

The Importance of Moral Values in Human Life (A Look at the Philosophy of Hannah Arendt)

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Abstract

With developments happened during the 19th century Arendt sees the situation very critical in relation to morals. Justification for a better personal life has often led people to lose their moral values, as this makes them to be willing to change them at any time with anything. It is exactly this era that has more needs of restoration and recognition of moral, recalling it from antiquity until nowadays. These moral philosophical thoughts not only are saved as treasures from oblivion of time, but they simultaneously become savior of the human, for the importance they have in the preservation of human values. Just being in the recognition of these moral philosophical thoughts, man attains to live in peace with himself in this world. Man has the quality of thinking, if he makes this process so far as he becomes able to establish a relation with itself, through this process of thinking, in the sense that he does not see itself simply as an executor of the actions, but simultaneously as observer, as a judge. So through this report man establishes a dialogue with himself, feels associated with himself and physically alone. The realization of this potential that every person carries makes the man a person and his activity starting from himself and others shows a personality. The issue is whether can we nowadays recover such moral values and make them our parts, without orders and penalties that come externally, but cultivating them as part of what come from within, as part of the development of human life itself, as a human will? Can we avoid arbitrariness in moral judgment? What is a moral for me may be a moral for all people? Arendt tells us that as precedents serve in adjudicating legal issues, so do the examples that we can recall from human history, help for judging the moral issues.

Keywords: Arendt, human values, dictator, Albania, communism

In the postwar years, Hannah Arendt starts from every angle to see in a critical reflection the extremely grave situation. This interest does not stop only at political plan but also in the moral one.

According to him, the nineteenth century had many consequences that needed to be judged, not only on legal aspect. It calls for a reassessment of the situation in moral terms, after the human catastrophe. Life on earth revolves around the idea for a better life and, no doubt, that everyone tries to realize it. This kind of individualism has significantly increased sense of selfishness, because people seek a better life, but forget that their country, where they require this life, is closely linked to the future of the world in which they live. Modern developments in science except greatness in achievement, bring the uncertainty of life in the world, even a kind of fear towards these achievements.

Achievements in biological weapons excellence make possible that big countries, with high capital flows, to pay scientists to attain a sophisticated realization, but they forget that the misuse of weapons may bring extermination, catastrophic consequences. About three decades before Arendt hold several lectures, which were later summarized in the book "Some issues of moral philosophy", Europe was shaken by the Hitlerian and Stalinist terror. They used the most cruel forms of execution of millions of people, and this made a flaw in the human dimension, in the sense that people exercised brutality on people.

Two decades later Arendt rightly concerned on man and humanity. "... Moral problem has fallen into oblivion because it is covered with something that actually is much more difficult to talk to because it is virtually impossible to detect, as it does not have what to discover, when the monstrous of what happened is naked"¹

How dangerous can human selfishness be in another related case, via a button can cut off a whole world and thinking that during the time that these lectures were held, (1965-1966), the Cold War was in its peak. The human mind facing any government, whether tyrannical, totalitarian and democratic, can not be addressed only by frames of a legal system. History shows that "the legal system has" worked "in any regime. "... This regime, in fact, listing the arrival of new values, introduced a legal system in accordance with these values .."²

It should be understood that there is a fundamental difference between legal and justice system. The first is related to the organization of the state, in its formal view, on the other hand, justice, realized not only by the formal part, but is primarily a moral acceptance of what is fair and unfair. As to say, justice emanates primarily from human belly, a self-condemnation and later expanded by considering others. The legal system functioning, even his existence, depends on dealing with this kind of formalism. "... Despite scientific models of the time, no matter that they killed and convinced the public, influencing legal professionals: Legal institution should challenge all this, if he wants to continue existing."³

The performance of the judicial system in accordance with moral values, departs from the analysis of individual cases towards a broader representation. A specific case should not be blocked in isolation but through it one can see what is behind it, to discover the biggest problems that can come later. So, moral problems start from specific cases, but their scope and interest for resolving must take overall dimensions. "If moral community is not limited to people of a particular country, it should not be restricted either to people of a certain time. No matter whether our actions will have consequences to people currently, or in the distant future. We have an obligation to consider all of their interests equally"⁴, While Arendt notes that "... It was not obvious because of the problems that were under discussion during that time, but always seems to happen when discussing moral issues not from a general point of view, but from the perspective of specific cases."⁵

