

On Hannah Arendt's Trilogy on the Origins of Totalitarianism and its Putative Lessons for a (Better) Future

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Abstract: *The importance and impact of Hannah Arendt's contribution to twentieth-century philosophy and social sciences cannot be easily over-estimated. In this review, we started from a re-reading of Arendt's trilogy 'On the Origins of Totalitarianism'. When compared to other authors of the epoch, e.g. George Orwell's 'Notes on Nationalism' (in which a clear demarcation line is drawn between nationalism and patriotism) and with the political and philosophical contexts of the pre- and postwar periods of the twentieth century, the profoundness of Arendt's oeuvre becomes apparent. Already in her early work, such as in Arendt's PhD thesis on 'The Notion of Love in Augustine', referring to the work of the early Christian philosopher St. Augustine, her acumen of analysis as well as a new positioning in the philosophical field of the era, can be discerned.*

However, in the line of Hans Achterhuis' reading of 'The Unknown Hannah Arendt', there is much more to it, in order to understand the kaleidoscopic nature of her work. More in particular, the silver lining in her oeuvre of the Jewish/Hebraic tradition of storytelling can be linked to a different understanding of Truth as Emeth (in the unity of speech and act in the auditive, Biblical tradition). This understanding is diametrically opposed to the Greek/Hellenic conceptualization of Truth as Aletheia (or the factually objectifiable, visual truth). Herewith, Arendt's philosophy shows both a common heritage and an abyssal rupture with that of Martin Heidegger. It has been suggested that this philosophical distinction forms an essential bypass when trying to transfer the conceptualizations in Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism towards the contemporary discussions on totalitarianism and geopolitics.

The question "can we learn from the lessons from history", however, remains rather rhetorical than practical, despite of Timothy Snyder's lessons 'On Tyranny'. Although they are well-designed to demonstrate the important social and political mechanisms that may protect the world from a global breakdown of democratic principles, the lessons drawn from the past seem futile and hardly defensive against the world's big players of today. Nevertheless, Arendt's trilogy and Snyder's lessons are considered indispensable tools in educating the young generations.

1. INTRODUCTION

A renewed reading of Hannah Arendt's (1906-1975) historical trilogy 'On the Origins of Totalitarianism' ⁽¹⁾ in the juncture of the 2020s, is very much appropriate, not only because of the upheaval of anti-Semitic sentiments in so many places of the world, as well as the equally frequent misuses of the term 'Antisemitism' by regional political leaders, and, not in the least, by the growing tensions between the global political powers. Hannah Arendt's work in the early 1950s was a major attempt to compare the mechanisms responsible for the killing of many millions of people in the twentieth century, both by Stalinism and Nazism. Moreover, it was a brave attempt to analyze the differences between the latter forms of totalitarianism and other historic forms of dictatorship, tyranny and despotism. Her trilogy 'On the Origins of Totalitarianism' consisted of three volumes, in the original order: 1. *Antisemitism*; 2. *Imperialism*; 3. *Totalitarianism*.

Already in *Antisemitism*, Arendt developed the idea of the correlation between the decline of the Nation-States and Antisemitism (in bourgeois circles) as an important mechanism why Antisemitism was a nineteenth-century new phenomenon, not to be confused with the *Judenhaß* and Pogroms of the previous centuries (and especially in the medieval era). In the 21st century, the decline of nationalism (and its counter-movement, the resurgence of nationalistic movements in politics, and the eroding effects of it on 'democratic' values in Europe and the world since World War II) wasn't only the result of the rise of the big superpowers (economically especially China and the USA, on a geo-political level also Russia), but also of an increasing influence of Europe's Centralistic ambitions. The eroding power

of some of the national governments (linked to far-right political movements) somehow was explained as a fierce reaction provoked by the shift of power towards Brussels (or Straßbourg) as the new centers of the European democratic institutions (*¹).

There are good arguments that support the view that a decline of the decentral, national seats of power, in combination with the effects of social media and algorithmic mass influencing of the anti-democratic movements (with several at present disclosed cyber-attacks and manipulations exerted by certain other geo-political blocs), in the new millennium were also exacerbated by some national scandals. This was seen at least in the United Kingdom (see e.g. the *'Post Office scandal'*, a famous 'miscarriage of justice' in which hundreds of postmasters were wrongly prosecuted) (²) and in The Netherlands (with the *'Toeslagenaffaire'*, exposing the wrongdoings of the Dutch Tax Authorities (³), and probably in other countries too, possibly yet to be discovered. It is important to note already at this point that these scandals couldn't be discovered if the strong public feelings of their respective state's miscarriages of justice had not found a window to escape the oppressive mechanisms of the national state institutions. Or, the fierce criticism on these democratic institutions needed the very presence of both a democracy and a so-called 'Rule of Law'. In other words, in a totalitarian state as defined by Arendt, they wouldn't have been possible. From a more distant observation point, one may ask which political power might have gained from the eventual, locally destabilizing mechanisms? The eroding influence of Europe's central foundations, moreover, became all the more obvious, since the elections won in recent years in Hungary, Slovakia, and recently also in Romania and Poland (presidential elections), i.e. in countries that until the fall of the Soviet Union were belonging to the sphere of influence of Russia (and to the Warsaw Pact altogether!).

Another recent example: the dismissal by the French *Assemblée Nationale* of the government of Michel Barnier (°1951), previously European's Brexit-negotiator and minister in several governments, and, eventually the French prime minister for 3 months (September-December 2024) under president Emmanuel Macron (°1977, presidency since 2017), came at a very remarkable day. It was on the very day that the restoration of the *Cathédrale Notre Dame* came to an end, and was re-opened with undiluted 'pomp and circumstance' in the presence of all available *prima donnas* and leaders of state of the Western world. The day chosen, December 7th, was also 240 years after Napoleon Bonaparte's (1769-1821) self-coronation - as the French emperor - in the same cathedral, that was largely destroyed by a structural fire on April 15th, 2019. Bonaparte has received the questionable honor to be called the first populist leader (at least since the French Revolution of 1789), who moreover abolished the democratic achievements of that very revolution. The congruence of all these icons of national and super-national symbolism, thus came at a day that the *Président de la République Française* lost its government, and therefore, the day-to-day labor of the democratic institutions were put on hold, so to speak. The resurgence of populist tendencies - threatening democratic achievements - appears to be a silver lining in the history of totalitarian systems.

In this paper we will focus on the historical origins of Hannah Arendt's trilogy, compared to some contemporary authors (see ¶ 3. **The Historical Context of *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*** and ¶ 4. **George Orwell on Nationalism and Patriotism**). But, viewing the ocean of commentaries and bombardments of criticisms, we cannot get started without reading a triple warning (see ¶ 2. **A threefold *Caveat***). In order to read the significance of Arendt's analysis for understanding the political turmoil of today, it is not only important to follow her meticulous observations of the era of Nazism and Stalinism in the previous century (¶ 5. **Totalitarianism as a crime against humanity**), but also to read the underlying philosophical genesis of Hannah Arendt's thinking on civilization and discarding of the ideology of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The famous but repudiated philosopher, who never publicly dissociated himself from the ideology of the *Third Reich*, not only was Arendt's lover for a while; their romantic relation started somewhere in the mid-1920s (⁴). But according to many, the romantic relationship was continued in a lifelong friendship, although their viewpoints were incompatible to a degree that they were almost antithetical. But since a binary representation of the World and its geo-

(*¹) More precisely since the foundation of the *European Coal and Steel Community* (ECSC), a smaller precursor of the European Union (EU), established in 1951 by the Treaty of Paris and signed by Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and West-Germany; it was put into action in 1952. However, the largest expansion of the EU only occurred from May 2004 onwards, when 10 new member states joined the EU: the Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

political hegemony in the preceding centuries has failed to solve its problems, it may form an interesting angle to look at the complexity of Arendt's philosophical landscape, from her personal viewpoints, including her early PhD thesis on the Augustinian (A.D. 354-430) notion of Love (¶ 6. **Civilization, Love for the World and All of its Problems**)⁽⁵⁾. Moreover, the importance of the aspect of storytelling in Arendt's philosophical work cannot be overlooked (see ¶ 7. **The Problem of Truth and Story-telling**).

