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***Politics and Truth in the Public Space.
Factual Truth and Rational Truth in Hannah Arendt's
Political Thinking***

Ph.D. THESIS

ABSTRACT

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2015

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Keywords

politics, truth, factual truth, rational truth, political space, public space, political game, deception, political lie, necessity, eventuality, justice, reality, appearance, political freedom

Politics and Truth in the Public Space.
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Summary

The theme of the research is the political presentation and the relevance of the concepts of political truth based on Hannah Arendt's political thinking.

The hypothesis supported by the research refers to the political presence of truth, to the criteria of the political truth and to the role of truth in the public political space. A transillumination of politics with the help of truth concepts is also necessary. According to my hypothesis, with the appearance of truth in the space of politics, politics becomes open and public. The thesis of the present study: the appearance of truth in politics is essential, from the view-point of the existence of political publicity. The arguments of the study support the importance of the political presence of truth, and my conclusion confirms the thesis: the presence of truth is one of the main conditions of the existence of the public political space.

The method of the research followed the traditional philosophic way of treatment. Its novelty is that it built up such a model of the public political space, that it makes the nimble treating of the political system possible, while stressing the enforcement of the special rules of the political game. In addition to modelling the political space, in order to understand and to place Arendt's concepts of truth in political context, during the research the reconstruction of the Greek and Christian philosophical background of Arendt's concepts of truth was also made.

Studying political philosophies, I have come to the conclusion, that most of the philosophers before Hannah Arendt were of the same opinion: in studying polity, truth is neither relevant nor subsidiary, as truth doesn't belong to the great political questions. Nevertheless, the claim to know and to show the truth – be it philosophical or rational, or only an everyday correspondence – was formulated.

The truth which is present in politics has become a central question in Hannah Arendt's philosophy, in such a dimension that Arendt's critics were against even the fact that in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, the main question is tyranny and truth instead of tyranny and freedom.¹ Arendt's commitment towards truth can be observed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* expressed not in analysing the problem of truth, but also in the rational treatment of truth. As a reaction to the information about the Eichmann legal action, in *Between Past and Future*, Arendt wrote a study entitled *Politics and Justice*, later the *Pentagon Papers* appeared in the *Crises of Republic*. In another study entitled *On Revolution* – just like in the *Pentagon Papers* – Arendt, instead of focusing on political justice, here deals with delusions or with lack of truth, in this case with the political hypocrisy. Arendt's concepts of truth and delusion can be understood by studying the concrete context, but a deeper interpretation depends on the understanding of the philosophical and political background illustrated by Arendt.

In the Introduction the research theme is presented and determined, which remains on the territory of political philosophy, although it touches sociological, legal and politico-

¹ John S. Nelson: *Politics and Truth: Arendt's Problematic*.

psychological aspects also. A survey of the earlier researches follows, underlining the fact that political truth in earlier political thinking was present mainly as a partial question, and that the totalitarian system itself – although it had had certain precedents – did not, until Arendt get a proper naming. A short summary of the philosophical sources used in this paper is also included in the introduction, stressing the most important Hungarian and English authors like Olay Csaba and Heller Ágnes, Margaret Canovan,² Andreas Kalyvas³ and among others, Alireza Shomali's⁴ works.

The first chapter -*Politics and truth in the public space*- defines the concept of politics on the basis of classic and modern definitions, supported by the theories presented by Machiavelli and Max Weber, in order to create the model of the political space which can express the plasticity of polity and which offers scope to the specificity of the different political systems. The political space as political publicity appears in Arendt's writing as well, without being merged with such concepts as social publicity or publicity in general, these concepts depend on the necessary activities of public and private life, while the political space has a free character. The treating of the concept of the political game goes back to the distressed character of political activity; from the games and rivalry which have been described by Huizinga, to the fights between political and legal rights, which have been stressed by H. G. Gadamer in the hermeneutical relation of truth. At the same time in Hannah Arendt's *Pentagon Papers*, the concrete illustration of the political game appears in studying the war in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the analysis of the political space which mostly influenced Arendt's conception of the political space was Socrates' agora. The public political space will be the medium, where in the framework of political discussion of the truth is first formulated in the political space as a form of activity. The first chapter ends with an analysis of the political discussion, as politics expresses or fails to express political truths in the form of discussion.

