
PATHWAYS ACROSS DARKNESS. Contemporary Evil and the Task of Philosophy

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I. Preliminary remarks

The title of this paper could sound a bit pretentious both to the big public and to the philosophical audience. Why do we need another work that wants to address something about the task of philosophy? Haven't we spent the last century – just to provide an historical horizon – practicing philosophy and questioning its task, trying to overcome the well-known distinction between continental and analytic philosophy?

My answer is quite problematic: yes, because in our life, as people who are deeply committed to philosophy, we have exercised (and we are still exercising) philosophy through the meditation on, and dialogue with, some great philosophers; no, basically two reasons that are mainly at the core of this paper: on the one hand, western philosophy has its own responsibility in the issue of evil. Using Arendt's words: "I suspect that philosophy is not altogether innocent in this fine how-do-you-do. Not, of course, in the sense that Hitler had anything to do with Plato [...]. Instead, perhaps in the sense that Western philosophy has never had a clear concept of what constitutes the political, and couldn't have one, because, by necessity, it spoke of man the individual and dealt with the fact of plurality tangentially."¹ Put in other words, this means that our philosophical tradition has been focused only on those metaphysical issues strictly tied to religion (in particular, the Jewish-Christian one) and, as a consequence of this fundamental constitution of western philosophy, non-metaphysical themes have been placed under the carpet for a long time, or, at best, have been investigated only accidentally, such as in the notion of plurality and that kind of evil that can happen to a community, when the last sky has no more God to invoke *more geometrico*. On the other hand, it seems to me that philosophy today is more interested in talking about its status and its incursion into the field of sciences, rather than in recovering its spiritual force

1. Hannah Arendt's letter to Karl Jaspers, March 4 1951, in *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, Lotte KOHLER and Jans SANER (eds.), trans. Robert and Rita KIMBER, Orlando FL, Harcourt Publ., 1993, p. 165.

and telling our society something. These words are not a polemic on some developments of contemporary philosophy – in particular, I am thinking of the so-called analytical tradition – rather, they are a simply an observation of the progressive decline of the philosophical and spiritual bite in the flesh of our society. If philosophy – using Jasper’s words – is not the mere knowledge of formulae, theses and words but a thinking that deals with oneself,² this means that philosophy has something to do with our lives and with our deeds, not only in terms of our private life, but more in general in terms of public life and public thinking. In this regard, philosophy cannot be reduced to a multitasking competence that deals with the neurosis of massive publications, or with a story-telling deprived of a critical eye on society; rather, we should recall that what we call philosophy is the silent and constant dialogue that we have with ourselves and that is embedded in our actions – as human beings – and in our critical contribution to the development of society.

I am inclined to say that the task of philosophy today is deeply connected with the issue of thinking and not simply with knowledge itself. It means that, for example, knowing what evil is doesn’t prevent me from acting towards it. It is precisely in this crack between thinking and knowledge that we deal with meaning and truth and, in this respect, we deal with the *limit* of our thinking.

This paper is articulated in two parts: in the first one, I will show to which extent we can refer to evil as rooted in a metaphysical ground or, conversely, if it is a tendency inscribed into the human being’s constitution. The notion of limit (*Grenze*) will illuminate this section. In the second part, I will consider the relationship between thinking, judging and acting and its implication in our age, demonstrating that this relationship has been compromised in the last 50 years by the increase of technicity: it is not simply necessary “to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly” – using Arendt’s words in *The Life of the Mind*, rather it is necessary to recover our constitutional ‘obsolescence’ (as Günther Anders claimed) to stop (and to prevent) the transformation of the human being into a product – “We were born and not manufactured,” Anders always said.