Issues of legal proceedings, after World War II, can not be solved by judging some people, as the dimensions of the crime against the Jews were those of an unprecedented crime proportions before. It was not about the criminal trial, but should be seen beyond this, since these criminals could be everywhere, they were common among ordinary people. "Human sensitivity to small things and insensitivity to big ones is a sign of a striking difference"⁶ Arendt seeks to make more understandable the question that justice could not be put in place only with the execution of some Nazi horrors (Eichmann case), but it seeks to make society reflect that this monstrosity that happened was unimaginable. Crimes against humanity committed against the Jewish people, had no precedent on which to rely their judgment. These were crimes because those who suffered, were judged, killed, for the mere fact that they were human, as their personal guilt did not exist. After finding the causes and origins of the cruelest regimes in human history, Arendt is also concerned about the non-clarification of moral issues, and he fears oblivion of time. The latter, oblivion of time, can repeat the history no matter in what 'corner of the world it can happen. "... We know and can see with our eyes, to what extent their minds were aware of the endless possibilities of human evil."⁷

For this reason brings "with him", during its analysis, thoughts of philosophers of antiquity, starting with Socrates, Aristotle, until later to Nietzsche, Kant, etc. These philosophers, compared with Medieval Philosophy ideas, take advantage of Arendt. For him in the Medieval Philosophy people obey divine commands that come in a form of imposition, even if done with love, yet they remain something coming from a prescriptive. Their implementation brings the results that is the reward or punishment in case of failure to perform the duties. For example: "We should not harm other people's lives".

[¹]Arendt, Hannah. "Alcune questioni di filosofia morale", "Enaudi", Torino 2006, p. 9

[²]Idem, p. 8

[³]Idem, p. 12

[⁴]Rachels, Stuart e James, "Elementet e Filozofisë Morale"[Elements of moral philosophy], "Dita 2000", Tirana 2009, p. 287

[⁵]Arendt, Hannah. "Alcune questioni di filosofia morale", "Enaudi", Torino 2006, p. 14

[⁶]Paskal, Bléz, "Mendimet"[The *Pensées* ("Thoughts")], "Plejad", Tirana 2005, p. 116

[⁷]Arendt, Hannah. "Alcune questioni di filosofia morale", "Enaudi", Torino 2006, p. 30

This order has the reward for those who follow and implement the orders, as has also the punishment for those who do not follow the do not implement them, in the afterlife. Thus Arendt relies on Kant. "...but let's go further. Moral behavior, according to Kant, it has nothing to do with obedience to a law imposed from outside - from God or from men. Simply in terms of Kant, and there is a difference between legality and morality."⁸

So whoever orders from the outside, differ radically from human morality that is the man himself. What is moral comes from the man himself, first for themselves. In fact, if I do not want to contradict myself, I have to react in this case, so that the maximum of my action could serve at the same time according to the universal law, which is valid for all."⁹

In this case the man decides to do something influenced not only by the consequences but by the good will to make a move. So, I do something not because someone orders me, or that someone will reward me for this, but I do because I want to do it, and that no one mediates the action itself. It's just me and I against what I willfully choose to do. So I am the one who judge myself, who experience the action and who bears the consequences of the solution that I do. From this it follows that the good done out of love for the good. "... the word conscience, in all languages, does not firstly show the ability to recognize and distinguish the good from evil, but what we today call conscience, is precisely our ability to recognize, above all, ourselves."¹⁰

Thanks to conscience anyone chooses to do good actions, as well as avoids the wrong ones. Man willfully chooses not to do wrong actions, not because it is not bound to do, but his ego, his free conscience, judges it as an act that should not be done. This is the human morality, unlike religious morality of Medieval Philosophy. The moment that man is able to judge his actions, to think before they do, constitutes the difference between a human creature and a person. "... The quality of being a person differs from the quality of being a human, because it can not be determined from the property, talents, gifts, or personal defects, with which people are born and they use or abuse with. Personal quality of the individual is his "moral" quality."¹¹

The question is, does consciousness operate in all human beings to judge actions as right or wrong? Not only that everyone has the potential to judge themselves internally, but Arendt reaches as far as thinking that at least in all legal systems that exist in society, persons who are authorized to adjudicate crimes presumed to depart exactly from this consciousness, this self-condemnation, which exists in them, even if they have not read any book on the law and right. So they must not only judge cases that contains the law, as a dry element that it serves, the legal right, but first need to ask ourselves, to think, to judge if the laws we are implementing are they fair or unfair. Firstly, man and in this case the judge, or anyone that is human must agree with themselves before taking into account the opinions of others.