The second chapter – *The reconstruction of the philosophical background of Arendt's truth concept* – deals with two great philosophical paradigms: the reconstruction of the Greek philosophical background and the reconstruction of the Christian philosophy. Analyzing Socrates' and Plato's concept of truth, Arendt discovers the break which led to the division of the philosophical and political truths. According to Arendt's interpretation Socrates' death was the point which induced Plato to withdraw the philosophical truth from the space of politics and make it a privilege of philosophers, who – thanks to their knowledge – were able to lead the state. Yet it is essential to consider the fact that, as the formation of the concept of truth is linked to the community of the polis (being the medium in which the dialogue and dialectics are formed), is in opposition to the ideal concept of truth being elaborated in the philosopher's solitude and his inner dialogue. These conflicts, the psychological battles and the social-moral discrepancies, eventually induced Socrates to accept the penalty of death. Arendt linked the perception of the inner truth to the religious experience with some doubts, in contrast to Socrates' inner dialogue, which referred to religious experience more steadfastly. In the interpretation of the inner experience of truth, Sziénai Katalin's Dialogue was a great help. Thus – on the one hand – Socrates' truth experience can be understood

² Margaret Canovan: *The Contradiction of Hannah Arendt's political Thought*.

³ Andreas Kalyvas: *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary. Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt*.

⁴ Alireza Shomali: *Politics and the Criteria of Truth*.

intellectually, on the other hand it enlightens the activity, as the expression of truth. Sziénai Katalin disproves Arendt's conviction that the Christian conception is anti-political, because it hides the activity from the publicity, it does not want temporal appreciation. In Socrates' sophistic approach truth comes into prominence as an opinion, in this context the convincing character of the political discussion is stressed. Likewise the role of the language comes into prominence, because it can verify – even against the reality – anything just by means of logical argumentation.

Plato interpreted the truth value of the opinion as a charming of the intelligence by means of arguments. In agreement with Plato, Arendt also denies the truth value of the opinion. According to Arendt the modern sophists – unlike the ancient Greek sophists – were not satisfied with the passing victory of conviction concerning truth, they wanted a long-lasting victory which survives the opinions, they wanted to overcome the false view of reality. As Arendt expressed it, the former sophists destroyed the dignity of thought, the later ones ceased the dignity of activity. The modern manipulators of facts tried to destroy history.

Plato's truth will be shown to be one of opinions and not one of the rational evidence of truth, yet on this foundation he attempts to rely on its convincing powers. This fortells Aristotle's political image, which is in the same time, both, an image of a free citizen and a person who convinces by means of speech. In contradiction to Plato's conception regarding the ideal character of truth, Aristotle's truth is partially accessible for anybody, and with the help of philosophy it becomes totally comprehensible. Arendt, like Aristotle, presents the role of the community finding the proper medium - in which one can be himself as an individual – free from the private space of the familiar *oikumene* in the political community. The first step in exceeding the *homo faber* is the leaving the *oikumene* and joining the *polis*.

Arendt is against the leadership of Plato and the philosophers in general, because they did not intend to serve the public welfare and happiness, rather, their intentions were to maintain the existence of the necessity of philosophical debate, to create those conditions which make possible their continued philosophizing. In this context Arendt elaborates her thoughts concerning the tyranny of truth regarding Plato's ideal truth. He withdraws it from the world of *polis* if it becomes a world of relativity, because the *polis* is unsuitable to accept the ideal truth.

Writing about Aristotle, Arendt queries his binding to the *polis*, stressing the idea that the process of the division of philosophy and politics continues after Plato, too.

The reconstruction of the Christian background is linked not to the political space of the *polis*, but to the forum of *res publica*, this is the medium in which the authority of the legal order can get into conflict with the inner moral law. In the Christian philosophical context, two kinds of truth are treated, the small truth and the great truth. The first type of truth is near to Arendt's rational truth, it obeys the law of conformity. The other, the absolute truth, can be defined with the parameters of Plato's main idea. The treatment of small truth brings those arguments, in which the Christian concepts of truth also appear in the public space, on the one hand as the expressions of *adaequatio*, on the other hand as the relation of the great truth.