II. Anthropological and ontological approaches

I would like to recall a passage from Arendt’s letter to Jaspers dated March 4th, 1951, in which we read: “Evil has proved to be more radical than expected. In objective terms, modern crimes are not provided for in the Ten Commandments [...]. Yet we know that the greatest evils or radical evil have nothing to do anymore with such [...] sinful motives. What radical evil is I don’t know, but it seems to me it somehow has to do with the following phenomenon: making

2. Karl JASPERS, *Philosophy*, vol. I, trans. Edward B. ASHTON, Chicago IL, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 13.

human beings as human beings superfluous (not using them as means to an end, which leaves their essence as human untouched and impinges only on their human dignity; rather, making them superfluous as human beings).³ This letter is written some years before the work on Eichmann and shows Arendt's dedication to one of the topics she will investigate for the rest of her life: the issue of political thinking in the light of evil. However, in her critical meditation, the usage of "radical evil" has nothing to do with the original meaning in Kant: although Arendt here employs the same expression used by Kant in his work of 1793, she doesn't mean to stress the propensity to evil (*Hang zum Bösem*) that characterises human nature, rather she wants to remark on the absence of depth typical of evil, what in German is called *Nichtigkeit*. In her letter to Scholem she writes exactly this: "It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is 'thought-defying,' as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its 'banality.'"⁴ Arendt's usage of the adjective "radical" is not aimed to investigate the anthropological approach described by Kant; rather it is a personal attempt to describe evil in terms of its rootless and banality.

Jaspers's comments on her exchange with Scholem go in this direction: even if in the letter dated October 22, 1963 he points out that she is "with Kant against Gnosis" in her use of the expression "radical evil", however a couple of months later, in the letter written on December 13th, Jaspers writes: "About the banality of evil: I think it's a wonderful inspiration and right on the mark as the book's subtitle. The point is that *this* evil, not evil *per se*, is banal [...] What evil is stands behind your phrase characterising Eichmann. And that question is indeed one we will probably never be quite to answer adequately."⁵ Jaspers thinks of the issue of evil *überhaupt*, not as a specific and historical phenomenon of evil, such as the Holocaust had been; rather the issue of evil *per se* remains something different from a particular and historical figure. There is something of truth in Jaspers' thinking: each historical aspect of evil, as far as it is only just one among many others, is not sufficient to describe and provide adequate elements for a general theory of evil, and a general theory of evil roots or in an anthropological approach or in a metaphysical/ontological one. However, at a certain point, we must face the historical dimension in which the

3. Hannah Arendt's letter to Karl Jaspers, March 4 1951, in *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, p. 166.

4. Hannah Arendt's letter to Gershom Scholem, July 24 1963, in *Hannah Arendt - Gershom Scholem: Correspondence 1939-1964*, trans. Anthony DAVID, Chicago IL, Chicago University Press, 2017, pp. 250-251.

5. Karl Jaspers' letter to Hannah Arendt, December 13, 1963, in *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, p. 542.

human being is embedded, and the socio-cultural consequences of this – and from this arises the question: is metaphysics still valid for our time? Can the long metaphysical tradition in which each of us has been educated, still provide an adequate explanation for the contemporary scenario? After the “death of God” – as Hegel and Nietzsche have shown – and after the “death of man” – using a common expression derived by Elie Wiesel and Edmond Jabés – what remains of metaphysics in its attempt to investigate the issue of evil?

Perhaps Jaspers’ meditation can help us in answering these questions. In the first phase of his thinking, Jaspers sees in Kant a kind of passage between evil as *noumenon*, and the manifestation of its essence in terms of different phenomena. Jaspers, in other words, is still with Kant. His work entitled *Das radikal Böse bei Kant*, originating as a 1935 conference for the Lesezirkel Hottingen in Zürich, underscores a particular point of view on evil. In this conference, Jaspers employs the word *Umgreifende* that will be central in his following works. *Umgreifende* is translated in English as “the encompassing” and it determines the phenomenological gradations of thought and being, a transcendental concept intended to suggest the all-embracing transcendent reality within which human existence is enclosed. Jaspers is dealing with Kant’s transcendental philosophy and with the clarification of reason in its possibilities and limits, a goal that will be fully reached in Volume II of his work entitled *Philosophy*. The act of thinking, in its constant impact into limits, is precisely this exercise of a groundless activity that tends to investigate the constitution of evil *per se*. It is properly this *Grenze*, this limit, that characterises the place of transcendence. Radical evil, as Kant thought, shows the limits of our moral attitude, writes Jaspers in this conference.

