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Political Responsibility: Reflections based on Hannah Arendt and Eric Weil

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Abstract

This article discusses political responsibility based on the works of Hannah Arendt and Eric Weil. For this purpose, it initially addresses the "German question", highlighting a markedly "anti-political" scenario as a fruitful field to reflect on responsibility as a political phenomenon. Then, it exposes the Weilian critique of the traditional split between morals and politics and, starting from a similar terrain, Arendtian analysis of the political implications of thought. Finally, we take political responsibility as an object of investigation by the two authors, either from the blurring of the distinction between guilt and responsibility in Arendt or the focus on the political subject in Weil. From what follows, it is possible to conclude by pointing to the importance of educating people for the exercise of democracy, conceived in two fundamental senses, namely, as a form of government and as a mode of social organization.

Keywords: political responsibility, politics, moral, Hannah Arendt. Eric Weil

1. Introduction

This article addresses the notion of political responsibility from Hannah Arendt and Eric Weil. The objective is to take the reflection of these authors to think about our position regarding the commitment to building a shared world and guaranteeing the essential conditions of our democracies.

We must consider at least two fundamental observations when proposing a reflection on political responsibility inspired by these two authors. First, this requires emphasizing that we will consider them respecting the nature of their different conceptions of politics. In the case

of Arendt, a reflection centered on the effort to combine the action of human beings with politics. That means, firstly, recovering action insofar as it reveals a who, a person, and, secondly, institutions that can safeguard the human capacity to start new things in a shared world (Andreiuolo 2013). In Weil, a proposal for the normative foundation of politics in articulating the "idea" of the State in a form of the ethical-political theory of Hegelian inspiration (Perine 2018).

Then, the approximation between Arendt and Weil is not arbitrary but presents justifications of different orders. The first concerns the historical experiences of the two Jewish-German thinkers (Calvet 2004, 149), adding to this the intercession of Anne Mendelsonn-Weil, Weil's wife and the friend to whom Arendt dedicated the book *Rahel Venhagen*[1]. Much more important, however, is the fact that both assume the challenge of thinking about politics after the "Hitlerian gospel" (Weil 1982, 51), recognizing the rupture that totalitarianism represents in the Western political tradition. Finally, the approach to different issues in the light of the approximation of both works has already been carried out by both commentators of Arendt (Calvet 2004) and interpreters of Weil (Castelo Branco 2018; Canivez 2021).

We reinforce that our intention is not restricted to the authors' comments; instead, we reflect on an urgent topic, benefiting from the theoretical apparatus developed by them. To this end, we have divided this text into three parts. In the first one, we revisit a subject common to political thought immediately after the Second World War, namely, the "German question". In the second, we return to Weilian reflection on the relationship between morality and politics and Arendt's analysis of the political implications of thought. In the last one, we approach political responsibility in terms of building a shared world and overcoming the crises of democracy.

As we can intuit, the route leads us to think about the conditions for the formation of the subject capable of responding, in the sphere of political action, for the world and democracy. Therefore, our final considerations resume the

ideas present in Arendt and Weil about the essential role of education in political life.

2. Political responsibility and the "German question"

Our initial hypothesis is that, both in Arendt and in Weil, we can consider the reflection on political responsibility from the bases posed by the "German question", more precisely by the question about the responsibility of the German people for the crimes of the Hitler government. In other words, in these authors, as was common among German intellectuals after the Second World War, political responsibility appears as a constitutive moment of the "German question" taken as a "question of guilt" (Jaspers 1946, 44).

But if, for the authors, the question of guilt is established as an unavoidable moment for the "German question", both reject a general condemnation of the Germans. Therefore, an adequate approach to the problem needs to overcome vansittartism, as it must be able to point both to the conditions of co-responsibility of the German people and to determine the sense in which each citizen should feel responsible indeed.

In this domain, Arendtian thought not only underlines the limits of the idea of "general guilt", but also points to the conditions that made possible the victory of animal laborans and the emptying of public space. Weil, on the other hand, emphasizes the insufficiency of a "moral reaction" when problems are effectively placed in the field of political action.