The existence in the public space is primarily formulated by Arendt in connection with Augustine, as related to Christian charity, its relevancy being expressed in communal existence. Arendt defines natural law as being one of both, the Divine authority and the conscience. The opening of the Augustinian philosophical background brings further data both

to the linguistic-logical formulation of truth, which pre-sages Wittgenstein's logic and to the understanding of the inner evidence, that led to Descartes' formulation of truth. In Arendt's and Wittgenstein's interpretations both the personal moments of truth – which are connected with the Augustinian notion of time – and the outer world of possibility, become comprehensible. Arendt borrows from Leibniz, the most concise and clearest formulations, originally demonstrated by Wittgenstein – formulations free from metaphysics. There is a hidden determination in Wittgenstein's formulation, which can be understood only by logic. The elimination of occasionality in the world of facts is possible only in the context of ideologies, in such a manner that the fictional facts make them consistent and determinate. Arendt defended the freedom of the political space with the help of the freedom of the occasional events, as the freedom of the political activity determines the fate of the political public space.⁵

The third chapter – *Hannah Arendt's concept of truth* – deals with the analysis of the concepts of truth, taking into consideration the truth-criteria of evidence and correspondence with the help of the perspectives of inherence and hermeneutics. The evidence is best expressed in Spinoza's thesis concerning truth, the *verum index sui*. In his interpretation truth is determined as its own sign. Spinoza's evident truth can be related to Arendt's evidence of mental truths, but Arendt derives them from intelligence and not from God. Spinoza's truth is formulated as a philosophical truth, which was criticized by Arendt in *Past and Future*, as his singular truth is personal and free from politics. The despotic character of the philosophical truth, just like the cruelty of the religious moral principle of Machiavelli, makes it unsuitable in the political public space, where the interests of the crowd must prevail.

In Arendt's interpretation the political truth can be found in the correspondence of facts and language, which implicitly contains the reflection of the world's logic. Wittgenstein goes even further, as he doesn't want to formulate the idea of truth at the level of the soul or of the intelligence, he only wants to define truth in the context of the outside world. Wanting to see the reality, he neglects the language, because it can catch the world only on the basis of the specific of the time-sequences, thus narrowing it down. So the lack of language becomes the state of entirety, giving space to the total reality, letting the facts express the final verity.

Such an expression of the facts, which is later considered by Arendt as impossible to verify, due to the contingency and the intransparency of the causal relations, defines the entirety of the world in its own subjective truth. The value of this statement is, that it tries to express the unique facts. Thus the general statements mostly express the possible world, and they will only be intelligible when they refer to a concrete individual. That's why the language will be just an experiment in expressing truth. The induction is never complete, as the possibility of an exception which invalidates the truth will always exist.

Arendt compensates the insufficiency of the expression of this method of defining the truth by complementing it with others' ideas. Thus truth - in spite of the imperfect character of *adaequatio* and in spite of the relativity of opinions – can be completed in the political space in the presence of others, and certified by others.

Due to this historical and dialectical ontological approach truth has gained a narrative character. This narrative character hides the progressivity, which in a certain moment is able

⁵ Olay Csaba: *Hannah Arendt politikai egzisztencializmusa*. 59.

to consciously grasp the truth; yet this will be only be a partial truth as in the process of estrangement of the spirit it becomes dualistic (mind-object). The recognition of truth will be a progressive teleological process bearing in itself the aim of history. Hegel's progressive dialectic change, the moving of mind-consciousness has practical aspects. These aspects have also an ethical and political character. Marx changes the Hegelean dialectics and makes philosophy practical, in his interpretation philosophy becomes politics. This change into politics will be both the realization of and the ceasing of philosophy. The political consciousness, self-realization and the freedom which Hegel intended to reach through the progressive historical-political dialectic development, for Marx seemed to be an impossibility in the capitalist system.