However, it will be in the 1961 work, entitled *Chiffren der Transzendenz* that Jaspers’ meditation on evil shows a different development. Jaspers underlines two aspects of evil: an existential, concerned with human existence, one; and a metaphysical, concerned with the structure of the world, one. These two aspects are closely interconnected and are embedded into two realms: one is the evil springing from the horrors of nature (*Übel*) and that comes from the blind necessities of nature; the other is the evil resulting from human action (*Böse*) and that arises from conscious human decisions. These forms of evil are inextricably connected with the good and linked to the human being. Rejecting not only the ancient eudemonic tradition which proclaims the possibility of attaining absolute moral perfection, but also the view that evil can be overcome by way of progress or self-education in moral reason, Jaspers states: “Man can never realize himself truly and purely, never perfectly, never self-sufficiently.”⁶ This bond of good and evil constitutes the basic character-

6. Karl JASPERS, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung*, München, Piper, 1962, p. 317.

istic of Jaspers' understanding of the human's position in the world. The specific interrelationship between good and evil is well reflected in the statement that evil is the *ghostly doppelganger* (*der gespenstige Doppelgänger*). This denomination signifies that the good has logical precedence: firstly, evil needs the good as its prototype, which it distorts; secondly, the presence of the good provokes evil to distort it, as a doppelganger cannot precede its prototype. However, Jaspers maintains a sort of realistic pessimism when he claims that man's position in the world is characterised by a "hopeless misery" within the world⁷ and within the time – our earthly misery.

III. Technology and evil

It is impossible not to refer to Arendt's and Heidegger's thinking with this last sentence of Jaspers in our mind: our earthly misery of being in the world and within time. I am inclined to consider Arendt's philosophy of evil – in terms of a progressive calculated technological extermination of human beings – adequate in showing how the metaphysical and ontological foundations of a general theory of evil are limited. If we go through her work on Eichmann and on her subsequent output, we find that the classical ontological conception of evil as *privatio boni* is totally inadequate and incomplete in observing the modern phenomenon of mass extermination, and neither is religion of any help in the understanding of this. In the concentration camps, as Heidegger observes, "hundreds of thousands die in masses. Do they die? They perish. They are put down. Do they die? They become pieces of inventory of a standing reserve for the fabrication of corpses. Do they die? They are unobtrusively liquidated in annihilation camps. And even apart from such as these – millions now in China abjectly end in starvation."⁸ It was precisely in the frame of these Bremen lectures (1949) that Heidegger referred publicly to the gas chambers in concentration camps. The context was the world becoming a disposable object, a picture, an idea for production, where both agriculture and deaths have the same fate. He writes: "Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs."⁹ In this context, Heidegger does not claim that the Holocaust is *identical* to modern agriculture, rather

7. Karl JASPERS, *Philosophy*, II, p. 250.

8. "Hunderttausende sterben in Massen. Sterben sie? Sie kommen um. Sie werden umgelegt. Sterben sie? Sie werden Bestandstücke eines Bestandes der Fabrikation von Leichen. Sterben sie? Sie werden in Vernichtungslagern unauffällig liquidiert. Und auch ohne Solches." (Martin HEIDEGGER, "Positionality," in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. Andrew J. MITCHELL, Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 53)

9. Martin HEIDEGGER, "Positionality," p. 27.

that they share the same ‘essence,’ that is the essence of technology (*Gestell*). In his speech entitled *The question concerning technology* he will say that “technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing,”⁹ that is the possibility of all productive manufacturing – human being included.