In several of Arendt's writings, we can find the theme of responsibility as a dimension of the German question. In those works, the author maintains that universal condemnation of the Germans does not only represent the emptying of the sense of responsibility; rather, it signifies the victory of one of the fundamental theses of Nazism: the assertion that the people form a single bloc with their government. In this sense, the vansittartist vision is taken as a result of Nazi propaganda abroad and the totalitarian politcs committed to making each German a co-author, an accomplice of the perpetrated crimes. In this scenario, "whether any person in Germany is a Nazi or an anti-Nazi can be determined only by the One who knows the

secrets of the human heart, which no human eye can penetrate." (Arendt 2005, 123) The conclusion reveals the dimensions of the question: "the only way in which we can identify an anti-Nazi is when the Nazis have hanged him. There is no other reliable token." (Arendt 2005, 124) Therefore, the real problem of the German question is to consider the possibilities for action, participation, and resistance when the boundary between criminals and ordinary people has been erased, where there is no longer a sharp separation between the guilty and the innocent.

The dilution of guilt among the German people would be the inversion of Nazi racism and the condition for the guilty to escape their responsibility. This dilution would also leave unanswered the question of the responsibility of those favorable to Hitler from the beginning, who helped him come to power and those who applauded him inside and outside Germany. If, in general, "these people, who were co-responsible for Hitler's crimes in a broader sense, did not incur any guilt in a stricter sense. They, who were the Nazis' first accomplices and their best aides, truly did not know what they were doing nor with whom they were dealing." (Arendt 2005, 126) What was at the base of the support of a large part of the germans for nazism, what made them effectively co-responsible for the atrocities perpetrated by the Hitler regime, was "their inability to judge modern political organizations" (Arendt 2005, 125).

In Arendt, this inability to evaluate is made explicit in the question about the factors that led the common man to put himself, without great difficulty, at the service of the extermination machine, becoming, without resistance or reflection, the most dangerous criminal of the twentieth century. For the author, answering this question also requires thinking about the conditions that made the emergence of the "mass man" possible. In this regard, she lists two fundamental factors: the victory of the animal laborans, that is, the individual who deals exclusively with his private life and with the demands of survival dictated by work (Correia 2014), and the role played by totalitarian propaganda (Aguiar 2007).

These are two distinct factors but intrinsically intertwined. The totalitarian propaganda stands out for its

definitive explanations about the German context, fully responding to the needs of the masses formed by the animal laborans, those subjects lacking in the world whose common experience is not the perception of the capacity for political action but loneliness and helplessness. In general, this propaganda was developed through the justification provided by superhuman laws (Chapoutot 2014) and turned to a mass of individuals lacking explanations about their situation, who cannot bear to deal with the contingency inherent in the relationship between men (Koonz 2005). The propaganda then traps the masses in its pretense of complete explanation. It gives them the false sensation of being part of a superior reality when, in fact, it distances them both from the potential outer space of freedom, the public sphere, and from interior freedom, the locus of spiritual activities. The psychological attraction exercised by Nazism was thus based on the world's emptiness as a shared experience. So, "its immense lies [...] were psychologically efficient because they corresponded to certain fundamental experiences and even more to certain fundamental cravings." (Arendt 2005, 111)

Weil, in turn, directly addresses the "German question" in a series of reviews published between 1946 and 1947. In these texts, the philosopher analyzes works by Hans Gisevius, Edgard Morin, Albert Béguin, Ernest Pezet, Leopold Schwarzschild, Ulrich von Hassell, and Karl Jaspers. They were jurists, historians, politicians, and philosophers who were attentive to the issue of guilt and, especially, to the political role of those who resisted Hitler, those who tried to break the situation of absolute voicelessness. However, we can find the best key to his understanding of the theme in an impressive metaphor, both for its clarity and forcefulness.