Arendt's ideas concerning factual truth and rational truth are detailed in this chapter. Here, he borrowed the concept of real truth and mental truth from Leibniz without respecting their logical interpretation. The deeper understanding of these concepts in the Leibnizean context reveals the question of uniqueness in contradiction to the intellectual character of the mental truth. The real truth of the world cannot be changed, because the facts and the events produce the network of the world, even if there are many different opinions about real truths. The success of the experiments which aim to cease the real truth depend on the successful ceasing of all the other linking real truths. From Leibniz' perspective this is impossible. In Arendt's case we know that the totalitarian techniques of annulment were not completely successful. The perspective of the totalitarian war nullifies only the politics, not the whole world.

Temporality, which follows the logic of causality, concentrically proves the truth, it creates a rotating confirmation. This can be valid only because temporality permits it. Arendt in, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, speaks about those empty periods of history, which only contain the truth of those who were defeated. Marx was seeking for a solution, and in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she extends the Augustinian remembrance to the existence of real truth, that there exists at least one single man who remembers and attests the truth. Historiography will be the means of completing these *holes of oblivion*. Of course, from a divine perspective, there are no holes, but Arendt refuses this divine perspective of fulfilment and he follows only the logical level of contingency. According to Arendt the surest certitude in the space of political publicity are offered by the facts of birth and death. For Arendt the only possibility to become immortal is activity. He considers activity as a capacity which can interrupt the determined course of life in order to build another existential sense of self.

The last theme of this chapter deals with Arendt's phenomenological connections, more precisely with the appearance of truth in the political space. In his study entitled, *In the Revolution*, Arendt refers the political thinking only in the realm of political phenomena. But to its appearance – in contradiction to that of the material things – the human speech and articulation is needed, their manifestation exceeds visibility and audibility. Heidegger calls this manifestation *phainestai*, and he uses this word for the expression in speech. Its joining with truth happens through the coming into prominence of truth, through the intended watching or understanding of the subject.

The analysis of the relationship between existence and appearance follows, wherein relationship becomes even more acute in politics. This difficulty arises also with both Socrates and Machiavelli, but is more emphasized with Arendt than with Socrates, where the

illusion appearing in human affairs means the truth as well. The phenomenological way of looking at things reappears as a problem of delusion. In politics truth appears as an illusion, that's why the possibility of delusion, as an illusive truth is present as a special characteristic of politics. This is the weakness of phenomenology: on its basis, as the delusion conceals the truth, it – like an illusion – bears weakness and can be refuted.

The phenomenological approach to the problems of delusions which has previously been referenced, is treated in detail in the fourth chapter - The categories of delusion. Hannah Arendt presents those delusion-forms adopted in politics, which appear against the political truth, creating such political systems in which the political publicity loses its sense, because the reality itself becomes questionable; on the one hand because of the systematic lie, on the other hand because of the appearance of such alternatives replacing the reality, which presuppose and reveal another reality behind the illusory reality. The political delusion brings forward arguments which present the consequences of the lack of truth. Arendt stresses that the lack of lies does not automatically mean the presence of truth. The real truth appearing in the network of reality must be revealed by means of narratives, as everybody has the right of rearranging the facts according to his own view-point without having the right to change the real facts.

The treatment of the forms of delusion begins with *Arcana Imperii*, the techniques of diplomatic delusion, supported by the evidence of the *Pentagon Papers*. Arendt traces the origin of lie back to the particularity of human activity, to the urge of creating something totally new. This needs a totally new political space, thus man endeavours to nullify or at least change the old one. To do this we need a mental space, that is we have to imagine a new one. So the imagination will generate the lie by denying the reality, in order to imagine and create another reality. Arendt connects the capacity of lying with the activity, as both set out from imagination. The greatest nullifier of a lie will be the reality itself, declares Arendt, because although the lie may be very comprehensive, it will never be able to replace the existing reality. The dimension of reality is much larger than that which is produced by lie.

The lie, as a product created for the consuming society begins with the shaping of the *image*, because according to the logic of *public relations* politics too is built of two parts; the first being the making of the *image*, the manufacturing of the political image, the second is the art of making the *image* one which will be accepted, more precisely the maintenance of the belief concerning the reality of the *image*. When the maintenance of this belief becomes impossible by theoretical means, the promises and the threats follow. This form of manipulation produces the variety of politics which is destined for mass-consumption. The professional category of delusion refers to the specialists' opinion, its extreme variety is the epistocracy, the reign of specialists or scientists.

