

17. Elements of Cosmopolitanism – and its Handicaps

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we have long since found ourselves in a new world of strife with the decline of the United States, the expansionism of China, the new imperialist policy of Russia, the European Union's search for orientation, hybrid, digital, state forms of aggression, anti-democratic populism and, last but not least and already recognised as a fundamental problem for more than 30 years, climate change. This makes it clear that democracy and the republic are by no means invulnerable, that peace does not take care of itself, and that the rapidly increasing globalisation of the movement of goods, information and labour by no means necessarily entails cosmopolitanism. This is rather promoted by Putin's ethno-imperial war against Ukraine, whose steadfast population and multicultural history brings to mind the fact that cosmopolitanism is a cultural and political practice that does not have to encompass the whole world, but already exists in the local or regional.

It is the republican component of our liberal democracies, the practice of civil society, the institutions of power formation, separation of powers and rule of law that enable a cosmopolitan perspective. Strengthening them is the answer to the multiple threats. In the following, I would like to present a path of thought that takes up core elements of Hannah Arendt's republican thought and places them in a cosmopolitan context. These are the quasi-anthropological, strongly valorised understanding of *plurality*, which at the same time underlies all other elements; the plurality of *judgement*, which implies a cosmopolitan dimension; plural, spontaneous action with the appropriate institutional form of *councils* and a correspondingly plural power-forming institutionalisation in the form of the separation of powers and *federalism*; and finally our *relationship to nature*. Such a fundamental understanding of plurality can no longer be limited to the political sphere, but proves to be the common principle in nature and *polis*. This means that plurality characterises both the anthropological and the natural realm.

Nature and *polis* are furthermore components of the one cosmos, so that plurality shapes not only the common existence of humans and nature, but also the mutual relations between them. It follows that the positive preservation and development of nature on the part of humans under the concept of sustainability not only concerns the relationship of humans to nature, but also the self-relationship within the

human polis. The preservation and development of plurality in nature and polis ultimately strengthen common well-being and stability.

Arendt's writings offer numerous references to the human relationship to nature¹ and suggest a far-reaching change of perspective with regard to the concept of plurality and the other phenomena already mentioned, as well as with regard to the traditional human-nature duality, towards a view of the community of cosmos and republic.² Thus, judgement, action and the corresponding institutional forms of enabling and preserving them can be thought not only in spatially limited forms, but at the same time also cosmopolitan ones.

The Arendtian perspective and its concepts not only offer analyses of the crisis and traditions of the 20th century on the one hand and a redefinition of the positive conditions of human existence and politics on the other, but also clarify the proximity between world and 'worldlessness', plurality and conformism, judging and concluding, to perform action and producing, etc. Although Arendt described the hell of the Nazi death camps and the miracle of action as two opposing extremes, she resisted the temptation to idealise in positive opposition and to mitigate these risky proximities through a closed system of thought, as it were, by offering a reassuring intellectual security. It would only lead to an essentialist view and limit, if not abolish, plurality. It was therefore in Arendt's interest to explore the everyday conditions of the erosion of civilisation and the transition to barbarism, the elements and origins of total domination that led to these borderlands, and also exist after total domination, let us think of modern labour society and the liberal concepts of freedom, power and domination. Some dangers will be named in the following in order to keep the difficulties of a change of perspective in mind.

Plurality and the Retreat into Oneself

Arendt's concept of plurality includes several essential aspects that distinguish a civic, active plurality from a more passive liberal one: first, the simultaneous existence of *sameness and diversity*, then the importance of the *person* and its characterisation by means of the distinction between the *who* and the *what* of a person, and finally two other aspects: the location of the person not in subjectivity but *intersubjectivity* in the midst of plural relations, and the importance of *responsibility*.

The first aspect, the existence of *equality and diversity in plurality*, concerns the fundamental starting point for determining thought, action and judgement. Equality

1 See *HannahArendt.net*, 11/1, 2021, "Nature and Politics". <https://www.hannaharendt.net/cindex.php/han/issue/view/19> (2022/10/3).

2 See chapter 20 in this volume: The Encounter of *republic* and *cosmos*: Arendt and Humboldt.

and diversity in plurality means that communication is possible, but at the same time necessary. In Arendt's words:

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough. the needs and necessities which are the same for all and which always remain identical.³

Maintaining the characteristics of equality and diversity and their relationship to each other is a tightrope walk; if they are alienated from each other, equality is lost, understanding is no longer possible and the world appears as a labyrinth; if they are brought into line, diversity is suppressed and the world turns into a desert. It is one of the fundamental temptations in politics to interchange equality and diversity in order to establish domination: to grant political equality to only a few 'different' people, the elite or oligarchy, and to level out social diversity through conformism and oppression.