> If in a family, someone becomes a rabid madman, it may be tragic from a personal point of view, but it is not that serious; however, when the family watches, with tears in their eyes, his fits of rage, and quietly waits for him to set fire to the house, one gets the impression that the other members are singularly shortsighted. The madman is no less mad because of this, he is the one who provoked the catastrophe; it is recommended that he be watched closely after the attack; but the family should also be concerned with reflecting on its role both in controlling crises and preventing them. (Weil 1982, 51)

The image does not need much analysis. On it, we know who the crazy and the improvident are and, after the attack, the task remains to reflect and create the means so that history does not repeat itself, after all, "nothing prevents us from waiting for others like [Hitler] to appear" (Weil 1950, 37). Now, it is precisely the reflection on the "role of the family" in the face of crises that forces us to think about the question of the guilt of the German people. Like Arendt, Weil refutes vansittartism while rejecting the Nazi argument about the identification between people and government. Therefore, the question is to determine how the government's acts make the citizens of a State co-responsible.

In Weil's texts, three arguments stand out. First, Hitler should be fought not just because he was leading Germany to ruin, but because his triumph resulted in "action for the sake of action, action in its purest state" (Weil 1982, 71). In this case, there was no true political idea, but the coupling of the forces of popular fury gave the most brutal power its ideological justification, sustained by racism and biologism, as well as by myth and its intrinsic hostility to reason.

Secondly, there is the definition of the real problem of the "question of guilt" and political responsibility since, in the political field, "the government is responsible, but the people are responsible for their government". This definition leads to the conclusion that "if [the people] do not accept this responsibility will never be a free people or worthy of freedom" (Weil 1982, 54).

Finally, opposition to Hitler's government would only make political sense if it took place in the sphere of action. Acting responsibly in this field presupposes both knowledge of political conditions and a distinction of the meaning of moral responsibility. Weil (1982, 45) even argues that under the setting imposed by the Nazi government, the opposition would demand the renunciation of "traditional morality". For the philosopher, many who resisted Nazism remained on the moral plane, limiting themselves, for example, to affirming their own repudiation concerning the regime's atrocities. These "saved their own souls and tried to save those souls around them: we do not have the impression that they did great things to save

their people or at least to warn or awaken them" (Weil 1982, 45). In a word, we are facing the fundamental problem of distinguishing between moral responsibility and political responsibility and recognizing the insufficiency of remaining on the moral plane when it comes to action in history.

3. Neither Adolf Hitler nor Francis of Assisi

If we are interested in the distinction between moral responsibility and political responsibility, in this case, we are much more concerned with understanding the consequences of the separation between moral conscience and political action. This split broadly characterizes part of our intellectual tradition.

In this domain, Eric Weil's philosophy helps us to specify the terms involved and to perceive the issue from a broad perspective, capable of criticizing the traditional point of view that sustains the radical separation between morality and politics. In a few words, the author argues that only by acting politically we can build a world in which it is possible to live morally. However, if Weil remains within the conceptual scope, Arendt moves towards the resumption of this same problem considering the "moral eclipse" that characterized the totalitarian experience and highlighting the political value of the faculty of thinking.

Weil starts from the observation that for our tradition, between morals and politics, there is a disagreement whose roots go back to the Old Testament and the writings of Plato. In other words, we are dealing with a tradition that considers politics "bad and perverse in its deepest nature" and morality as "an ideology that understands nothing about the reality of human relations" (Weil 2003, 241). The immediate consequence is the possibility of choosing between them.

> The choice is possible. The proof is in the fact that men chose, opting for one possibility to the exclusion of the other: Epicurus and St. Francis of Assisi rejected politics, Gengis Khan and Hitler did not dedicate their time to solving problems of morality. It means that we can live in one of the two domains as if the other did not exist, at least as if the other did not represent any interest. (Weil 2003, 241-242)

It is necessary not only to consider the possibility of an exclusive choice; it is equally fundamental to understand that the problem of this alternative exists for those who did not opt for one over the other. Therefore, the question arises for those who want a world in which politics and morals dialogue.