While the public relations presented in the *Pentagon Papers* were destined mainly for „inner consumption“, that is for the large political public, the propaganda took aim at the outer consumption, that is at the outer *image*, at the foreigners. Nevertheless propaganda wasn't used only outside the system. At the beginning it intended to overcome the inner opposition. Arendt shows a strong relationship between the indoctrination of the political movements and the propaganda, in the shaping of the connection between the dimension of the movements and the outer pressure. A weaker movement needs more propaganda in general, while the stronger movement needs a more of a specifically active propaganda. At

the same time, proportional to the strengthening of the movements and to the isolation of the system, the indoctrination and the terror grows. This can be demonstrated in two different forms: propaganda is part of the psychical war, while terrorism can be defined as – with Arendt's words – the reign of terror over a psychically subjugated population.

Hannah Arendt's analysis of ideology starts from the supposition that the totalitarian state must prepare its subjects both for the role of the martyr and of the executor, and these preparations which replace the principle of activity, will become the ideology. She distinguishes the ideologies existing before the totalitarian systems, which – thanks to the illusion of science and to its name ending in „logos” (doctrine) – appeared to be scientific philosophy, and the totalitarian ideology, whose origins are based on another definition of logos. Ideology will not be used as the doctrine of an idea, but as the logic of the idea itself. The object of the totalitarian ideology will be the history itself, that's why instead of explaining a closed system, she follows a continuously changing and developing process. Because it contains the logic of history, it will be the key of the past-present-future mystery. In Arendt's interpretation the ideology is not interested in existence, as it expresses itself in the great steps of rising and destruction, thus it can accept and certify that everything and every process seems to happen according to the logic, to the „idea” of ideology.

After the ideological delusion, the treating of the political myths follows. The *ultima ratio* of desperation, which sees the solution in miracle and in supernatural, in the midst of the fallability of politics, acts as the formulation of embodied collective sentiments or wishes. Regardless of how primitive the irrational impulse is, to get a political form it needs a theory which formulates it, and which – as Cassirer referred to - the more complicated it is, the better it is. Moreover, joining the characteristics of the *homo faber* and the *homo magus*, it plans step by step the cult of a new religion. At this point the political myth becomes a political weapon.

The last category of the political delusion will be the betrayal. The chapter of delusions ends with this theme.

Finally we can state that the ideas appear as being the necessary elements of the political games, as being such theoretical constructions which contain rational truths, they can be pseudo-scientific or they can function as an erroneous belief. Dealing with propaganda or indoctrination, we meet – in both cases – the erroneous forms of ideas. The most interesting thing is, that these erroneous forms can generate positive sentiments if their effect on the masses goes with a sentiment of power.

In *Political truth in the public area* we meet the bearers of the political truth, the politics of things, the time-dimension of politics and such relations as the connection of truth and justness. The presence of truth in the political space cannot be separated from the issues regarding the bearer of truth. It's true, that Arendt's factual truths are rooted in reality, but the truth of the facts must be expressed by the active political partaker, and this truth becomes political only if this happens in the conditions of plurality. Arendt's political subjects do not get a special ranking in the sense of Marx' class of Mannheim's free intellectuals, the epistocrates or the political elite. Arendt names only wide categories besides the *homo politicus* who undertake the *vita activa*. She speaks about becoming a crowd or a pariah, the last of which can be understood as an outlawed state, a *homo sacer*.

The space in which the politics of the *res publica* is realized presents the problem of the representation of administration, not only in Arendt's, but also in Bruno Latour's critical conception, as it gives a solution to Arendt's problem of maintaining the factual truth. Latour with his maintaining criticism seeks to avoid destruction. The politics of things is realized by everybody's contribution to administration in the public space.

The negative aspect of the political space – opposed to Arendt's which assures freedom – was stressed by Foucault, who showed the intrusion of the political power both into the spaces free of politics and in the space of private life. His conviction, that under the liberal democratic surface there are oppressive techniques, expresses his idea that the repression of the power and of the governing can be identified also outside the political space.