If we go back to the elements and origins of total domination, we encounter even more profound questionings of plurality that were not intellectual conceits but corresponded to people's experiences. Let's take the removal from the world and alienation from the world of modern times mentioned by Arendt, to which Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* reacted as a retreat to the individual self⁴ and, thanks to changed forms of work and social structures, developed ever further into a self-centred individualism up to the present day.

In this context, Arendt understands the alienation from the world not only as a scientific process, but as an overall cultural process in which the natural sciences influenced the prevailing views in religion, philosophy, historiography and political theory. Thus, she notes "the almost too precise congruity of modern man's world alienation with the subjectivism of modern philosophy"⁵ – from the doubts of Descartes through Hobbes and English sensualism, empiricism and pragmatism to the existentialism and positivism of the 20th century – accompanied by a retreat of people to their selves. So, it was not mere ideas about world alienation that moved the philosophers, but tangible events, inventions and discoveries to which they reacted in their thinking with doubts, axiomatic conclusions and a "catastrophic loss of judgement"⁶.

3 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday 1958, p. 155f.

4 *Ibid.*, ch. 38.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

6 Hannah Arendt *Natur und Geschichte*, in *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft*, Munich-Zurich Piper 2000, p. 68.

Or let's take the colonisation of Africa, the "phantom world of the black continent"⁷, as the experiential space of those settlers who, as exiles from Europe, found the African population so alien that they contributed two elements to the later totalitarian way of thinking: mob and race. As always, the literature provides vivid details of this experiential space. In the case of Africa, Joseph Conrad describes Mr. Kurtz (presumably the German Carl Peters) as "hollow to the core" "reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity and cruel without courage."⁸ The settlers, according to Arendt, did not live in any political space, but nomadically like the natives, whom they identify only as a race: "One did not murder a human being when one slew a native, but a shadow in whose living reality one could not believe anyway, and one did not act into a world, but into a mere play of shadows".⁹

Or, finally, let us look at the loss of orientation of the people in the Weimar Republic, who, according to Arendt, were looking for a banister in the face of the dissolution of class society and gratefully trusted in logical coherence and unity with those leaders who, even more important than ideology, gave the impression that they knew how to intervene in world events. In the full development of total domination over the outside and inside of people, any residue of plurality is lost.¹⁰ Eichmann was an exemplary representative of the complete loss of plurality and thus of the world, a functionary of this movement, careerist, conformist in following orders, free of empathy and imagination, and even more, free of thinking and therefore speaking only in clichés. He was one of the many representatives of a simple way of crossing borders, practitioners of what Arendt called the banality of evil.

The forms of negation of plurality through conformism, slavery, exploitation or simply through a utilitarian taking of people as a means to an end, through elitism and ideology or through the delusion of wanting to create the new human being are almost endless.

The second aspect of plurality concerns Arendt's *characterisation of the person* by means of the distinction between the *who* and the *what* of a person. The *who* of this person is always revealed when "the unique shape of his or her body and the no less unique sound of the voice appear"¹¹. The *what* of the person differs from this with its "qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings"¹², which are largely subject to our control, in contrast to the appearance of the *who*, which is difficult to control.

7 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland: Meridian 1958, p. 186.

8 Ibid., p. 189.

9 In Hannah Arendt *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*, Munich Piper 1986, p. 315. (My translation WH)

10 See chapter 4 in this volume: "Ice cold". The Way to Totalitarianism.

11 In the German edition, Hannah Arendt: *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, Munich: Piper 1981, p. 169.

12 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, *ibid.*, p. 159

Despite the activities that Arendt does not usually personalise, such as action or power, she mentions the special role of people on three occasions: Waldemar Gurian, whose unique humanity she praises in the obituary of her friend in a political science journal – more than his scholarly merits,¹³ the readers of Boris Pasternak’s banned writings in Moscow at the end of the Stalin era, who, after years of the poet’s silence, recited his poems by heart at a first public reading, when the reciting poet’s manuscript fell to the floor,¹⁴ and finally the soldier Anton Schmidt, whose rescue of persecuted Jews, when told at the Eichmann trial, seemed theatrical, “those two minutes ... were like a sudden burst of light in the midst of impenetrable, unfathomable darkness ...”¹⁵. They all appear not as their what, as a scientist, audience or soldier, but as their who, as the embodiment of humanity.