The philosopher's task assumes a precise design here since the possibility of an agreement between morality and politics must be examined from the assumptions of each one of them (Raimondi 2018). This problem will only make sense if, regardless of the starting point, the place of the interpenetration of domains "appears as such to those who initially believed in their radical separation" (Weil 2003, 244). Considering the search for a positive relationship between politics and morals to think about political responsibility, we return to the terms of the "German question" when Weil recalls that many opponents of the Nazi regime positioned themselves in the moral domain without effective action on the political level (logically when this was still possible). Furthermore, we must always deal with the "temptation" to put the conscience at peace by abstention (Weil 1991a, 169).

However, after all, what would be the price of renouncing political space, of trying to escape political responsibility? Concerning the condition of modern man, this complete abstention from the political plane is simply impracticable. It is no longer a question of saving one's soul but of creating a world in which it is possible to live morally. The point is not to stay off from the political world but to ask what constitutes good politics. In Weil's philosophy, good politics is the one that reduces violence in the world, that is, the one that creates the conditions for every man to lead a sensible life (Weil 2003, 246-247). Weil resorts to another image to develop the argument of the insufficiency of the exclusive option for morality.

> Neither goodwill nor the will to the good suffices, as much as they would not be enough in the case of a doctor ready to sacrifice himself for the sick but who does not cure anyone, either because of technical incompetence or because his moral convictions prevent him from intervening in the field of individual autonomy through anesthesia, scalpel or potions (Weil 1991a, 162).

However, highlighting the insufficiency of moral conscience in the face of the demands of political responsibility is a limited exercise, an effort that only sometimes reaches the extent of the problem shown in situations of moral collapse, such as what happened in totalitarianism. Therefore, a broader approach to the issue also considers that those historical conditions not only compromised the bases of political responsibility, pushing subjects into the inviolable sanctum of their own moral conscience while undermining the possibility of a properly moral life itself.

In the essay "Personal responsibility under dictatorship", Arendt poses a similar question: it is up to those who preferred to withdraw from public affairs in order not to be responsible for the crimes committed by the Hitler government to be accused of being concerned only with the salvation of their own souls and, therefore, focused solely on non-political issues that can have undeniable anti-political reverberations? For the author, far from irresponsibility and indifference, in the extreme situations that characterize dark times, responsibility for the world – politics par excellence – cannot be assumed since it implies a minimum of power, participation, and freedom. Under the totalitarian aegis, these potential processes give way to powerlessness, which undermines the foundations of responsibility and also demonstrates that the total absence of power is a valid justification for those who choose not to participate.

Still taking these individuals as a reference, Arendt undertakes the argumentative path that leads to questioning what differed those who participated in the regime – with more or less enthusiasm – from those who did not. She found that the seconds never experienced conflicts of conscience or pondered over the lesser harm their insertion would cause. On the contrary, she "never doubted that crimes remained crimes even if legalized by the government and that it was better not to participate in these crimes under any circumstances". In other words, "they did not feel an obligation but acted according to something self-evident to them even though it was no longer self-evident to those around them" (Arendt 2003, 78). This axiomatic evidence, capable of demonstrating what cannot be

done, would be achieved through the dialogue between me and myself that lays the foundations of moralities and thinking.

For Arendt, the thought, under the eclipse of traditional morality, when trying to understand those who adapted so quickly to the Hitler regime, comes close to the observation that the greater the firmness with which individuals adhere to political movements without questioning, them, the more thoughtlessly they will align themselves with its prescriptions. Thus, there is another place for the problem of morality:

> Morality collapsed into a mere set of mores-manners, customs, conventions to be changed at will-not with criminals, but with ordinary people, who, as long as moral standards were socially accepted, never dreamt of doubting what they had been taught to believe in (Arendt 2003, 54).