The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenge (*Herausfordern*), which puts onto nature the unreasonable demand that it supplies energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind’s blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. [...] Agriculture is now mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use.¹⁰

Those interpreters that have considered Heidegger’s words on gas chambers and agriculture as an equivalence of facts are quite irresponsible, since they tendentiously use Heidegger’s thoughts and remarks only to draw a portrait that fits with their narrative and that is not Heidegger’s thinking. Rather, I would submit, Heidegger is interested in how what is operative here is indicative of a manner of understanding and revealing the world, animals and indeed other human beings which we do not in fact control but rather are controlled by. In the famous interview with *Der Spiegel* Heidegger says: “Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them.”¹¹

It is precisely Heidegger that illuminates this pathway with a letter to Jaspers, dated April 8th, 1950. In this very important letter, in which Heidegger, privately with Jasper, clarifies his position during the Rectorate and soon after, we can read a sentence that reverberates as a warning: “But the affair of evil has not reached its end. It is only entering upon its world stage.”¹²

What kind of evil Heidegger is talking about?

Looking closely at his output of work between the end of the ‘40s and the end of his life, we can observe another turn (*Kehre*) in his meditation – one among many others. Heidegger is deeply committed to thinking and writing about

10. Martin HEIDEGGER, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William LOVITT, New York NY, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 13 and following.

11. Martin HEIDEGGER, “Only a God Can Save Us,” in Richard WOLIN (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy. A Critical Reader*, Cambridge MA – London, The MIT Press, 1998, pp. 105-106.

12. Heidegger’s letter to Jaspers, in Martin HEIDEGGER - Karl JASPERS, *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence (1920-1963)*, Walter BIEMEL and Hans SANER (eds.), trans. Gary E. AYLESWORTH, Amherst NY, Humanity Press, 2003, p. 188.

the essence of technology, as a way of revealing being, through its oblivion, nihilism and *Gestell*. The essence of technology is connected to the *Machenschaft* (Machination), that occupies a large part of his reflection both in the *Contribution to Philosophy (of Knowing)* and in the *Black Notebooks*, whose issues need to be addressed from the point of view of metaphysics, and this occurs within the space of western technical rationality. Progress, technicity and machination are considered as particular features of modernity since they do not only conceal the unfolding ownmost of being, restricting the human being into the 'darkest night.' The being-historical thinking encounters modernity in all its nothingness. Precisely in *Überlegungen V* in *Black Notebooks* we read:

We proceed still in the era of progress – with the difference that, once and for a certain period, it was pursued as an international good, while today it is simply declared as a challenge among nations: “best” movies and “fastest” airplanes – the “safest” means; not resting on anything in order to be to its height – but holding everything immediately in one shot, and then? Stumbling in the big vacuum and screaming highest than others. Progress [...] becomes now a pincer more powerful that grips human being in its nothingness.¹³

In 1969, he writes:

No prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now will soon be determined by the new fundamental science which is called cybernetics. This science corresponds to the determination of man as an acting social being. For it is the theory of the steering of the possible planning and arrangement of human labor. Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news. The arts become regulated-regulating instruments of information.¹⁴

It is not difficult to observe that the world in which Heidegger was embedded is not our world anymore – and with this I am not referring the background of the agricultural world of the Black Forest, but more in general to the broader technological, social, economic scenario of 40 years ago. Nevertheless, his reflections (*Überlegungen*) on the essence of technology have something to do with the issue of evil, and more precisely with our time. Heidegger's critique of technology and machination does not ignore the progress through which humankind has developed, rather it softly insists on a kind of evil that is veiled by technology and machination. In the conference *The Danger* we can read:

13. “Wir bewegen uns immer noch im Zeitalter des Fortschritts – nur daß er eine Zeitlang als internationales Gut angestrebt wurde und heute als der Wettbewerb der Nationen ausgerufen wird: die «besten» Filme und die «schnellsten» Flugzeuge – die «sichersten» Mittel, nirgendwo mehr zu verweilen und auf etwas zuzuwachsen – sondern alles unversehens in einem zu besitzen und dann? in der großen Leere taumeln und sich überschreien. Der Fortschritt [...] wird jetzt zur noch schärferen Zange, die den Menschen in seine Leere einklemmt.“ (*Überlegungen V*, p. 387)

14. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings*, David Farrell KRELL (ed.), San Francisco CA, Harper, 1993, p. 434.