The third aspect of Arendt’s plurality concerns an equally indispensable characteristic, *intersubjectivity*. If the interplay of sameness and diversity is preserved, two forms of reference emerge, which Arendt describes *spatially* as the in-between of political phenomena and *structurally* as the reticularity of the actors’ references. The fact that political concepts such as freedom, civil disobedience, authority and power only arise *between* people and can therefore be understood intersubjectively frees the concept of power, for example, from its traditional identification with domination, thus strengthening the possibility of the existence of a strong citizenry and at the same time its sensitivity to forms of restriction of plurality.

The fourth aspect of plurality concerns the meaning of *responsibility*. Arendt described responsibility as the indispensable flip side of freedom. To the extent that the recognition of plurality enables freedom of action, this freedom must respect and protect the plurality that presupposes it.¹⁶ When we speak of the common good in this context, we do not primarily mean social well-being, but political, intersubjective plurality, freedom and justice and the exercise of political and social responsibility.

The aspects listed here are essential components of a republican concept of plurality, which with all its implications is not only a challenge for politicians and parties, but for the whole political community. This includes not only the civically engaged, but also the economically active entrepreneurs who take responsibility for their actions towards employees, consumers and the environment, practising corporate social responsibility.¹⁷ Responsibility is thus an integral part of freedom: it is

13 Hannah Arendt: Waldemar Gurian. In: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1968, pp. 310–323.

14 Hannah Arendt Die Ungarische Revolution und der totalitäre Imperialismus, in *In der Gegenwart*, Munich Piper 2000, p. 97f.

15 Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, New York: The Viking Press 1965, p. 231.

16 Hannah Arendt: *Collective Responsibility*, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, pp. 147f.

17 See chapter 9 in this volume: Sustainability – The Power of the “Unreasonable”.

speaking and acting in the sense of responding, for Arendt the positively meant flip side of freedom, the responsibility for the consequences of free action and speaking.

Plurality of Judgement and the Search for Banisters

It is not surprising that the importance of plurality shapes not only Arendt's concept of action, but also that of judgement. Arendt's recourse to Kant's thesis of the "enlarged mentality", which consists of judging in the place of every other, implies an intersubjective perspective that is as circumspect as possible and at the same time not objective or normative. Hence Arendt's statement: "The validity of such judgements would be neither objective and universal, nor subjective, dependent on personal whim, but intersubjective or representative."¹⁸

This form of intersubjective judgement is now used to assess events not only in our immediate but also in the wider environment, right up to the challenges in our global world. Thus, as early as 1957, in her essay "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World", Arendt declared that there is no meaningful alternative to the fact that, in view of the globalisation of the world, we must also take note of the diversity of perspectives in this world. "It is only natural", she explained, "that the common reactions to it are political apathy, isolationist nationalism, or desperate rebellion against all powers that be rather than enthusiasm or a desire for a revival of humanism."¹⁹ The reaction to a kind of forced global unification may be "a tremendous increase in mutual and a somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else"²⁰. Therefore, according to Arendt, to create positive solidarity "a process of mutual understanding and progressing self-clarification on a gigantic scale must take place."²¹ This implies: that "the solidarity of mankind can be meaningful in a positive sense only if it is coupled with political responsibility."²² How topical this essay still is after more than 60 years! And what a memorable statement Arendt makes here: to set in motion a "process of mutual understanding and progressing self-clarification". This sentence pleads for an unusual self-critical attitude, for listening as a necessary part of communication, for making one's own views and ways of acting understandable as the basis of dialogue. According to Arendt, all thoughts and content must answer to Jaspers' question: "Are they such that they may help or such that they will prevent communication? Do they seduce to solitude or arouse to communication?"²³

18 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, op. cit., p. 141.

19 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 83.

20 Ibid., p. 84.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 86.

The challenges of globalisation and the crises can only be meaningfully met by renouncing not only violent action, but also abstract thinking²⁴, the refusal of communication, unquestionable dogmas and supposedly objective truths.

Only communication as mutual understanding and progressive self-explanation can be an indispensable humane basis of globalisation. With this perception of different perspectives, we leave our subjectivist position and adopt a new perspective in the Arendtian in-between. Thus, it is not only globalisation that challenges us to adopt a world perspective, a cosmopolitanism, from which we cannot avoid asking whether an institute of philosophy should continue to be interested only in European philosophy. Rather, any judgement that follows Kant and Arendt is cosmopolitan insofar as it includes all those present, real or imagined, regardless of how large the respective cosmos is.