"...According to Socrates, there is no need for any other special body, because it is enough to stay in themselves, without using any afterlife tool, it is enough to see with spiritual eyes, to show what is right and what is wrong."¹² When people make a decision they previously need to analyze it with themselves. And when they make the right decision they are at peace with themselves. And in the worst case, when the action is not approved by his conscience, by himself, then he has to live with the feeling of guilt and loses the rapport, set between him and himself. Ego, in this case, becomes the worst enemy that did not lay off even after having committed the unfair action. It is not easy to live with a panel all the time, a panel (ego), who can not escape for a moment. When making a crime you are judged by the relevant authorities, this judgment lasts temporarily, but in the case of judging ourselves, this trial lasts for life. You can not stay indifferent to your thoughts and if you try to refuse, to think, you turn into a creature which loses the human part. "... based on the justification that Socrates makes to his moral thesis, we can say that the process of thinking that defines humanity through human speech, shows me as a person able to reconstruct it all again."¹³ This means that man has a capacity of thinking, reasoning and remembering the actions he makes. But this is a thing that can be lost. The ability to judge and think morally exists until the man has not lost his ability of thinking and reminding of actions made in life.

[⁸]Idem, p. 24

[⁹]Idem, p. 25

[¹⁰]Idem, p. 33

[¹¹]Idem, p. 37

[¹²]Arendt, Hannah. "Alcune questioni di filosofia morale", "Enaudi", Torino 2006, page 50

[¹³]Idem, p. 55

At the moment that he lost this capacity, ie he lost dialogue with himself, he has broken the decided ratio refusing to think and recall the actions he has made loses his human part, losing himself. “.. The morality of a man are those through which, in the end, he agrees to lead his life.”¹⁴

It is important to understand that living by yourself is something more than just a quiet conscience. Living with yourself is to be able to live in solitude. At first glance Arendt seems inconsistent with himself because at the "Human condition" he says that human elements can be developed by being part of public life and is against crouching in privacy. He stresses the idea that man was born to live in the community and that only there can achieve the highest qualities of human life. In our case Arendt does not say the opposite, that man should live in solitude, but before he, the man, therefore, may decide a report of ideas, opinions, judgments of others, must first have reached a similar thing with themselves. In the sense that even when someone is alone in his loneliness, he has to be in the company of himself, without losing it. As can happen the opposite which may be in the company of dozens of people and still feel lonely.

Loneliness, in the case when the individual is living with himself, is a kind of filled loneliness because except of myself there is another who accompanies me and I feel I am not alone. Example: the case of a person confined in jail. Even though alone, is in the company of himself because he is isolated but he continues to think, recall, evaluate, judge even manage to create. Some of the artists have managed to write works in solitary confinement. This shows that they have not lost the company of another, thus that of themselves. "No talent can not survive the loss of your integrity, which is confirmed by the loss of thinking and memory."¹⁵

There is a difference between being in the accompany of the others and associating by yourself. The latter accompanies the man not only as another whatever, but as another like me, so another who judges and thinks like me. Not in the sense that we have the same thoughts and judgments, but in the sense that the other one is me, at the same time, so myself, has this thinking capacity. So, it is my level. In case of being accompanied by someone other than myself, but another person, the latter perhaps may have lost the ability to think and recall, the ability to embed a report of him with himself, and if the other one has lost this report to himself, how can he be able to establish a right report to me?! So the difference is that the other which is myself has integrity, and I can only live better with it than with another individual who lacks this integrity. And so I feel coupled with my loneliness than in the company of others. "I feel bad and isolated even if i am among a crowd".¹⁶

In the company of himself the man puts his limits himself, without the need of external constraints. He has freedom of judgment of himself, and Socrates wanted to achieve this thing to its citizens. "Socrates thought that teaching people how to think, how to talk with them, without teaching them the art of oratory to convince, it makes no sense to teach what to think, in this way you will improve your citizens more..."¹⁷ Given what Socrates believed we reach a point which is called morality today, and it used to be called a man in his singularity.