2. A THREEFOLD CAVEAT

When writing about Hannah Arendt's political work, however, there is more than a few lines of disclaimer needed to be read before starting this project. This urgent warning or CAVEAT was already made abundantly clear by reading Hans Achterhuis' (° 1942, Hengelo) almost apologetic book on his ultimate philosopher Hannah Arendt⁽⁶⁾. First of all, but not solely, we have to acknowledge Hannah Arendt's firm positioning against political philosophy, even against 'philosophy altogether'^{(*)2}, as well as the unfortunate accusations and designations as a 'reactionary philosopher' or defamatory 'political journalism'. These accusations followed the scandal that broke out when Arendt published the book '*Eichmann in Jerusalem*' (first edition published in 1963), according to Achterhuis and others a most misunderstood book, probably because of its subtitle '*A Report on the Banality of Evil*'⁽⁷⁾.

But, there is more, Achterhuis wrote in his defensive apology: "*against the 'narrative philosophy' we should embrace the notion of 're-incarnated meaning' (or 'embedded meaning')*"^{(*)3}. The latter notion was forwarded by Leuven's philosopher Herman De Dijn (° 1943, Galmaarden, Be) in his work '*Religion in the 21st century*'⁽⁸⁾, as well as in the (metaphorical) reading of 'the diagonal of Kafka' (with reference to Arendt's reading of K. in *Das Schloß*)⁽⁹⁾ and of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in '*Über den Begriff der Geschichte*'⁽¹⁰⁾.

Finally, but not in the least, Arendt's positioning 'against Zionism'⁽¹¹⁾, and, not unexpectedly, the resulting fierce opposition and her complete exclusion from the Jewish philosophical community forms a warning, a very serious one. It is a mine field that should be avoided, wisely. But is it possible to limit the historical window to the same contours as defined in Arendt's trilogy⁽¹⁾? Or, could we confine it to the span of her writing activities (grossly between 1924, the start of her philosophical and later theological studies in Berlin, and her death in New York, in 1975)? In accordance with the work of Achterhuis⁽⁶⁾, and also that of Timothy Snyder (° 1969, Dayton, Ohio)⁽¹²⁾ and others, we here will extend the span of focus to the developments of the new millennium. Because, speaking about antisemitism without naming its present manifestations as well as abuses of the term, is equally perfidious as speaking about antisemitism without referring to the impressive work of Arendt in this matter (e.g. *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951)(see e.g. Bettina Stangneth's [°1966, Germany] defamatory reading of H. Arendt in '*Eichmann Before Jerusalem*')⁽¹³⁾. Maybe unexpected for some, the latter viewpoint was supported by Christophe Busch (° 1977), director of the Belgian Hannah Arendt Institute, at the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau (27 January 2025): "*The celebration of the camp's liberation cannot be unhinged from the present actuality. The point is to uncover the mechanisms, by which the derailments of the past could equally take place today. Such derailments are seen in the reality of the camps, that we have seen in Cambodia (during the Khmer regime), Guantanamo Bay, the Xinjiang internment camps (allegedly for 'vocational education and training' of the Uyghurs in P.R. China), and obviously, also in the Gaza strip. What is happening in these camps is a narrative to explain the exception as the (new) rule!*"^{(*)4}. A similar argument and warning concerning the 'malignant repeats' of the camp culture, was given in Sloterdijk's *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* (2009)⁽¹⁴⁾.

3. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ON THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM

In the Preface to the second part of her trilogy, 'Imperialism', Hannah Arendt opens with the sentence that "rarely could the beginnings of a historical period be dated with such precision". And the same holds for its 'definite end'. Arendt situated the clear onset and definite end of 'Imperialism' around

(*)2 H. Achterhuis (2022). '*Ik wil begrijpen. De onbekende Hannah Arendt*', p. 26. See also Arendt's position against Plato in *The State*.

(*)3 Arendt however refutes the so-called diagonal of Kafka, representing an alternative view – and opposed to the Platonic ideal - on the relationship between reality and the separated realm of abstract ideas, of pure meaning (Achterhuis, 2022), p. 21-22.

(*)4 Program *Terzake* on VRT-Canvas (Flemish Radio & Television, 27 January 2025).

1884 (begin) and in 1947 (end). The historical context refers to the new state India, which became independent together with Pakistan, in 1947. History narrates that this independence followed after periods of violence between Hindus and Muslims and the British colonial rule, officially lasting from 1858 till 1947. After the completion of the Suez canal in 1869, both British and French governments, the builders and designated 'owners' of the Suez canal, developed a strong interest in the stability of Egypt and the Middle-East region. After the 'Urabi revolt' – a nationalist movement led by Ahmed 'Urabi (1841-1911) – London decided to end the turmoil by force, but the French did not join in. The 'turmoil' was both experienced in the Egyptian finances as in the upraisal and the embarrassment to British prestige. The British Prime Minister William E. Gladstone (1809-1898) ordered the bombardment of Alexandria, launching a short but decisive Anglo-Egyptian War in 1882. Egypt nominally remained under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, whereas France and other nations had their representations, but British officials made the decisions. The year 1884 was chosen by Hannah Arendt in a footnote referring to the work of J.A. Hobson⁽¹⁵⁾: "Though, for convenience, the year 1870 has been taken as indicative of the beginning of a conspicuous policy of Imperialism, it will be evident that the movement did not attain its full impetus until the middle of the eighties... from about 1884".

Also another transcontinental canal, namely the Panama canal, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, played a pivotal role in the origin, or at least in the rise of antisemitism in France, according to Arendt⁽¹⁶⁾. It shouldn't surprise us that the repercussions of these historical events still influence some of the geo-political leaders of today. The almost bankruptcy^(*5) of the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique de Panama*, led by the Comte de Lesseps^(*6), following a widely ramified swindling scandal, was the direct cause. The consequences were a far-reaching catastrophe! The result of the swindling, by which half of a million French middle class citizens became ruined, resulted in the upheaval of the anti-Semitic newspaper *Le Libre Parole* (founded in 1892) of Edouard Drumont (1844-1917), which, according to Arendt, used to be an unimportant newspaper. Drumont initiated the *Antisemitic League of France* in 1889. His writings played a key role in catalyzing the famous *Dreyfus Affair*. Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935) was an officer of Jewish descent in the French army, who became victim of a conspiracy that wrongfully accused him of being a German spy. This resulted in 1894 in his public degradation (cashiering) and imprisonment on Devil's Island (French Guiana). The antisemitic stirring of the *Dreyfus affair* divided the French nation into two opposing sides, but also the growing support for Dreyfus, such as the open letter *J'Accuse...!*⁽¹⁷⁾ by Émile Zola (1840-1902), had raised the stakes for the political arena. Already in 1896, the true culprit of the espionage was proven to be a fellow officer, but high-ranking military officials suppressed the new evidence. Only in 1906, Dreyfus was finally exonerated (see also¹⁶⁾).

The habit of Arendt to draw sharp demarcation lines is somehow conspicuous. With regard to the end of British rule in India, "the 'liquidation of His Majesty's Empire', over which (Winston L.S.) Churchill (1874-1965) had refused 'to preside' (...)", she claims that "no European nation could hold on to its overseas possessions" (Arendt, *ibidem*, Preface to Part 2, p. V). But what about the remaining French, British, and not to forget 'American' (in strict sense, of the United States) in the Pacific and other oceans of the world? Although for Arendt it was more important to note the fact that France under (Charles A.M.J.) De Gaulle (1890-1970), "dared to give up Algeria", it is hard to deny nowadays that France and the UK still have significant 'overseas territories', thereby avoiding the contaminated notion of 'colonies': e.g. New Caledonia in the Pacific, the Falklands in the Southern Atlantic. We may wonder whether Arendt would have come to a different conclusion, if she had witnessed the vehement ten days war over the Falklands that were fought in 1982 between Argentina and the UK (under the reign [1979-1990] of Margaret H. Thatcher [1925-2013]). It is not unusual to see an American predilection for the

(*5) The liquidation of the *Compagnie Interocéanique de Panama* occurred only in 1894, but the stakeholder's decision to dissolve the Compagnie was taken in 1889 (placing it under legal receivership, because the public subscription asked for by De Lesseps had failed (Source: Autoridad Del Canal de Panama (2025). 'The French Canal Construction'. Website Canal de Panama (Republic of Panama, Baboia Ancon, Panama City) (<https://pancanal.com/en/>) (accessed: 19-01-2025)).