Arendt's arguments point to an essential direction for understanding contemporary political challenges and questions concerning political responsibility. That is the centrality of thought, especially in extreme situations where the line between obedience and participation in the execution of political crimes is blurred. The inability to think underlies the phenomenon of evil acts whose agents are not monstrous or demonic nor moved by villainy, pathology, or ideological conviction. Therefore, Arendt alerts us to the dangers of non-reflection that, unlike stupidity, "it can be found in highly intelligent people" (Arendt 2003, 164).[2]

Taking this relationship between the inability to think and evil is necessary considering three fundamental propositions. First, we must take this connection as a risk inherent in all men. Second, the thinking faculty cannot be expected to generate moral propositions, such as a prescriptive code of conduct or a new definition of good and evil. Finally, thinking is "out of order" for dealing with the invisible as we move into a world of appearances in which truly human existence can be described as "pure presence". Hence the conclusion that "For thinking as such does society little good (...). It does not create values, it will not find out, once and for all, what 'the good' is, and it does not confirm but rather dissolves accepted rules of conduct." (Arendt 2003, 188)

It is not our purpose to make a complete analysis of Arendt's[3] faculty of thinking but to point out some of the author's arguments about political responsibility. The political importance of thinking is precisely shown when things seem to fall apart, when political structures crumble, and moral convictions fade away. In these moments, thinking ceases to be a politically marginal issue. "When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action" (Arendt 2003, 188). Therefore, "thinking itself is dangerous" (Arendt 2003, 177), since it provides the conditions for the release of the faculty of judgment, the most political of spiritual capacities, the ability to take a stand, stating "this is wrong" or even "I cannot do this", a moral proposition par excellence that, in times from political obscurity, distinguishes those exempt from guilt and participation (Arendt 2003, 78).[4] That is why the author states that "it is sheer absurdity to expect moral behavior from someone who does not think. Not thinking is, for example, not imagining how I would feel if what I inflict on others happened to me; it is evil." (Arendt 2006b, 718)

Finally, if the "German question" is part of the frame of reference of political responsibility in Arendt and Weil, an adequate answer to the problem must, for Arendt, reflect on thinking as an essential element to release the capacity to judge. For Weil, it is indispensable to consider the relationship between morality and politics and the insufficiency of remaining in the moral field when it comes to acting. In both, what is at stake is man's freedom understood as a condition and as an end of politics.

4. Responsibility for the common world and the maintenance of democracy

Arendt addresses the issue in "Collective Responsibility" which starting point is the dividing line between moral guilt and political responsibility. The text revolves around responsibility "for things one has not done", that is, the question of whether "one can be held liable for them" (Arendt 2003, 147). To a large extent, the difficulties arise precisely

from the blurring of distinctions between guilt and responsibility, a confusion that, in the post-war period, encouraged, even among Germans resistant to Nazism, the confession of collective or global guilt[5]. For Arendt, as we have seen, such a statement only serves to excuse those who are effectively guilty, after all, saying that everyone is guilty is the same as saying that no one is guilty. Precisely to avoid the dilution of guilt until its complete disappearance, it is essential to delimit the border between guilt and responsibility. In other words, it is necessary to emphasize that "guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is strictly personal" (Arendt 2003, 147).

For Arendt, the blurring of the line that separates guilt and responsibility is due to two distinct difficulties. First, by the vagueness of the terms in which we deal with the conflicts between moral and political considerations, on the one hand, and with moral and political standards, on the other. Roughly speaking, the ambiguity that dominates our vocabulary is made explicit in Modernity by shifting the center of interest from the world to the self. Secondly, this movement is justified by the religious discourse, translated in the shift from care for the world to concern for one's soul and salvation. The conclusion is simple: "In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political considerations of conduct stands the world." (Arendt 2003, 153)

The difference between morals and politics becomes clearer when Arendt takes up two Socratic propositions extracted from the Gorgias. In the first, Socrates says that "to commit injustice is worse than to suffer it" (474b). In the second, he states: "it would be better for me that my lyre or a choir that I lead were out of tune or strident with dissonance, and that the majority of men disagreed with me and said the opposite of what I say, than I, being one, were at variance and contradiction with myself" (484c). Both reflect the assumption that I live not only with others but also with myself. The question is to define which perspective should take precedence, because, if from a moral point of view suffering an injustice is better than practicing it, from a political perspective, the best thing is that there is no injustice, which implies the duty to

prevent it. Thus, the problem of political responsibility can finally gain definitive features, pari passu with which the question becomes unavoidable because there are injustices in the world and they concern everyone who shares the world that made them possible.