Where is the difference between obedience that comes from outside and obedience that comes from inside? If the first is for the sake of conformity to the rules of social life, the second is not meant for me to convince myself with arguments to be conformable to the rules of society. But the primary aim is morality. The action should be done or not because it is best for my judgment, not because society thinks so. All human mental activity that has morality as an indicator, turns man into a person, then it creates a personality. So in the 60's, even though after many years, crimes against the Jewish people began to be tried as individual cases. It seemed ridiculous because the terror that was inflicted on the Jewish people was viewed superficially. In Europe there were pouring from everywhere vehicles filled with human beings towards extermination centers and the society was not able to understand that what happened can not be settled by the execution of some people who could be counted on fingers as Adolf Eichmann. "... The problem with the remaining Nazi criminals is this: to make known any cost of any act committed willfully, and this was a kind of reason for not forgiving or punishing them."¹⁸

It is the time for everyone to wonder how able was he morally to judge what had happened.

[¹⁴]Idem, p. 122

[¹⁵]Idem, p. 57

[¹⁶]Arendt, Hannah. "Alcune questioni di filosofia morale", "Enaudi", Torino 2006, page 59

[¹⁷]Idem, p. 62

[¹⁸]Idem, p. 73

The judgment could not turn into life millions of people savagely executed, but at least they could feel the responsibility that all were part of what had happened and not to hide under the excuse that they "were orders coming from more important people". As long as we call ourselves human beings with a personality should be aware that any orders given to us pass to the approval of ourselves, so we approve the order, we judge it as fair or unfair, and at this moment we are the moral responsible when we apply them. Here begins the feeling of responsibility.

Our solution does not belong to an external imposition when it is not only implemented but done with a terrific zeal, then it means that you are totally involved in the process of its implementation. Performing an act is not just a reason or desire but for Arendt is something more than that. "... But the new discovery is that there is something to the man who says yes or no to precepts of reasons. In other words we can not give willingly, for ignorance or weakness, but with willingness.

Willingness is a third choice. The reason is not enough, nor the desire".¹⁹ If I really want something, reasoning can stop me to do it, telling me the consequences and in this case, between the desire and recognition through reason of the results that may stem, will intervene. So, I take into consideration any result and yet continue to want it more. This will include me as part of a voluntary act that I do. And so the justification that comes after that is poor. Or the legal justification can be found by the ingenuity of lawyers, can not have in this regard a moral justification. "The first thing we learn about the desire is "I want, but I can not".²⁰ We all keep in mind this phrase and from it we make our choices. Before you decide we suffer every opportunity to comply with our will. In other words, we decide to do good or to do bad, willingly. So, first we should do the division between good and evil "justice that I set may not be the same with that that we all live, but this justice would be an excellent example on further proceedings on this issue."²¹ Arendt relies on Kant and says that we refer to examples during the judgment we make on moral behavior. Particular examples serve as general indications and our behavior is directed by them. Our memory restores every moment that we live and restores examples of behavior judged to be good or bad. On the basis of these examples we can judge as good or bad the actions of the present, too. They also serve as guidance for the future, in the sense that there are borders that we have already lived and known and on their basis we will analyse future actions. "... It is necessary to have a fixed point to judge. Port judges those who are on the ship. But where would you find a port of the moral?!"²² In this regard, Arendt was worried because he had lived in an era where human evil knew no limit. Everything that happened was of such magnitude that did not find any example in the history of mankind up to that time. This showed that this nightmare should be described as something new, and that failure to refer to the past to judge on the basis of an example, strengthened it even more, because it was impossible to find such a precedent in the past, a precedent of those dimensions.

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[¹⁹]Idem, p. 75

[²⁰]Idem, p. 81

[²¹]Idem, p. 106

[²²]Arendt, Hannah. "Alcune questioni di filosofia morale", "Enaudi", Torino 2006, p.131