Immeasurable suffering creeps and rages over the earth. The flood of suffering rises ever higher. But the essence of pain is concealed [...]. Everywhere we are besieged with countless and boundless suffering. We however are unpained, not brought into the ownership of the essence of pain. A grizzly abjection makes the rounds. The army of the poor grows and grows. But the essence of poverty is concealed. What takes place in poverty is that what is simple and ameliorating of everything essential, this inconspicuously becomes a propriety wherein the things enjoy dwelling in a granted world.¹⁵

“We are unpained” – Wir sind schmerzlos

Our attitude in recognizing pain and participating through empathy and interrogation is totally anesthetised by media and by the almost absence of awareness of the knowledge of the consequences of such pain. As Babette Babich put it: “We are not pained and today there is more of this un-moved, painlessness than ever. Who bothers to watch animal rights videos, if one ever did, who is really concerned about the plight or fate (pick any word you like) of the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Nigerians, etc. and etc.? [...] We are unpained, we do not sense what is all around.”¹⁶ Perhaps, someone can recall Jonas’s words on the silence of creation: a silence provoked by the technical usage of nature and animals, reduced to products, to perishable goods. In his essay entitled *Philosophy at the end of the century* he describes the crisis he sees arising from “the threats we pose to the planet’s ecology” that forces us to look at one of the oldest philosophical questions: the relationship between the human being and nature. The impact of contemporary technology on the natural environment has been unprecedented and the development of experiments on animals and humans gives rise to questions of a moral nature.

The affair of evil is what remained open in Heidegger’s meditation¹⁷: with the foresight typical of his thought, Heidegger was able to see all the issues that characterised our age, as European and, more in general, as human beings. As pointed out by Zimmerman,

in speaking of the Holocaust in the same breath with the hydrogen bomb, Heidegger was making an important point. Mass extermination in the Nazi camps was possible only because of developments within industrial technology. Moreover, the Nazis spoke of the Jews as if they were little more than industrial ‘waste’ to be disposed of as efficiently as possible. Officials in charge of planning strategic use of nuclear weapons must be trained to conceive of the enemy populace in wholly abstract terms. Heidegger argued in several places that the hydrogen bomb – an

15. Martin HEIDEGGER, “Positionality,” p. 54.

16. Babette BABICH, “Constellating Technology: Heidegger’s *Die Gefahr/The Danger*,” in Babette BABICH and Dimitri GINEV (eds.), *The Multidimensionality of Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Contributions to Phenomenology 70*, Frankfurt am Main, Springer 2014, p. 178.

17. See Francisca BRENCIO, “Martin Heidegger ad the thinking of evil: from the original ethics to the Black Notebooks,” *Ius Fugit*, 19 (2016), pp. 87-134.

instrument of mass extermination – was not the real problem facing us. Instead, the problem is the perversion and constriction of humanity’s understanding of being itself in the technological era. Extermination camps and hydrogen bombs, from Heidegger’s viewpoint, were both symptoms of humanity’s conception of itself and everything else as resources to be produced and consumed, created and destroyed, at will.¹⁸

“The performances of our heart – our inhibitions, fears, worries, regrets – are inversely proportional to the dimensions of our deeds” writes Günther Anders.¹⁹ In his short and provocative essay entitled *Reflections on the H Bomb*, he asks the reader to “imagine the bomb has been exploded” and has created a lifeless desert. According to Anders, the H-bomb exemplifies how the “technification” of our being makes notions of *human responsibility* or *individual responsibility* meaningless and obsolete. The bomb, for Anders, is not an exceptional device: it is regarded as an exemplary, destructive, technological object that allows a glimpse into the world that is produced by labour processes and modes of consumption that are so computerized and detached that the outcome of work is destined to remain ever “abstract.” Since no one is fully responsible for the existence of an atom bomb, or any other complex machine, and each single person makes only a partial contribution (to education, science, production, finance, maintenance, etc...), *nobody* can fully apprehend or even feel responsible for its effects. For Anders, the existence of the bomb is testament that we have been propelled into a sphere ‘*beyond morality and immorality*’ because “the division of labour prevents the [participant] so completely from having clear insight into the productive process, that the lack of conscience we must ascribe to him is no longer an individual moral deficiency.”²⁰