In the exact text, Arendt adds to the constant reference to Hitler's Germany the framework posed by the controversies surrounding the Vietnam War: in both contexts, the question of responsibility appears as a dilemma in the face of which it is necessary to decide between complicity and resistance. The latter, however, is only possible when the center of concern shifts from the self to the destiny of collective life since political resistance also involves thinking that, in turn, "calls not only for intelligence and profundity but above all for courage" (Arendt 1970, 8). Once again, it is important to stress that no moral and personal standard of conduct can excuse us from responsibility for this decision. Political responsibility "is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men" (Arendt 2003, 158)[6]. Therefore, it is intersubjectively based, as one is always responsible towards someone, whether towards oneself or those with whom we share the world. The recognition of political responsibility, whose genesis is the exercise of the capacity to judge, is contrary to anonymous complicity with violence, terror, and the always anti-political use of hatred and racism. Sharing a familiar world, everyone is responsible, whether those who can be singled out, like Eichmann, or the co-responsible, diluted in a depersonalized mass of supporters (Sanchez 2011).

For a final observation from the "German question", given the embarrassment felt by some Germans for what the Nazi government had caused, Arendt points to the "ashamed of being human" (Arendt 2005, 131). Indeed, only the idea of humanity can illuminate both the imperative of collective responsibility and the consequence it entails in the political field, namely, the fact that "must assume responsibility for all crimes committed by men" (Arendt 2005, 131). Faced with the unfortunate actuality of the resumption of Nazi-fascist discourses and the ever-strong acceptance of racial ideologies, "in political terms, the idea of humanity [...] is the on guarantee

that one 'superior race' after another may not feel obligated to follow the 'natural law' of the right of the powerful and exterminate 'inferior races un-worthy of survival'" (Arendt 2005, 131).

In 1957, Weil published „Responsabilité politique", whose approach not only distinguishes it from the moral and legal planes but focuses attention on the "political subject" in a narrow sense, beginning with the question about the political responsibility of a man of government.

Following him in that direction would take us away from the itinerary proposed. However, two of Weil's observations allow us to take the article for our scope. First, we must consider the idea that in constitutional States, there exists a relation of reciprocity regarding political responsibility between the political man and the common citizen (Weil 1991b, 342). Then, in the last paragraph of the text, we find the assertion that "a political responsibility of the citizen exists wherever the question of such responsibility is explicitly posed" (Weil 1991b, 350).

On the one hand, this responsibility is properly political because it concerns the value of the action. On the other hand, it is situated on three interdependent and distinct planes. First, the responsible agent is required to discover the true problems and discard those that are only apparent or even absurd, in other words, to separate what can only be solved in the political field from what should not be linked to this domain. Then, it must also deal with articulating the solution to political problems. Finally, the solution needs to be put into action. In this regard, it is essential to remember that a theoretically good solution may not achieve the desired ends. Due to negligence, the ill will of lower bodies, or the intervention of non-political groups and groupings, the chosen plan is not implemented (Weil 1991b, 344).

Therefore, political actions are judged "the criterion is historical and not moral or opposed to moral: the man who acts invokes this criterion himself: his political responsibility was precisely to succeed in the realization of what he considered as desirable, just, good" (Weil 1991b, 344). But even more important is the statement that "implicitly or explicitly, all

political discussion recognizes the validity of this criterion" (Weil 1991b, 344). Indeed, by bringing the expression "political discussion", Weil offers the keys to directly associate the theme with reflection on the tensions and limits of democracy. Political responsibility and democracy are not just convergent themes but are placed in Weil's political philosophy as interconnected issues that share his assumptions. This thesis is supported if we consider democracy a government regime and a form of social life.