The possibilities of impairing such judgement are admittedly great. Dwelling on prejudices, replacing reflective judgement with subsuming judgement or logical consequence, the limited cosmos of judgement for reasons of opportunity, the appeal of lying²⁵, non-thinking. Just as Arendt names courage as the virtue corresponding to action, it also seems to be courage in judging that gives the power to think for oneself, to open up the corresponding cosmos of diverse views and to confront surprising insights.

Action / Councils – and the Problem of Persistence

Arendt's defines action that begins again and again under the impression of depoliticisation in the course of the modern era and totalitarian anti-politics in the 20th century as a miracle, as a "despite everything". In *The Human Condition*, she characterises non-action and action in pathetic, existential-philosophical words: the non-action that follows the natural law of rushing towards death from birth, i.e. handing over the everyday to an automatic process, which would "inevitably would carry everything human to ruin and destruction,"²⁶. Arendt contrasts this biblical apocalyptic vision of doom with the 'New Jerusalem', the light of action as a curiosity and miracle, the action "that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal 'natural' ruin".²⁷

24 In a preface to *The Warriors*, written by her friend J. Glenn Gray, Arendt quotes: "... abstract thinking is strictly comparable to the inhumanity of abstract emotions" and adds: "the love and hatred of collectives", in: Hannah Arendt: Introduction to *The Warriors* by J. Glenn Gray, in: *Thinking Without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 317.

25 See chapter 3 in this volume: The Temptations of Lying.

26 Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, *ibid.*, p. 222.

27 *Ibid.*

Modern times know a series of such spontaneous actions and events that prove the possibility of a separate form of state, the council democracy. However, since the revolutionary parties in the French and Russian revolutions destroyed the spontaneous groups and thus the prospect of a council democracy, and since apparently the conflict between parties and councils appears again and again, the question arises as to how spontaneity can be perpetuated, or how, after the destruction of the beginning, its salvation can be made possible.

An example of the emergence of the councils as an independent form of state is provided by the uprising in Hungary in 1956, which is generally referred to as an insurrection, but which was a revolution because of the question of power posed by the population. This uprising was not aimless, but directly created self-representation with a large network of councils. For Arendt, what was very remarkable was that “the striking absence of party wrangling and any ideological dispute,”²⁸ and fanaticism were superfluous and out of place, that is, actions that from within slow down, divide and finally cause the common beginning to fail. The reason for this was that the spontaneous movement primarily raised the political demand for freedom, not for consumption, so it was linked to thought and action, that is, the political sphere, and dispensed with detailed programmes and manifestos that went beyond that. Thus, the revolution was driven forward unhindered by an elementary force that had sprung “from the collective action of an entire people”. This people was concerned with two basic goals: the withdrawal of Russian troops and free elections. These general goals, combined with clear political leadership by the councils, left no power vacuum and thus no room for arbitrary violence, looting, lynch law and mob rule. A civil war was thus ruled out all the more. Thus, the Hungarian Revolution escaped the fate of the French Revolution, where, instead of the political demand for freedom, in the words of Heinrich Heine, only soup logic was accessible to the rebellion of the stomach.²⁹

It is noteworthy, according to Arendt, that such revolutionary councils “have emerged with a historically unparalleled regularity whenever the people have been permitted for a few days, or a few weeks, or months, to follow their own political devices without being spoon-fed by a party or steered by a government”³⁰. No more than a few days, weeks or months means that such councils were always liquidated when they were no longer needed by a revolutionary party. So by Robespierre, who needed the ‘*sociétés populaires*’ as supporters until his seizure of power, only to destroy them immediately afterwards as a potentially competing power factor, and

28 Hannah Arendt: The Hungarian Revolution and Totalitarian Imperialism, in: *Thinking Without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 132.

29 See The Roving Rats, in: *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine*, tr. Hal Draper, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982, pp. 783–5.

30 Hannah Arendt: The Hungarian Revolution, op. cit., p. 133.

so also by Lenin, who “stole” the name Soviet for his “own *anti-soviet* regime”³¹ and crushed the Kronstadt uprising in order to strengthen the monopoly of the ruling party. It is above all the new rulers who recognise and fear the old revolutionary language and therefore destroy the councils.