Is this the evil entered on the world stage in its final act? And if the answer is yes, what can philosophy do in this scenario?

IV. The task of philosophy

When I started to write this paper, in the back of my mind there was (and still is) one short work of Heidegger, entitled *The end of philosophy and the task of thinking*. I went through this essay yet again (after many hundreds) and I began to think about the end of philosophy in terms of metaphysics as Heidegger proposes. Philosophy is ending in the present age – wrote Heidegger 50 years ago – and its place is occupied by the sciences. Today we could add

18. Michael E. ZIMMERMAN, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity. Technology, Politics, Arts*, Bloomington-Indianapolis IN, Indiana University Press 1990, p. 43.

19. Günther ANDERS, “Reflections on the H Bomb,” *Dissent*, 3 (1956), p. 154.

20. Günther ANDERS, “Reflections,” p. 150. See also Christopher MÜLLER, “Desert Ethics: Technology and the Question of Evil in Günther Anders and Jacques Derrida,” *Parallax* 21 (2015), pp. 42-57.

that philosophy is perhaps alive in a very restrict space. I assume that the status in which some philosophical disciplines – such as phenomenology or hermeneutics – are held is quite well known: many of them are dead, and those which survive are at death's door. What seems to me dangerous is that it is not more required to enter into dialogue with philosophers but that it is simply required to collect some notions of their works and their thinking in order to pass exams, having one more paper published, having a conference accepted, or a research project funded. Nevertheless, I have in mind Foucault's metaphor for philosophy which is: Philosophy is a bag of tools and we should use these tools as the plumber does with the tools of his bag; when there is a problem, he knows which tool is required to solve that problem, just as a philosopher should know which tool is required to interpret our time and its problems.

Among many of them, I would like to recall your attention on the following ones.

Firstly, people have become desensitised. To what? To sufferance (both of humans and not humans) to violence, to injustice, to immorality – and so on. With this expression, I am not referring merely to the ability that each of us, as individual, has lost in terms of empathy and recognition, but more specifically to a phenomenon that affects our community and our society. Perhaps it has been provoked by the increasing of technology – both in education and in communication – and by the massive role played by social media, but perhaps it is also a result of our inability to deal with all of this. There was a time when moral evil was condemned, and people took some action to stop it. The Civil Rights Movement is a good example. Today, people feel powerless. This desensitization is caused by a constant exposure to violence in the media, including TV, video games and movies. Some scholars suggest that violence may prime thoughts of hostility with the possibility of affecting the way we perceive others and interpret their actions, producing a number of aversive responses such as increased heart rate, fear, discomfort, perspiration and disgust. Clinical literature supports the theory that the increasing phenomenon of cyberbullies among young people could be a result of a constant exposure to violence. People are desensitised to humanitarian crisis. The recent and massive waves of refugees coming from war zones in Europe has provoked the reaction of exclusion and ostracism. The ideological dialectic between “we are....they are...” is still at work in Europe and it leads to an increase of nationalism and right-wing political movements. The mottos “keep refugees out” or “our land to our citizens” are still alive. Between 2015 and 2017 borders and walls seemed to burst onto the global agenda in the context of migration and halting spontaneous movement. Some European countries within the free-movement Schengen zone have reverted back to their enforcement of national borders. Some countries, like Hungary, have decided to build physical walls and those barriers have been the most dramatic than ever, after the WWII

and after Berlin's wall. Always in Hungary in the referendum held in 2015, 90% of voters chose to reject EU-mandated refugee resettlement quotas and to support the idea to close the borders. Refugees are still waiting in Greek islands, in Calais, at the borders of Italy in merciless condition but people do not feel empathy toward them, rather predominant feelings are anger and refusal.