At first, however, in a first attempt at a definition, we can return to Weil's words when he states that democracy is "always a system of free discussion in evolution" (Weil 1950, 37), which can only be achieved by "conscious and responsible action" (Weil 1950, 39). At this point, our problem arises since democracy is the most complex political system to define. It does not exist fully realized anywhere; everywhere, it presents itself as an ideal and a march. This first attempt at a definition highlights another essential aspect: the fact that democracy "does not withstand all tests, tensions, and injustices due to a kind of state of grace" (Weil 1950, 39). Also, nothing guarantees that a democratic community does not fall into a situation in which democracy becomes impossible, after all, as the author recalls in another text, "it is not enough to talk about democracy for citizens to be able, or at least willing, to take part in the discussions that regulate the destiny of the community" (Weil 1996, 172-173).

Weil lists at least four risks to democracies. First, there is the fact that "the citizens may be so ignorant of public affairs that they fail to appreciate the importance of the problems involved and may well have no desire to express an opinion on them" (Weil 1951, 425). Then there is the danger that social and economic pressures are so intense that they prevent most citizens from expressing their convictions. Third, the political system can exclude part of the population from discussions about ends and means to problems in collective life. Finally, there is always the possibility of finding a population willing to "dispose" of democracy.

This last risk mainly revolves around the attitude to adopt when democratic instruments threaten democracy. It

leads us to two fundamental problems: on the one hand, thinking about the limits of tolerance and, on the other hand, considering the current success of anti-democratic doctrines. While the first is a constitutive issue of our theme, the second is a challenge that not only resurfaces from time to time but which is never wholly absent.

This makes it particularly urgent to think about political responsibility in this framework, as "it is impossible to ascertain a priori whether a state which is at present democratic will remain so" (Weil 1951, 442). Weil recalls that "Hitler came to power by the most democratic means possible" (Weil 1950, 36). So now "we no longer ignore the reasons for considering Hitler, elected by the German people, as an undemocratic head of state – but nothing prevents us from hoping that others like him will appear" (Weil 1950, 37).

Finally, to remain faithful to the initial proposal, we want to note that the democracy for which we are responsible should not be taken as a means but as an end capable of guiding the creation of material and spiritual conditions without which it would not even be possible. Furthermore, "every democratic government train its citizens" (Weil 1951, 438). That is, he also conceives action to educate the people for democracy. We end with a constant concern in Weil, education, without which "talking about democracy (in whatever sense such a controversial term assumes) is a joke" (Weil 1993, 135).

According to Arendt's perspective, education is a double path of responsibility, namely, with the conservation of the world and with the protection of the unexpected that underlies every newcomer, those in whom we place our hope in the establishment of a world in which the dignity of politics is finally protected. Therefore, initiation into the legacy of our ancestors is essential to form individuals who are genuinely responsible for the in-between space, which reverberates in action, discourse, belonging, participation, and thought. Therefore, it would be up to education the arduous mission to provide us with the necessary information so that "our inheritance [no] was left to us by no testament" (Arendt 1961, 3). Not only that but also to prevent thoughtlessness and loneliness from remaining the routine experiences of an ever-

increasing number of people. All this makes the educational process a spark of illumination for the problem of thoughtlessness. Consequently, to face evil, a potential help to decide, "in the rare moments when the chips are down" (Arendt 2003, 4), which other self we want to live with and how we choose to appear to those with whom we share the world.

5. Final Considerations

Our itinerary brought us responsibility for building a shared world and for the foundations that sustain democracy. At the starting point, the German issues call attention to the reflection, difficult and necessary, on the responsibility that the members of a community and a State have, if not for the mistakes (or crimes) of their government, at least for the existence of such government. In periods of destabilization of democracy, this reflection becomes even more complex and necessary. We think this makes the theme's relevance sufficiently clear for current philosophical reflection.

If responsibility always demands a response, in the political field, it is not limited to the moral sphere, but people must translate it into a form of action. In other words, political responsibility is not consistent with the concern for "saving one's own soul", nor is it reduced to signing notes of repudiation. It implies the transformation of the world through the creation of conditions in which moral life becomes possible.