(*6) The French Ferdinand Marie, Comte de Lesseps (1805-1894), in 1869, was the much hailed developer of the Suez Canal, joining the Mediterranean and Red Seas. The stubborn attempts to repeat this success by building the Panama Canal during the 1880s, remained unsuccessful. The French trajectory at sea level was never completed. However, the Americans solved the many problems instead, especially the infectious plagues caused by malaria and yellow fever, and build a non-sea-level canal with locks completed in 1914!

British versus the French or remaining European nations, and so does Arendt's work, concentrating on the British rule and role in Imperialism (1951).

What other 'clear demarcations' are drawn by Arendt? For the role and definition of 'imperialism', according to Arendt in Part 2 of her trilogy, the role of the 'mob' versus the bourgeoisie and industries is important. It is hard to overlook an analogy with the events in the U.S. of America after January 6th, 2021 (18).

Hannah Arendt: *"This changed when the German bourgeoisie staked everything on the Hitler movement and aspired to rule with the help of the mob, but then it turned out to be too late. The bourgeoisie succeeded in destroying the nation-state but won a Pyrrhic victory; the mob proved quite capable of taking care of politics by itself and liquidated the bourgeoisie along with all other classes and institutions"* (Chapter 1 of Part 2, p. 4). This was a definite path to total chaos, for the bourgeoisie that had developed within and together with the nation-state, which however, almost by definition ruled over and beyond a class-divided society. *"Even when the bourgeoisie had already established itself as the ruling class, it left all political decisions to the state. Only when the nation-state proved unfit to be the framework for the further growth of capitalist economy did the latent fight between state and society become openly a struggle for power. During the imperialist period neither the state nor the bourgeoisie won a decisive victory (...)"* (Arendt, *ibidem*, p. 3-4).

We will come back to Arendt's clear demarcations and especially the abyss between mob and bourgeoisie in the following paragraphs. But, more importantly, we will further explore the importance of the aspect of story-telling in Arendt's work on Antisemitism and Totalitarianism (see ¶ 7. **The Problem of Truth and Story-telling**).

4. GEORGE ORWELL ON NATIONALISM AND PATRIOTISM

Arendt's work on the *Origins of Totalitarianism* is not a stand-alone document. Also the British novelist George Orwell (pen name of Eric Arthur Blair, 1903-1950), author of some very influential, satirical and dystopian novels like *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), published a few essays on *Nationalism* and *Antisemitism* (1945) (19) too. (We will come back to some of Orwell's other publications in ¶ 8. **Timothy Snyder about the Threats of the Present**.)

In 'Notes on Nationalism', Orwell tries to demarcate 'nationalism' from 'patriotism': *"Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power"* (Orwell, 1945, p. 2); and also: *"Nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception. Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also – since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself – unshakably certain of being in the right"* (Orwell, *idem*, p. 4). Orwell wrote these notes when Great Britain and its allies just won World War II by defeating Germany and the Axis Powers (Italy and Japan). As a declared anti-Stalinist, however, Orwell also repeatedly warns for the threats disseminated by Joseph Stalin's (1879-1953) Soviet Union (see also below). It is interesting to read Orwell's classification of the different forms of nationalism into three branches: **Positive -**, **Transferred -** and **Negative Nationalism** (Orwell, *idem*, p. 18 and following).

To the 'Positive Nationalism' heading he counts: **1) Neo-Toryism**; **2) Celtic Nationalism** (referring to the typically English criticism that *"the delusion that Eire, Scotland and even Wales could preserve its independence unaided and owes nothing to British protection"*) (p. 19); **3) Zionism** (*"the American variant of it seems to be more violent and malignant than the British"*) (p. 20).

The 'Transferred Nationalism' heading includes: **1) Communism**; **2) Political Catholicism**; **3) Colour Feeling** (which feeling Orwell links to the *"increasingly common (feeling) among English intellectuals, probably resulting more often from masochism and sexual frustration than from contact with the Oriental and Negro (sic) nationalist movements"*) (Orwell, *idem*, p. 21); **4) Class Feeling** (such as *"loyalty to the proletariat"* and *"most vicious theoretical hatred of the bourgeoisie"*) (p. 21-22); **5) Pacifism** (Orwell here refers to a *"minority of intellectual pacifists whose real though unadmitted motive appears to be hatred of western democracy and admiration of totalitarianism"*) (p. 22).

Then, to the 'Negative Nationalism' heading are listed: **1) Anglophobia**; **2) Antisemitism**; **3) Trotskyism** (which Orwell defines as *"hostility to the Stalin régime"*) (p. 24). This designation may surprise, because Leon D. Trotsky (1879-1940), a political theoretician of Jewish-Ukrainian descent and one of the early Soviet revolutionaries, was murdered by an agent following Stalin's orders, while living in Mexico in exile. But for Orwell, *"the fact that Trotskyists are everywhere a persecuted minority, and that the accusation usually made against them, i.e. of collaborating with the Fascists, is*

*absolutely false, creates an impression that Trotskyism is intellectually and morally superior to communism; but it is doubtful whether there is much difference. The most typical Trotskyists, in any case, are ex-Communists, and no one arrives at Trotskyism except via one of the left-wing movements. No Communist (...) is secure against a sudden lapse into Trotskyism” (Orwell, *idem*, p. 25).*

One may be surprised not to encounter old-fashioned British *jingoism* (a form of extreme chauvinism or ultranationalism, the name ‘Jingo’, which is a minced oath expression for ‘Jesus’, that occurred in an old popular song referring to the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878), and also not the obvious adversaries, denoted as Fascism and Nazism. However, although Orwell thinks British *jingoism* is still widespread, in his essay he is “concerned chiefly with the reactions of the intelligentsia, among whom *jingoism* and even patriotism of the old kind are almost dead, (...). Among the intelligentsia, it hardly needs saying that the dominant form of nationalism is Communism – using this word in a very loose sense, to include not merely Communist Party members but ‘fellow-travelers’ and russophiles generally. (...) Obviously such people abound in England today, and their direct and indirect influence is very great” (Orwell, *idem*, p. 6-7).

It is important to remember that Orwell’s essays (published in 1945) appeared well before the beginning of the Cold War (1947-1991), especially before the wave of anti-communist purge initiated by the republican senator for Wisconsin (USA), Joseph R. McCarthy (1908-1957) in 1950, and also before Hannah Arendt published her trilogy (in 1951, also in the USA). Concerning the risks of ‘ultranationalism’ today, inside and in many countries outside the British islands, no ‘*Jingo song*’ needs to be clarified. The ‘*America first!*’-slogan of a contemporary world leader ticks all the boxes. From Orwell’s classification and lists of various forms of nationalism, it is very educative to read Orwell’s own affiliations: a patriot and a white (male) Anglican, a non-pacifist, anti-communist (i.e. anti-Stalinist, anti-Trotskyist and presumably also anti-Maoist...) right-wing liberal, who doesn’t hate the bourgeoisie but doesn’t want to be assimilated by the proletariat, neither by the British intelligentsia. Or, in a one-liner, a very (old-) British islander!

In the next paragraph, we continue with Arendt’s delineation of totalitarianism as a specific threat of humanity, raised in the twentieth century. However, Orwell’s description of patriotism as rather ‘mild’ compared to ‘nationalism’, may become not so harmless, when patriotist movements all over the world seek each other to become an international ‘patriotic’ movement, that is hard to discriminate from global or super-national ‘nationalism’, as it seems developing in Europe at present (see ¶ 1. Introduction).