Besides external and internal reasons for the failure of revolutionary movements, there are also cultural reasons for failure in reformist movements. The fact that action does not take place in a sterile space but in our diverse and contradictory world was described by the Berlin feminist Christina Thürmer-Rohr when she brought together the experiences of feminist movements, especially in Germany, with Arendt’s thinking in a critical reflection at the Zurich Arendt Days in 1997.³² Movements that in their times did not require heroic action, but like the workers’ movements and ecological movements required common goals, political skill and courage.

Thürmer-Rohr refers to Arendt’s statement in *On Revolution* that “it is in the very beginning to carry with itself a measure of complete arbitrariness”, because it stands outside the chain of cause and effect.³³ For this reason, beginning involves a narrowing of the gaze and a lack of concern, which, according to Thürmer-Rohr, leads to the fact that “it is precisely in the blanked-out and unthinking that those who are beginning drag *traditions of domination* into the new”. Such a beginning “wants the unambiguous assertion and setting, not the multi-dimensional view of things. It cannot tolerate plurality. The feminist critique”, Thürmer-Rohr continues, “is in the process of approaching those burdens of domination that were in its beginnings”³⁴. Such burdens of domination lie on the American Revolution, which, in founding its freedom, forgot about the slaves who came from Africa; they also lie on the French Revolution, in which the revolutionaries forgot about women. In the feminist movement, Thürmer-Rohr argues, the concept of “self-determination” disregarded the “relationship to others” because this self was performed by “members of the dominant culture with an egocentric and ethnocentric claim”³⁵. Therefore, Western and white feminism has not taken the history of racism, colonialism and anti-Semitism

31 Ibid., p. 134.

32 Christina Thürmer-Rohr Die Anstößigkeit der Freiheit des Anfangens. Feministische Kritik – Feminismuskritik, in Daniel Ganzfried / Sebastian Hefti (eds.) *Hannah Arendt. Nach dem Totalitarismus*, Hamburg: eva 1997, pp. 135–146. English version see: The Offensiveness of the Freedom to Begin. Feminist Critique – Feminism Critique, in: *HannahArendt.net* 12/2022. (2022/12/1)

33 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin 2006, p. 198.

34 Christina Thürmer-Rohr *Die Anstößigkeit*, op. cit., p. 137.

35 Ibid.

“into its own baggage”³⁶ and has only just “begun to trace the hierarchisations inherent in the tradition of Eurocentric concepts of freedom”³⁷.

“The history of the women’s movement”, according to Thürmer-Rohr, “reflects this contradictory process between passionate beginnings and disappointed retreat”: a political beginning with “the impulse to ‘lighten the public sphere’”, when it is “still a provocative field”, with the “undesirability of the newcomers’ appearance” which becomes “precisely a confirmation of the gap and the urgency of their entry”³⁸, and then the retreat. The problem begins afterwards, according to Thürmer-Rohr, when beginning usually ends before freedom, which was out of their hands to create. There were small founding acts in marginal places, but “the political movement became social, the social became psychological. Turning to the social question made the movement social work, turning to self-suffered discrimination made it therapeutic”³⁹. The newly invented concept of politics, according to Thürmer-Rohr, declared the private to be political and thus shifted the problems to one’s own project, home or heart and treated the political on the scale of the private sphere: as a “desire for unity and identity – we are all the same), we belong together, *hierarchy of values* – we are better than the others – and *exclusion* – the others do not belong to us”⁴⁰. Finally, postmodern identity theories take us even further from a plural and contradictory world. “The luminosity of the word ‘beginning’ is extinguished in the face of the sorting out that followed beginnings again and again; it remains closed to the disappointed and the inconsolable who experience the futility of the search for a place and public action.”⁴¹

Cultural influences also include the myth of Google as a technology company that, as in the case of Facebook, Apple and Amazon, embodies unexpected, passionate beginnings and the founding of a new smart world. But Google’s entrepreneurial motto of the early years, “Don’t be evil”⁴², alone makes a mockery of the violation of patent law and the destruction of Terra-vision, the Berlin start-up of the 1990s whose patented internet programme of a mobile earth view was copied by Google and presented as Google Earth.⁴³ Google’s beginnings in the guise of youthful innocence have given way to monopolistic irresponsibility. This fundamental change is obscured by a mythical narrative described by Adrian Daub, a literary scholar who

36 Ibid., p. 138.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 139.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 140.

42 2018 replaced by Alphabet’s slogan “Do the right thing”.

