of administration. The fatal mistake of the councils has always been that they themselves did not distinguish clearly between participation in public affairs and administration or management of things in the public interest (Arendt 2006d, 265).

5. THE PLACE OF INCOMPLETENESS

Arendt was interested in a twofold process with regard to the concepts: on the one hand, their unfolding in a pure form against the background of the *human condition* and, on the other, their liberation from the state of hybridity. She thus addresses the theoretical and the practical possibility: the spontaneity of action, which is inconceivable without a horizontal formation of power and leads to the appropriate organisational form of councils. Arendt's rejection of utopia and science in the field of politics makes it clear that this theoretical concept is not a utopia, and she emphasises this by referring to practical, historical experience. Furthermore, the fact that her critique is not a critical theory is made clear by her refusal to categorise it

in terms of the history of ideas. It is critical in a Kantian sense, historicises Marx as the end point of a Platonic tradition and redefines «the social» and concepts of existential philosophy such as the world and mortality in favour of an independent space of politics, without tying them together into a theory. This is why there is no name for Arendt's endeavour. «So you ask me where I am. I am nowhere. I am really not in the mainstream of present or any other political thought [...] sometimes you are attacked. But you usually are ignored, because even useful polemic cannot be carried through on my terms» (Arendt 1997, 336).

Rather, the way Arendt is treated sheds light on the nature of the critiques. Judith Shklar with her accusation of metaphysical elitism, Seyla Benhabib with her critique of a «reluctant modernism» (Bajohr 2017; Benhabib 2003), and Habermas, all fail to recognize the «incomplete phase as a historical and therefore also theoretical factor in its own right. One reason for this lies in the problem of criticism that makes it easy for itself; it uses its own perspective for orientation, not an enlarged mentality. Criticism thereby marks the subjective difference between the critic and the criticised, which neglects or completely disregards the perspective of the other. This becomes clear in the discrepancy between Arendt's reflection on the possibilities of horizontal power and Habermas' criticism that she does not take into account his topic, that of structural violence.

The theoretical incompleteness of Arendt's work deserves more attention than it has received. To this end, it is necessary to transform the negative connotation into a positive one. If action, power and councils arise spontaneously again and again and are repeatedly fought and destroyed by parties, one can either recognise their limitations, hybridity and ultimately unsuitability or acknowledge their constant return, their onslaught, their creativity and humanity as anthropological potential. The latter makes it possible to evaluate actions as positive that would be judged a failure from the perspective of a theoretical claim to totality. In the positive evaluation, a «for all that» remains in the memory, an event, as an example and narrative of those who acted. What remains is the certainty of return. Arendt's avowal of a romantic relationship to the councils resists the negative prospect of an almost inevitable failure. As if in passing, Arendt mentions the humanity that emerges with the new beginnings that occur again and again. It characterises the «general atmosphere of fraternity» (Arendt 2018b, 132)² and makes it possible to choose the best, «selected according to political criteria, for their

2. The German version is even more euphoric: «Atmosphäre einer überwältigenden Brüderlichkeit». (Arendt 2000b, 101)

trustworthiness, their personal integrity, their capacity of judgment, often for their physical courage» (Arendt 2006d, 266; see Heuer 2023d). This humanity, the hybridisation that underlies emotions, also remains the certainty that a confrontation with the hybridity of relations and their concepts will always start anew. Between new beginnings and failure lie the phases of the disregarded, the unfinished with its potential for further development.

It is this type of experience and example that exemplifies political thinking, judgement and action and enables a critical formation of concepts. It can enrich political science. At the time of the Hungarian Revolution, Arendt still had to realise that these events were reacted to «with anonymous silence and complete disregard from political scientists and theorists» (Arendt 2018b, 136).

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