5. TOTALITARIANISM AS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

It is very important to remember that the historical doom of totalitarianism in the twentieth century occurred in several regions of the world, not only in the so-called axis states (Germany, Italy, Japan...), but also in the Soviet Union. Referring to the so-called four (or 5) stages in the transition from a democracy into a totalitarian state, Hannah Arendt specifically mentions the mechanisms of terror installed by Joseph Stalin around 1930: **1)** first, Stalin infiltrated and undermined the national soviets (in 1927, in the villages 90 % of the soviets [councils] and 75 % of the chairmen were not members of the Communist Party. In the regional committees, there was a 50 – 50 % of Party members and non-members, whereas in the Central Committee 75 % of the delegates belonged to the Communist Party (*7)(²⁰), by forming Bolshevist cells, that became the exclusive basis for recruitment for the higher echelons of the Central Committees; **2)** then the bolshevist government started with the elimination of the classes: for ideological and propaganda reasons, they started with the wealthy classes, the new middle classes in the cities and the farmers on the countryside; **3)** finally, the laborers were targeted, which formed a much weaker opponent than the ‘Kulaks’ (i.e. the farmers) before them.

Consequently, this resulted in **4)** the ‘atomization’ of the masses, by repeated collective ‘purges’, literally by mass killings and deportations. The total number of people that disappeared from the Soviet population, based on counts in 1937 (*8), was estimated to be almost 30 million (a decline from 171 to 145 million!!!), which was even four times higher than the number of murdered Kulaks, namely about 8 million (*9).

(*7) H. Arendt referring to Maurice Dobbs in his item ‘Bolshevism’ in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (fide H. Arendt [1951, 2005 Ed], p. 120, footnote 28).

(*8) Source: Boris Souvarine (1939). *A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*. New York, p. 669 (cited in H. Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, p. 117, footnote 15).

(*9) H. Arendt (1951, 2005 Ed), p. 73.

However, one may find it disenchanting to read how Arendt considered the late decades of the Soviet Union (especially after Nikita Khrushchev's [1953-1964] reign) not longer as a totalitarian state, for her moving reasons. The re-birth of Stalinist methods of terror and control, the mass killings of the own population and during the proxy wars in Syria (2013-2025), Ukraine (starting with the killings at Kiev's Maidan Square in 2014), under a present head of state, that was raised and rooted in the secret services of the ancient Soviets (under the Cold War period), is all the more a reason to re-examine Arendt's trilogy.

The atrocities committed by the Nazi-regime of course weren't less cruel and dehumanizing than of the Stalin regime, although maybe only in absolute number: the six millions murdered Jews in the concentration camps, the thousands of Sinti and Roma, as well as the thousands homosexuals, diseased and psychiatric patients, cannot be forgotten. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (⁷), Arendt documented that the Nazis were not only trying to eradicate the Jewish population, but also the Sinti and Romani ('gypsies'), homosexuals and the whole "middle strata of the Polish intelligentsia were to be arrested: teachers, the (Catholic) clergy, nobility, legionaries, returning officers, etc. (...)". And, "the measures taken against the Eastern Jews were not only the result of anti-Semitism, they were part and parcel of an all-embracing demographic policy, in the course of which, had the Germans won the war, the Poles would have suffered the same fate as the Jews – genocide" (*¹⁰). The mass killing of Polish officers moreover, had been preceded by the massacre of Katyn (April-May 1940) where nearly 22.000 Polish military, officers and intelligentsia were killed by the Soviet Union at Stalin's orders (and hence before the Nazis had declared the war to the Soviet Union [June 1941]). The fact that 'war crimes' (e.g. "the violation of Belgium's neutrality") had been committed by both sides (e.g. the invasion of Finland and dividing of Poland in 1939, involving also the Soviet Union), the so-called *tu-quoque* argument, played a significant role in the declaration of a new category of legislation by the *London Agreement* of 1945 (designated as 'the Charter'), namely the 'crimes against humanity' (*¹¹). The Charter formed a cornerstone for the *International Military Tribunals (Nuremberg Tribunals, November 1945- October 1946)*, although the underemphasizing of precisely the charges of 'crimes against humanity' – the "only crime to which the *tu-quoque* argument did not apply" – was a serious blow to their vigor and moral impact (*¹¹).

Arendt's elaborate analysis of Eichmann's role (and his prosecution in the Jerusalem Tribunal) is probably her most controversial work. It has prompted quite a number of secondary authors discussing the question why Arendt's report of the Eichmann case became so disturbing. For e.g. Ian Buruma (²¹), it is the subtitle of Arendt's work *A Report on the Banality of Evil* (⁷) that is most contested. Not only the question whether Arendt completely misjudged the personality of Eichmann (E.) – which so-called *passive personality principle* played an important role in the prosecution in Jerusalem (*¹²) – but also the framing of Eichmann as a small fish in the evil monstrous framework of the *Third Reich* would be misrepresented (²¹). When reading *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, it struck me that not only Arendt had meticulously 'fine-tuned' the position of E.: on the one hand, "technically and organizationally, E.'s position was not very high", but, on the other hand, "the labyrinth of parallel institutions" characterizing the different branches of the Nazi-regime, enabled each of them "to exonerate their own outfit (and blaming the others)", while each of them were involved in a fierce competition, united in the ambition "to kill as many Jews as possible" (*¹³). But intellectually, E.'s role in directing the system towards the organized mass killing was far from a small wheel in the machine, Arendt recognized. The question whether Arendt's critical attitude against the *communis opinio* and the setting of the *Jerusalem tribunal*, or her tentatively objective approach of a catastrophe of this magnitude might have caused her disgrace, at present is rather difficult to judge.

(*¹⁰) H. Arendt (1964), *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 216-218.

(*¹¹) H. Arendt in her Epilogue to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, elaborates on the difficult applications of international law, *de facto* applied retro-actively, in the justification of the Nuremberg Tribunal (and which consequently, would have been applicable to the Jerusalem Tribunal too, where Eichmann was prosecuted). Arendt cites several of the international judges deploring "the lack of consistency" (of the Tribunal as well as of the Charter), for "convicting (preferably) on the war crime charge, while underemphasizing as much as possible the charges of crimes against humanity (...). How deeply the Nuremberg judges were aware of the outrage perpetrated against the Jews may perhaps be gauged by the fact that the only defendant to be condemned to death on a crime against humanity charge alone was Julius Streicher, whose speciality had been anti-Semitic obscenities (...)" (H. Arendt, *ibidem*, p. 252-257).

(*¹²) H. Arendt (1964, *ibidem*), p. 259.

(*¹³) H. Arendt (1964, *ibidem*), p. 68-69.

Still, the foregoing debate possibly may have huge consequences for the evaluation of some of the horrible conflicts of today. Leaving the past examples of totalitarianism, there is ample reason for focusing on the autocratic regimes of the present, that more and more shut up the free press, intimidate, oppress and incarcerate political opponents, obstruct free elections and/or manipulate the election results, and even organize mass killings of oppressed minorities and groups of a different belief or persuasion. To date, the political health of the world is in a very cumbersome shape, when regarded from the perspective of human rights⁽²²⁾, the perspective of political refugees⁽²³⁾ and mass detention⁽²⁴⁾. Also the list of genocides, altogether causing the killings of millions of civilians in almost all continents of the globe, in the recent decades seems only steadily increasing⁽²⁵⁾. Finally, and not less importantly, the political decisions of a certain world power to abstain from the previously offered health programs (like the global HIV aid programs) or the refusal to alleviate the health risks of entire populations in case of a global pandemic (e.g. the corona-pandemic), already have caused hundreds of millions of avoidable casualties and will remain to do so, according to a number of NGOs.

It appears that the sharp demarcation of the totalitarian regimes of the past and the autocratic, oppressive regimes of today is but a gradual difference, a gray-scale of atrocities in number and severity. In his concise booklet *On Tyranny*⁽¹²⁾, Timothy Snyder (°1969, Ohio) provides twenty lessons from the twentieth century, many of which show a grim resemblance with recent developments seen in every corner of the world (see ¶ 8. Timothy Snyder about the Threats of the Present).