43 *The Billion Dollar Code*, directed by Robert Thalheim, 2021.

teaches at Stanford, in his analysis of *What the Valley calls Thinking*.⁴⁴ This thinking is shaped by the neoliberal elite stories of capitalist self-realisation à la Ayn Rand, whose novels were devoured in California. In them, the author celebrates creative people and despises the supposed parasites. This thinking cultivates the myth of the successful dropouts and finally the myth of those who first fail but then become heroes of success and will fly to Mars in the near future.

Federations – and the Underestimation of Institutions

Arendt's notion of the miracle of action implies that it is not a moral category, nor, despite the choice of words, a metaphysical category, but an anthropological one. Spontaneous action and its institutional form of councils appear again and again, though possibly rarely. The political space is all the more susceptible to opposing forms of action and institution that have more the appearance of the normal: vertical rule and its identification with arbitrariness and violence, bureaucracy as the rule of the nobody (Arendt), restrictions on the separation of powers and legislation corresponding to this. These forms of restriction are in close exchange with corresponding forms of action and judgement, whose plurality, intersubjectivity and cosmopolitanism are equally restricted.

These limitations are contrasted by the possibilities of expanding plurality and institutionalising it. This is not at all about an administrative construction called multi-level government, but about political philosophy.

Separation of powers and federalism are forms of institutionalisation and consolidation of plurality. They represent power potentials if they are acted upon, whereby speaking and acting already constitute power. Since power and action in general are not only incalculable in their development, but also tend to get out of hand, Montesquieu and the founders of the USA found a formula for limiting power that not only respects plurality, but even promotes it: Strengthening power through power sharing. This formula refers to the separation of powers, but was also used by the founders at the same time as a solution to the open question at the founding of the USA of how democracy could be institutionalised in a country that was very large by the standards of the time (the East Coast). Their answer: through a second territorial federal division of power in the form of the Senate.⁴⁵ Separation of powers and federation represent institutional forms of so-called coagulated but naturally constantly available power.

44 Adrian Daub: *What Tech calls Thinking. An Inquiry into the Intellectual Bedrock of Silicon Valley*, New York: Macmillan 2020.

45 See chapter 13 in this volume: Federalism – A Hidden Treasure.

It is not surprising now that Arendt's concept of plurality and intersubjectivity leads directly to the principle of federation. Consequently, Arendt discussed the principle of federation on three occasions: with regard to the minority question in the 20th century, the nation state and councils as an independent form of rule. Thus, in 1940, in order to overcome the minority problems in Europe, especially of the Jewish people, she proposed the creation of a European federation with a common parliament in which the Jewish people would be represented on an equal footing with other peoples.⁴⁶ A federation, according to Arendt, offers the chance to abolish the political difference between majorities and minorities. Her proposal for the establishment of a binational Jewish-Palestinian state, if possible, in a Mediterranean-Middle Eastern federation, also served the goal of enabling equality and diversity in a non-national pluralistic polity.⁴⁷

This would provide an alternative to the modern nation state, in which the national, cultural majority structurally threatens the political equality of all. The federation rejects the concept of exclusionary sovereignty and not only contradicts a nation-state closure to the outside world, as we experience, for example, with the United States despite an internal federalism, but also, in view of a cosmopolitan perspective, as already developed by Kant in his federation of republics, potentially enables further accessions. The various considerations of a Euro-North African Mediterranean Union, drafted by France since the 19th century, give an idea of possible alternatives.⁴⁸ Similar proposals were made by Albert Camus for a Franco-Algerian confederation and by African politicians for a West African union. Unfortunately, in the process of decolonisation, both colonisers and colonised failed to resist the temptation of nationalism and the supposedly easy path of violence, the consequences of which continue to negatively shape the politics and culture of formerly colonised countries to this day.

Finally, plurality and federation emerge in the original form of self-representation in the form of councils. In them, according to Arendt in view of the insufficiency of the party and modern representative system, plurality, speech and action, intersubjectivity and power in the republican sense are revealed.

These councils say: we want to have a say. We want to make our voice heard somewhere in the public sphere. ... Such a council state, to which the principle of sovereignty would be quite alien, would be excellently suited for federations of the

46 Hannah Arendt: The Minority Question, in: *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken 2007, pp. 124–133.