In the legal order of the political space questions of justness arise. Law, opposed to a real existence of truth is not a rare phenomenon, it belongs to the world of self-evidence, thus closing the political space. The relationship between truth and justness gives rise to arguments concerning these concepts. On the one hand, that truth without political justness will be present only marginally, as a rhetorical means or as the object of political thinking, without touching the actual political space; and on the other hand the knowledge of truth will be the condition of justness itself.

The legal systems can hardly eliminate the gap between laws and justness, the extra-legal state of the totalitarian systems have produced exactly this form of justness. Cicero's *jus gentium*, called by Arendt *consensus iuris*, loses its sense in the case of the totalitarian systems, because the effectiveness of law doesn't depend on the human activity and will, due to the fact that the embodiment of law will be the man himself, that's why the man himself will be the bearer of justness too. Law ceases to be such an existing authority, which functions independently of man as a standard, and it will be – in a legal, moral and divine sense – the expressions of evolutionary forces of history embodied in man.

The experiments targeting the realization of the public space and the understanding of the functioning of power prove the fact, that the enforcement of truth in politics isn't a marginal problem, it is the condition of the functioning of the public political space. A such experiment was conducted by Zimbardo in the subground floor of the university in Stanford, or can be named others like the *Los Horcones*, built up in Mexico, according to Skinner's *Walden II*. conception as the reigning form of *personocracy*, Gandhi's truth politics or Foucault's demand regarding the truth politics of the individual. In Arendt's interpretation we can speak about complete political life only if the basic truth is protected. Without this basic truth we can't speak about a collectively recognizable world, and a viable politics cannot exist either.

This concept of Arendt's reveals the direction of the criticism of her thinking treated in the last chapter. The idea of basic truths, releases the tension of the modern society which has been deprived of its traditions. Thus Arendt's interpretation – with the possibility of reinterpretation – shows in the direction of freedom, which brings with itself the depth of baselessness and indefinability. The criticism of Arendt's thinking refers to the political presence of truth and to questions of its existence in totalitarian systems, which, in the course of the destruction of history make the factual truth disappear – *historicide*.

Nelson thinks that neglecting truth brings about the disappearance of truth. This is his counter-argument against the political presence of truth. This counter-argument was

refuted by Arendt herself. Actually this could more simply be treated as a problem of the interpretation of facts.

Sheyla Benhabib reproaches the lack of establishment of morality in Arendt's political space, as this problem is not set forth by Arendt. Dealing with the reconstruction of the philosophical background we have seen that the moral question is unavoidable in the reconstruction of both the Greek and the Christian background. The Eichmann report also raised the question of Kant's ethics. Arendt's last works, most pointedly, the *Life of the Mind*, raises the question of judgement. Morality can be joined to this question concerning the *vita contemplativa*, although Arendt has not addressed these arguments very deeply.

On the basis of Arendt's thoughts we can reason that the undertaking of truth at political level leads to another type of politics, which is powerful but not violent, which proves its efficiency during the different resistance movements or in the establishment of more open political spaces.

Truth in politics apparently could act only against the political delusion and lie, against treason and hypocrisy, but its role is much more, because man's pursuance of truth is that motive power which joins to the deeper moral dimension of man. Arendt in the last sentence of *Truth and politics*, defines truth as something unchangeable, which firmly borders the political public space, where the others' company and the collective activity bring happiness and satisfaction.

Arendt, in spite of the political deformations and in spite of totalitarianism, influenced by Jaspers' conception of philosophical responsibility, intended to name the *Human Condition* studies *Amor mundi*. The understanding and love of the world is not expressed by its uncritical acceptance, rather - relying upon a foundation of truth - by the free activity assumed in building of the political public space, in the others' acceptance, in collective activity, in plurality. In *Amor mundi* Arendt formulates both the moment of forgiveness and the moment of political promise, which direct the political activity to a better future.

The question of the presence of truth in politics will always remain problematic, but if the political thinking starts from the basis of truth, that is from *what exists* instead of *what would exist*, then even the conditions of the political public space - respecting plurality and freedom - can be realized.

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