6. CIVILIZATION, LOVE FOR THE WORLD AND ALL OF ITS PROBLEMS

It is said, that reading Hannah Arendt's work cannot be disentangled from the whole of her philosophical and sociological contributions (see⁶). Therefore, we'd like to return to the philosophical start of Arendt's work, related on the concept of love in the philosophy of Augustin⁽⁵⁾. It is very difficult for the contemporary reader, being submerged into the reading of a historical, 19th to 20th-century discourse on the origins of contemporary political systems and ideologies, to jump into the early centuries of the Christian era. This is probably not only because of the unfathomably different constellation of the Late-Roman world, on the verge of Christianity becoming a world religion, compared to the world of today. There is also the deeply human, identifiable, psychological *avant-la-lettre* approach of the self in its environment and the difficult notion of self-sufficiency (but not self-complacency), almost creating an aura of modernism, that are at the least confusing. We are talking about one of most profound inspirators of Christian theology and philosophy, Saint Augustine (AD 354-430), church father and bishop of Hippo, who became one of the most influential thinkers of the Western world (in terms of the duration of his intellectual legacy). According to the German-American theologian-philosopher Paul Tillich (1886-1965), there is a direct conceptual link between Augustine's 'restlessness'-notion, with Baruch Spinoza's (1632-1677) notion of 'conatus' and with Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) 'will to power'⁽²⁶⁾, to name a few. And here, these Christianity-founding writings are excavated by a young twentieth century philosopher of Jewish descent, as part of a PhD dissertation. Not unimportantly, Arendt was supervised by Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), the psychiatrist who became famous for his pioneering existentialism philosophy, somehow rooted in the works of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

6.1. Amor Qua Appetitus

In the first part, called '*Amor qua appetitus*', Arendt starts with the statement (obtained from Augustine's *De diversis quaestionibus*, 83) that "*Jeder appetitus ist gebunden an etwas Bestimmtes, das er begehrt*" (p. 11). Each appetite is connected to something definite, which is desired, and which principally is sought outside one's life (p. 26). It is something which is already given, a known thing, called a 'bonum', that is not possessed ("*Das Spezifische dieses bonum ist, daß es nicht gehabt wird*", p. 11). This an important characteristic, for when that something is possessed, the '*appetitus habendi*' easily transforms into a '*metus amittendi*', i.e. the fear to lose. Thus, appetite transforms into fear. The philosophy of Augustine is directed towards a striving for a state of 'beatitude', in which the 'bonum' can be held firmly and even more, with the certainty not to lose again. In the Christian philosophy it is interpreted that "*the beata vita ist dort, wo unser Sein keinen Tod haben wird. Das bonum also, das der amor erstrebt, ist das Leben, und das malum, vor denn die Furcht flieht, ist der Tod. Die beata vita ist das unverlierbare Leben*" (p. 13). Hereafter, the contrast between 'irdische Leben' as a 'vita mortalis', and opposed to a genuine 'beata vita', is further explained. The good thing (*bonum*) about love (*amor*) is that what cannot be lost, what is not a *res mutabilis* (a mutable thing). But the unattainability of self-

determination of life itself, subdues it to fear and to a feeling of failing *potestas* (power of our own life). Therefore, the future can only be a threat to the present, which always is a 'not-yet'; only a presence without future, which no longer knows of *bona*, but which in itself is the absolute *bonum* (*summum*), can be where pure restfulness is attained, the so-called pure *metu carere*, which is 'eternity'.

In a following section, it is explained how a state of forgetfulness of the presence, which at the same time is a re-finding of one's self (and in Augustine's theology a "finding of God", p. 24) can be a way of "*Ueberspringen (transcendere) aus der Gegenwart in die absolute Zukunft*", which is the true state of *inhaerere Deo*, translated as 'holding to God' (p. 25).

But, in order to return to the main theme of the present article, the state of the present world, how can the previous be reconciled with a 'love for the World', the '*Amor Mundi*'? In the work *In Epistolum Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus*, Augustine clearly defines: "World not only is the name for what God has created, *coelum et terram* (Heaven and Earth), but all inhabitants of the world are called 'the world', also including all those who love the world" (*fide* Arendt, *ibidem*, p. 17). Therefore, Arendt concludes: it is the love for the world that makes the world, *coelum et terram*, into a *res mutabilis*. However, this doesn't mean that 'loving the world' is a good thing, as explained below (*ibidem*, p. 21).

6.2. Caritas Et Cupiditas

Following the Greek-Aristotelian notion of *orexis* (ὄρεξις), love as appetite is discernable as two opposing notions, the notions of *caritas* (see e.g. charity) and of *cupiditas* (cupidity, greed). These notions are not inherent to the person who strives for love (the *amans*), but as love mediates between *amans* and *amandum*, the object to be loved, the difference between *caritas* and *cupiditas* follows the object of the desiring. The longing for the worldly things, belongs to the world. And, therefore, the *cupidus* entails his/her transience through the nature of the *cupiditas*, whereas *caritas* – on behalf of the *aeternitas* aspired after - may become eternal itself (Arendt, *ibidem*, p. 18). At present, we will not comment of the deep, almost irreconcilable contrasts that in later eras will originate from these distinctions. It is however important to point to the connection of the *cupiditas* with 'love of the world', which results in enslavement, because the object of its desiring is a *foris*, an *extra me*. In Augustinian philosophy, there is a clear distinction between beatitude and happiness, "since we can also enjoy things which aren't lovable things, because we enjoy rather than love them" (²⁷)(cited in Arendt, *ibidem*, p. 117, footnote 27).

However, in modern philosophy and even in post-Lutheran theology, a very different appreciation of the physical and psychological needs of the body is integrated, although the notion of enslavement to the matters of our worldly environment are well-recognized, especially in addiction care. Also the psychiatric derailments of the so-called *Münchhausen syndrome (by proxy)*, which are only recently recognized and very rare psychiatric disorders, obviously, should be kept out of the philosophical framework of the *caritas* as developed by Augustine. What makes this body of information interesting for the present analysis, is the notion of self-sufficiency (as opposed to being a slave to the world), which can be attained through the *caritas*, and not as a form of self-complacency, but rather the self-forgetfulness, which becomes a way of transcendence of the temporality here-and-now, into a true *inhaerere Deo* (a being in the adherence to God)(*ibidem*, p. 25).

6.3. Ordinata Dilectio and Dilectio Proximi

In Augustine's writings, the notion of self-forgetfulness even transforms into a self-denial (in the *inhaerere Deo*), which according to Arendt follows from the definition of love as *appetitus* (see above) (*ibidem*, p. 26). Also in the striving for *caritas*, according to Augustine (and in contrast to the viewpoint of Paulus, *fide* Arendt) (²⁸), the *amans* remains isolated from the desired future. For Augustine, the search for a *bonum* which is free from death, a live which isn't defined by *amittere*, i.e. which cannot be lost, is the absolute *aeternitas*, which is found in God (*ibidem*, p. 26). Moreover, an important dimension according to Augustine, is the 'seeing' - which also is an enjoyment - in the absolute rest and certainty (of the *inhaerere Deo*). In this eternal enjoyment, the *appetitus* is fulfilled. Each love is a striving for fulfillment, and the fulfillment of the 'good' love is the beatitude. But the beatitude "doesn't reside in the loving (*amare*), but in the enjoyment (*frui*), which is a 'being-with' (*Sein-bei*) what is strived for (and seen), in eternity" (*ibidem*, p. 28). Moreover, the way to the beatitude, "goes from *frui* to *uti* (utilize)" (*ibidem*, p. 29). The right attitude towards the World, according to Augustine, is the

'utilization': "*utendum est hoc mundo non fruendum*" (*¹⁴), or we have to utilize this world, not enjoy it! In the 'uti' of the World (of the *caritas*), the World becomes related to God (*ibidem*, p. 29). These seemingly paradoxical lines (enjoyment of a future *bonum*, and utilization of the present world as a way to attain it), are further worked out in the analysis of the *Ordinata dilectio* (the 'ordained love') (*ibidem*, p. 32 a.f.). The world order is a '*supra nos*', which not only grants an objectivity as such, but also our relationships to our neighbors, our loved ones as well as our enemies. But, according to Arendt, these relationships are far from settled yet (see below).