47 Hannah Arendt: Peace or Armistice in the Near East, in: *The Jewish Writings*, op. cit., pp. 423–450.

48 Wolf Lepenies *Die Macht am Mittelmeer*. Französische Träume von einem anderen Europa, München. Hanser 2016.

most diverse kind, if only because power would be constituted horizontally and not vertically in it.⁴⁹

The councils enable network-like action, they represent more than just an institution, they prove that we, as independent but interconnected and acting in equality and diversity, already enter into a kind of federation on the spontaneous level.

The importance of considerations on an institutional design of freedom is shown by a comparison of Arendt's considerations with those of the contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang⁵⁰. Zhao harks back to a world order in Chinese thought of the 11th-3rd centuries BCE, according to which heaven mandates the king to rule over all that lies under that heaven, i.e. all of China at that time. In Zhao's view, our world is currently in chaos, with not only failed states but a failed world as a whole, shaken by economic and financial crises and political as well as ecological crises. This non-world cannot be transformed into a good world by nation states or empire and their egoism and lust for domination, but only by a complete change of perspective. This consists in the complete integration of all states and peoples, including cooperation between them, into a real world politics in which there is no longer an inside and an outside and world problems are no longer viewed from national perspectives. This vision replaces a UN that, according to Zhao, is only *agora* but not an actual *polis*, and it replaces a political philosophy characterised by friend-foe thinking à la Hobbes and Schmitt.⁵¹

Zhao's cosmopolitanism is sympathetic when he states that we all live under one sky and should solve common problems together. However, it no longer sounds sympathetic when he offers as an alternative the traditional ruling structure of the good order between heaven and earth, which geographically encompasses all land as well as socio-psychologically all people's hearts and politically is supposed to form a world system under the leadership of a leading state. Does this leading state mean China? And where is the UN as a *polis*? According to Zhao, a fusion of states is to take place gradually by means of voluntary membership. The ultimate aim is to turn enemies into friends and to bring the Greek and Chinese philosophical traditions into a harmonious relationship. Politically, however, according to Zhao in an exchange of letters with the French former revolutionary Régis Debray, "dictatorships and democracies are to merge into a new system"⁵². Is the Chinese system in mind here?

49 Hannah Arendt *Macht und Gewalt*, Munich 1970, p. 132f.

50 Zhao Tingyang *Alles unter dem Himmel. Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Weltordnung*, Berlin Suhrkamp 2020.

51 Zhao Tingyang: *Redefining A Philosophy for World Governance*, Palgrave 2019, p. 60.

52 Régis Debray / Zhao Tingyang: *Du ciel à la terre La Chine et l'Occident*, Arenes Editions, 2014, Kindle pos 1910.

An idea of “all under heaven” (Tianxia) formulated in this way is thoroughly different from Arendt’s “being in the world”. Its republican federalism, whose constitutional conditions Arendt developed against the background of total domination, is contrasted with a hegemonic, expansive empire whose form of government is based on political dictatorship and state-controlled democratic market liberalism. It is astonishing that in the reviews of this book, as far as I can see, this unmissable aspect has not received any attention.⁵³

Nature – Following the Tradition of Dominance and Exploitation

Arendt’s intellectual impulses – plurality, federation and an expanded way of thinking about judgement – are filled with her concern for our world, for human conditionality and the conditions of humane life, as well as for our relation to reality. This concern is about modern interpersonal alienation and distance from the earth.

The technical inventions and subjectivist currents were accompanied by presumptions of human reason and human action, not only in the world of thought, but also quite painfully in the form of presumptions of domination: domination equally over subjects and women, colonised and enslaved, justified as the presumption of domination of “culture“ over inferior, exploitable “nature”.⁵⁴ Alexander von Humboldt’s critical description of the plantation economy in Cuba around 1800 shows the close interaction of the exploitation of nature and man, of monoculture and slave economy of that time, of environmental destruction and violence.⁵⁵ For Humboldt, the alternative was already the coexistence of ecology and human rights, of sustainability and non-violence.

In critically assessing our relationship with nature, it becomes clear that the climate crisis is about much more than the data of climate experts and the goals derived from them to achieve climate neutrality. Rather, it is about understanding the relationship between culture and nature not as an opposition, but precisely as a commonality. We need a far-reaching change of perspective, a very active broadened way of thinking. We humans are part of nature, of a world-spanning organism or cosmos in Humboldt’s words. This cosmos includes equally humans and animals (or human and non-human animals), plants, minerals, the classical elements as well as climate and atmosphere. This perspective, which prevailed in antiquity and the Middle Ages, ended with Humboldt and Goethe. A look at the reception of the literary

53 Robin Celikates: Tianxia and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism, in: *Zeitschrift für Praktische Philosophie* 7, 1, 2020, pp. 376–380.