Finally, particularly in a democracy, political responsibility is essentially placed in the obligation of each one and everyone in training the people to participate, which also leads us to say a word about education, not by chance a topic that appears, with different spaces, in the reflections of Arendt and Weil. We are responsible for forming a subject capable of participating in the processes of solving collective problems, aware of the importance of their participation. It is equivalent, as stated above, to the formation of a man capable of thinking, expressing himself, discerning, and engaging responsibly in the construction – and permanence – of the familiar world.

The choice of Arendt and Weil is not fortuitous. They are thinkers deeply concerned with the erosion of essential conditions for everyday life, even if they see this phenomenon

from different angles. The two, whose experiences with Nazism are well known, take on the task of thinking about time itself, and in this, they also help us to understand the social role of those who think about politics. In dark times there is no exemption from political responsibility, not even for the pseudo-humanist, who perhaps imagines himself untouchable in an ivory tower. Finally, the "courage of reason" must be recovered, recognizing that what is at stake is the possibility of effectively combating violence and not just its verbal and artificial exclusion.

NOTES

[1] For the correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Anne Mendelsonn-Weil, cf. Arendt (2019).

[2] "[Nonthinking] teaches them to hold fast to whatever the prescribed rules of conduct may be a given time in a given Society. What people then get used to is not so much the content of the rules, a close examination of which would Always lead them into perplexity, as the possession os rules under which to subsume particulars. In other words, they get used to never making up their minds. If somebody then should now up who, for whatever reasons and purposes, wishes to abolish the old 'values' or virtues, he will find it easy enough provided he offers a new code, and he will need no force and no persuasion (...) to establish it" (Arendt 2003, 178).

[3] About the faculty of thought in Arendt, see Richard Bernstein (2000) and Fábio Passos (2017).

[4] As thinking imposes reflection on what causes astonishment, enabling individuals to judge whether they should adhere to specific values, it is understandable why the most questioning have always been considered "dangerous". They are described like this due to the threat inherent in their own thinking because, in extreme situations, while the respectable are more easily controlled, the rebels seldom adhere to the "new order". Those who question keep the inner dialogue alive and update the question about the *self* with which they will live. "They asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing [...] because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves at all" (Arendt n.d., 5).

[5] As happened in Stuttgart in October 1945, when the Evangelical Church Council - also composed of opponents of the Hitler regime, such as Pastor Martin Niemöller – stated: "It is with deep pain that we declare: through our fault, unspeakable sufferings have befallen many peoples and countries (...), although we have fought for long years against (...) the terrible National Socialist regime, we accuse ourselves" (Gounelle 2017, 3).

[6] In this sense, the cosmopolitanism of human life is affirmed, a character that is reflected not only in plurality but also in the fact that, in every community, individuals are responsible for each other, in reciprocal care, and in the relationship with the common world. Thus, it is possible to understand why the responsibility that binds men in the public space is the same that gives meaning to the Kantian maxim according to which the violation of rights committed in one place is felt worldwide. In other words, our cosmopolitan existence is sustained by political responsibility that aims to ensure that, even immersed in being together, we can, as agents, differentiate ourselves in uniqueness, given the permanence of the world. At this point, the boundaries between action and political responsibility are blurred: as every action implies the actor's desire for his peers to witness his deed, it can be said that the action also aims to serve as an example. The exemplary character of the action means that responsibility is, in essence, "knowing that, starting from you, an example is presented that others will 'follow'; this is how we change the world" (Arendt 2006b, 626). The relationship between cosmopolitanism and responsibility was the backdrop for Young's (2005) discussions on how to think about responsibility in a context of globalization: instead of the perspective that defended that political responsibility only refers to individuals from the same community, the sharing a globalized world imposes the perception, inspired by Arendt, that actions give rise to chains whose apprehension is impossible in terms of their consequences and the determination of those concerned by their effects.

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