The next question answered in Arendt's analysis, is how love for one's neighbor (*Dilectio proximi*) is conceived in Augustine's philosophy and Christian doctrine. In the second part of her dissertation, entitled *Creator – creatura*, referring to God and His creation (⁵), the *Dilectio proximi* is explained as a strange back-coupling towards the origine of the dependence of the *appetitus* following its *beatum esse velle* (striving for beatitude). The dependence is that of the created toward its Creator (p. 45). But, the *appetitus* for something in the future, necessarily leads into a self-oblivion (*Selbst-Vergessen-an*) and leads into an absolute isolation of the created in its love for the other creations and for the world (p. 85). Moreover, it is in the feedback seizing of the own being and the absolute isolation of it, that the love for one's brother is grounded (*dilectio fraternis, frater* (brother) \approx *proximus*) (*ibidem*, p. 87). The primordial condition for a real encounter with one's neighbor therefore is the seizing of one's original being (which also is a self-oblivion). This seems like an almost modern psychological notion of self-acceptance as the precondition for loving our neighbor, but it originates from the Augustinian doctrine of Christian love.

The difficult concept of isolation of the creature in front of its Creator is discussed at length, which is almost impossible to be summarized in a few paragraphs. The way-of-being (*Seinsmodus*) of the created is characterized by an *imitari* (imitating) (p. 47), which in itself is independent from the enacted (free) will (p. 69), although forever imperfect. The process of assimilation is limited by an eternal boundary, for an attempt of being like God (*esse sicut Deo*), and, therefore, the notion of Equality, cannot be attained. What remains is an unremitting *similitudo* (p. 70); in a more modern expression, we could translate it as a mere *look-alike* of the Divine, a constant, imperfect imitation. However, there is another danger impeding the back-coupling of the created to its origine, taking away the sight of death, namely the commonness (\approx banality) or *consuetudo*, although the lack of sight of death in falling back to the world, may certainly lead into death. And, Arendt adds, "commonness is like a perennial yesterday without future" (p. 73). It results in a levelling of the temporal, transient existence and hence in the anxiety of our ultimate destination (see also ²⁶).

According to Arendt, the question of the *Dilectio proximi* as being a command of Self-denial, cannot explain who these *proximi* (neighbors) are; for, it doesn't explain "how a neighbor can be given to the absolutely isolated *creatura*" (p. 85). In the third part of her thesis, entitled *Vita socialis*, Arendt repeats the question how the *Dilectio proximi*, despite these difficulties, could play such an important role in Augustine's philosophy (p. 93). In the following pages, the notion of *Vita socialis* is explained. Herein, an important cornerstone is the common descent of all humans from Adam (²⁹), which defines the equality of all humans one to another (p. 96). This also entails a common participation into the *peccatum originale* (original sin) (p. 98). The community of the human kind, going back to Adam, is what has built the world that we have inherited. (Christian) faith is what defines the reciprocal, mutual dependence of all humans (p. 96). The historical world (the *saeculum*) is the self-evident world of togetherness. Arendt here points to the important differences between the second and third parts of her work, posing the question of the being of the *creatura* as individuals (part 2), which is answered very differently – namely leading into the complete isolation (*coram Deo*, before God) – compared to the question of the being of humans among humans (part 3) (Arendt, *ibidem*, p. 100).

In the final pages, Arendt links the notion of humans as social beings, and the much disputed notion - in later eras - of the Equality of grace for all people, to the Christian faith of "God's revelation in Christo" (p. 101). We will come back to Arendt's alleged relationship to the notion of revelation, in accordance with the Jewish and Christian tradition(s), for instance as pointed out by Achterhuis (⁶) (see below).

(*¹⁴) H. Arendt referring to Augustine's (AD 397) *De doctrina christiana* I, 4 (H. Arendt [1929, 2018 ed], *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, p. 29. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag).

7. THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH AND STORY-TELLING

The relevance of Hannah Arendt's philosophical analysis of Augustine, for many symbolizing a pinnacle of antique philosophy and founding father of Christian theology, is not easily understood within the vast oeuvre of the twentieth century philosopher. It would be too easy to pinpoint the Augustinian thinking on a few oneliners, like Arendt⁽³⁰⁾ following Augustine in “*the darkness of our own, lonely heart*”⁽³¹⁾, or, “*Augustine is the first great philosopher who reflects on the inevitable evolving of time from the past into the future*”⁽³²⁾. We may wonder how and to what degree the kaleidoscopic image of Augustine's notion of Love has influenced Arendt's own world view? An answer to these questions may be found in the different narratives and the importance of storytelling in the work of Arendt (and related spirits, see below). Achterhuis uses the metaphor of the pearl-diver, an image that Arendt adopted from Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). In his elaborate apology, Achterhuis tries to picture the unknown aspects of Arendt's oeuvre, against the all too obvious and even unfair accusations of contemporary critics. Among these, the defamatory labels of a reactionary, conservative world view aren't probably the worst⁽³³⁾ (see also ¶ 2. A threefold Caveat).

Not only the Heideggerian criticism of the *Seinsvergessenheit*⁽³⁴⁾, which is directed against the broader body of Greek and Christian philosophy⁽³⁵⁾, but also her own positioning as a Jewish thinker, according to Achterhuis⁽³⁶⁾, provides a different perspective. Arendt conceded that she broke away from Heidegger (allegedly in 1928) and his repudiated sympathies, left Europe for the United States, and, according to Achterhuis, also took a very different stand on many philosophical questions than the European colleagues, that were left behind⁽³⁷⁾. For Achterhuis, however, the life-long friendship with Heidegger may have raised suspicion⁽³⁸⁾ (39). In the breaking with Hellenic tradition, and more in particular with Plato's philosophy as expressed in the cave allegory (see below), Arendt and Heidegger share some definite resemblance, which however does not involve Heidegger in Arendt's Jewish writing signature.

Arendt's writings on the concept of truth, according to Achterhuis, remain problematic. Especially Arendt's attempts to using the concept of truth in a political context, may result in a deplorable ambiguity⁽⁴⁰⁾. However, this ambiguity should be seen as a pivotal element in Arendt's distancing from the Hellenic philosophical tradition, and especially against the preponderance of the visually observable truth (*Aletheia*) in the Greek philosophy of Socrates and Plato. Truth is not an 'eternal', abstract idea. This visual preponderance is much in contrast with an acoustically revealed truth of the Divine word of Revelation, a contrast that was also brought up by Arendt's friend Walter Benjamin⁽⁴¹⁾. A similar discrimination of the two families of truth, the visual and acoustic families, would also occur in Ludwig J.J. Wittgenstein's (1889-1951) *Philosophische Untersuchungen*⁽⁴²⁾, according to Achterhuis. However, the correlation (based on resemblance) between these different notions of truth is too easy, Achterhuis cautions. It will be subjected to a further scrutiny in Arendt's work *The Life of the Mind, Part One/ Thinking*, where the difference between the notions of truth and meaning are analyzed more deeply⁽⁴³⁾ (44).

Meanwhile, one of the most curious readings of Arendt's position about 'truth' (in relation to politics, religion, or, – in the words of Slavoj Žižek - any form of ideology), to my opinion, is found in Achterhuis' interpretation of Arendt's analysis of the power of 'promise'. Here, an abyssal difference between the Hebrew/Judaic and Hellenic usages of language comes forward, a difference that is also observed in Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) lecture *How to avoid speaking: Denials*⁽⁴⁵⁾.

(*15) H. Arendt in *the Human Condition* (1958), p. 336.

(*16) Referring to a citation of Augustine in *De civitate Dei*: “Man is created in order to make a new beginning; before Adam there was no one” (*fide* Achterhuis, 2022, p. 17). Literally, Augustine writes about ‘the first Adam’, who committed the original sin and “like whom we all have to die”, and opposed to “the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit, meaning Christ” (*De civitate Dei*, XIII, 23, p. 613, 620)

(*17) H. Achterhuis (2022), p. 44.

(*18) H. Achterhuis explicitly refers to the philosophies of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Bertolt Brecht (Achterhuis, *ibidem*), p. 48.

(*19) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 33-35, p. 46.

(*20) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 74.