54 Carolyn Merchant: *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, New York: Harper and Row 1980.

55 Alexander von Humboldt: *Essai politique sur l’île de Cuba*, 1826.

work of Adalbert Stifter, for whom nature was not a mere backdrop in the middle of the 19th century, but itself an actor, not an object but a subject, a producer of atmosphere and a companion of interpersonal constellations, shows how difficult it was for philosophers to deal with nature after that.⁵⁶ Nietzsche, Rilke and Kafka loved Stifter's works for their depictions of humanity, but did not comment on the predominant nature; Benjamin was very impressed, but criticised the lack of eschatological engagement with nature; Heidegger traced the ineffable, and Adorno criticised the lack of a socio-critical impulse.

To begin a far-reaching change of perspective, a collection of aspects and thought experiments suggests itself. Among them would be Arendt's distinction of the *who* and *what* of a person⁵⁷, which, applied to a group of trees, would recognise their *what* in the wood and its more or less good and useful qualities and their *who* in their role as actors among themselves and towards their environment. As a group of multiple Whos, they would form a place of mood, a bodily atmosphere, the aesthetics of a landscape. They would be distinguished by the *what* of their properties as means to an end and their *who* as ends in themselves, as objects and as subjects. This would resemble Arendt's thesis of intersubjective relations. And this not only in relation to the trees among themselves, but also between them and humans, so that humans and nature enter into intersubjective relations with each other in the common cosmos. This is what Hartmut Rosa describes with his theory of resonances, according to which social phenomena are filled with the human striving for "resonant" relationships. He thus expands Honneth's thesis of recognition to include not only aesthetics and religion but also nature as a resonant space.⁵⁸

Such intersubjectivity naturally implies plurality, which means that within the framework of the cosmos, in addition to human plurality, there is also natural plurality in the form of biodiversity and species diversity of animals and plants, and both pluralities constitute the common cosmos. This expresses the observation of François Cheng, a man of letters influenced by Chinese philosophy, that the beauty of living beings and plants in space and time can only be experienced through their uniqueness, yet not in solitude, but precisely in and through their plurality.⁵⁹

Another aspect would be that cosmic thinking offers the difference of oasis and desert instead of the contrasting pair of culture and nature or civilisation and barbarism. For oasis and desert designate not only natural phenomena, but also the

56 See chapter 18 in this volume: Desert and Oasis: Arendt Reads Stifter.

57 See chapter 6 in this volume: Who is Capable of Acting?

58 Hartmut Rosa Die Natur als Resonanzraum und als Quelle starker Wertungen, in Gerald Hartung / Thomas Kirchhoff (eds.) *Welche Natur brauchen wir? Analyse einer anthropologischen Grundproblematik des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg/Munich; Karl Alber, 2014, pp. 123–141.

59 François Cheng *Fünf Meditationen über Schönheit*, Munich C. H. Beck 2008, p. 23.

condition of human societies. Thus, Arendt used oasis and desert as metaphors to characterise a human-friendly environment versus the unleashing of totalitarian terror: "... it is as if a way had been found to set the desert itself in motion, to let loose a sand storm, that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth."⁶⁰

If Eichmann was, in Arendt's words, a nobody, that is, not a barbarian, not even a person, but a non-person, then one could add that his humanity had been devastated. So, it is not the state of nature but the man-made devastation of life and nature that is our central problem.

According to the theses developed so far, it becomes clear that the principle of sustainability applies to both, our relationship to the biosphere and our relationship to the human sphere, where sustainability is based on participation, public spirit, responsibility and transparency, freedom and diversity, plurality and federation, and both aspects of sustainability are connected in a cosmic thinking and mutually reinforce each other.

However, the road to this thinking is long. For, since more than half of humanity now lives in large cities and urbanisation continues to increase, one can assume that with a general increase in environmental awareness, knowledge of the natural environment will continue to decrease at the same time. In questions of the cosmos, illiterate people still face a handful of specialists in every conceivable specialised field. And while the natural sciences concentrate on *knowledge of* factual reality, the question arises as to what is needed to *understand* this reality.

It is well known that understanding is easier with the help of literature. In the following chapters we will take a closer look at the positions of Adalbert Stifter and René Char as well as François Jullien's Chinese description of nature.

Written in 2022. First published in this volume.

60 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins*, op. cit., p. 478.