Secondly, the increasing of nationalist movement and populism across the world. In rich countries nationalism is a cheap and easy way to generate enthusiasm for the state, and to deflect blame for what is wrong. The new nationalism owes a lot to cultural factors. Many Westerners liked their countries as they were and never asked for the immigration that turned Europe more Muslim and America less white and Protestant. Elite liberals stress two sources of identity: being a good global citizen and belonging to an identity group that has nothing to do with the nation. Communication tools have accelerated the spread of the new nationalism. Facebook and Twitter allow people to bypass the mainstream media's cosmopolitan filter to talk to each other, swap news, meet and organise rallies and in this massive communication more than often opinions are mixed with a real hate.

In this scenario, I could also mention the climate changes – that philosophically speaking is the total destruction of our *Lebenswelt*, in which our life and thinking are embedded – and many others.

In addressing the task of philosophy when faced with the issue of evil, we deal with many important questions that arise from the furrow of the metaphysical and ontological traditions. These traditions provide good “soil” for growth and development of the issue of evil, but they are not enough to uncover a meaning and an answer to this issue. In her *The life of the mind*, Hannah Arendt writes: “I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today. Such dismantling is possible only on the assumption that the thread of tradition is broken and that we shall not be able to renew it.”²¹ I would like to underline this last sentence: *the thread of tradition is broken and we shall not be able to renew it*. This means that we are not required to renew these metaphysical pathways, rather, I would softly suggest, to let our philosophical tradition leaving its dark and dusty room to confront our reality and our deeds. I find necessary to relocate human being in the world, in its mortality, in its fragility and in its morality and immorality – and not behind as Günther Anders claims. I feel the urgency to reawaken a critical thinking that is not merely able to propose old questions about God, immortality and world.

21. Hannah ARENDT, *The Life of the Mind*, ed. by Mary MCCARTHY, Orlando FL, Harcourt Publ., 1977, p. 212.

Perhaps, we could begin to take up the issue of *being educated in political thinking* and dealing with the contemporary vacuity of thought. “We all still need an education in thinking, and before that first a knowledge of what being educated and uneducated in thinking means”²², writes Heidegger: this need is our limit and at the same time the hope and challenge of our age.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to investigate the task of philosophy in our contemporary scenario. In doing so, this work is articulated in two parts: in the first one, I will show to which extent we can refer to evil as rooted in a metaphysical ground or, conversely, if it is a tendency inscribed into the human being's constitution. The notion of limit (*Grenze*) will illuminate this section. In the second part, I will consider the relationship between thinking, judging and acting and its implication in our age, demonstrating that this relationship has been compromised in the last 50 years by the increase of technicity: it is not simply necessary “to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly” (Arendt), rather it is necessary to recover our constitutional ‘obsolescence’ to stop (and to prevent) the transformation of the human being into a product.

SOMMAIRE

L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner la tâche de la philosophie en regard de notre époque. Cet examen s'articule en deux temps. Premièrement, j'explore la question de savoir si nous pouvons faire référence au mal comme enraciné dans un fondement métaphysique ou plutôt comme une tendance inscrite au cœur de la constitution humaine. La notion de « limite » (*Grenze*) fournit le fil conducteur de cette analyse. Dans un deuxième temps, j'examine les rapports entre penser, juger et agir ainsi que leurs implications pour notre époque. Je m'emploie à démontrer qu'en raison des développements techniques des cinquante dernières années, ces rapports ont été subvertis. Il n'est plus seulement nécessaire de différencier le vrai du faux ou le beau du laid (Arendt), mais il faut également recouvrer notre « obsolescence » constitutive afin de cesser (et de prévenir) la transformation de l'être humain en un produit.

22. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings*, p. 72.