(*21) This connection was inferred from Arendt's work *Menschen in finsternen Zeiten* (1968)(München: Piper 1989 ed)(*fide* Achterhuis, *ibidem*, p. 74).

(*22) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 75.

But Arendt's inspiration for the power of promise isn't derived from a Judaic (or Zionistic) concept of 'Promised Land', but it is rooted in the tradition of storytelling. Achterhuis explains this tradition at length with examples from Arendt's first husband (from 1929-1937) and cousin of W. Benjamin, Günther Anders, born Günther Siegmund Stern (1902-1992). Anders obtained a PhD with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the German founder of phenomenology, and also studied with Heidegger at Freiburg where Anders and Arendt met. Anders' novel *Die Molussische Katakombe* (written in 1931-1933) tells a story about the brainwashing techniques used by totalitarian regimes, a fictitious but poetic story reflecting Plato's cave allegory and the notion of truth in a context inspired by the Marxist-Leninist revolution⁽³⁶⁾. But, whereas Anders' novel doesn't evade from Marx' conversion of Plato's system of idealism, which therefore becomes reinforced in Marxism, and also hasn't been able to escape from Heidegger's shadow^(*23), a few decades later, Arendt will finally reckon with the truth-notion in Greek philosophy, with Marxism and the philosophy of Heidegger altogether^(*24).

Another example of storytelling elaborated in Achterhuis' apology of Arendt, is the influential and famous novel *The Fountainhead*⁽³⁷⁾ by Ayn Rand, pen name of Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum (1905-1982). The life span and history of Ayn Rand, an American writer and philosopher of Russian-Jewish origine, shows some remarkable although superficial similarities with that of Arendt. Rand's philosophical work is designated as *Objectivism*, which is also reflected in her main opus *Atlas Shrugged*⁽³⁸⁾. Herein, a philosophical system is described of an individualistic, libertarian way of human endeavor directing the future, or, simply put, a story reflecting an ideological foundation of capitalism. This may be very well recognized in certain excessive interpretations of certain leading giants in today's economy. But, Achterhuis rather refers to the original example of story-telling in *The Fountainhead*^(*25). Rand builds upon the *Prometheus* myth (reflecting Plato's *Protagoras* story)^(*26)⁽³⁹⁾. However, apart from the metaphor of the half-god bringing technological progress and prosperity to mankind, designated as the ideal of the *homo faber*, Rand has forgotten to mention the other gift(s) of Prometheus, the gift(s) of Honor and Righteousness, Achterhuis deploras^(*27). Very unfortunately, indeed, that aspect of the gift of technology seems a much forgotten dimension nowadays.

For Achterhuis, the interpretation of Arendt's 'power of promise' - in the Jewish sense of tradition - can be linked to the unity of speech and act in Hebrew/Judaic culture and to the Biblical tradition of God's trust and reliability in the word *Emeth*, which is a very different notion compared to the Greek (visual) *Aletheia*^(*28). Whereas for Plato the ultimate truth is attained by the philosopher ascending from the cave/imprisonment into an abstract realm of pure ideas, this interpretation is bluntly refuted in Arendt's work. For, the latter Platonic idea of ascension seems to lead into disaster each time the philosopher redescends onto the world's reality, in order to re-shape society based on his philosophical ideas. The metaphor of the *Thracian Maid*, making fun of the philosopher's clumsiness when he tumbles in a (rabbit) hole when looking up to the sky - a story originally told by the Pre-Socratic philosopher Thales - , is a metaphorical expression of this caveat. It is found in Plato's *Theaetetus* as well as in Arendt's *The Life of the Mind/Thinking*⁽³⁴⁾. The reliability of *Emeth* is not given as a static, objectifiable truth, but relies in the trust and relationship of truthful doings.

Moreover, in the latter work, Arendt's sharp criticism is found towards the philosophy and political affiliation of Heidegger's thinking of 'building/residing'⁽⁴⁰⁾. Herein, Heidegger is referring to the Old-German word '*Buan*', a common etymological basis for the German words *bauen* and *wohnen*. But Heidegger's plea for a return to a 'simple' rural life - much ahead of the return-to-nature hype of the post-millennial generation - has been scornfully denoted as a '*Blut und Bodem*' philosophy (affiliated with Nazism) by some, if not as 'ecophobia' by others^(*29). Much in contrast to all these, Arendt defends a cosmopolitan horizon for the future of mankind, where the signature of the *homo faber* ideology seems almost impossible to be ironed out^(*29).

(*23) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 68, 76.

(*24) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 119-121.

(*25) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 137-149.

(*26) Achterhuis here refers to a philosophical text of Rand, considered as being essential for her philosophy of *Objectivism*, published in *For the New Intellectual* (Rand, 1961, p. 83-94)(Achterhuis, *ibidem*, p. 141).

(*27) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 147.

(*28) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 79-80.

(*29) Achterhuis for instance mentions the work of Jos De Mul (2019), *Breng mij die horizon* [in Dutch](Amsterdam: Boom). (H. Achterhuis *ibidem*, p. 119-122).

A very important aspect of storytelling, according to Achterhuis, however, is the aspect of confidence. Confidence is what makes the difference between whom we think are trustworthy to share certain delicate information with, and whom we do not. From the commonality of (Christian) faith and universality of grace - in Augustine's theology -, a shift in perspective towards the confidentiality of the like-minded could be witnessed. For Achterhuis, this confidentiality notion is ironically designated as the 8th dimension of language, referring to the satirical novel *the seventh function of language* of Laurent Binet⁽⁴¹⁾ (*³⁰). The underlying idea is reminiscent of a twenty year older anthropological hypothesis on gossip as a grooming function of language⁽⁴²⁾. In Binet's novel, which reads as a whodunnit on a fictitious suspicious death of the famous French philosopher Roland Barthes (1915-1980), all the French and American philosophers and linguists of stature of the previous century (from Foucault to Chomsky) are passed in revue. Originally, the riddle dates back to the Russian linguist Roman Osipovich Jakobson (1896-1982), a pioneer of structural linguistics and phonology who described the six functions of language⁽⁴³⁾. Jakobson indeed has profoundly influenced the forthcoming linguists, from Barthes to Chomsky.

However, what is important here, according to Achterhuis, is that the confidentiality of certain personal information (e.g. Arendt's letter of 13 April 1963 to Karl Jaspers), may not and cannot be used to defame Arendt's reputation (as certain did, in relation to Arendt's work on the Eichmann case)⁽⁷⁾. Similarly, in an anthropological perspective, Dunbar pointed to the function of gossiping and grooming (in social 'animals')⁽⁴²⁾ as an evolutionary stratification principle, subsisting the discrimination between kin and non-kin. On a deeper philosophical level, Achterhuis illustrates the differences in opinion between Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre, as related to the question of antisemitism and the position of the Jews (*³¹). In *Réflexions sur la question juive*⁽⁴⁴⁾, Sartre defends the thesis that – simply put – the *Gestalt* of the Jew is what appears in the view of the other, namely the opponent: the anti-Semite! But also here, Arendt firmly opposes Sartre's view by posing a 'positive' definition of the Jewish (religious and socio-cultural) reality (*³¹). It would go too far for this paper, and not too wise either, to extend Achterhuis' elaborate analysis of how the outcast/pariah Hannah Arendt (with respect to a certain orthodox Semitism/Judaism) has contributed to and expanded the Jewish tradition, and leave that qualification to others.

In the end, the question remains what universal, global value can be attributed to the story-telling perspective (in addition to fact-finding and -checking), when the narratives are so disparate and marked by an ideological, religious or cultural incommensurability? Is it possible to define an unbiased, common ground for future co-existence, which is not tainted or compromised by traditionalism or selfish (ultra-) nationalism?

8. TIMOTHY SNYDER ABOUT THE THREATS OF THE PRESENT

Whereas Arendt's trilogy *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*⁽¹⁾, necessarily reflects on the then recent past of the first half of the twentieth century, Timothy Snyder, in his concise *Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*⁽¹²⁾, cautiously looks forward. For instance, Arendt's denomination of the post-Stalin period of the Soviet Union as 'no longer a totalitarian state' (see ¶ 5. **Totalitarianism as a crime against humanity**), according to Snyder, is contradicted by the present developments in that part of the world (and since the take-over of a former intelligence officer of the Soviet era as the president of the Russian Federation).

Timothy Snyder's endeavor to warn us for the threats of the present, results from the immanent risks of a developing tyranny. Such risks have always been on the lure of democracy, since the founding of the democratic institutions and their Constitution, Snyder cautions. Even so, and more in particular, this is happening in the United States of America of today! Compared to the twenty lessons listed by Snyder⁽¹²⁾, it seems that also in this Federation, a head of state has popped up that ticked all the boxes of inherent danger.

Apart from a general support for the evidence and history lessons concerning the threats and defense strategies against tyranny, from regarding the phenomena of 'anticipatory obedience' (lesson 1) until a 'plea for courage' (lesson 20)⁽¹²⁾, we still may formulate a few scientific question marks regarding Snyder's list. For instance, with respect to the monopoly of the use of force (lesson 6) by the government

(*³⁰) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 131-136.

(*³¹) H. Achterhuis (*ibidem*), p. 167.

and/or the constitutionally granted institutions (police, regular army), the position of Snyder may become questionable: **1)** when the monopoly of the state in armed law enforcement is contested - as it is constantly - by organized crime, drug cartels, which indicate that the Rule of Law does not apply to these countries (which however are far more numerous than suspected). In some cases, the population itself has been forced to take up arms against these 'paramilitary' or plain criminal organizations, because of an alleged or proven alliance between the governmental and the paramilitary troops; **2)** the argument of Snyder obviously is taken from a defense position of democracy or, from a defense of the Rule of Law as a *Status Quo*: in this argument, however, there is little space for liberation movements (such as have been active in the insurrections that ended the rule of former colonial imperia). Without an armed insurrection, how deplorable the many victims of these revolutions at either side, the imperialist colonization of the third world would not have come to an end; **3)** the argument also leaves little space for a defense other than the spoken (or written) word, against racism or discrimination (of any kind) in the official police and regulatory military forces; etc. **4)** last, but not least: the large scale possession of private weapons – exactly in agreement with the Constitution of the Federation where also Snyder is a citizen – makes the challenging of the state's force monopoly by armed civilians all the more a risk for democracy (from those that may threaten it).

Finally, an important discordance was found in Timothy Snyder's *Twenty Lessons for the Future* ⁽¹²⁾, with the foregoing analysis of the 'problem of truth' in Arendt's oeuvre (see ¶ **7. The Problem of Truth and Story-telling**). Referring to Victor Klemperer's saying that "*truth dies in four modes*" ⁽⁴⁵⁾, Snyder depicts a process we have been all familiar with since only one (or a few) decade(s) (see also ⁴⁶). We especially want to point to the last of these four modes: "*the final mode is misplaced faith*" ^(*32). Not only an abyssal difficulty arises when trying to define the moment when faith has become 'misplaced' (whether it is from an insider's versus outsider's position?) or to define faith as being opposed to (a tangible) truth altogether. Not without reason we have spend a whole paragraph in explaining how Arendt's philosophical struggle with the notion of truth has involved a profound break-away from the Hellenic origins of western philosophy. But, the adherence of Arendt's oeuvre to the Jewish/Judaic (religious) tradition of story-telling, at least in the opinion of Achterhuis ⁽⁶⁾ may remain a *mer à boire* for many, if not an indigestible follow-up (see ¶ **7. The Problem of Truth and Story-telling**).

In addition to the previous, it is also interesting to point to Snyder's citation of some of the works of George Orwell (see also ¶ **4. George Orwell on Nationalism and Patriotism**). But, in Snyder's citation it is the notion of 'double-think' (or double-speech) and the omnipresence of camera-monitoring (using two-way television screens) that are referred to, namely in Orwell's novel *1984* ⁽⁴⁷⁾. In this dystopic novel, published only one year before his demise, Orwell indeed addresses the totalitarian systems of the Nazis and the Soviet Union. And despite the contemporary embracing of the commercial TV-success formula of live television streaming, ironically named after the tyranny exerted by a *Big Brother*-system, it seems a dystopic nightmare giving birth to the reality of today. And, unlike the gray wizards in J.R.R. Tolkien's ⁽⁴⁸⁾ or J.K. Rowling's ⁽⁴⁹⁾ fantasy novels, Orwell didn't own a crystal ball that could help him to foretell the widespread (ab)uses of video-monitoring in all corners of the present world, prolonging the threats witnessed in the former totalitarian systems.

What Orwell ⁽⁴⁷⁾ did foretell was the eroding effects of constraining language as it is exerted by the totalitarian regimes and the extremist movements that helped them to seize power. As Snyder put it (in lesson 9), it culminates in the "*elimination of ever more words with each edition of the official dictionary*" ^(*33). We have seen a similar evolution in the eroding of language in social media, where the (initial) limitation to 50 signs was a technological restriction of the messaging through twitter (now X). The alliance between Big Tech restrictive policies, the use of polarizing algorithms on social media ⁽⁵⁰⁾ and the rise and support of certain Big Tech giants for anti-democratic movements, are no longer a dystopic prophecy. They sadly became reality, especially since the year 2025. Although not being elected by any population, Big Tech companies became dominant players in the global, political arena.

Finally, providing lessons for a better future becomes aimless when the concentration of power has become so overwhelming, that civil opposition is no longer possible (by any of the legal means).

^(*32) T. Snyder (2017), p. 66-68.

^(*33) T. Snyder (*ibidem*), p. 60-61.

Therefore, it is of cardinal importance to closely watch the political developments and give support for the decisions that prevent the political powers to develop into a totalitarian cul-de-sac (blind alley). This is what is currently at stake in various European democratic nations. However, it would go too far to discuss these developments in detail, especially so because of the volatility of the present developments.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The starting point of this review followed from a re-reading of Hannah Arendt's Trilogy *on the Origins of Totalitarianism* ⁽¹⁾. But it was certainly not estranged from the recent geo-political events and the resurgence of (neo-) fascism, antisemitism, and other far-right movements worldwide. Because of the vehement and often negative reactions to Arendt's work, in particular regarding her writings on antisemitism and especially her report on the Eichmann case ⁽⁷⁾, we adopted a broader perspective. Following the caveats as for instance formulated by H. Achterhuis ⁽⁶⁾, we have tried to view Arendt's trilogy within the kaleidoscopic framework of her oeuvre, including its beginning, namely her PhD thesis on the Augustinian concept of Love ⁽⁵⁾. Already here, we found a tremendous effort to combine the most intricate religious and philosophical doctrines of early Christianity with a practical view on social and interhuman relations in the actual World.

Reading through this monumental oeuvre, in the footsteps of Achterhuis, we did not only find an immense body of factual documentation of the globally most disruptive juncture of the twentieth century, we found also some controversial elements. For instance, Arendt's position on the notion of truth in politics is problematic (as was also suggested by Achterhuis), but also Achterhuis' defense of Arendt's adherence to the Hebrew/Judaic culture of storytelling (in contrast to the Greek/Hellenic philosophical tradition regarding the notion of truth) may not be convincing for all involved parties in the present world of perpetual conflicts and threatening wars. The human dependency on a storytelling motivational mechanism may also cause what Martin Shaw designated as a 'myth-shaped hole': this hole in our inner motivation, however, can easily be answered by a flight into religiosity, spiritism but also by the acclamation of a strong political leader and populism ⁽⁵¹⁾. Apparently, the most difficult conundrum, the integration of political reasoning and fact-finding with religious ideals and ideologically-driven ambitions, not only have ignited perennial scorn in the history of many (Western and other) cultures, it also appears to hamper the political and economic developments in newly established (non-western) regimes, e.g. in the aftermath of war and occupation ⁽⁵²⁾ (*³⁴).

The recognition of the inherent difficulties of combining complex political situations and profound learning in the skills of religious or ideological inclinations, that are present in conflicts at either sides of the parties involved, may perhaps become a more hopeful ground for starting a dialogue between opposing parties. To recognize the humbling awareness of our own limited possibilities and vulnerabilities, rather than the boosting we are all too familiar with.

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